

Life in the Wartime Parish Part II: Accounts from the Parish Archives of Tagbilaran and Corella from the Japanese Occupation of Bohol until the Post-War Period

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This article continues and completes the study began in the previous issue about wartime life in Tagbilaran and Corella. In that article, we traced some of the major components of parish life in the years before the outbreak of war in the Philippines, continuing through the first months of the Japanese invasion of the country, before the arrival of occupying troops in Bohol.

Japanese forces landed in Tagbilaran on May 17, 1942. A brief look at the sacramental data in Figure 1 below shows that the parish functions of Tagbilaran continued, providing the sacraments of baptism, marriage, and burial, though at rates that were trending decidedly downward in the months after the start of the occupation. However, the regular operations of the parish come to a screeching halt in October of 1942. It was common practice for the parish priest to approve and sign the financial register on the first day of the

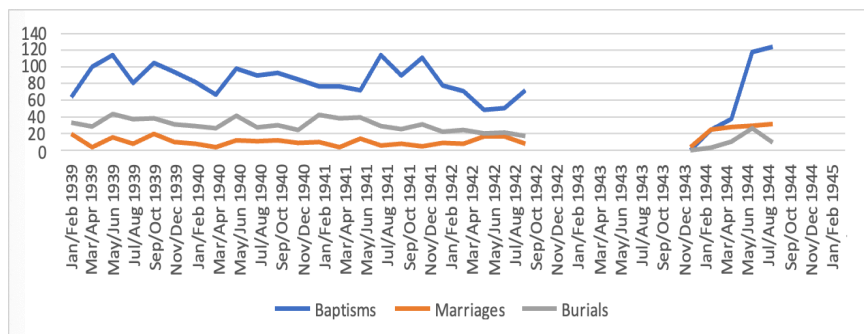


Figure 1. Tagbilaran Sacramental Data. Numbers of baptisms, marriages, and burials between January/February 1939 and March/April 1945.

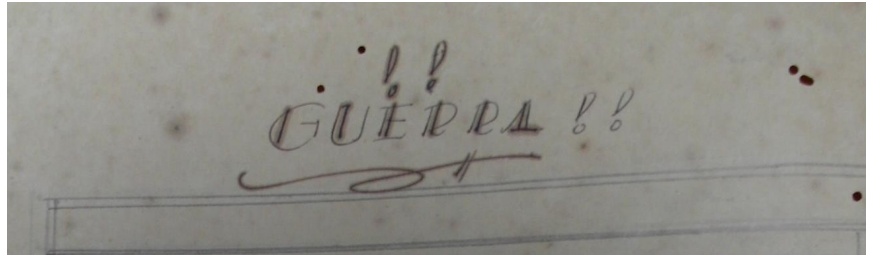


Figure 2. Detail from Tagbilaran Libro de Cuentas after September/October 1942. (Archives of the Tagbilaran Cathedral, *Libro de Cuentas* 1913-1956, fol. 101r.)

month following the dates of the entry; for instance, a July/August entry would be signed for on September 1. However, in the September/October 1941 entry, Fr. Castro signs for it on October 15, in the middle of the month. Fr. Castro or his secretary remove any question as to why this unusual action has been taken in a succinct, yet chilling, entry on the following page of the *Libro de Cuentas*, seen above in Figure 2.

What we can take from this is that somewhere around October 15, 1941, it was no longer possible to continue normal parish bookkeeping operations in Tagbilaran. ¹ The sacramental books show similar sudden stoppages in recorded entries. The burial register ends after an entry on November 1; the last recorded marriage is on October 21; the final legitimate baptism takes place on November 5; and the final illegitimate baptism on September 22.

The Catholic faithful in Tagbilaran were not entirely bereft of the sacraments, however, but these were not always easy to obtain. The half-destroyed Globe Brand school notebook shown below in Figure 3 below as an ersatz war-era baptismal register, but only

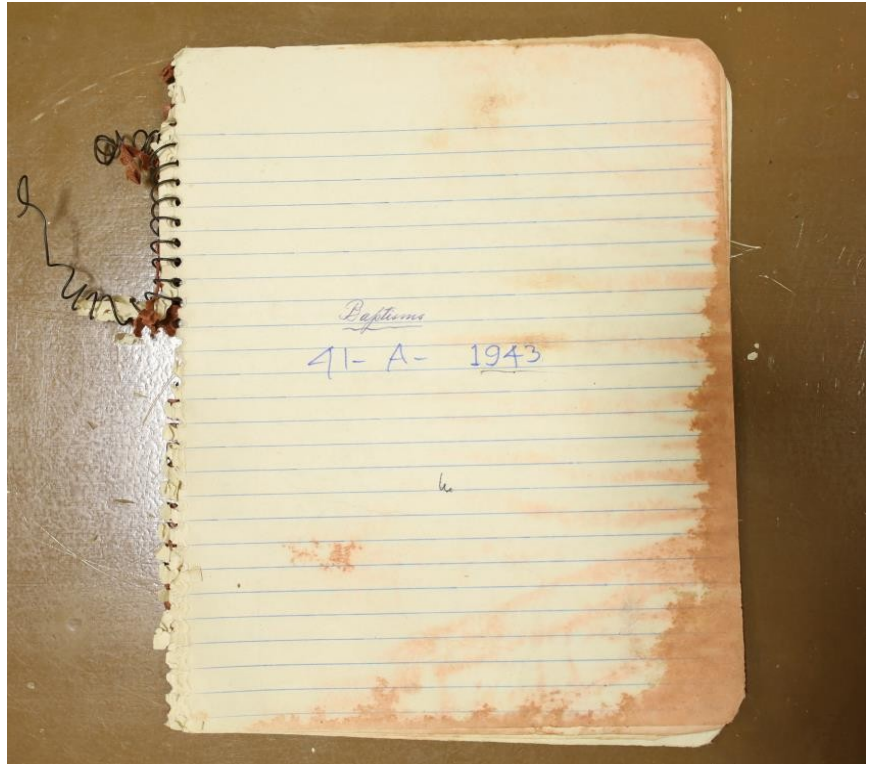


Figure 3. Wartime Baptismal Register from Tagbilaran.
(Archives of the Tagbilaran Cathedral)

for a very few births in Tagbilaran, and only in the *barrios* that were furthest away from the *población* toward the north: Taloto, Ubujan, Manga, and Tiptip. Priests were often not available to perform these baptisms, at least those recorded in this particular book, so nearly half of them were solemnized by the local Holy Spirit Sisters², who, being mostly German citizens and allies of the Japanese occupying forces, were allowed significantly more freedom of movement. An example of these wartime baptismal entries are in Figure 4 below, showing two signatures from a local priest, and two by different Holy Spirit Sisters.

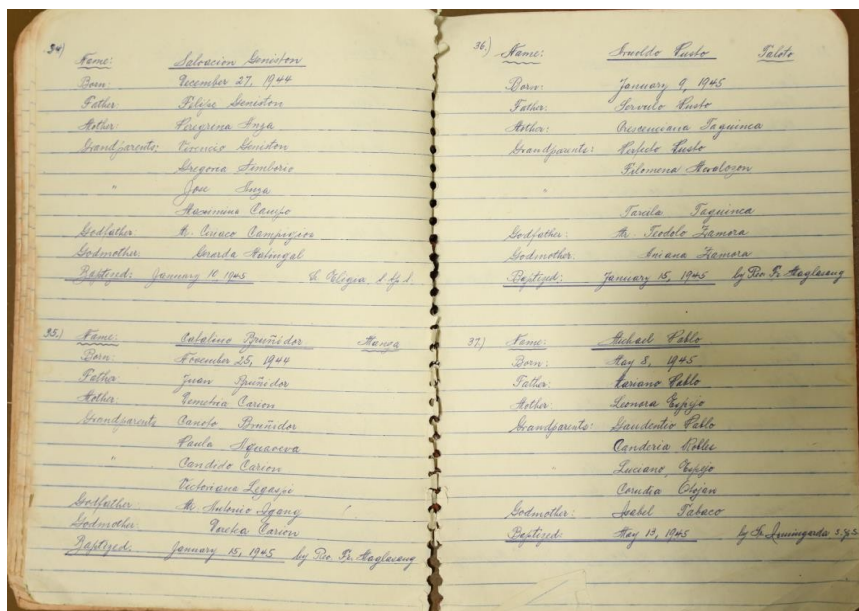


Figure 4. Detail of Wartime Baptismal Register from Tagbilaran.
 (Archives of the Tagbilaran Cathedral)

In contrast, the parish of Corella did not experience the same sudden and near-total cessation of regular parish life as did Tagbilaran. Indeed, an initial glance at Corella's sacramental records makes it appear as if the war did not affect the community much at all, at least as far as religious life was concerned. However, a deeper dive into the data reveals a much different story. Though the first half of the graph below displays gaps similar to those found in Tagbilaran in, these are due to water damage to the Corella *Libro de Cuentas*, which made many entries illegible, and to not gaps in the original records because of wartime conditions. In Figure 5, note the stable and regular rates of birth, marriage, and death in the months and years leading up to the May 1942 Japanese landings, and compare them with the wide variations found immediately thereafter and until the end of the war. This suggests a certain level of instability within the wartime community, with difficulties in accessing the

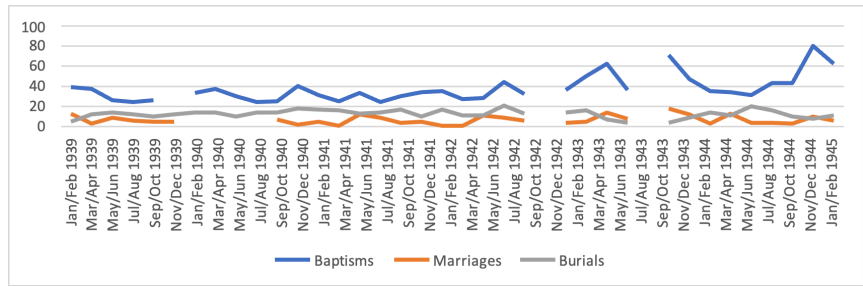


Figure 5. Corella Sacramental Data. Numbers of baptisms, marriages, and burials between January/February 1939 and March/April 1945.

parish church, the *barrio* chapels, the parish priest himself, or some combination of all of these. Children may have been baptized long after birth, burials were postponed or the bodies disinterred and reburied once the consecrated ground of the cemetery was again available, and marriages delayed. Regarding marriages in particular, approximately one-third of all marriages contracted in Corella in the years 1943 and 1944 were celebrated in the extraordinary form, meaning that a competent assistant, such as a priest or deacon, was not available to witness the solemnization of the marriage.³

Because we have the wartime burial registers from Corella, we are able to trace specific causes of death in the parish. However, I should note here that a potential weakness of this type of data is that the causes of death are not always standardized across the parishes, at least in parishes where I have examined large numbers of records (including the Central and Eastern Visayas and Northern Mindanao). Parishes records did not include causes of death at all until 1868, when an order was received from the Vatican to begin specifying such causes. Even then, there were only two options: natural death (*muerte natural*), which could be from any “natural” cause, such as old age or illness; and violent death (*muerte violenta*), due to murder or accident. In the last decades of the 19th century, more specific causes were included, particularly if they were part of a larger epidemic or pandemic. This is why we can trace the cholera outbreak of 1888-89, as well as later outbreaks of cholera, smallpox, and influenza. As the 20th century continued, many (but not all) parishes begin recording dozens of

different causes of death. However, the entries were not uniformly consistent across parishes, which can make it somewhat difficult to compare data. However, in this case, we are only analyzing the records of a single parish, Corella, so there is a high measure of regularity among the entries. We already noted the pre-war prevalence of beriberi and tuberculosis in the previous article, and this continues with some interesting variations during the war years. Tuberculosis was endemic in Corella—and almost everywhere else— before 1942 but as we can see in Figure 6 below (I have used bar graphs for the next few figures, as it makes the data easier to visualize), there is an increased and relatively sustained rate of TB through the end of the war. This is true even though there are gaps in the records, though not as severe as those experienced in Tagbilaran. Also note in Figure 6 that there is only a single data point between May 1943 and January 1944. The burial register has a five- month gap between mid-May and mid-October 1943, and another gap of about six weeks between mid-November and early January of 1944. These is not caused by water or any other damage, but are simply consecutive entries that skip several weeks or months. ⁴ Plotting these missing months using the wartime monthly average of tuberculosis deaths, as

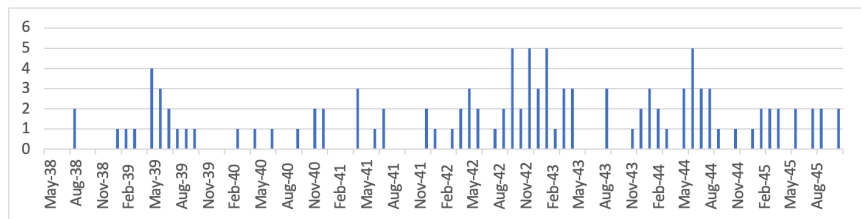


Figure 6. Mortality Rates in Corella. Monthly rates of death caused by tuberculosis according to the Libro de Entierros 1938-1945.

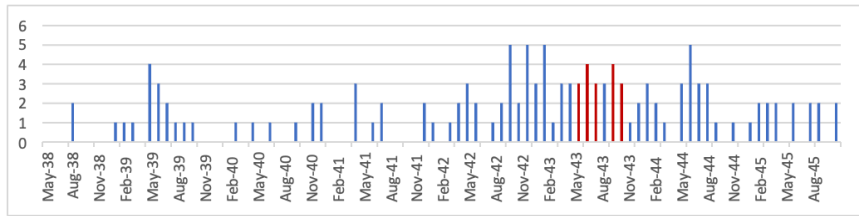


Figure 7. Mortality Rates in Corella. Monthly rates of death caused by tuberculosis with projected rates added for missing months (projected rates are in red).

I have done with projections in red in Figure 7, the increased wartime prevalence of TB is clearly illustrated.

Digging a little deeper into these two recording gaps, another piece of information may shed some light on it. Around the time the gaps occur (May 1943 through January 1944), there are almost no burials taking place for people living in the *población* of Corella, though there are plenty before and after this period. During these several months, the burials are almost completely of people from the *barrios*, such as Anislag, Pandol, Tanday, Canapnapan, Canangca-an, and others. Again, this is a clue that points to the fact that there is a problem accessing the parish church and its grounds—which stand at the very center of the *población*,

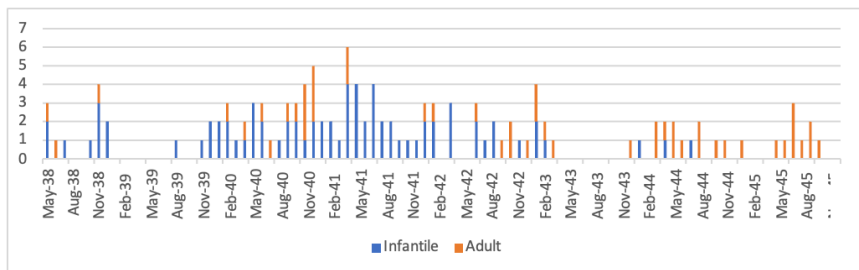


Figure 8. Mortality Rates in Corella. Monthly rates of death caused by adult and infantile beriberi.

suggesting that it may not have been possible to move between the center of Corella and the outlying barrios.

Returning to the subject of wartime disease, we see slightly different patterns with beriberi than we did with tuberculosis, which was likewise quite common before the war in many regions of the Philippines (Annual Report—1964, Philippines Health Statistics).⁵ Generally caused by Thiamine deficiency, beriberi is usually reported in two separate categories in the burial records: infantile beriberi and adult beriberi.⁶ In Figure 8 above we can see the relative rates of fatal beriberi in both categories. What is interesting is that the dominant form of the disease in the pre-war period is infantile beriberi, while during and after the war it is adult beriberi (note again the record gap between May 1943 and January 1944—I have *not* added projected data here). I do not know why beriberi would become less prevalent among infants during the war years and more prevalent among adults during the conflict.

⁷ Furthermore, most of the who died of adult beriberi were not nursing mothers (frequent victims of adult beriberi), but rather older children, women not of childbearing age, and men of all ages.

⁸ These are just two of the diseases that were prevalent in Corella in the years surrounding the Second World War. There were many others, and my analysis here merely scratches the surface of the kind of information that can be garnered from sacramental records. But there is one conclusion I will make, and I realize it may be a potentially controversial statement—these additional deaths caused by disease, malnutrition, and lack of access to medicine and medical expertise, are war *deaths*, even if the victims were not directly shot, beaten, bayoneted, bombed, or burned alive by invading forces. And many deaths in these latter categories did indeed occur, which I will touch upon in the following section.

THE REINVASION

Near the end of June 1944, the Japanese initiated a “reinvasion” of Bohol in which troops landed at several points around the province and drove inward in the direction of the municipality of Carmen, with the intention of eliminating active guerrilla forces as well as an underground Boholano government operating in the area. These forces remained stationed in the province for several months until most of them were removed and reassigned to Leyte in response to the American landings there in October of 1944. A small Japanese detachment remained to occupy Tagbilaran.

Parish records during this time shed light on this period of reinvasion, though there are many more questions raised than answers.⁹ As we saw earlier, Tagbilaran was unable to keep records from mid-October 1942, but they were able to resume operations—albeit very limited ones—from February of 1944. The *Libro de Cuentas* records regular fees received for baptisms, marriages, and burials, but the only expenses listed are payments made to acolytes who served during Holy Week in April 1944. Sacramental activity increases over the next few months, until it reaches or exceeds pre-war levels at the time of the reinvasion in June. What is curious is that this resumed parish activity continues through October, when the reinvading forces have largely left, but have left a small garrison in Tagbilaran. I am unsure what specific factors led to the parish church there being given a temporary reprieve over these months, but they were indeed able to operate, though these limited operations ceased entirely after October 1944, and did not resume until the end of the war.

However, one conclusion we can make from the data presented below in Figure 9 is that the war years, especially those after the 1944 reinvasion, were very tumultuous as far as parish operations were concerned. The regularity and relative stability of the sacramental data in Tagbilaran is replaced by wide fluctuations until the end of the war, something that is clear even with the large data gaps. This is even easier to detect in Corella in Figure 10, where we observe numbers outside of what had been a stable range almost immediately after the initial Japanese invasion in May 1942. These numbers continue to fluctuate widely,

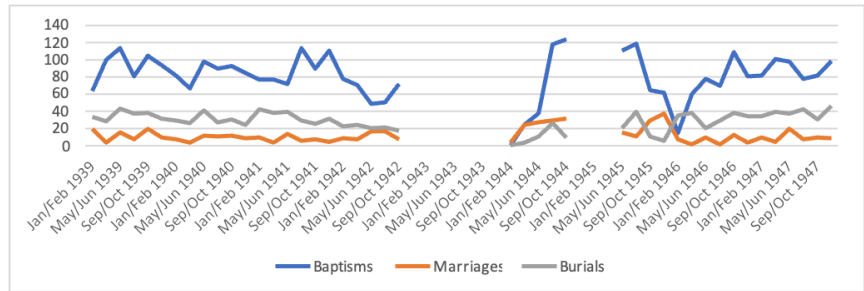


Figure 9. Tagbilaran Sacramental Data. Numbers of baptisms, marriages, and burials between January/February 1939 and November/December 1947.

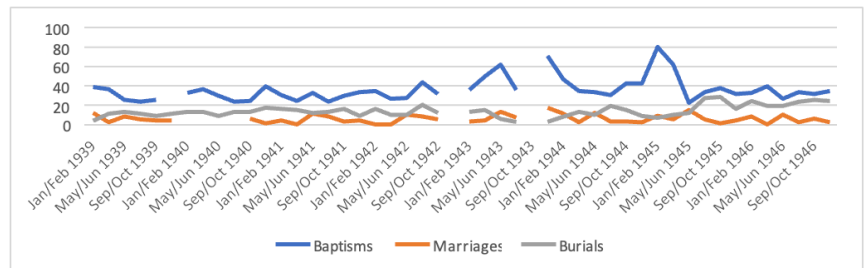


Figure 10. Corella Sacramental Data. Numbers of baptisms, marriages, and burials between January/February 1939 and November/December 1946.

both above and below their previous ranges, throughout the war years, but returning almost instantly back to normal after the war.

I mentioned above that I would return to the subject of causes of death, particularly violent causes, which we would expect to find during wartime in places invaded and occupied by hostile forces. Though there are no surviving wartime burial registers from Tagbilaran and there are, somewhat oddly, no violent causes of death listed in Corella during the war years,¹⁰ there are hints in the burial records of surrounding parishes. Records in nearby Dauis record the burials of two young people—an 18-year-old man and a twenty-year-old woman—shot to death by Japanese soldiers on December 22, 1944 (Archives of the Dauis Parish, *Libro de Difuntos* 1944-1948, fol. 17r).¹¹ The Balilihan parish

interred three men, including two brothers aged 45 and 32, and another 33-year-old companion, all originally from the municipality of Cortes, who were killed by the Japanese (Archives of the Cortes Parish, *Libro de Difuntos* 1943-1948, fols. 19r-20v). A 26-year-old Tubigon man was killed on September 26, 1944, as a result of “bullet wound from Japanese rifle” (Archives of the Tubigon Parish, *Libro de Difuntos* 1943-1945). A very odd entry is another from Tubigon, where a 24-year-old man died as a result of “guerilla warfare” on April 11, 1942, before the first Japanese landings in Tagbilaran (Archives of the Tubigon Parish, *Libro de Difuntos* 1942-1943). Strange or not, these accounts illustrate that the threat of violent death was rather increased during the wartime period, and not always from invading soldiers. There were a number of competing guerrilla organizations operating in Bohol, and not all demonstrated that a sense of patriotism or anti-Japanese sentiment was the primary cause of their armed activities. Also, the relative lack of viable, organized government in many places created conditions for a general state of lawlessness.

MONEY DURING AND AFTER THE WAR

It is sometimes overlooked, but crucially significant, that goods and services still cost money during the war. A unique difficulty arises through the fact that during wartime, currency may become scarce due to hoarding, especially of coins made of precious or militarily-critical metals, and it is difficult for paper money to retain its value during uncertain or dangerous times. The existence of multiple competing forms of currency during World War II exacerbated this uncertainty, making parish bookkeeping, to say nothing of daily transactions among the population, rather complicated. As the war began and President Manuel Quezon realized that Manila was likely to be cut off from the rest of the country, he ordered the regional managers of the Philippine National Bank in Cebu, Bacolod, and Iloilo to design and print emergency paper currency to fill the anticipated lack of available supplies of currency from the capital. Later, local provincial and even municipal governments printed their own banknotes for wartime use. To further complicate matters, the Japanese occupational government also printed and distributed their own currency for official use (the proverbial “Mickey Mouse” money), while banning and

suppressing the use of other forms of currency (**Bersales, *The War in Cebu*, 30-31**). Penalties for being caught by Japanese soldiers carrying such currency could be severe, but Filipinos discovered in possession of Japanese banknotes by the various guerilla groups could likewise face severe punishment, including summary execution [**check reference in book**]. As is so often the case with occupation and guerilla resistance, atrocities abound on all sides, and it is the regular citizens who bear the brunt of the suffering.

This multiplicity of currency shows up in the parish financial records. In the first year or so of the war, the balances in the *Libros de Cuentas* were simply recorded in pesos and

207.70	"cebu money"
388.70	"japanese"
171.10	"bohol"
<u>5.63</u>	"genuine"
772.63	

Figure 11. Detail from Corella *Libro de Cuentas* entry for January 13, 1946.
(Archives of the Corella Parish, *Libro de Cuentas* 1884-1946, fol. 196v)

centavos, but as the war continued, many parishes divided their totals into “types” of money. The pre-war currency of the Philippine Commonwealth still circulated, albeit at a very limited level. This money is variously referred to as *dinero genuino*, *dinero real*, *dinero antiguo*, and *dinero filipino*. Japanese occupational currency is listed as *dinero Japonés*. The different wartime currencies approved by President Quezon are sometimes referred collectively as *papel-dinero de emergencia*, while at other times it is further separated into “Cebu money” or “Bohol money.” Figure 11 above illustrates this reality of wartime and post-war accounting in the parish of Corella. In these parishes and in others throughout the Philippines, Japanese currency fairly quickly simply disappears from bimonthly entries, reflecting its complete worthlessness by the

end of the war. The local and regional banknotes could be turned in and exchanged at full or partial value for some time after the end of hostilities, and this currency likewise eventually disappears from the records. It is interesting to note that the emergency money was intended to be accepted at full face value throughout the conflict, but this was unevenly practiced (**Bersales, *The War in Cebu*, 31**). For example, in Tagbilaran, despite the large gaps in the records, fees for the various types of baptisms, marriages, and burials remained the same throughout the war. However, in Corella, many of the fees doubled and tripled during the last year of the war, before returning to normal. I can only speculate as to why this was done; perhaps the local economy in Corella had devalued the emergency currency to half or a third its face value. However, salaries for parish employees did not similarly increase, so this is a continuing mystery.

REBUILDING THE PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL INFRASTRUCTURE AFTER THE WAR

In his introduction to *The War in Cebu*, Ino Manalo makes the following statement, which deserves quoting at length:

It behooves future tomes to dedicate some pages to evaluating how the war affected the people's psyche for many years. Filipinos have not yet really come to terms with how the destruction of the Second World War involved not just physical but spiritual resources as well. Thousands of poets and painters, works of art and books perished in the holocaust. Gone too were the contexts for ritual, the spaces which helped contain the meaning of everyday life. These losses have lasting repercussions which are often unacknowledged (Bersales, *The War in Cebu*, 8).

Once the fighting was over and the Filipino people, governmental officials, and parish priests and the Church hierarchy had some time to look about them, the sheer scale of the violent destruction, the lost lives and devastated families, and the complete disruption of spiritual and cultural life became painfully apparent. The bishops, many of whom were unable to communicate at all with the parishes in their jurisdiction or with each other, finally met in council in July 1945 in the

largely-destroyed city of Manila. During the council, all of the archbishops, bishops, apostolic prefects, and apostolic administrators issued a joint circular to the clergy and the faithful. The letter is heartbreaking in its detailed and graphic description of the bloody conflict, as well as its damaging effects on the Church and the clergy. But as we have seen in earlier circulars, the greater part of the message is always ultimately pastoral in nature, and the bishops quickly moved from the recently-concluded physical warfare, to the spiritual warfare that must now be fought. While the concerns that occupied the Church hierarchy in the decades before the war are largely the same, the scope of the concern is increased, partly from the four-year period of conflict that precluded most or all spiritual life, and also due to the presence of large number of American troops, who were perhaps introducing habits of moral laxity. Together with a call to rebuild the physical fabric of Philippine society, there is an even stronger call to rebuild and restore the spiritual fabric of the nation:

Joint Letter of the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of the Philippines on the
Occasion of the Annual Council

To Our Vicars General, Vicars Forane, Venerable Regular and Secular
Clergy, and to all Our Beloved Faithful, Blessings and Health in the
Name of Our Lord.

Beloved Children in the Lord,

After four years of a near complete lack of communication, we the Archbishops, Bishops, and Apostolic Prefects of the Philippines, have at last been able to assemble in the City of Manila to continue our series of annual councils, which were traditionally held in times of peace and prosperity, and from which so many excellent benefits have been received for the spiritual benefit of our people. The war that in December of 1941 enveloped nearly the entire Orient in a universal conflagration, which has wrought so much distress, so much ruin, and so many tears among the peoples of the world, made it impossible for us to celebrate these annual gatherings, and when we resumed them today, our joy was overwhelming.

But as nothing in this life is perfect, our joy is overshadowed by the sight of the horrendous devastation of our towns and cities, and by the memory of the terrible sufferings that our most beloved children have endured during these three years of barbaric domination, the cruelties of which, during the period of liberation by the American troops, exceeded the limits of anything imaginable. Few are the households that do not mourn the loss of one or more family members; countless are those who have seen their homes destroyed and their possessions plundered; our holy sanctuaries have been desecrated; our churches burned or bombed; torrents of blood have flooded our streets and plazas; in short, no calamity that the cruelest war can inflict has not been borne by our people.

Therefore, most beloved children, as we address this letter to you, our hearts beat together in unison with yours, and the pains with which you are burdened also reverberate profoundly in our own souls. Throughout the course of the war, we ourselves, our priests, our religious, both men and women of different congregations in their separate territories, have been in constant prayer that we might encourage one another in faith and trust in God, placing all our hope in His eternal Providence. We have identified with you both in holy ideals and in patriotic yearnings, while suffering insults and privations, imprisonment and torture. We have been in your midst to provide spiritual comfort and the aid of the Christian life. In our council, we cannot forget all our brethren in the priesthood and our children in the Lord who perished in the slaughter, either killed in the midst of the battles and incidents of war, or sacrificed in the defense of the people. These innocents, inhumanely massacred by the ferocious cruelty of the enemy, had already been made victims of sufferings and illnesses brought on by the ravages of war. In remembering so many of our slaughtered children and praying to God for their eternal rest, we send our most heartfelt condolences to their bereaved families, to all who mourn such bitter loss, and we remain united in suffering and prayer,

mutually consoling one another. To this end we offered today a Pontifical Requiem Mass for the repose of their souls in the Church of the Holy Rosary in Bulacan, Manila.

May God grant that the Philippines never again witness the horrors that our people have seen and witnessed!

However, beloved children, the same causes produce the same effects under similar circumstances: so we fear that if the nations do not change their current course, the world may be enveloped in a catastrophe even greater than that of the present. War is an evil, and as such is the punishment for our sins. Personal transgressions are punished by God, either in this world or in the next, but collective sins are punished by God in this world, because nations no longer exist after death. The only way, therefore, to prevent a public calamity is to avoid all social sins. Ungodly and deceitful religious ideas; scientific systems that disregard human dignity; political doctrines that enslave a part of humanity under the yoke of a few states that believe themselves to be superior and privileged races; social doctrines, which by their distortion of the concept of justice, trample on the rights of the wretched and downtrodden; public immorality whose scandalous influence perverts the minds and hearts of the inexperienced youth; forgetfulness and disregard of duties to God in the daily life; these are the greatest collective crimes that provoke the wrath of God on peoples and nations.

Faith That Brings Salvation

It is necessary, therefore, to strive for the reformation of modern society. For all Christians, this reform consists simply in an adherence to the teachings of the Mother Church which, even if they have not the luster and apparent cleverness that the musings and imaginings of certain intellectuals appear to possess, they are nonetheless in conformity with human nature. The Church is the living representative of the Word of God Incarnate, who from His eternal throne reigns over time and history, and no one but He is able to teach us with true

authority what is needful for humanity to know, in order for the lives of the people to be filled with peace and harmony.

Renew, therefore, dear children, your Christian spirit; submit your actions and habits to the excellent moral precepts contained in the Holy Scriptures; instruct your children in Christian Doctrine, or if you are unable, send them to Catechism, being convinced that religious instruction is a prime necessity for the spiritual and moral life. God will then reward your faithfulness with overflowing grace from His infinite mercy.

Inexplicable Frivolity

Regrettably, most beloved children, and with the deepest sorrow of our souls, we have observed that many of the faithful have too quickly forgotten the sufferings and hardships with which divine justice has punished us, and have given themselves thoughtlessly and negligently over to a frivolous and sinful life. In all places, but especially in the city of Manila, public morality has taken a terrifyingly unrestrained character. Centers of amusement and dissipation have multiplied everywhere, the culture of righteousness seems to have been forgotten, and what is even more saddening, women, especially young women, have forgotten their traditional modesty and decorum. While it is true that the presence in the Islands of a liberating army, generous and kind, may naturally give rise to a certain degree of relaxation of traditional customs, we believe that the reality exceeds all limits and bounds. If on occasion, the Philippines, after its Christianization, has been obliged to display gratitude for divine blessings, we believe that this obligation has never been as imperative as in the present situation. And it is certainly a strange way of giving thanks to God for our deliverance, by giving ourselves up to a life of disorder and dissipation!

For this reason we beseech you, beloved children, that you do not behave as the people of Israel who called upon God in their times of misfortune, but turned their backs on Him in times of prosperity; but become true children of God, not forgetting the precepts of God and His Church, preserving the traditions of our people, and as far as possible, increasing true devotion as befits true children of God, observing the obligation to hear Holy Mass on Sundays and feast days, and frequently receiving the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion. Above all else, we implore the preservation of the traditional modesty and spirituality of the women of our nation, and not to be seduced by the reading of popular, romantic novels. Nothing is more degrading to the dignity of the woman than is careless frivolity. Therefore, we appeal to them to avoid dangerous entertainments and spectacles in which their honor and decorum are often compromised, such as indecent dances, the immoral cinema, and the corrupting theater; keep out of their hands the obscene books that not only dull the mind, but also poison the heart.

Deeply distressed by this decline in Christian morality, precisely when we are most obligated to express to the Lord our deepest gratitude for the immeasurable benefits He has bestowed upon us, by freeing us from the horrors and disasters of this cruel war, let us address ourselves to the Clergy, both secular and in religious communities, and to all faithful Christians, so that with their prayers and cooperation in our ecclesiastical ministry, our Filipino people may return to their former spiritual zeal, and families and

individuals alike may recover the spirit of religiosity that our Lord Jesus Christ came to establish in the world. We recommend to all to embrace the spirit of sacrifice and self-denial, for no one may follow Jesus Christ if he does not take up his own cross; moreover, penance is the most propitious means of appeasing divine wrath.

Redeeming Ourselves

Finally, dear children, the systematic destruction that has reduced our towns and cities to ruins demands of us a work of rebuilding that will be done only with great difficulty. The difficulty of this undertaking should not discourage us, but rather serve as a source of motivation in order to achieve it, whatever challenges and obstacles we must overcome. And we must begin this work confident in our own efforts, without expecting others to carry it out without our cooperation. The salvation of a people exists within their own hands, and in no way may we better demonstrate our abilities than by redeeming ourselves. We beseech you, therefore, beloved children in the Lord, do not forget your duties as citizens and stewards, and cooperate with the authorities in the rebuilding of our country. Let us strive as much as possible to cultivate the fields, to resume our previous industries, to reestablish commerce; in a word, let each work diligently in his own profession, and our nation will rise from its ruins into a future full of life and prosperity. Do not forget, however, that no matter how we strive, we can do nothing without the help of God, for as He Himself has said, “without Me you can do nothing.”

Our One and Only Treasure

And nothing more, dear children, for the moment. We will not take our leave of you, however, without the reminder that, as experience has ever shown, all in this world is fleeting and ephemeral except our faith and our religion. The whirlwinds of revolution and war can destroy in a short time all that humanity has built up through ages of labor; the only thing in life that is eternal and defies the power of destruction is religion, our own Christian religion established by God Himself, against which all the powers of the world have fought for twenty centuries, and will continue to fight until the end of the world. Preserve, therefore, within your souls the great gift of your faith; grow under the influence of divine grace, and be faithful emulators of Him who came to the world to be a living example to all those predestined for salvation.

In token of our affection, of our sympathy with your misfortunes, and of our desire for your spiritual welfare, receive this blessing of your Shepherds in Christ.

Given at Manila, July 20, 1945 (Archives of the Cortes Parish, Libro de Ordenes 1887- 1948, fols. 136v-139v).

Having heard from the entire united Philippine Church hierarchy, let us return to the Archdiocese of Cebu and hear what Archbishop Reyes has to say to the Boholano clergy. As I mentioned near the beginning of the article, the province of Bohol was separated and proclaimed as the Diocese of Tagbilaran just before the war, but this was unable to be implemented due to the outbreak of hostilities. After the war, Archbishop Reyes served as Apostolic Administrator of Tagbilaran (in addition to his duties as Archbishop of Cebu), awaiting the installation of the first bishop of the new diocese. However, the parish church that was to become the new cathedral, St. Joseph the Worker in Tagbilaran, was in rather poor condition after the war. Given that Cebu City was heavily damaged, with the cathedral and archbishop's palace destroyed (and so much else besides), Archbishop Reyes decreed in the below January 22, 1946 letter, that it should be the Boholano churches that will provide the funds to renovate the newly-elevated cathedral, making it fit for the installation of a bishop.

Archbishop's Residence Cebu City, Philippines

Reverend and beloved Father,

You are already aware of the present deplorable state of the church of Tagbilaran, due to the effects of time and the disaster of the recent war. It is now the Cathedral Church, the Mother church of all parishes of the new diocese and province of Bohol. As much for this as for the imminent arrival of your first bishop, it is urgent that absolutely necessary repairs be completed, notwithstanding the costs of materials and the wages of the workers.

For these works of repair, we stipulate for the present that the parishes of the new diocese shall contribute to the costs.

The parish of Cortes that is in your care will contribute the amount of one hundred pesos.

In your Parish Book of Accounts, include this expense on the authority of this circular.

If there are not sufficient funds existing in your parish treasury, you as Parish Priest may pay the quantity assigned from your own personal funds, and later charge it to the parish account.

Your assigned amount may be submitted directly to the Archdiocesan Curia, or collected by my delegated representative on or before February 15, 1946. Do not submit the funds to any other person.

Gabriel M. Reyes

Archbishop of Cebu and Apostolic Administrator of Tagbilaran
(Archives of the Cortes Parish, *Libro de Ordenes*, fol. 139r)

This letter is addressed to the parish priest of Cortes, and instructs him to contribute 100 pesos. Each parish church (except, of course, Tagbilaran) received such a letter, with differing amounts based on the parish's ability to give. For instance, Corella and Baclayon were instructed to pay 150 pesos each, and Loon the amount of 400 pesos, despite the fact that each of these parishes were themselves repairing war-related damage to their churches and property. We then see in the *Libro de Cuentas* of Tagbilaran regular amounts arriving throughout 1946 for the purpose of repairing the church.

I noted above in my discussion of the general circular letter released by the bishops in July 1945 that Church administrators were concerned with both the physical and spiritual health of all citizens of the country. The following letter from Archbishop Reyes is addressed specifically to the clergy, and while he emphasizes to them the importance of vigorously renewing their pastoral

duties in the post-war period, he recognizes their own need for spiritual refreshment and renewal, and their need for time for reflection in community.

Archbishop's Residence
Cebu City, Cebu
February 14, 1946

To Our Venerable Clergy of Cebu and Bohol.

Let us give our most sincere thanks to God for having preserved our lives, delivering us from the disasters of the recent war. Each of us has lost much, and the Church as well. We mourn the loss of the lives of so many loved ones, and of the articles and materials dedicated to the mission of religion and the Church. But we thank God that we have retained our lives, and through those lives and the grace of God, which is never lacking, we will gradually recover what we have lost. For our part, we embrace these words from

Holy Scripture: "Laqueus contritus est, et nos liberati sumus." ["The snare has been broken, and we have been freed" – Psalm 123:7]. The rope has snapped and we are now free. The bonds of our servitude and the chains of enslavement under which we have groaned over the past four years have been broken apart, and we may now breathe the fragrance of peace.

As priests, we must generously repay this tremendous gift, using the most precious currency at man's disposal—gratitude. Gratitude to the Lord our God, whose mercy is the prime source of all good, who chastens our faults, heals, and renews us. Gratitude to the most holy Virgin Mary, whose powerful intercession we invoked unceasingly during our days of tribulation, to whom we are most indebted for the recovery of our lost freedom. But it is not sufficient that our gratitude be only trivial and ephemeral, but constant and firm, genuine and proper to those in holy orders, as it is our sole and best gift—the total and absolute dedication of each to the sacred mission, our vocation. This is precisely

where we as priests must demonstrate our gratitude to the Author of all good, to the God of mercy, the God of love, the God of peace.

To this end do we write this circular letter, to encourage you to be grateful, and to exhort you in your service to God, for our just gratitude is consistent with the execution of our ministerial duties. Express your gratitude in the following ways:

- 1) Be in compliance with the statutes and ordinances, and take care that the faithful comply likewise;
- 2) Make constant effort in sanctifying the self, and work with untiring zeal for the sanctification of others;
- 3) In the timely and diligent administration of the Holy Sacraments, and the desire to administer them with all dignity and gravity;
- 4) Take care to accurately preach the divine Word on prescribed days and times, and endeavor to do so in a way that is useful, pleasant, and profitable to the faithful, whether they live in the town or in the *barrios*;
- 5) Diligently catechize both adults and children, and take care that they learn the catechism correctly;
- 6) Show eagerness in assisting the sick and dying with the Holy Sacraments, and show courage in overcoming any hinderances and impediments that may be faced;
- 7) Be diligent in hearing confession, with the sacred delicacy required for the proper discharge of this office;
- 8) In your persistence in edifying all the faithful with your good example promptly and without partiality, according to the apostle, with the warning not to discourage any with a bad example, or anything that would be an occasion to sin;
- 9) Finally, show gratitude in all the tasks and duties that the Church requires of her priests, so that they may be stewards of the sacred ministries that are Her greatest treasure.

Those who have been consecrated to the worship of God and the sanctification of souls must distinguish themselves from the rest of the faithful, and must shine as the Light of the World with their teaching

and good works, so that the Christian faithful, seeing them, may glorify their heavenly Father. Because there is nothing more effective in prompting the people to piety and divine worship than the good life and example of those who are dedicated to sacred ministry. Let the clergy be mindful that their lives, both interior and exterior, should be holier than those of the laity, in order that they may lead by their example of virtue and good works. These obligations cannot be fulfilled without a profoundly spiritual interior life that is tangibly Godly.

All this, Venerable Fathers, is what we ask of you for the love of God and the charity of Christ. How much we would love to have you together for some days of spiritual exercises, but circumstances do not allow it at the moment. After the next Holy Week we hope to have this consolation; in the meantime we ask the aid of the Lord of mercy who leads us on the path of piety, to instill a holy zeal for the health of the souls entrusted to your pastoral care. Pray also to the Lord for us, that as we labor under the same conditions, we may be faithful to God before our own conscience.

Fortunately, the Lenten season is approaching, the first we will celebrate after the dark days of the war. Lent is a time for self-examination and reformation in our life. By reason of holding the office of priest, you are heralds of God to proclaim His name, His teachings, and His precepts to individual souls and to the greater society; preach the eternal truths, restore the Christian life that has been neglected as a result of the war, by organizing spiritual exercises in groups, and the other practices and devotions that are customary during the wholesome season of Lent. Times may change, but what does not change is the eternal law of God and the moral wretchedness of mankind. Let us all work to restore Christian life among the people. And now that we enjoy, thanks be to God, a measure of normality, we ordain that the ecclesiastical laws be put into effect in conformity with the Synodal constitutions and the laudable customs of our parishes. Likewise, the war having ceased, the precept of Fasting and Abstinence (which we had given dispensation *ratione belli* [by reason of war]) is in effect as of this

coming Lent. Make this understood by the faithful in a timely manner. As of the date of this circular, cease offering the prayer in tempore belli, and in its place use the prayer pro papa as simply implied, in other words, to be said whenever the rubrics allow.

Exurge, Domine, advuja nos! Arise, O Lord, and help us! We ask this through Your mercy. *Libera nos propter nomen tuum!* Deliver us, save us, raise us up for Your name's sake.

Gabriel M. Reyes

Arz. de Cebu y Administrador

Apos. de Bohol (Archives of the Cortes Parish, *Libro de Ordenes*, fols. 131v-132r)

The final letter I will share acts as the second of two bookends, the first being the initial circular letter I shared from Archbishop Reyes in the previous article. In that letter, dated September 12, 1941, the Archbishop reminds the clergy to encourage their faithful to take refuge in daily recitation of the Holy Rosary, especially during the times of uncertainty that preceded the war. Here, nearly five years to the day of the writing of that letter, he again urges the efficacy of the Rosary, as the three-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of La Naval approaches. Archbishop Reyes asserts that, just as the participants of the 1646 naval battle appealed to the Rosary for victory, so also did the clergy and the people during the recent war, and it was through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, through the recitation of the Holy Rosary, that the Filipino people were saved from ultimate defeat by foreign invaders.

Archbishop's Residence

Cebu City, Philippines

To the Venerable Clergy and Beloved Faithful of Cebu and Tagbilaran

Blessing and Health in the Name of the Lord.

This year of 1946 marks the three hundredth anniversary of "La Naval de Manila," a victory achieved by the Catholic Spanish-Filipino

armada against immensely superior enemy forces; a victory that symbolized the triumph of the Catholic faith against heresy, which was declared by Ecclesiastical Authority to be a miracle performed through the agency of Our Lady of the Rosary. As an act of thanksgiving, and in fulfillment of the sacred vow taken by the faithful forces in the heat of the battle, the feast of La Naval has been celebrated yearly during the solemnities of the Holy Rosary with full native splendor in the Church of Sto. Domingo in Manila, and also in all the parishes.

During these three centuries, the Philippines, in both prosperity and misfortune, has always sought the protection of Mary by praying the Rosary in faith and love. The Filipino has daily poured out this prayer, a prayer most pleasing to the ears of the Holy Mother, for Her divine graces and favors. Through these three hundred years Mary the Most Holy Virgin of the Rosary has heard these pleas, and has bestowed Her protection during times of great danger upon individuals, upon families, upon all the people. She has preserved the Catholic religion in these islands despite the efforts of heretics and the machinations of enemies who conspire to destroy it.

During the bitter years of the recent war, we have suffered unspeakable horrors. In our sufferings and bitter tribulations, we entreated, we turned to God without ceasing. We appealed in confidence and humility for the protection of Mary, Mother of Jesus Our Divine Redeemer, "Mother of God," and prayed insatiably Her Holy Rosary, and in praying it, we were encouraged and consoled in the midst of our distress. The noble hearts of Filipinos invoked Mary their Mother for comfort. Ever our dearest Mother, She soothed us, delivered our nation from the total ruin planned for it by those who had us in their power, sustained our faith, and preserved Christian Culture, protecting within our

families the fire of Filipino Tradition. How grateful we should be to God for His mercies and to Mary our Mother for Her intercession! Noblesse oblige!

The war has ended. We live among ruins and, we must acknowledge with great sorrow, we also live among scenes of frivolity and debauchery that are precipitating the moral ruin of our people. Everywhere we see that public morality has been loosened and centers of entertainment and leisure have multiplied. With rampant robbery and pillaging, traditions of justice and honesty seem to have been forgotten, and what is more dismaying, the youth seem to have lost their traditional modesty and characteristic decorum. Truly, anyone who has love for our people will be dismayed at this laxity in Christian morality, a laxity that undermines the principles of righteousness and morality, and results in the transgression of established laws, constituting a public scandal. This state of society naturally causes concern and a fear for the future. Here is what the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of the Philippines said in this regard in their joint letter dated July 20, 1945, and directed to the Filipino People, the vast majority of whom preserve their Catholic faith:

“May God grant that the Philippines never again witness the horrors that our people have seen and witnessed!

However, beloved children, the same causes produce the same effects under similar circumstances: so we fear that if the nations do not change their current course, the world may be enveloped in a catastrophe even greater than that of the present. War is an evil, and as such is the punishment for our sins. Personal transgressions are punished by God, either in this world or in the next, but collective sins are punished by God in this world, because nations no longer exist after death. The only way, therefore, to prevent a public calamity is to avoid all social sins. Ungodly and deceitful religious ideas; scientific systems that disregard human dignity; political doctrines that enslave a part of humanity under the yoke of a few states that believe themselves to be superior and privileged races; social doctrines, which by their distortion of the concept of justice, trample on the rights of the wretched and downtrodden; public immorality whose scandalous influence perverts the minds and hearts of the inexperienced youth; forgetfulness and

disregard of duties to God in the daily life; these are the greatest collective crimes that provoke the wrath of God on peoples and nations.”

In our case, therefore, we urge the rectification of these errors, which we all deplore. It is thus necessary to undertake a crusade of restoration, of reconquest; for it would be a strange and dishonorable way to thank God for His benefits, and the Virgin Mary for Her favors, if we were now to give ourselves up to dissipation and a disordered life.

Our gratitude to God must always be the expression of a pure soul, of the spirituality of the Filipino nation. It must be a Christian idealism, and therefore a factor of life that will renew and improve mankind—a means of transformation.

This gratitude and renewal is linked, and for Catholics it consists of an adherence, with the entire heart and soul, to the doctrines of the Church. It is a return to the life of the spirit, and a rejection of materialistic notions of life, which have brought peoples and nations to ruin and despair. We must give as much depth and breadth possible to catechesis and the religious education of our youth, as well as to the popular masses. If we truly love our People, we must not forget that the peace and prosperity of peoples and nations have deep spiritual roots, though often veiled by the slogans and machinations of politicians and government officials. Therefore be renewed, our beloved faithful, submitting your conduct to the noble principles of morality contained in the precepts of God and His Church; teach your children the Christian Doctrine, and if you cannot undertake this, send them to catechism, and to Catholic institutions and schools, being convinced that such religious instruction is necessary and essential for the spiritual and moral life of all, both great and small. Exercise careful vigilance over the children, especially the youth, protecting them from dangerous companions and harmful amusements. Defend them from the morbidity of Protestantism. Receive the Holy Sacraments together with them, and with them as a family pray the Holy Rosary.

And as the Rosary has been a token of salvation in our inner lives and in our religious history, a sign of peace and happiness in our homes, and an encouragement to social order, let us make use of it in this current crusade, praying it unceasingly. The mysteries of Salvation which we contemplate in the Rosary remind us of the eternal principles of justice, of love for God and neighbor, which constitute a consummately powerful force, able to move consciences, inspiring them to the virtues of Christian morality.

Venerable priests, be Apostles of the Holy Rosary. Let this devotion be instilled in individuals, and let communal prayer take root within families. We strongly urge in the coming month of October that parishes and churches celebrate the Feast of the Holy Rosary with a general communion with all possible reverence and magnificence. We enjoin our parish priests, rectors, and those in charge of churches to extol the theme of the excellencies of Mary the Mother of God in their homilies, teachings, and catechism.

Venerable fathers and beloved children, through the Holy Rosary, let us make petition with living faith and confidence; for our own needs and intentions; for the sanctity of the family; for moral integrity; for justice and charity in social affairs; for Catholicism in the Philippines.

May Our Lady of the Rosary keep us always under Her shelter of protection. It is with fervent longing that we greet you and end this letter in Cebu City on September 10, 1946.

Copy this letter to your Book of Diocesan Orders.

Gabriel M. Reyes (Archives of the Cortes Parish, *Libro de Ordenes*, fols. 132v-134r)

These are words that would have been read to, heard by, and acted upon by the parishioners in the communities of Tagbilaran and Corella, and they act as a

final word to the priests and parishioners in the Archdiocese of Cebu as they emerge from the shadow of the war.¹² As the official pastoral message and voice of the Church, these words would become a part of the local life of the individual communities, just as much as the financial registers and sacramental records.

Working in parish archives can be somewhat of a mind-altering experience. I do not refer to states of mind triggered through contact with the toxic ink and mold present in so many canonical books, or the potential dangers of working in close proximity with large numbers of *ipis*, *anay*, and bats—that is why wearing a mask, keeping your hands clean, and watching your head is essential when doing this kind of work. The mind-altering experience I am referring to is what happens when reading through the canonical books, the records of baptisms, burials, marriages, confirmations, financial accounts, inventories, collections of circulars, and the many other materials one encounters in a parish archive. Following these records, as they pass by steadily day by day, month to month, and year to year, there is a feeling of looking down a long tunnel into the past, whose length is punctuated with the births, lives, and deaths of generations of people who have made the parish community their home. Larger and broader than any single person, the community itself takes on a life of its own, with its own birth, major life events, illnesses, challenges, and triumphs. People in general may be forgiven if they look at their *old* parish church, full of *old* books and other *old* things, and feel there is nothing truly living there; at least nothing relevant to their daily life. However, these communities *are* still alive, and when we look, we can read the story of a living, breathing entity, whose history continues to be written, and which intimately includes us today.

Notes

¹ Tagbilaran restarts limited financial entries more than a year later in February 1944, but only for a brief period.

² Their full name in English is the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit, and in Latin *Congregatio Missionalis Servarum Spiritus Sancti*, or *S.Sp.S.* for short. This shortened abbreviation appears as part of the signatures of the Holy Spirit Sisters in the wartime baptismal records.

³ Canon law allowed for the celebration of canonical marriage without the presence of a person competent to assist at the ceremony under the condition of *periculum mortis*, or danger of death. Such conditions might include extrinsic causes, such as danger due to wartime conditions. This is almost certainly the case here, as I have also come across a number of such examples in parishes in Cebu.

⁴ It seems clear that Corella experienced disruptions similar to those of Tagbilaran, albeit of significantly decreased duration. While the particular reason is not specifically stated in the records, the parish church and/or cemetery must have been unavailable during these periods.

⁵ And afterwards as well. Beriberi remained a major cause of death among Filipinos for decades after the war. “Annual Report—1964, Philippines Health Statistics,” Disease Intelligence Center, Department of Health, Republic of the Philippines.

⁶ An amusing aside that illustrates the mistakes or clerical errors that sometimes enter the sacramental books, a February 1944 entry records the burial of a 110-year-old (!) man, whose cause of death is listed as *infantile beriberi*.

⁷ A possibility, and a rather morbid one, is that small children were simply dying of other diseases before they could succumb to infantile beriberi. This was often seen during cholera and influenza outbreaks, where mortality rates for *calentura*, *tisis* and other common fatal conditions drastically decrease in the presence of the more fatal epidemic disease.

⁸ I should note that I have seen similar wartime spikes in adult beriberi in parishes in Northern Mindanao, Camiguin, and various places in Bohol, Cebu, and Siquijor.

⁹ I am aware that potential answers exist elsewhere, such as municipal and military records, as well as personal accounts, and I am familiar with the contents of many of these sources. However, as I noted in my previous article, I am purposefully focusing on parish archival sources here in order to illustrate their relative importance, and this obviously includes their eventual use in *conjunction* with these other sources of information.

¹⁰ This does mean that there were no war-related violent deaths in Corella, only that none are recorded. There are a number of burial records in which the cause of death is listed as “muerte natural” (natural death), or is left blank. The priest and/or parish secretary of Corella may have had practical reasons of their own for not recording specifics of violent deaths.

¹¹ There are also several entries in the months around this time that show people, typically children, being murdered by *bolo* in Daus. The victims were as young as six months old, but I do not know if these killings were committed by Japanese soldiers, guerilla fighters, or local residents.

¹² Of course, in many senses the war was not over. The herculean task of rebuilding the country was still largely to be completed, and dioceses and parish churches would seek redress for war damages well into the 1950s. The personal and societal trauma continues, in one form or another, to this very day.

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