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## THE ANGRY DAYS OF SURIGAO, 1898-1899 (OR: THE DRAMA BEHIND F. GONZALEZ STREET, CEBU CITY)

*Peter Schreurs, MSC*  
Magallanes, Agusan del Norte

Most of the events of the Philippine Revolution (1898-1900) and the Filipino-American war happening in Cavite, Manila and the rest of Luzon have been amply written about in local and some foreign publications. The same is not wholly true of what occurred elsewhere in the Philippines. The latter events, although happening far from Luzon, were nevertheless inspired by and initiated in Luzon. "The Luzon insurrection leaped to the rest of the Archipelago like flames in a field thick with reeds," as one writer (Pastells) put it.

If Luzon had a hard time of it, more so the Visayas and Mindanao, at least as seen from the horizon available to local revolutionary leaders. Events, decisions, dilemmas in Manila and Luzon were, of course, more "decisive," and consequently weighed heavier on those who had to solve the dilemmas, make decisions and were in the thick of resulting clashes. As Manila was going, so the rest of the nation would (have to) go. This was not just one more invocation to be added to the long litany of revolts that had happened at various times in the past, at various places and for various reasons . . . .

There was of course the lack of communication preventing an effective coordination between what was planned, dreamed, or just happened in Luzon and in the rest of the country. And everywhere loomed the same logistical problems: financing, mobilization and movement of troops and supplies.

Like in Luzon, the unforeseen twists added by the Spanish-American War and the American take-over of the Philippines made for new confusion, bitterness and tragedies in local events that could very well do without them.

Nor were the uprisings in the far-flung districts of the Archipelago spared another deadly dimension: internal dissent and power-struggles among the leaders themselves. The latter partly arose from the dilemmas introduced by the American intervention, partly from machinations around who was who or wanted to do what. Burdened by all its liabilities and ballast, the Revolution never got a fair chance to become what it legitimately should have been: the birth of a free nation. In 1901 a new foreign banner flew over the Islands and that was it, for another 45 years to come.

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The following pages wish to give an insight into the nearly totally unknown revolutionary events in Surigao and some adjoining areas. The reader will not find here

any report on military campaigns: except for a small-scale confrontation in north-east Davao in Sept. 1898, there were none; after 1900 there were only some “skirmishes” and “mopping-up” operations to use the terminology of American reports. The information herewith provided is (aside from a few personal communications) taken from two sources:

- *Historia con Visos de Novela de Nuestra Prision en Surigao* by Father Ricardo Romero O.S.B. (Barcelona, 1903).
- *Mision de la Compania de Jesus de Filipinas en el Siglo XIX* by Father Pablo Pastells, S.J. (Barcelona, 1916).<sup>1</sup>

When the Revolution broke out in 1898, Father Romero was the assistant parish priest of Cantilan (now Surigao del Sur). He was 28 years old and had been in the Philippines for only two years. Father Pastells was the Superior of the Jesuits in the Philippines. He was well acquainted with Mindanao, having been parish priest of Caraga (northeastern Davao) and Bislig in the 1870s and '80s. Afterwards he became the foremost historian of the missionary apostolate of the Jesuits in the Philippines.

As far as I know, these are the only written sources providing substantial information about the revolutionary events in this part of Mindanao, gathered from personal experience (Romero) or from on-the-spot reports (Pastells). *Harper's History of the War in the Philippines* has some columns with reports about the same area and events, but these are very sketchy and superficial.

Romero's story and Chapter XIX (vol. III) of Pastells are predominantly about the imprisonment of the Spanish Benedictines and Jesuits of Surigao and Agusan, about the major dramatis personae who effected that imprisonment on orders from Malolos (the Gonzalez brothers Simon and Wenceslao) and about the liberator of the prisoners (Colonel Prudencio Garcia).

Pastells' Chapter XIX (like the whole *Mision*) is dense with information, meticulous, detailed. Romero's book as a whole is factual. He was there and underwent it all. However, in the title and in his foreword he is honest enough to warn the reader that he is writing *con visos de novela*, adding some “embellishments,” as he says in the foreword. Reading him I tried my utmost to discover (or sense) where his story of the reality ends and his *visos de novela* begins.

He writes in a turn-of-the-century kind of style, is extremely sharp when describing the features of some personalities . . . and the latter often come stumbling out of the process not exactly “embellished!” Some are downright verbally killed.

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Pastells are to vol. III, chapter XIX.

One poor soldier, launched into the Revolution is portrayed as follows:

He was an old man, already close to seventy, Visayan by birth, of medium height, his head covered with white hair, his mustache was small, sparse, bristly trimmed, its strands horizontal. It looked as if it had grown there willy-nilly. His big teeth were covered with tartar and stained by buyo (betelnut) chewing. He was flat-nosed, had a brown, almost black face, which was wrinkled like parchment. He was a charlatan, shameless and mischievous like a boy. His feet had wide soles and were bare. Finally, when he laughed, his jaws opened like a double-door (Romero: 48).

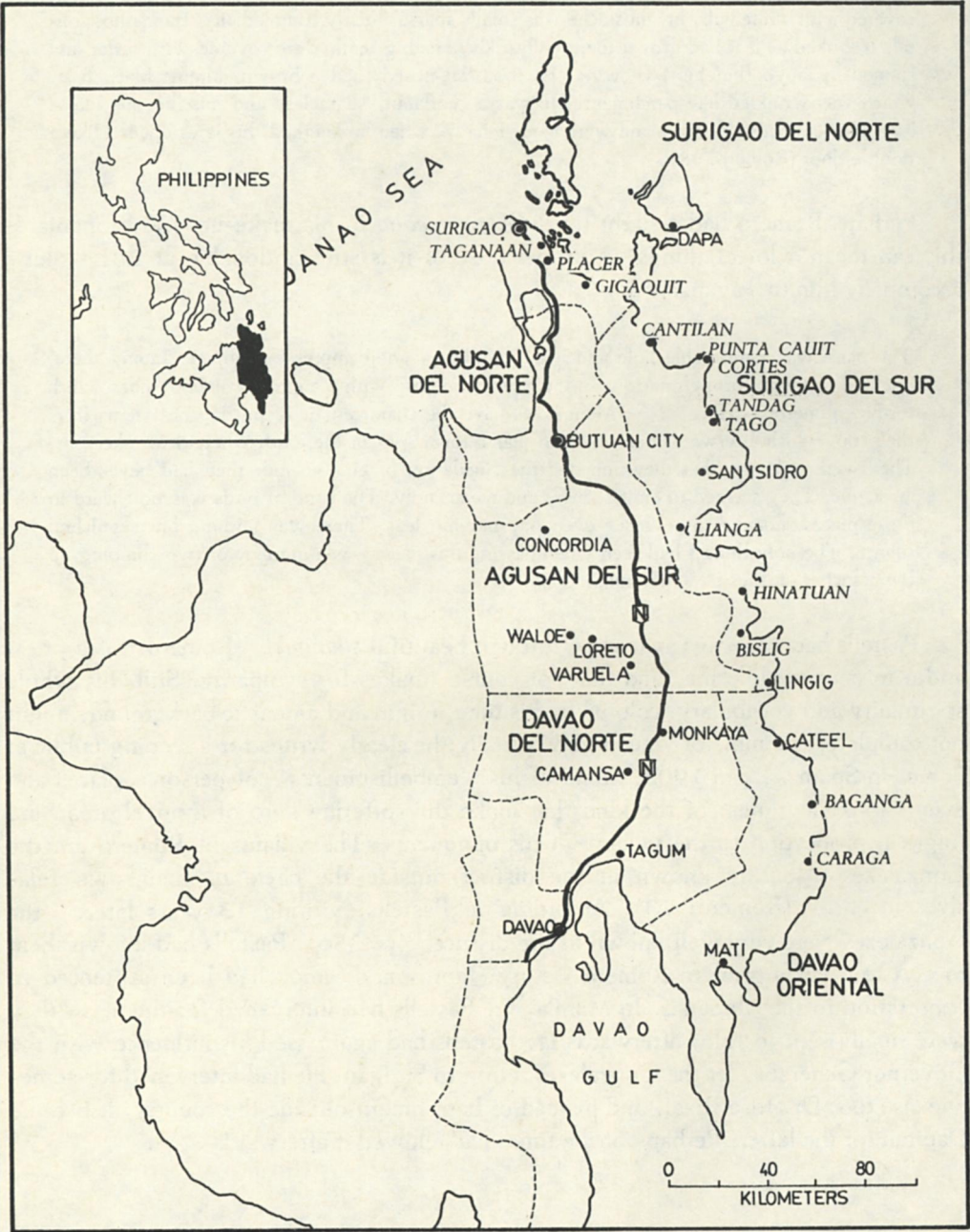
Perhaps Romero had a slight touch of *melancolia* in his make-up. With Spaniards this can mean a lot of things! A proper dose of it is still pardonable at 28, so let's accompany him to Taganaan:

The place was a miserable hole and it never made a good impression on me. Going there, one had to travel through narrow and winding *silangas*<sup>2</sup> with mangroves at both sides which formed numerous deltas . . . . Mangroves have the characteristic of putting out stems from their top, which afterwards bend over to search for a spot in the earth wherein to take root. They were so dense that they impeded the circulation of air. To me, they had never been attractive. They seemed to emit sadness and melancholy. The song of birds was not heard in those places, nor did the eye see even one moving leaf. There was nothing but sepulchral silence. The only thing I had seen when passing this place was a monkey or two climbing up the branches of trees . . . . (Romero: 37).

Pastells had gone to Taganaan "through beautiful *silangas*!" Romero was a priest and a missionary like me, and that, of course, makes for sympathy. Still, his whole spirituality and vocabulary, colored by his time, origin and monastic background, might not completely be mine or yours today. Finally: he clearly writes for a reading public at home, in Spain . . . in 1903. Some of his "embellishments" of persons, places and events look, at times, of the kind that make the suffering hero of a novel great and tragic in proportion to the villainy of his opponents. The villains of Romero are the Gonzalezes, "hardly known in the district outside the circle of their own relatives . . . ." (Romero: 13). According to Pastells, writing 13 years later, "the Gonzalezes were very well known in the district" (p. 356). Pastells had known them too. A few years prior to Romero's story, Jantoy and Simon had been sentenced to deportation to the Marianas. In Manila, Fr. Pastells had intervened for them, so they were finally sent to Jolo; afterwards Fr. Pastells had again used his influence with the Governor General to let the Gonzalezes return to Surigao. He had intervened for someone else too, Dr. Jose Rizal, and instead of banishment outside the country, it became Dapitan for the latter. Perhaps, if the times had allowed it afterwards . . . .

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<sup>2</sup> *Silangas* is the Bisayan term for the winding channels between mangroves.



NORTHEASTERN MINDANAO

Romero disposes of Rizal with an indirect reference of six lines. Pastells, in a number of pages relating the events of the days preceding Bagumbayan, is obviously already struggling hard with the "problem" Jose Rizal . . . (vol. II, ch. XVII).

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What was going on in Surigao between April 1898 and December 24 of the same year? Let's first listen to the small Spanish community residing there. They were living with

fears from within and from without. In the interval of the Spanish-American war this district was cut off from communication with the rest of the Philippines. In case of an uprising, from where would protection have come for us? There was no military detachment. The horizon was dark and no light could come to us from any direction . . . . Although Surigao was a Spanish center, it nevertheless was a small community. It had sixty rifles at its disposal but there was no one to take them up. It would have been difficult to suppress any attempt at revolution, even if the Indios would have nothing but a bolo. The Governor was a courageous soldier, but he saw his life so endangered that he looked for a hole through which to slip out, but because of his extremely unfortunate position he had to stick it out. So it was said by the public. At this very time the Spanish community ran the risk of death . . . . The situation inside the district, however, did not worry the colony as much as what could happen to them from the outside. It was rumored that three vessels, armed with Tagalogs, had sailed from Luzon towards Mindanao and that they were going to arouse Zamboanga to arms and spread the revolution throughout the entire island. Lucky for us that they did not show up in Surigao.

What was certain however, and felt among us with trepidation and heartache was what had happened in Baganga and Caraga. It was said that in the first of these towns, at the word of Prudencio Garcia, the military detachment had revolted against Spain. After some days, the sky cleared and we saw what was really the matter (Romero: 20-22).

This was not yet intended as a revolt against Spain, but as Garcia had openly stated, against the Spanish Governor of Davao because of certain abuses by the local Spanish administration. "It had no other meaning than that of a protest against bad government" (Romero: 24).

Shortly thereafter we began to learn about the war in Luzon, the disaster in Cavite, the fall of Manila, the Yankee covetousness to possess the whole Archipelago, and the betrayal of the Indios and of the Philippine government established in Malolos . . . . When we got hold of the truth, our hearts fell to the ground . . . . (Romero: 25).

This was September 1898. The Spaniards in Surigao started preparing to leave. A Provincial Junta was formed and Governor Viseo turned his authority over to them. On December 24, 1898 the Spaniards evacuated the provincial capital. Only the Spanish missionaries stayed behind. According to Father Pastells, the provisional Junta governed as well as possible, and the district was in reasonable peace and harmony. But on February 12, 1899 the steamer "Melliza" arrived with Simon and Wenceslao



Gonzalez on board. According to them, they had been appointed by Aguinaldo as military commander of Mindanao and Governor of Surigao, respectively. In spite of what Pastells suggests and Romero clearly states, I am inclined to believe that Simon and Wenceslao came with an authentic appointment from Aguinaldo (Romero: 252-53; Pastells: 356 f.). In the first place: nobody from Surigao had previously had any contacts with Aguinaldo at Malolos aside from the Gonzalez brothers. Previously, a "Committee for Mindanao" had been organized in Malolos. The president was a Julio Ruiz, who most probably never came to Mindanao at all; the vice-president was Simon Gonzalez, and Wenceslao was a member of the Board. The Gonzalezes "took part in the momentous drafting of the Malolos Constitution" (Romero, *loc. cit.*). The appointment which they claimed upon arrival in Surigao had been issued after the formation of the just mentioned Committee.

It is true that at about that same time Aguinaldo had issued a general statement that "the *natural* leader of any area should be the man who had first taken up arms against Spain." Prudencio Garcia had sided with the Revolution once his mini-revolt in Baganga was over. I rather think that Aguinaldo did not foresee the complications he was to create for Mindanao with his general statement. It could even be that he had never heard of Garcia's revolt when he appointed the Gonzalezes. It had taken place in another district; I do not know of any representatives from Davao being in contact with Aguinaldo in Malolos. The Gonzalezes certainly were. But it is also true that against the background of the above-mentioned general statement by Aguinaldo, the claim of Garcia has a ring of truth to it. (At present somebody is checking for me if there are perhaps documents available in the National Archives pertaining to this controversy).

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After the arrival of the two Gonzalezes, the provisional Junta Provincial (headed by Jantoy Gonzalez, the father of the two brothers) handed its authority over to them.

Undoubtedly, the shock of the Revolution and their subsequent imprisonment came hard to the Spanish missionaries, not to mention their fear that eventually American Protestantism would become a problem for the Catholic Church, a fear which was far from unfounded. Among those who were pushing President McKinley to annex the Philippines were certain prominent Protestant denominations in the U.S.A.

It should be noted here that the Benedictine Order had not played any role in the Hispanization of the Philippines, unlike other Orders. The Benedictines had arrived only in 1895. In one of their confrontations with Wenceslao Gonzalez during their imprisonment, nevertheless the well-known accusation of "friars having robbed the country" was thrown into their faces during an angry moment. Father Eladio Alonso answered him:

"Do you believe that we missionaries are here for our own advantage? Tell us what we have taken possession of. In such a short span of time we may not have been able to do any good but neither have we done any wrong" (Romero: 113).

As for people's attitude towards the Benedictines, it is very revealing that shortly after they were imprisoned, all parishes had offered to buy their freedom with a financial subscription. (Years later, in Gigaquit, in 1914, a Dutch priest ran afoul of the local mayor. He was sentenced to imprisonment, but people bought his freedom for 100 pesos, which they brought to the Tribunal in a sack full of one-centavo coins!) The Gonzalezes were not unaware of what the Benedictines had done for the wife and children of Simon during the latter's deportation. Therefore, when Simon came to tell the Fathers of Gigaquit that they were going to be imprisoned, he did so

as if possessed by fear and filial respect. The sentences flowed haltingly out of his mouth and were ridiculously ill-phrased.

"Alas, Fathers, my heart crushed with pain and sorrow, I come to carry out a mission which is extremely painful for me. I have received so many favors from the Benedictine Fathers. If it were not for Father Fulgencio, I might be in the other world by now, or in Fernando Poe (sic). I also recall how much your Reverence has protected my wife and family during my exile. In view of so many favors . . . I do not dare tell you . . . but . . . anyway . . . they have given me orders and I have to obey. From now on, Fathers . . . sorry for having to say this to you . . ."

"Do not hesitate, your Excellency, just say it," Father Tomas said softly. "We know what you want to say . . . we are aware of what is going on . . ." (Romero: 63-64).

On another occasion, the old Jantoy — otherwise not exactly an enthusiastic proclerical — after an acrimonious outburst of Wenceslao against the Fathers

stayed behind with them and started to bewail the situation in gentle words . . .

"How sorry I am, Fathers, that this has happened to the Benedictines . . . I really like you, and now this trouble has come to chill our friendship. But at the end I will try to arrange everything and I am going to have things my way" (Romero: 116).

No, the stage-setting for the Revolution in Surigao was not the same as in Luzon. Many Spanish priests elsewhere in the Philippines would gladly have exchanged their predicament with that of the Benedictines and Jesuits in Surigao, although the lot of the latter was not to be envied. Whether or not because they were facing the inevitable, more than once in their verbal exchanges with the Revolucionarios, the Fathers stated clearly that it was not their mission to perpetuate Spanish dominance over the Philippines:

"We will never be opposed to the creation of the Republic of the Philippines. We wish it prosperity a thousand times."

"To us it does not make any difference whether the Yankees will govern or the Filipinos. All we are after is to save religion."

"To a Benedictine missionary it makes no difference whether the people be governed by kings or presidents or counts, as long as religion will be protected."



“We will not look askance at a people civilized by Spain and now governing itself, as long as it does not allow the followers of Luther to come here and blemish this wholly Catholic country” (Romero: 116; 140).

From a letter by the Mission Superior to the two Benedictines who were still sticking it out in the “independent republic” of Cantilan:

“I fondly beg you not to create obstacles to the government of Simon and Wenceslao. They have been appointed leaders of Mindanao and Surigao respectively by the President of the Philippine Republic. Let us bow our heads, since God is with them. Do away with any hostile attitudes and mollify the spirit of the people. Our mission is one of peace” (Romero: 141-42).

Frankly, the recipients of this letter, the Fathers Moral and Romero, were not totally innocent of the attempted creation of that “Andorran” republic of Cantilan . . . in spite of all their protestations to the contrary afterwards! What had happened was the following:

Cantilan, then rather isolated from Surigao, and the second important town of the district, was not so sure that the Gonzalezes had legitimately taken over the authority over the whole province. They had only received an unofficial letter from Surigao, somewhat amounting to “You are herewith informed, . . .” and that letter had not been coursed through the parish priest as was customary in the case of such important changes of authorities. A little moral support from Father Moral did not exactly weaken their skepticism. Anyway, everybody knew that U.S. authority was a distinct possibility also. Father Romualdo had helped them draft a Resolution addressed to the powers that were at Surigao:

The leading citizens and the barrio-captains of this town of Cantilan, sitting in full session in the townhall, considering the serious circumstances which the Filipino Archipelago is going through, and, it not being evident to them that other Powers have recognized her revolt and independence, while, on the other hand, the Filipino people lack the means for the aforementioned purpose, think it expedient not to adhere to any side and to remain neutral, as long as the dark horizon hovering over the Philippines has not cleared up (Romero: 109-10).

That was January 1899, and the Resolution reached Surigao on February 13th. It could have cost the necks of Father Moral and his assistant, Romero, when the two were eventually also escorted to imprisonment in Surigao. Wenceslao Gonzalez easily recognized the penmanship of Father Moral — so he shouted at them: “I know all the people in Cantilan and none of them is clever enough to write such a Resolution!” Rumors had been circulating in Surigao that there was a counter-revolution going on in Cantilan, and already a small force had been dispatched to teach the Cantilanons a patriotic lesson!

This “revolution within a revolution” came to a foreseeable end, not with any bang but with quite some whimpering when finally the Fathers were to be shipped to Surigao to join their captive confreres. The whimpering (like everywhere) came from

the people. What had undoubtedly contributed to it was the farewell sermon by Father Moral on Ash Wednesday:

“ . . . I have a foreboding, as if an Angel were speaking to me confidentially . . . . I have a presentiment that — alas, what grief! — in a short while it will be said: Do you see those ruins? Well, many years ago they were a sanctuary where the true God was adored in spirit and in truth. Here they also venerated the Mother who bore the Light of the world in her virginal womb. But now, weep, angels of glory! Look at those harmful weeds and reefs (sic) that have sprung up in their minds. No trace or sign is left of the road that could have led them to eternal happiness. My God, do not permit such a calamity! These people do not deserve it! Our Mother, cast your eyes over the people of Cantilan and stop the flood of wickedness drawing near them! ” (Romero: 130-31).

Understandable emotions (*visos de novela*?) made him forget that at the beginning of his sermon he had thundered:

“That’s what you get for leaving Spain! In a short while you will be without faith, and that’s what you deserve because of your sins! ” (Romero: 130).

It was Ash Wednesday after all . . . and he had seen that even the captors from Surigao were in church and came forward to receive the cross of ashes!

Afterwards in Surigao, Wenceslao gave them a resounding lecture for their alleged activities in Cantilan:

“You have disgraced your priesthood and your Father St. Benedict. If the latter would descend from heaven now, he would beat you over the head with his staff! You have disgraced your Order and your holy Founder” (Romero: 155).

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Romero’s book is filled with many bitter pages. But no less with moving scenes where he describes the emotions of people when they saw their priests being led away to prison. The same is true for the pages of Pastells about the people in Agusan. And Pastells definitely did not write *con visos de novela*.

In Gigaquit, the wife of Rafael Eliot (then Gobernadorcillo of the town), spoke in the name of a women’s delegation:

“Alas, General, what misfortune has befallen us today! The Father goes away and the people are left sad and lonely. We are going to live in the hovels in our *ilayas*.<sup>3</sup> What are we going to do here if the missionary is not here anymore? Jesus, how rueful that is! The church will look

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<sup>3</sup> *Ilayas* are farmlands on which the owners are accustomed to set up temporary make-shift huts.

like a desert. The rains will destroy it. Thistles will grow up at its door and the streets leading to it will fall into disuse. Our patrons, St. Benedict and St. Augustin, will get angry and will punish us for our wickedness. From heaven they will tell us: 'How slovenly you live, you people of Gigaquit. Look in what neglect my house is. You are very estranged from your Lord!' Grant us this favor, General, and do not take the Father away. For the love of God, leave him with us!' (Romero: 68).

Textcritically speaking: one is tempted to think that the good Mrs. Eliot had been listening to the sermon in Cantilan . . . .

One day a delegation from the island of Nonoc arrived in Surigao. They were preparing for their fiesta to be celebrated that week. Imagine their perplexity when hearing that all the Fathers were under house arrest in the convent as prisoners of the Revolution . . . and they needed one for their fiesta! A convent chockful of priests and not a single one for them? That was not going to happen, revolution or no revolution! Off they went to see General Gonzalez . . . and Nonoc got its priest!

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Of course, those were angry days. But it is quite revealing to compare the tough words and threats uttered by the Gonzalezes "for public consumption" (if I may say so) with the conciliatory and amicable private conversations between them and the imprisoned priests (once animated by a friendly drink in the house of Simon). Sometimes those conversations sound like: "Sorry, Fathers, we are all in this mess together." The same Simon who also had publicly threatened to cut off the heads of the Fathers, was in the same sailboat that brought Father Tomas to Surigao, and

the conversation during the trip was very pleasant, Simon explaining his wonderful dreams about the future of Surigao. "Since I was born in this land, I wish it to excel in every branch of learning. With the support of the Benedictine Fathers I will establish centers of education, and I count on you in everything and for everything" (Romero: 77).

Benedictines minus their heads would have been of little help to him! On another occasion, the Fathers had told him that the missionaries would be indispensable for the future: they, the church, the school, were actually the only centripetal presence keeping people in the towns. Without them "they would just stay in their *ilayas*," as Mrs. Eliot had rightly said in Gigaquit. The answer of Simon:

"Yes, I have taken this aspect up with Aguinaldo just because I also believe that you will be needed. He agreed with me on that point" (Romero: 167).

It is revealing that an enormous family-squabble between Simon and Wenceslao erupted when the Jesuits of Agusan arrived in Surigao after a harrowing trip and in very disheveled condition, one of them nearly dying. The brothers came to blows when Simon blamed Wenceslao for not having properly taken care of the prisoners. This was

not in his script. Under normal circumstances, at least Simon would have gotten along quite all right with the Fathers, like that mayor of Gigaquit in 1914, who became a good friend of that Dutch priest . . . . That mayor was, in fact, a son of Simon, the "Sisenando" of Romero! In 1898 Romero thought that "Sisenando would probably not live very long because of his involvement in the Revolution" (Romero: 22). He did, however . . . and in 1915 became Governor of Surigao. Only, his real name was Recaredo! However, there was one priest whom the Gonzalezes were dead-set on capturing for more than just revolutionary reasons: Father Francisco Sanchez, the Jesuit parish priest of Tandag. Simon had lived in Tago (near Tandag) for a number of years. For a variety of reasons the relations between him and friends of Father Sanchez (and I assume with Father Sanchez himself) had become very strained. One day, Simon's house "burned down" as Romero (p. 16) says. Some very old people in Tago (who witnessed that disaster) say, however, that it was put to the torch, and they could even tell you who did it — no, it was not Father Sanchez. Afterwards Simon settled in Gigaquit. In spite of his good relations with the Benedictines there (Simon even obtained a vital piece of equipment for his nipa-wine distillery from Father Fulgencio), he became suspected of masonic (like in Tago) and secret revolutionary activities. The Spanish Governor had him deported (again) from Surigao. Although not a single record says so, there seems to be no doubt that certain informations provided by Father Sanchez about his antecedents in Tago had something to do with that deportation. The Governors always had to consult the parish priests in such cases.

Because of the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, Simon (and Wenceslao) could not be deported any farther than Iloilo. From there they eventually went to Hongkong, back to Manila, Malolos, from where they returned (via Cebu, where they informed the Bishop about their appointment by Aguinaldo) to Surigao. And then the hunt for Father Sanchez was on!

Tandag, however, is far away from Surigao, and it was a stormy, rainy season. A teacher of Taganaan, Severa (Capanas) saw a chance to smuggle a letter to Father Sanchez to warn him of the threat hanging over his head. Father Sanchez had previously been parish priest of Taganaan. Owing to the stormy weather (there was no road then) she got only as far as Cantilan, just when the would-be little republic there was being mopped up. There she entrusted the letter to the teacher of Cortes, Hilarion (Martinez), who finally put it in the hands of Father Sanchez. To keep a long story short: by then Father Sanchez knew what was good for his health and he hurriedly left for Caraga to the safe territory of a good friend of the Jesuits, (then) Colonel Prudencio, who was now the military commander of that district. Along the way he picked up his Jesuit confreres in Lianga and Hinatuan.

Informed by Father Sanchez about what was going on in Surigao, the six-foot-plus Garcia bristled with anger about the predicament of the priests there. Some other (political) reasons possibly had also something to do with that anger . . . there was that boundary dispute between Davao and the southern part of Surigao. Prudencio Garcia stated: "All the territory south of Punta Cauti is mine". Wenceslao Gonzalez had meanwhile rushed to Tago (south of Punta Cauti), probably reasoning: first get Father

Sanchez . . . about that boundary dispute we can talk or fight afterwards.

At that state Simon and Wenceslao had made another tactical blunder. The detachment which they had dispatched ahead to Tandag to capture Father Sanchez was led by Pio Kaimo, a graduate of the Normal School of the Jesuits in Manila, while the second in command was Inocencio Cortes, whose son had also studied at the Normal School . . . and both were good friends of Father Sanchez. These two saw to it that the sailboat for Tandag became a slow boat, indeed, to give Father Sanchez a good head-start . . . *ad majorem Dei gloriam*! Lesson: if you ever wish to capture a Jesuit, don't dispatch "Arrrneo" boys to do the job for you. Listen to the (tongue-in-cheek?) lines of Pastells:

(The advance party led by Kaimo and Cortes had finally arrived in Tandag . . .) and inside the convent of Tandag Brother Perez heard a voice outside the door:

"Ave Maria"!

"Sin pecado concebida" he answered.

"May we come in?"

This, of course, spelled disaster for the murderous intentions of Wenceslao, who was also on his way to Tandag "to eat Father Sanchez raw" as he had threatened. When upon his arrival he heard that he had been deprived "of his most favorite dish," as Father Romero puts it, poor Pio Kaimo had to pay for it with a "pair of red buttocks," military degradation and imprisonment. What aggravated his offenses and his subsequent punishment was the fact that he had attended Mass that morning and failed to give Wenceslao a report about the loaded sermon that the old and deaf Father Ceballos had delivered. The latter may have been deaf ("sign of God's love for him," Romero says piously) but he obviously knew what was going on. The day before, when the revolucionarios came to confiscate the money of the convent . . . "upon hearing the word money, he became even more deaf!" (That's not from Romero, nor from Pastells, but from one of the early MSC Fathers in Surigao).

Wenceslao did not know it, but a small advance party of Garcia was already in town observing his activities. Don Prudencio was on his way north with 24 well-armed soldiers headed by a cut-throat lieutenant by the name of Domenic. All this happened "south of Punta Cauti."

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We have to shift the scene back to Surigao.

With the developments taking place in Luzon, the whole situation was becoming rather complicated for the Gonzalezes and the rest of the revolutionary leadership. For all practical purposes, the Aguinaldo Republic was out of the picture and Manila was in American hands. At any time U.S. gunboats could appear at Surigao. The Gonzalezes had made it clear from the beginning that Surigao was not going to be subjected to another foreign power again.

But the Treaty of Paris had underlined “America’s manifest destiny” after President McKinley had “fervently prayed” to Heaven to tell him what to do with the Philippines, and had come out of that prayer with the conviction: “There is nothing left to do but take them all.” Quipped an American humorist: “Two months ago we did not even know whether they were islands or canned goods” (Peter Dunn, quoted in *Filipino Heritage*, p. 2091).

When the revolutionary government started in Surigao in January 1899, phase one of the problem (defeat of Spain) was “not applicable” there anymore. All Spaniards (except the priests) had withdrawn from Surigao. The real problem in 1899 was how to resist American occupation. The Gonzalezes were actually sharing the very same fear which was (for different reasons) on the mind of the Spanish priests. That prospect became more and more frightening after Cebu had surrendered to the Americans and U.S. troops had landed at Tacloban. Simon Gonzalez had decided to put the town of Surigao on war-footing and even burn it down if necessary. After that, the small revolutionary army would retreat to the mountains and start a guerilla war. A decree to evacuate the women and children had already been issued.

Such a prospect did not sit well with the population of Surigao and not even with the other members of the revolutionary government. Almost everybody had cheered the Gonzalezes before, but when the cry “Resist the U.S. aggressors” came home to roost, Simon’s supporters drifted away from him, leaving him a lonely man. It looked as if he was also finally “stuck” with that big group of captive priests and brothers. He could not very well give them their freedom, so he decided to disperse them to three localities: Placer, Gigaquit and Surigao.

Meanwhile Prudencio Garcia was proceeding to Surigao. He stopped at Placer where the first group of Benedictines was liberated. Garcia dispatched an emissary to Surigao to inform the Gonzalezes that he would like to have a talk with them about two topics: The Fathers and the question of the boundaries of the two districts. He stressed that he wanted to avoid all bloodshed.

On March 24, 1899 he arrived in Surigao with his soldiers from Baganga and a small rearguard of followers which he had picked up in Tago and Placer. For two days there was some cool and nicely covered-up cloak-and-dagger maneuvering, after which the troops of the Gonzalezes were disarmed (they right away changed loyalties) and Simon and Jantoy were made prisoners. Shortly afterwards Wenceslao was imprisoned in Gigaquit. For the missionaries it was the end of the ‘Prision en Surigao.’

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It was also the beginning of the most tragic episode in the Revolution in Surigao. Don Prudencio had decided to deport the three Gonzalezes to his stockade at Baganga. One evening they were put into three separate sailboats, and:

Once in the boats they were handcuffed. At about the time for weighing anchor, the death-sentence which had been passed, was read to them . . . (Romero: 287).



On the beach of Cortes (just south of Punta Cautit) they were executed on April 4, 1899. "The reason for the killing is unknown," says Pastells (p. 375). Once more a revolution had devoured its own children. After Bonifacio and Luna in Luzon, now Jantoy, Simon and Wenceslao.

Aside from being tragic, the killing had its ironic aspects. In spite of all their flamboyancy and often furious shouting, in spite of the fact that towards the end the brothers had shown only too clearly that they were not of the caliber needed to keep a crisis-situation in hand, there had been no bloodshed in the district during the days of the Gonzalezes.

According to the late Mr. Miguel Calderon of Surigao (whose mother was a Gonzalez!), "in 1916 and again in 1922 it was earnestly and convincingly explained to me by General Prudencio Garcia, that he had no hand whatsoever in the shooting of the three Gonzalezes."

Was Romero (p. 287) writing *con visos de novela* when he stated: "At the time of weighing anchor, the death-sentence which had been pronounced, was read to them" . . . ? That same day, Prudencio Garcia had assured the wife of Simon: "I am not planning to kill him. I will only lock him up in the fort at Baganga so he will not disturb the peace of the towns anymore" (Romero, *ibid.*).

Again, according to Mr. Calderon: "Garcia also told me that the killing had actually been a decision by lieutenant Domenic who, upon his return, reported to me that the prisoners had tried to escape. Later I was told that on the way to Cortes somebody had insinuated that the killing could be explained on that alibi . . . ."

Once the priests were free again, people started begging them to return to their towns. However, because of the political instability of the district, the Benedictine and Jesuit Superiors ordered them to come to Manila.

In the steamer Nuestra Señora del Rosario they embarked for Manila, leaving their hearts in Mindanao (Romero: 287).

As for Agusan: in 1899 only one priest was left for the whole province. Father Pastells ends his chapter with even that last S.J. straggler leaving Agusan and his century and walking into the twentieth.

## EPILOGUE

A copy of Romero's book was for many years treated as a very special, "forbidden" book by prudent MSC Fathers, who in 1908 took over the spiritual care for the

province of Surigao, as successors to the Benedictines. I can perfectly understand that prudence. Years ago, the children, and presently some of the grandchildren of Simon Gonzalez were and are still alive. The story, as written by Romero, might embarrass good people or might be misused by political opponents of the Gonzalezes. In addition: the killing on the beach of Cortes naturally led to a lasting, deep hatred between the Gonzalez and Garcia families. Those who had the book in their possession did not wish to fan that hatred by making the contents public.

Meanwhile, much of that original hatred has undergone the healing influence of the ‘‘Story after the Story,’’ of time and of life. There has even been a marriage between a Gonzalez and a Garcia! Many years afterwards (but not without much trouble) it traipsed into that atmosphere of hatred, a love story of two young people who had as little to do with the bitterness and anger of 1899 as you and I.

In the foregoing pages no attempt has been made at ‘‘canonizing’’ the Gonzalezes. I only tried to point out that perhaps none of them, neither the Gonzalezes nor Garcia, were as bad or good as Romero depicts them. They were all just as good or bad as the times and their own humanity allowed them to be.

If Romero is willing to take risks with his *visos*, so am I. One must not forget that also in Surigao the year 1898 saw the culmination of the accumulated national bitterness. The previous years had produced certain individuals who, when their time came, turned out to be angry people. Romero, who had been in the Philippines for only two years, writes about the Revolution and revolucionarios with a sardonic kind of sarcasm . . . which I can understand. At certain moments I can even appreciate it from a certain angle! At other moments (some coming naturally, others of my own making) one is, however, tempted to soften Romero’s verdicts more than a little or even allow some of them to boomerang! It is, of course, possible that, e.g., that simple soldier guarding the convent-door of Cantilan was speaking ridiculous Spanish. But it is more than probable that upstairs, inside the convent, someone who had been in the Philippines for only two years, was speaking equally ridiculous Bisaya. But that would not fit the text, of course!

With a lot of hindsight, 81 years later, one feels also like telling Romero that he himself, with Jantoy, Simon, Wenceslao and Garcia, plus that verbally ‘‘flattened’’ guard of Cantilan, were all, each in his own way, prisoners of a past and a present.

Jantoy, Simon and Wenceslao have their pages and lines (if one is willing to discover them), wherein one can also see them — to an extent meet them — as complex individuals, confused and angered by their times and by what the years had done to them.

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There is in Cebu a street named after F. Gonzalez, which stands for Florencio Gonzalez, son of Jantoy and brother of Simon and Wenceslao, who was killed by the Spaniards for revolutionary activities in Cebu on April 7, 1898. Such events are apt to

produce angry and nasty people.

What interests me in the book of Romero is not merely the story as information, but even more the history of a peculiar human condition wherein Surigao and Surigaonons became what they were and much of what they are now. Having had the privilege to see the latter, I would like to invite Father Romero back to write the story over, once more. Perhaps he would stand by his facts, but one would expect his old *visos* to have mellowed a little. But since he cannot come back, I offer him these pages as an epilogue to his book.

Last, but not least: the book (like Pastells') interested me because of the hundreds of *people* milling in and between the lines, devout people with confusions and dilemmas all their own. To many it seemed as if the Revolution of 1898 was going to destroy the only frames of reference and objects of devotion which they had known till then. We now know that it did not. That may be hindsight granted to us many years later. But then, in the natural order of things, hindsight has often been one source of confidence in the present and the future.