

Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies

Philippines Pentecostalism

Volume 8, Number 2 (July 2005)

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE CHURCH OF GOD
IN NORTHERN LUZON (1947-1953):
A HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

Doreen Alcoran Benavidez

PART I: HISTORY

1. The Groundwork of Early Pioneers

In 1918, Jennie Brinson Rushim and her husband, Church of God (COG) Missionaries to China, came to the Philippines for several months. It was their impression that there was no Pentecostal missions at that time, and certainly no ministry of any noticeable size. Although they did some missionary work in Manila and won a few converts to the Pentecostal persuasion, their visit was too short to achieve lasting results. They soon returned to China, the land of their burden.¹ Then, in 1936, another COG Missionary, J. H. Ingram in his trip around the world, spent about a week in the Philippines and was deeply moved by the spiritual needs of the country. Unlike Rushim, who reported in 1918 that there was no apparent Pentecostal ministry present in the islands, Ingram reported in 1936 that several small Pentecostal churches were active in the interior.²

The Japanese took the Philippines during World War II in 1941 and 1942. The islands were liberated in 1944, and on July 4, 1946, the

¹ Charles Conn, *Where the Saints Have Trod: A History of the Church of God Missions*, (Cleveland, TN: Pathway, 1959), pp. 19-20.

² On February 18, 1936 he sailed from Los Angeles harbor bound to cross the Pacific and the Orient; he termed it "Golden Jubilee Tour" because the COG was fifty years old that year. His intention was to contact independent missionaries around the world who were interested in affiliating with the COG. The tour carried him to thirty-one countries including the Philippines. Charles Conn, *Where the Saints Have Trod*, p. 29

Philippine Commonwealth was granted complete independence by the United States and became the Republic of the Philippines. It was at about this time that the COG entered the Philippines.

1.1 Missionary

The first COG Missionary from the USA, Frank Porada³ and his family from Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, came back to the Philippines in February, 1946 and resided in San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte. He was a former Missionary of the UFGC⁴ in Ilocos Norte, and being fluent in the Ilocano dialect, he was well received by the Ilocanos. After his affiliation with the COG, he returned to the very people with whom he formerly worked and led to the Lord, and told them of his new affiliation.

In early 1947, some of his former members of the United Free Gospel and Missionary Society joined him. The local churches composing the new group were: Sinaongan Sur, San Agustin, Isabela; Virgoneza, San Agustin, Isabela; Cabanuangan, Jones, Isabela; Cabatuan, Isabela; Barbarit, Gattaran, Cagayan; Payas, San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte; and Taguipuro, Bangui, Ilocos Norte.⁵

Porada's wife and his two children became ill and they were compelled to return to the United States. He stayed and worked alone in the Philippines. Within several months, the COG in the Philippines was organized, and five independent congregations, six ministers and 280 members united with the church and immediately came together for a convention in May, 1947.

Eighteen months after the organization, Frank Porada left the Philippines and was advised by the COG World Missions Department (Cleveland, TN) to appoint one of the ministers to take his place, and to superintend the new work that he had established.

1.2 Initial Expansion

Under the leadership of Cortez and his co-workers, including Vicente E. Agustin, Aniceto Domingo, Manuel Gonzales Sr., Eusebio Juan, Jaime Gumallaoi, Aurelio Molina and Victor Rafael, a fruitful

³ Before World War II Frank Porada as a United Free Gospel Church Missionary went back to the States for furlough and stayed there for several years.

⁴ United Free Gospel Church

⁵ The response of Fulgencio Cortez, Sr. to a questionnaire (March, 1990) sent by Al Tagayuna.

program of evangelism began. Not long afterward, in 1950, the Mission Board appointed Cortez as the national representative of the COG in the Philippines. In that same year, under his leadership, the COG in the Philippines was reorganized.

The reorganized Church of God had seven ministers, six organized churches and about two hundred members. In the following years, 1948-1952, the young group was slowly expanding and the following are some more places where new works were started and established (with pastor's name identified in parentheses): Dibuloan, Jones Isabela (Loreto Mateo); Arubub and Pungpungan, Jones, Isabela (Vicente Agustin and his wife), Palacian, Aglipay, Quirino (Aniceto Domingo); Alannay, Lasam, Cagayan and Atoc, Luna, Apayao (Gideon Lagundino); Cabatacan East, Lasam, Cagayan (Alfredo Valiente, Sr.); Maddela, Quirino (Victor Rafael) and Namatican, Santa Lucia, Ilocus Sur (Manuel Gonzales, Sr. and other co-workers).⁶

The reorganization made the confluent efforts of the ministers more effective and fruitful. One American observer noted:

Practically, the entire task has been accomplished by serious, consecrated Filipinos...they have not allowed the lack of American missionary to hinder their zeal to carry the glad tidings of Jesus into new areas where there are no Pentecostal works, the young ministers willingly sacrifice their comforts and move to the needy community. The COG is being enlarged and strengthened constantly by many young people...walking for miles...they go forward for Christ.⁷

The local ministers pressed into remote villages of the Northern Provinces of Luzon, carrying their musical instruments and Bibles with them, talking to those they met, and winning souls for Christ. The work grew steadily so that by 1952, the denomination had fourteen ministers, twelve church buildings and 551 members.⁸ Cortez resigned his pastorate in Barbarit, Gattaran, Cagayan in order to devote his full time to supervising the expanding work.

⁶ The response of Fulgencio Cortez, Sr. to a questionnaire (March, 1990) sent by Al Tagayuna.

⁷ Charles Conn, *Where the Saints Have Trod*, p. 229.

⁸ The Church of God, National office, provided the statistics used. The data records the number of churches, members and ministers from 1947-2002.

1.3 The Pillars of the Philippine COG

The following people are considered to be the pillars of the COG in the Philippines because they pioneered ministries and planted churches. They stood for the COG when it was first established and formally registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and they were Fulgencio Cortez, Aniceto Domingo, Vicente Agustin, Victor Rafael, Eusebio Juan, Manuel Gonzales and Jaime Gumallaoi.

1.3.1 Fulgencio Cortez, Sr.

Cortez from Namatican, Santa Lucia, Ilocos Sur is an Ilocano preacher who was converted to Christianity in California, USA, when he went there for work. Upon his return to the Philippines, he studied at Free Gospel Bible Institute. Before Porada left, he appointed Cortez to take his place; however, some of the ministers of the new organization were not happy with his appointment and they left the group.

The above-mentioned ministers accepted the appointment of Cortez and readily supported his leadership. Cortez led the group for four years without the aid of any missionary.

1.3.2 Cortez's Co-workers

In Isabela, Porada stayed in the house of Aniceto Domingo and family. Domingo was a United Free Gospel pastor, but Porada was able to convince him to join the COG. Domingo started a COG work in Jones, Isabela and was assisted by Porada in his early ministry endeavors.

Vicente E. Agustin was also a United Free Gospel pastor and also from Cabanuangan, Jones, Isabela. He had already started works in Arubub and Pungpongan, both barrios of Jones, Isabela when he joined the COG, following Domingo's move. Agustin helped Domingo in spreading the work in the neighboring barrios in Jones, Isabela.

Eusebio Juan pioneered the COG work in Saranay, Cabatuan, Isabela. While he was the pastor, a revival was experienced in the church. Many of the believers received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As a result of the revival, the towns of Cauayan and Dabubu in Isabela were reached with the gospel through the members who experienced the Pentecostal outpouring.

Jaime Gumallaoi was from Baruyen, Bangui, Ilocos Norte. He helped pioneer and establish the churches in the towns of San Nicolas, Taguiporo and Bangui all in the province of Ilocos Norte.

Manuel Gonzales was from Samac, San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte. He was encouraged to become a pastor by his pastor Maura Miguel, who

was then pastoring in Payas, San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte. He entered the ministry at the age of eighteen even before he had formal training in a Bible school. In 1951, after four years of ministry, he decided to have formal training at the Messengers of the Cross Bible College in Santa Catalina, Ilocos Sur. In his second year, he married Gertrudis Manuel, one of the youth of Payas, San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte. During his early years in the ministry, he became sick and pledged to serve God if he was healed. Gertrudis Manuel Gonzales, his wife narrated the incident:

In 1955, a religious gathering (at that time called “rally”) was held at Bingao, San Nicolas Ilocos Norte. Benigno Maningan, one of the powerful preachers of his time, preached about the healing of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20:1-6. Among those who attended the gathering and heard the preaching were Manuel Gonzales and his brother in-law Blas Gonzales. One month after the rally, Manuel Gonzales suffered from a terrible stomachache, and there was no known cure for it. It was an illness that no one could explain. Every possible cure was tried, and every person who might be of help was consulted, until one of them said one day that there was no hope and as soon as the sun sets that day the patient will also die. We had given up hope. I had even called the pastor in the vicinity, Pastora Cayso, to perform the last rites for the patient; but Blas Gonzales refused to give up. He went to the patient and reminded him of the preaching they heard about the healing of Hezekiah and they both agreed that they should pray. We began praying, and when the pastor and the Christian brethren in the area arrived, they joined in the prayers. For hours we did not waver in our prayers. Suddenly Manuel Gonzales made a stir, which he had not done for some time because he had gone very weak. We who were praying were even more encouraged. Later, Rev. Manuel Gonzales jumped up from his bed and joined in our praises, joyfully thanking the Lord for healing. And healed he was! So the preparation for the supposed wake that would follow his death became a powerful revival in the area that strengthened our faith and began a powerful healing ministry of the church through the believers.⁹

Manuel Gonzales became one of the most respected leaders because of his dedication to the ministry. He was one of the leaders who helped the early missionaries in their ministry in the Philippines.

In 1952 Victor Rafael pioneered a church in the town of Maddela in the province of Quirino. He was responsible for the spread of

⁹ The author's interview with Gertrudis M. Gonzales, Pasay City, Metro Manila, November 2002.

Pentecostalism in the towns of Palacian and Aglipay in the province of Quirino.

2. Spread

2.1 Province of Isabela

2.1.1 *Cabanuangan, Jones*

The pastor of the church was Aniceto Domingo. The church experienced a great revival in the village. People were healed of different kinds of sickness, several hundred were baptized in water and some were baptized in the Holy Spirit. As a result of this revival, churches were planted in Arubub and Pungpungan and Dabubu.

2.1.2 *Virgoneza, Jones*

Emeterio Mariano brought the gospel to Virgoneza, a town of Jones. Virgoneza then became an outstation of the church in Cabanuangan, Jones. When the revival broke out in Cabanuangan, the group of believers in Virgoneza heard the news and they visited the church; they too experienced the outpouring of the Spirit. Through the leadership of Aniceto Domingo, who was the pastor in Cabanuangan, Virgoneza, the COG planted three daughter churches in Quimmalabasa, Rang-ay; Dappig and Sinaoangan Sur.

2.1.3 *Sinaoangan Sur, San Agustin*

In the 1950s Sinaoangan Sur COG was started as an outstation of the church in Virgoneza. In 1964 the church was turned over to Manuel Gonzales, Sr. It was through his ministry that the church had grown rapidly, and revival in the church was experienced, souls were saved and sick people were healed. Gonzales helped pioneer COG churches in Sinaoangan Norte and Palacian in the town of San Agustin, Isabela.

2.2 Province of Cagayan

The church in Barbarit was the key in the spread of the COG work in the province of Cagayan. During the 1950s a group of believers were praying and fasting in the small church in Barbarit, Gattaran, Cagayan. After a few days, at the peak of fasting and praying, at about ten in the evening, a fire from heaven came down and enveloped the church building. The top of the church was so bright that the people in the village and the neighboring villages thought the church was being

consumed by fire. But in the morning, when they went to see the damage, they were amazed that the church was intact. Yes, the church was on fire, but by the fire of the Holy Spirit. Because of this experience, many were saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit. As a result revival spread and churches were planted in Alannay and Cabatacan East, in the town of Lasam, Cagayan.

3. Incorporation

With the mission growing in number and expanding, the ministers felt the need for the group to be registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) of the Philippine government, so that it might obtain the rights and privileges of any legitimate organization set forth by the government. On March 20, 1953, Fulgencio Cortez, with the close cooperation and assistance of his fellow ministers, started to work towards this registration, with the approval of the COG headquarters in the United States. The SEC granted the registration of the church on May 8 of the same year and the group became known as the New Testament Church of God, to differentiate it from another group that had already taken "Church of God" as its name. The founding incorporators were seven "pillars": Aniceto Domingo, Vicente Agustin, Victor Rafael, Eusebio Juan, Manuel Gonzales, Jaime Gumallaoi, and Fulgencio Cortez Sr.

In 1984, the name was changed to Church of God World Missions of the Philippines, Incorporated. The registration of the organization resulted in the establishment of a formal organization and the acquirement of the right to solemnize marriage.

After the incorporation of the organization, Wade Horton, Foreign Missions Representative of the COG in the US, visited the Philippines during his 1953 world tour. He visited Mindanao to see whether there was a possibility of planting a church on the island. That trip was made in response to the request of some Christians in Mindanao who wrote to the COG headquarters in Cleveland, Tennessee, expressing their desire to join the church. Discovering the reality of spiritual hunger of the people in Mindanao, he decided to include this island as a mission field.

PART 2: THEOLOGY

In its formative stage of the denomination (1923-1947), two Pentecostal groups exerted their theological influences in the COG in the Philippines, as many ministers in early years came from the UFGC and many ministers and workers were trained at the Bible school of the Filipino Assemblies of the First Born.

1. The United Free Gospel Church

The United Free Gospel and Missionary Society was a Pentecostal organization whose international headquarters was located in Turtle Creek, Pennsylvania, USA, and was the first Pentecostal denomination that reached Philippine soil.

1.1 A Brief History

Joseph Warnick, the first American Missionary, started the work in the Philippines in 1921. He came from Hawaii with two other Filipino ministers, Emeterio Mariano and Antonio Corpuz, both Ilocano immigrants to Hawaii.¹⁰ The three went to San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte the hometown of Corpuz and began to preach the Pentecostal message. They were quite aggressive in spreading the gospel and they extended their outreaches to the neighboring towns. They soon won some converts and baptized them in water. They built the first chapel in the *poblacion* of San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte, where the converts of the town assembled and worshipped during Sundays and mid-week services.

In 1923 Mariano visited his hometown in Virgoneza, Jones Isabela, and preached the gospel. One of the converts through his ministry efforts was Theodorico Lastimosa, who a year later in 1924 became a licensed local pastor. Mariano and Lastimosa worked together in Isabela. The work extended to Quimalabasa, Sinaoangan Sur, Sinaoangan Norte, Rang-ay, Dabubu, Dappig, Pongpongan, Arubub, Addalam and Palacian.

After three years, another young Missionary, Frank Porada, came to help the work in San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte. He worked with Joseph Warnick until Warnick died in 1927. Then Porada became the leader of the work.

¹⁰ The author's interview with Hermie Vivit, National Chairman of the Free Gospel Church, San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte, May, 2002.

In 1927 Lastimosa was assigned to pastor in San Nicolas after Antonio Corpuz had quit. For two years, Lastimosa worked with Frank Porada and started works in the towns of Laoag, Dingras, Banna, Nueva Era and Batac, all in Ilocos Norte.

Porada tried his best to learn the Ilocano dialect. He sent Lastimosa to take care of the work in the town of Dingras and he took care of the church in San Nicolas. This continued until 1931 when Porada decided to swap places with Mariano. Porada went to Isabela to work in Virgoneza, while Mariano went to pastor in San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte.

Before World War II, Porada went back to the States for furlough and stayed there for several years and Mariano assumed the leadership. He handled the work in Ilocos Norte and Lastimosa handled the work in Isabela.

There were two female ministers who helped in the promotion of the gospel work: Florentina Luis, who helped in Cabanuangan, Jones, Isabela, and Josefa Derrada, who helped in the work in Dingras, Ilocos Norte.

In 1937 United Free Gospel Bible Institute was opened in San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte. The institute offered a two-year Bible training. There were sixteen graduates in their first graduation class. The following year, fourteen graduated and one of them was Fulgencio R. Cortez, Sr.¹¹ After the second graduation, the school closed because only one minister had committed to take care of the school and he was not able to keep it going.

When Frank Porada returned to the Philippines after the war, he was no longer a UFGC Missionary, but a Missionary for the COG. Upon his arrival he contacted Emeterio Mariano and his former Free Gospel colleagues and invited them to join him. Mariano joined the COG.

Mariano, who was formerly the head of the UFGC, rallied the churches and informed them of his affiliation with the COG. Many of the ministers and churches of the UFGC joined Porada and Mariano because they were introduced to faith by the ministry of the two of them. When Porada returned and introduced a new organization to the group, the people did not resist the change and voluntarily joined him. Their loyalty to Porada and Mariano, and the fact that the teachings of both organizations were not much different, made their change not difficult. But other ministers refused to join and remained with the UFGC. The ministers and churches that joined Porada became the first members of

¹¹ He later became the first national representative of the Church of God in the Philippines.

the Philippine COG. The charter churches were: churches in Jones and Virgoneza, in the province of Isabela; church in Barbarit, Gattran, in the province of Cagayan, and the Church in Payas, San Nicolas in the province of Ilocos Norte. When Mariano died, Cortez was appointed to lead the COG that was then known as the New Testament Church of God.

The post-war period saw a significant decline of the UFGC because there was no solid leadership to head the church. Finally, in 1979, a Missionary, Lyle Berg, Sr. and his family, arrived to help strengthen the dying church. One year later another Missionary, David Cook, arrived. With the arrival of the Missionaries, the work of the Free Gospel Church began to grow again. These Missionaries worked with the national pastors who remained in the group. In 1981 they re-opened the Bible school and renamed it Faith Bible Institute, and this brought further growth. There are fifty-one ordained and licensed ministers, and forty-two local congregations scattered throughout Isabela, Cagayan, Ilocos Norte and Abra.¹²

1.2 Theological Influences

Since the early ministers of the COG came from the UFGC, the UFGC had influenced the teachings and the practices of the COG ministers. The major influence of the UFGC on the COG churches in Northern Luzon was in the holiness teaching. The UFGC established the first Pentecostal Bible school in Ilocos Norte in 1937 and many of the pastors who joined the COG got their theological education there. The UFGC believes in the entire sanctification of believers. The statement of faith of the UFGC states:

The Scriptures teach a life of holiness without which no man [*sic*] shall see the Lord. By the power of the Holy Ghost we are able to obey the command, "Be ye Holy, for I am Holy." Entire sanctification is the will of God for all believers, and should earnestly be pursued by walking in obedience to God's Word (Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15, 16; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 1 John 2:6).¹³

The subjects like entire sanctification and holiness were the major teachings during the 1950s in the Pentecostal churches. Because of the

¹² Hermie Vivit interview (May, 2002).

¹³ "Doctrinal Statement of the United Free Gospel Church" supplied by Hermie Vivit (San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte, May 2002).

strong pursuit of holiness, many prohibitions were taught and preached in Bible schools and in the churches. The early COG members were influenced by the rigid rules set by the UFGC, such as prohibitions for women to have short hair, to perm their hair, to wear jewelry of any kind, to wear short skirt or pants or to wear make-up. These rules also include prohibitions to eat blood, to drink wine of any kind and to go to the cinema or to a disco house.

Those who violated these rules were even accused of being backsliders. Fulgencio Cortez, Sr., the first Superintendent of the Philippines COG, was one of the first graduates of the United Free Gospel Institute and he was greatly influenced by the holiness teachings. He strongly imposed that all these rules were to be followed by all COG churches in Northern Luzon during this time. In one of his sermons in 1975 he said:

Holiness is God's standard of living for his people. One of the commandments of God for us is to be holy (1 Peter 1:16). Holiness and humility should grace the life of a minister and if he possesses these spiritual qualities he will always live successfully. No unholy man is fit to handle the word of God neither worthy to represent a holy God.¹⁴

Even ministers who later joined the COG adopted the holiness teaching and the prohibitions. In the COG churches, the failure to adhere to any of the rules meant disciplinary action and worse, expulsion from the church. Soledad Gungab, one of the earliest members of the COG in San Nicolas and the first woman to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, recalled:

I had my hair permed because that was the hairstyle during the early 1950s. I was excited to show to my fellow young people in the church of my new hairstyle but I was shocked when I was disciplined. My ministry in the church was stopped and I was prohibited to be involved in any ministry of any kind. It was a painful moment but I had to obey the leaders of the church.¹⁵

¹⁴ Sermon of Fulgencio Cortez, Sr. entitled "Holiness as God's Standard for Living" (1975).

¹⁵ The author's interview with Soledad Gungab of Payas COG, San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte, May, 2002.

The slogan, “Holiness unto the Lord,” that can be seen in almost all United Free Gospel churches, was adopted by the COG pastors. Even today this can be seen in some COG churches all over the region.

2. Filipino Assemblies of the First Born

2.1 A Brief History

During the 1920s, Filipinos were recruited to work in the agricultural plantations in the United States. Many left the Philippines and worked as cane cutters in sugar cane plantations in Hawaii and as grape pickers in the vineyards in California. They only received meager salaries and were discriminated as “secondary citizens.”

In 1917, Julian Bernabe, the pioneer of the Filipino Assemblies of the First Born, landed on a plantation in Hawaii. He was converted and was baptized in the Holy Spirit in the early 1920s during a Pentecostal revival meeting in Papaikou, Hawaii. Coincidentally, the associate evangelist of the revival meeting was Emeterio Mariano. After his conversion, Bernabe had a desire to share his new found faith with his fellow Filipinos. He then moved to California and made friends with Filipino laborers there. In California he started his first Filipino congregation.¹⁶

In the 1930s Pentecostal revival meetings were conducted in San Jose, California, and many Filipinos were saved and baptized. There were many Filipinos looking for a place to worship, as many area churches did not welcome them. White Americans did not want to fellowship with Filipinos. That strong racial discrimination pushed the plan to organize a Filipino church community in California. In 1933 the Filipino Assemblies of the First Born (FAFB) was registered as an organization.¹⁷

Sometime after the incorporation of the FAFB in California, Silvestre Taverner, who was saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit in a Pentecostal revival meeting, felt a call to share his new found faith with his fellow Filipinos in the Philippines. Thus, in 1935 before World War II, he sailed back to the Philippines.

¹⁶ Heredel P. Cappel, *Filipino Assemblies of the First Born, Inc.: Its Pentecostal Roots and Fruits* (Caba, La Union: Messengers of the Cross Bible College, 2001), p. 15.

¹⁷ Cappel, *Filipino Assemblies of the First Born*, p. 16.

He began his ministry among his friends and relatives in San Juan, Abra. But the people perceived the gospel message as a threat to their syncretistic religious belief. At the break of the war (1941), Taverner's evangelistic effort was temporarily stopped. Immediately after the war, he resumed his ministry, and this time the wind blew in a different direction. People not only believed in the Lord Jesus Christ but experienced the endowment of the Holy Spirit. Concurrently in California, God spoke to four Filipino ministers, Clemente Balangue, Pedro Yaranon, Domingo Mabalot and Felipe Calizar, to join Taverner in the Philippines.¹⁸

In January 1949, five Bible schools were opened in various parts of the country: Messengers of the Cross Bible Institute in Sta Catalina, Ilocos Sur; FAFB Agricultural Bible Institute, Dappig, San Agustin, Isabela; Temple Bible College, Tandang Sora, Quezon City; Glad Tidings Bible School, Marbel, Mindanao and Bible School, Piddig Ilocos Norte. Young people flocked to these schools to be trained and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

On November 24, 1949, the first convention was held in San Juan, Abra. The presence of the Holy Spirit was heavily felt, and God moved supernaturally.¹⁹ In January 19, 1951 the FAFB was registered with the SEC.

In 1968, because of severe persecutions, the FAFB headquarters and the Messengers of the Cross Bible Institute were transferred to Caba, La Union, where they have remained until now. From its humble beginnings, the FAFB continues to grow and spread from the Philippines to locations around the world, including Canada, England, Spain, Greece, Kuwait, Singapore, Hong Kong and Australia. Currently FAFB has 350 ministers, 250 churches and 18,000 members.²⁰

2.2 Theological Influences

Julian Bernabe, the pioneer of the FAFB, was saved in a revival meeting in Hawaii through the preaching of Emeterio Mariano. When

¹⁸ Cappel, *Filipino Assemblies of the First Born*, p. 22.

¹⁹ People heard sounds of rolling ocean waves, some jumped for joy, others were slain flat on the floor, others spoke in tongues, others made the interpretations, others cried because of the wonderful experience of the power of the Holy Spirit. Cappel, *Filipino Assemblies of the First Born*, pp. 23-24.

²⁰ Interview with Heredel Cappel by Conrado Lumahan in Caba, La Union on August 12, 2005.

Bernabe opened the Bible schools in the Philippines, early ministers of the COG received their training in the FAFB Bible schools, until the COG was able to establish their own training schools. That is the reason why there is evidence of the influence of the FAFB in the early theology of the COG, such as:

2.2.1 *Dispensational teaching*

The COG pioneers were fundamentally dispensationalists as some early leaders (e.g., Manuel Gonzales and Valerio Vicente) studied at the Messengers of the Cross Bible Institute in Santa Catalina, Ilocos Sur in the early 1950s. Larkin's dispensational chart was studied in the school, and all graduates were supposed to master the chart in order for them to graduate. Furthermore, the Scofield Reference Bible was sought after by many ministers which helped in the propagation of the dispensational teachings.²¹

2.2.2 *Baptism in the Holy Ghost*

One of the major pre-requisites for graduation at the Messenger of the Cross Bible Institute in the 1950s was baptism in the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues as the physical evidence. The glossolalic experience was the proof that a student was ready for the ministry.²²

2.2.3 *Divine healing*

The students in the Messengers of the Cross Bible Institute were taught that healing and deliverance from sickness is provided for in the atonement and is the privilege of all believers (Isa 53:4-5; Matt 8:16-17; James 5:14, 16). Divine healing is an integral part of the gospel. The graduates were encouraged to exercise the gift of healing in their ministries.

2.4 *Eschatology*

The urgency in teaching and preaching the imminent coming of Christ compelled many Pentecostals for evangelism. The eschatology taught during that time was the two-stage rapture of Christ: the

²¹ "FAFB Statement of Faith," in Heredel P. Cappal, *Filipino Assemblies of the First Born*, pp. 36-39.

²² The author's interview with Valerio Vicente, former COG Regional Overseer of Northern Luzon, in Baguio City, November, 2002.

immediate return of Christ for the saints and his return after the great tribulation with the saints to reign on earth.

Conclusion

In the late 1940s the Church of God first reached the Ilocano-speaking people in the northern part of the Philippine islands. Then after the reception of the gospel and the Pentecostal revival in the north, the church grew in number in that part of the country. It was not until the early 1950s when the church finally went to the southern part of the Philippine islands by starting its ministry among the Ilocanos who migrated there who came from the north.

Today, in 2005, we must recognize that the Church of God finally has been completely established and is operating in the whole country. The COG has to be grateful and recognize the historical antecedents that have brought us where we are now. Let us recognize the encounter, which people in our past have made with their present realities and the repository of concerns, and activities that reach us either as mistaken judgments or deliberate undertakings because these things also form us.

The present generation and the future generation of the Church of God in the Philippines are in danger of losing their identity if they are not reminded of their history. Also the key to continued growth of the denomination lies in the study of its history.

The denomination whether we like it or not, is influenced by the past and we distort not only history but also ourselves when we live unaware of our past. In order not to repeat the misdeeds and false expectations of the past, the denomination should not ignore its history or should not have a short historical memory.