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A REFLECTION OF A MISSIONARY TO THE PHILIPPINES:
GARY A. DENBOW INTERVIEW

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This interview is part of the oral history project of the Asia Pacific Research Center of Asia Pacific Theological Seminary. The interview took place in Columbia, Missouri, U.S.A. on August 10, 2001. The initial transcription was provided by Doris A. Denbow on November 13, 2003.

Denbow and his family served as missionaries in the Philippines from 1977 to 1981. In these four years they were greatly involved in the early years of the Charismatic movement in the Philippines, which started in Manila. Thus, this piece serves a multiple purpose: as a sample of the oral history project, a record of a missionary family, and also as a window to the socio-religious environment at the dawn of the Charismatic movement in the Philippines.

When the interview took place, Denbow was the pastor of Christian Chapel, Columbia, Missouri. He was recently appointed as the president of Central Bible College, Springfield, Missouri, U.S.A.

(Legends: “E” for Rose Engcoy, the interviewer, “D” for Gary Denbow, the interviewee.)

1. Call

E: Good afternoon, Pastor Denbow. It is really a great privilege for me to have this opportunity to ask you about your first-hand experiences in the Charismatic movement in the Philippines. Let’s start with the basics. How did you get your calling to be a missionary?

D: We have a program here in the United States called Speed-the-Light. It is a program through which our young people raise funds for missionary vehicles and for missionary equipment. I was on a seventeen-night Speed-the-Light tour when I was the District Youth

Director for the Southern Missouri District (of the AG, USA). David Grant and I were going from place to place, and by the end of the tour, I knew I was to do more than just give money or raise money. So I submitted myself to the call. I went to see Wesley Hurst (Regional Director) at what is now the Asia Pacific Office at the Division of World Missions in Springfield, Missouri. He wanted me to go to Jogjakarta in Indonesia to start a student center. We submitted ourselves to do that, raised money, and were ready to go, but never could get a visa. So we ended up in the Philippines in October, 1977. That's how it all began.

- E: Did you specifically choose to come to the Philippines or were you assigned to go to the Philippines?
- D: We were assigned there because we were waiting for a visa for Jogjakarta, Indonesia. The wife of Brother Dwayne Turner (another US AG missionary to the Philippines) had become ill and they had to come home, and so Brother Wes Hurst called and said, "I want to send you there for a few months until we can get a replacement. Then after a few months, your visa will come through and you will go on to Indonesia." By the time I had been there a few months, they then needed a director for the International Correspondence Institute (ICI) office in Manila, and they asked me to go there and stay in the Philippines instead of going on to Indonesia. It was in 1980 before I ever even got to visit Indonesia.

2. Ministries in the Philippines

- E: Please give us a summary of your ministry involvement in the Philippines within the span of four years.
- D: Our first assignment was (to serve as) Dean of Immanuel Bible College (IBC), filling in for Dwayne Turner. We knew that would be temporary because we knew we were going on to Indonesia. After a few months, Bill and Alvera Farrand were assigned to IBC. In a meeting in early January of 1978, they asked us to stay in Manila and work at ICI. So, for the next two years, I was the ICI Director in the absence of John Burnett. When he came back, I stepped down as Director and became the Evangelism Director of ICI. During that three and half year period that we were in Manila, we also started the church now pastored by Herald Cruz and Peter Banzon out in

Quezon City. We taught dozens of Bible studies and prayer groups meeting around the city of Manila. I was on staff at the Far East Advanced School of Theology (FEAST), now Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, for three years teaching both on the campus and teaching at on-site courses. I did crusades and revivals all around the Philippines and served on boards and committees that I was asked to serve on. But the daily Bible studies and the ICI office, the pastoring of the church and teaching at FEAST were my main duties, I guess you would say.

- E: You mentioned that you helped in a church that is now pastored by Pastor Banzon. Do you know the name of the church now?
- D: Well, when we started, it was known as Holy Spirit Fellowship. It has had two or three names through the years, and I am not really sure right now what the name of the church is. They have already celebrated their twenty-second anniversary.
- E: Looking back, what would you say would be your ministry thrust when you were in the Philippines?
- D: When I was in Manila, the ministry thrust was the daily involvement I had with Bible studies that had sprung up in offices and restaurants and churches and homes. Most of them were weekly; some of them were daily. And, they were attracting people that had never been attracted to Assemblies of God (AG) churches, because they were attracting people who had recently been baptized in the Holy Spirit or had been to a Life in the Spirit seminar and had come to know the Lord through those seminars. They were so hungry for the gospel that we literally spent day after day, week after week, for three years just trying to keep up with all the invitations to teach those Bible studies. Some of them became regular, so we went every week at a given time, and we developed a core of leaders in those places. One of them even became a church. That was the main thing that I did during the day, every day.
- E: You said that you first came to the Philippines in Cebu City, and that was in 1977. Please describe the Philippines when you first came, in terms of common practices and beliefs of the people of the church, the spiritual atmosphere, the ministry opportunities that were present, both in Cebu and in Manila.

3. Philippine Assemblies of God in the Late 1970s

- D: The AG Church, which even at that time was the major Pentecostal church—of course, now, it is one of the major evangelical churches in the Philippines—the AG Church at that time was split, and there were two leaders. The General Council met in two different sessions with the two different leaders. Churches were known by the name of the leader that they followed. So, in a particular town there could be two AG churches: one belonging to one of the groups and the second to the other group. There were court cases over who was going to use the name, who owned the properties, etc. There was not a sense of revival among the churches because there was all this talk about the split and all this talk about the trouble.
- E: This was in 1977?
- D: Yes, between 1977 and 1978. And it was pervasive, especially through the Visayas, because in many places our works were still young and struggling, and then to have this split loyalty just hurt even more. But when we moved to Manila, we found the same thing. We found animosity, hurt, pain and a desire to get back together, but no one seemed to know how to do it. So, our people in the AG were basically holding on; they were basically trying to keep going through all this trouble and to somehow get these court cases settled. Well, in late 1978 and early 1979, the door began to open for some of us to go into Bethel Temple, which at that time was not a part of the church that the U.S. AG was relating to.
- E: This is Bethel Temple, Manila?
- D: Yes. I was invited to preach there. Dwight Palmquist was invited to preach there as well. And I began to preach there about once every two or three months on a Sunday night, and we began to build relationships. Then some of the other brothers who were a part of the split, that we were not necessarily working with at the time, began to invite me to preach for them.
- E: Do you remember who the pastor of Manila Bethel Temple was?
- D: It was Brother Dan Marocco. And in that period of time he brought Brother (Lester) Sumrall and David Sumrall out to help him. And then, when Brother Marocco left, Brother Sumrall stayed. But we began to build relationships with Brother Marocco, Brother Tandog, Brother Lazaro, Brother Lagmay, Brother Alcantara, and Brother Lapasaran. And then in 1980, we were privileged to have a meeting

where the entire general council met and was brought back together. It was a wonderful meeting where God's grace prevailed. In my opinion, it was at that point that opportunities for growth in the AG really began to come, because, as long as there was a split, people were too concerned with the split. It was even difficult for us to bring in people from the outside, new converts who needed a church. And there was so much involved in the split situation that we were hesitant to even do that. But when the split was resolved, and our churches began to grow and to flourish, our pastors began to work together. I think at that time there were about 650 AG churches all together; and they were strong enough to do some things that they couldn't do when they were split about in half. And the tide began to turn at that point to lay the groundwork in the 1980s for what happened in the Decade of Harvest in the 90s, when more than 200 churches were added every year. But we really saw God work a miracle to bring those factions of the church back together.

4. Involvement with the Charismatic Movement in Manila

- E: Let's move on now to how the AG got involved with the Charismatic movement in Manila. Would you please relate to us how this started?
- D: Well, Sister Virgie Cruz felt led of God to begin developing relationships. She would say of herself that she was just a poor farm girl from Bulacan, when in reality, God had gifted her with a tremendous ability to touch people's hearts. And through some contacts that she had, the door was opened for her to do some Bible studies in the homes of some very wealthy people who were connected to large churches, to the Cursillo movement, and to other things that were going on in the Philippines at that time.
- E: Was the Cursillo movement strong during this time?
- D: It was involving a number of people and gaining strength. But, at the same time, people that had been involved with Cursillo began to be hungry for more of God, and so they began to invite Sister Virgie to come into their homes and to teach them the Bible. So doors began to open for her in places where she never thought she would get to go.

- E: Do you remember who were the first Roman Catholic people who invited her?
- D: I think Sister Virgie's son is going to have to help you with some of the names, but I do know that they were people who were in some way involved with a group that started at Ateneo University in Quezon City. They were people who had either read a book like *Nine O'clock in The Morning* by Dennis Bennett or had read Pat Boone's book, *New Song*. And, maybe they had read some of the other Charismatic materials that had come out of the movement in the United States, such as Full Gospel Businessmen, Women's Aglow, those things had been started in some places and had begun to attract attention. So, by the time Sister Virgie began holding these Bible studies in homes, invitations began to come that became more than she could handle. So she first involved Brother Dwight Palmquist and then, when he went back to the province to do evangelistic work, she turned to me, and she and I partnered together for three years. We partnered together in the starting of the church, Holy Spirit Fellowship; We partnered together in the conducting of many of these Bible studies because we attempted to use ICI material. So, she would find an open door, and then she would tell the folks about ICI and they would invite me in, and I would bring the materials with me, and Sister Virgie would go on and start another Bible study. I would come behind her with discipleship materials. One of those, for instance, was in the Social Security System (SSS) building in Quezon City, a large office building with hundreds of workers in the government center area in Quezon City, right around the big circle there. She had founded a Bible study there with some of the workers after the wife of the leader of the SSS had been to a Life in the Spirit seminar where she had been exposed to Sister Virgie's teaching. At that time, these Life in the Spirit seminars were huge, with people wanting to find out more about the Lord. But honestly, there were not enough teachers in the Catholic Church; so Sister Virgie began to teach those things.
- E: So the Life in the Spirit seminars started with the Roman Catholic Church?
- D: Yes, it started with the Roman Catholic Church. Materials were brought to the Philippines, but as I said, they didn't have enough people to teach them. So, since Sister Virgie was already teaching at these Bible studies, they turned to her, and she began to teach their Life in the Spirit seminars. And then I began to teach them, and so

on. Well, the wife of the SSS head had been touched at one of these seminars and she went to her husband and told him to open up the building; and we started a mid-week Bible study at noontime. That grew to an average attendance of 350. We would meet from 12:05 to 12:55 p.m. Some of the workers would sit at their desk and eat their lunch; others would come in from other parts of the building. I would carry a guitar in, or someone else would carry a guitar in, and we would sing, I would preach, or I would have a guest to preach, and then we would involve the people in ICI Bible studies, trying to get them through all the basic courses.

Out of that group came pastors, workers, missionaries and eventually a church, because within the next year or so, after we left in 1981, the Catholic Church put out a circular letter that said that Protestants were not to be allowed in their churches to teach Bible studies any longer. They honestly tried to bring all the Bible studies back under the church umbrella. At that point, many of the Bible studies decided they didn't want to be under that umbrella, and they wanted the teachers that they had had; and it was at that point that there was a breaking off from the Catholic Church in a lot of areas. And these fellowships, that had been quasi-Catholic, now looked for someone to affiliate with. They looked for someone to be their leaders and basically turned from the priests, because many of the priests were not familiar with the Charismatic movement, were not born again by biblical standards, and were not filled with the Holy Spirit, and could not lead these groups. So, it was at that point that some of these groups became churches; but, they were not forced to become churches by the workers, but by the Catholic Church itself, which basically put them out.

5. Holy Spirit Fellowship

- E: You said that you pastored the Holy Spirit Fellowship. How did the fellowship start?
- D: Sister Virgie and I had Bible studies that we were responsible for. I think at one time, I was responsible for about twenty-five Bible studies a week, which meant I was going morning, noon, and night. Your husband, Lemuel Engcoy, was driving for me a lot of times because I would have very little time to even eat between preaching engagements all day long. Well, we had all these Bible studies

going, and we just couldn't train leaders fast enough. We saw a need to train leaders, and so we actually started that service with the idea that we would have a Sunday morning meeting that would be geared toward leadership training. We would preach and teach to the leaders, setting an example for them, giving them messages that they could take back to their Bible studies during the week. What we thought of doing in the beginning was more of a laboratory type situation where we would demonstrate how to do this. We started this ministry in Quezon City near the Scout Streets.

E: Not in University of the Philippines (UP) yet?

D: No. We started there, and we had 240 the first Sunday.

E: Leaders? Prospective leaders?

D: We had some people who just "came to be coming," but we had people born again. There is a good story there, too. We had people who were born again that Sunday, and then we had leaders that we developed. We went from there to Greenhills, and from Greenhills to the campus of UP, to the laboratory hotel that they had on the UP campus.

E: So, you pastored this church for three and half years?

D: Yes.

E: Then when you left?

D: Sister Virgie became the pastor. She kept the church basically until she turned it over to Pastor Peter Banzon, back in 1985-86 when Sister Virgie needed to leave the Philippines, when there were some threats on her life—bomb threats and murder threats. When she did, she basically turned it over to Pastor Peter Banzon, her son-in-law.

E: Was it Monterey (Christian Fellowship) already at that point?

D: Yes, it was Monterey. They dedicated the facility in 1985 and they probably were there for two or three years before they had to move out; and when they moved out, they moved down near where East Avenue joins EDSA, and then from there they started another service in another place. It is New Life Fellowship or something like that; I don't remember exactly the name.

6. Responses of Protestant Churches

E: You mentioned about how the Roman Catholic Church already drew the line to close the door to other Protestants to teach the people. How about the Protestants themselves? How did they respond to seeing Protestant ministers conducting services among the Roman Catholics?

D: In the middle 1970s, Sister Virgie told me there were a lot of suspicions and questions from the AG leadership as to what she was doing. Among the missionaries there were a lot of questions. There were many questions about, “You are going to these Bible studies week after week. Why aren’t these people coming out and joining our churches?” But, as I told you earlier, our churches were in somewhat of a disarray because of the conflict in the general council.

It was also at that time, I think it was 1975, that Paul Klahr saw the possibility of bringing some of these early Charismatics in to a service. So, in 1975 he started the service that is now called International Charismatic Services (ICS) and has its own building in Mandaluyong. But he started a service in the Holiday Inn; at least its long tenure was in the Holiday Inn. It might have started in another place but moved to Holiday Inn in 1975. And from that came the possibility that we could have an English service that would reach into the homes of people who were well-to-do or who were English-oriented or who were internationals in the city—and many of them had been touched through one of these Bible studies—because when that opened, Sister Virgie began to suggest to people to go to the Holiday Inn on Sunday.

When I left in 1981, there were ten five-star hotels in Manila, and every one of these hotels had a Charismatic service going on. Some of those, like ICS, eventually bought property and became a church. And the one we started in the building in Quezon City, which met for a long time in a hotel, became a church. Some of them rented business office-type property along EDSA in Cubao. And, in the middle 1980s, you could drive down EDSA and you could see banners in many of the windows where fellowships had started; but that all really stemmed from Paul Klahr starting at the Holiday Inn in 1975.

When that happened, and then when our church started, and when we began to feed young men and women into the Bible school, and when our church began to support..., we had two Philippine

missionaries go out at that time and when our churches began to support those missionaries...

E: The Viscas?

D: No, it was prior to that. It was Elisa Tibung who went to Taiwan. She is now married, and I cannot remember her married name. Before her, Cresmerio Fernandez went to Vietnam; and that is when they were supported from the Philippines. And when our churches began to support these people and care for them, they began to see we were going to bring these people into the AG, but it was going to take a while. So there was suspicion at first among the leadership and the pastors of the AG.

So, what I intended to do when I was there, even though I was doing a lot of these Bible studies, I locked into local churches and went on a regular basis to speak. For instance, my wife and I were regular speakers every month at Pasig First Assembly with Brother Lobarbio. I attended sectional and district meetings, and every opportunity I would have, I would speak. So, I intended to let the brothers know I was a part of them. And then when they asked me what about this Charismatic work, I would tell them, "This is just an open door God has given us for this particular time."

During the time I was there, for the most part, the Charismatics were really not welcome in most of our AG churches. The reason was, in my opinion, maybe multiple reasons, but the key reason seemed to be, and again my opinion only, that many of our pastors felt threatened by members who were much more educated and from a different walk of life. And they really didn't have the training, or confidence is probably the best word to use, to step out and invite these folks. When that barrier was crossed in a few churches, it really helped the other pastors see that they could also do that. And in particular, I think of Brother Irving De Mesa in Cavite who crossed that line, and he began to see that he could minister to that group of people in his town in Cavite City.

E: Would you say the "elite?"

D: You know, not just the elite; but back at that time, I would say the emerging middle class. Not just rich people, but educated people. People that were working, but they owned a car. You know, they had a nice house, and not just the elite. Although many times the elite formed the core of our Bible studies because they had a big house. Honestly, I have spoken in the sala of a mayor's home in a city of

the Philippines with 300 people fitting in the sala. You can imagine the size of the sala. So we had those kinds of people. But we also had a lot of people who were well educated and who had positions of leadership, principals of schools and college faculty members and people like that, architects and engineers, who were looking for spiritual reality.

E: So the Charismatic movement at this time primarily attracted the educated or the professional group?

D: Yes, it did. And not because we just set out to attract them, but that's where the doors were open, in the professional offices and in the schools.

E: Would you call Rev. Paul Klahr's church a Charismatic church, or was it just a precursor to the Charismatic movement?

D: No, it was a Charismatic church.

E: So, there were no Protestants? They were all Roman Catholics?

D: No, I think there were a lot of Protestants. But by "Charismatic" I mean that, from the beginning, they emphasized worship and baptism in the Holy Spirit; they emphasized small groups where people could come and be prayed over to be filled with the Spirit. It had internationals, it had Filipinos who were Catholics, it had just a cross section of people who had come to find some reality in serving God there. I think it was a mixed group from the beginning; but I would consider it a Charismatic church from the beginning, simply because it involved people from all different walks of life and religiously a very mixed group of people. And they were all gathered around that one central truth of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That marked us; that and spiritual worship: lively chorus singing and the kind of worship that has been developed today. That, along with Pentecostal baptism and speaking with other tongues, marked us.

E: And that was what made it Charismatic?

D: Yes.

7. Theological Emphases among Charismatic Fellowships

E: My next question is related to that. What messages or themes were emphasized during that time? You did mention the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Any other message or theme emphasized?

D: Sister Virgie was so strong on family life that, if she had an opportunity to preach to a group twice, she would preach the first time about Jesus, his saving grace and his gift of the Holy Spirit, and the second time on proper family relationships. She saw back in the middle 1970s just a real breakdown of the family. Now, I am sure if she were alive today and in the Philippines, she would see the problem having escalated and multiplied. So she taught all of those early Charismatic Bible studies about proper husband-wife relationships. And, of course, as a woman she taught more from the woman's perspective on what the woman should be and do. There were many women in our office Bible studies and she would tell them to bring their husbands. So, we would have meetings as all the women brought their husbands at night at a rented place. Sister Virgie would teach the husbands what kind of men they should be.

We saw dozens of families put back together. And, in fact, in the church that I was privileged to be a part of and start, we actually had a man come up to the altar after a service and say, "I have been living with my second (woman), but I am going to bring my wife next week because I am rededicating my life and I want her to rededicate her life." The next week, she came, and we saw that family rejoined together.

At the very first service of the new church when we started, we had a man come in and sat on one side, while a woman sat on the other side. Out of 240 people there, these were two people I did not know. He was an engineer; she was a teacher. They came in, and when I gave the altar call at the end of the message, they stood and they prayed the sinner's prayer with me. And, when they stood, they looked across the building and saw each other; they were husband and wife, but they had been estranged. They both gave their hearts to the Lord, and then they met at the altar at the conclusion of the service and embraced. That brother is now a pastor of an AG church in Australia along with his wife, and they now have three children God has given them. It is a wonderful family that the Lord has given them over the years. But on that first Sunday, the emphasis was on putting their family back together, and that is exactly what happened.

That was Sister Virgie's big emphasis. It was salvation, baptism of the Holy Spirit, and family life. And I usually came along with more verse-by-verse Bible study, and the emphasis was to just ground those people in the word of God, to get them solid in God's word. So I would either take an ICI book and teach it, or a book of the Bible

and just teach it week after week, a chapter at a time, and get the people grounded in the Lord.

8. Catholic Doctrines

- E: How did you handle the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church about Mary and about the Santo Niño?
- D: You know, we taught about the Holy Spirit, and for the most part the people were getting born again and filled with the Holy Spirit and making their own decisions. I think I can say this for Sister Virgie, although she can correct me when I get to heaven if I am wrong, we just didn't talk about the controversial aspects between us. We talked about Jesus; and we talked about the Holy Spirit; and we talked about life in Christ; and we preached very strong and straight about what we would call the priesthood of the believers. We didn't call it that, we didn't use that word, but we would talk about how we could have a personal relationship with Christ. We talked about how we could be filled with the Spirit and his Spirit would teach us how to pray, and we would lead people into the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And so, I never got up in any Bible study I was ever at and took off on Mariology or on icons or saints or images.
- E: So nobody ever asked this question?
- D: At times they would ask the question, and I would divert. You have to know, these were brand new Christians, and we were walking on very thin ice because we were in places sometimes right in, maybe in a wing of a Catholic church. At times, we were in the nunnery; we were in the rectory of the church. At times, our Bible study met right inside the church; so we were there at their invitation, and I just always felt like I would be better off not to make issues out of our differences, but to emphasize our sameness.
- E: So you would just divert the question?
- D: Yes. If they would ask me specifically about praying to Mary, I would just open the Bible and I would give them some scripture passages about praying in the Spirit and just say, "You know, you have to do what you feel led to do. Here is what the scripture says, and let's leave it at that." Now there are times when a priest would come to our Bible study, sent by the church, because some of our

Bible studies were large and they would hear about it. So they would send a priest out to do a mass.

E: A mass and Bible study at the same time?

D: Exactly. A priest would come in; he would know that it was not his group, and I would say, "Do what you need to do." I would back out of the way. I would not make an issue of it. And most of the time that's what happened: the priest would turn to me and say, "You have the Bible study ready, so when it comes time for the homily, I will turn to you." So, I would do the homily and he would do the mass. And we worked together on that, and I have done that with a number of priests. It got to a point where I would preach funerals with priests. At one point, with a monsignor with all of his regalia on, we were together at the committal service for the body. One of the people who had been touched through one of the Bible studies, with her judge husband, requested me to do the music at the committal service. So here was the priest doing all of his ritual, and then when it came time for the music, I was singing along with my guitar, *Amazing Grace*. And then he went on, and then I finished with *How Great Thou Art*. By the time I got finished, the priest himself was moved, and he said, as we walked back out together out of the cemetery, "You know, we really do say a lot of the same thing, but in different ways." And that was sort of what we felt.

There was just this motto that we had between us that in all things liberty, and where there was some doctrinal issue, we had charity to try to understand each other. And it was hard for me, because I am from Missouri, from the Bible belt, and hard-nosed, but I saw the value of preaching the gospel, letting the gospel work, and letting it bring the fruit that the gospel should bring. Thus, I reduced my messages to basic Bible content; I did it in an animated way and with a lot of music, and it was fun. But, I just did not make enemies. I made that choice.

9. Role of Other Partners

E: Were there other Filipinos who were with you in this activity?

D: I usually did not go alone, but had somebody with me. And some of the things were started by Sister Virgie, and she always had a carload of people with her, because she was always training

someone. But, there were enough people that came up under our ministry so that when we left, we didn't stop anything. It just kept going, but under Filipino leadership. Eventually Brother (Eli) Javier, who was the general superintendent (of the Philippine AG) at the time, was brought in to a lot of these Bible studies and was introduced to this whole concept.

I like to think, rightly or wrongly, history will tell, that the great revival that the general council (of the AG) experienced during the 1990s in the Philippines was a lot the result of all the seed planting that we did in the late 1970s and early 80s. Sister Virgie spread an enormous amount of goodwill; and she never hid who she was. So, she would be in a place and there would be two or three thousand people there, and she would not deny that she was an AG minister. And yet, she would love, train and help them and pray for them and spend all night with them; and they began to get a real good feeling towards the AG. When they could not go back to their Catholic Church because of the edict that was put out, they came to us. Many of them, hundreds and hundreds of them, came to us.

- E: Do you have information as to why the edict was given by the Roman Catholic Church, even when you said you were not bringing them into the church?
- D: Well, Jaime Cardinal Sin wrote the letter; and I think it was even published in the newspaper. You can have a move of God, but at some point you are going to have to straighten out theology. You are going to have to deal with theological issues. And you have people like Sister Virgie and me preaching, many times between groups, many of whom were Catholic, talking about the born again experience. If you remember, that became almost a catch phrase. People would say, "Are you born again? Are you with the 'born again'?" It became both an adjective and a noun. I think it was the desire of the Catholic Church to sort of draw some lines and say that this "born again" is not Catholic theology. And the effort I think was to try to pull the people back into Catholic theology, because they were losing those people. At that point, they were losing many of those people who, with their born again experience, no longer prayed to Mary; no longer prayed to the saints; no longer attended mass because mass had become empty to them, as now they had the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In fact, they began to lose large numbers of people. At some point after that, the large Catholic Charismatic group really began to blossom and grow in the Philippines. I heard

somewhere recently that it might have eight million adherents in this group.

E: The El Shaddai?

D: The El Shaddai. But that was just a small group back in the early 1980s. That really didn't become a force for the next ten years probably. And that probably grew out of the Catholic desire to bring this group back in under the Catholic Church.

E: By the way, were there other AG missionaries, or even non-AG missionaries, who were also involved in the Charismatic movement besides Brother Paul Klahr and yourself?

D: Yes, Brother Jim Long became the pastor of the ICS church, and Dwight Palmquist was involved; when he was in Manila, he was always with us. There was Tom Hynes, an AG missionary who later switched to non-AG affiliation, who started the service. It was actually a part of the service at Holiday Inn. He then took a group and went out to the Manila Gardens (Hotel). I think he is probably still in the Philippines and has started his own denomination. Jerry Halloway was with the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, which I think in the Philippines back then was called the New Testament Church of God. He started a service at the InterContinental Hotel in Makati. Those were the early ones; and since that time, I think a lot of different people have been involved.

10. Implications of the Charismatic Explosion

E: Do you remember any specific event that led to the mushrooming of the Charismatic movement?

D: Before I came to Manila in 1977, there were some large meetings at Ateneo University. There were some Charismatic leaders that came in, and I think at one point David DuPlessis visited.

E: From the United States, you mean?

D: Right. Well, originally from South Africa, but from the United States, and I know that those things had a lot to do with opening the doors early. There were Bible study groups that came out of some of those early Charismatic meetings.

E: Do you remember the World Map meetings of Ralph Mahoney?

- D: Yes.
- E: Do you think that would have an effect on the Charismatic movement?
- D: I think that had some effect, but in the World Map meetings that I attended, Brother Mahoney was ministering to pastors a lot. And what the Charismatic movement was doing was ministering usually to Catholic lay people. So the value of the World Map meetings that I remember was that it began to open the eyes of our traditional Pentecostal pastors in a lot of places. Now, he did invite other people in.
- E: Where there were Roman Catholic priests?
- D: Right. He invited other people in. But I remember, in the meetings in Cebu, for instance, there were a large number of our AG pastors who had this as a first exposure. They were first exposed to the fact that a Catholic Charismatic could have the Holy Spirit and that we could introduce that to them, and that is what I think World Map did. Now I think all these things worked together. I think the meetings that were held, the crusades that were held, the eye-opening events that were held, all worked together to break up the fallow ground and to plant the seeds that needed to be planted.
- E: Most of the activities began in Manila. Do you know how these reached the other islands of the Philippines?
- D: From what I understand, people would become involved in a Bible study in Manila. Back at that time, everybody seemed to be from the province. You know, Manila was just growing by leaps and bounds. People were moving in because jobs were there. And so I would give the lesson and then one particular fellow would say, "I am from Bicol, and I've just gotten saved, and I am taking my friend and this Friday we are going to take the bus to Bicol. We'll get there Saturday morning, and we are going to spend all day Saturday teaching Bible studies in our barrio, and then we will take the bus on Sunday and come back and be back to work on Monday." There were people that began to immediately make sacrifices to tell the story of what they had found. And so, a lot of the early work was done by people who worked in Manila, lived in Manila, and then who traveled back and forth to their homes out in the provinces or would take vacation or holiday and go to their families and would take the gospel with them.
- E: That would be mostly in Luzon?

D: A lot in Luzon, yes. But, you know the Filipino's network—the word got around. There were circuits that different speakers got onto. Sister Virgie began to be invited all over. We had an open door for a lot of roads. We had an open door in the military because again some contacts were made high up in the military. I was invited onto military bases, where the new recruits were in basic training, to do two hours with every new recruit. I mean, I spoke to hundreds of recruits in the army, the marines, the navy, because the commandant of that particular base in some way would have been touched by the Charismatic movement and would want all of his basic training troops to have this opportunity to be born again. And so, they would invite us in and march 300 marines into the room. They would all sit on the floor, and we would preach for two hours. Unheard of stuff! The doors were just open. If you preached to 300 troops, they are from all over the country, and they would just go right back out and tell the message. But the work in Manila was central to what else was going on. That is for sure.

11. Then and Now

E: Let's go to your reflections. Please compare what is happening in the Philippines today with what happened back then in the early 1980s.

D: Here is what I gather from the last time I spent five days with the leadership of the Philippine AG, back in 1996, and I have had a lot of correspondence with them. We were on a retreat, and I was the speaker with them for five days.

The Charismatic movement has given way to church planting. We were, at the beginning, church planters. When AG missionaries went to the Philippines, just like when they went to many other countries, they planted local churches; and then built Bible schools to train leaders for those local churches. A little different need today, but what the church has turned to do is to become very powerful through church-planting. And our pastors these days are not so afraid to reach the up-and-outers, as well as the down-and-outers. So, when you go into large churches like Word of Hope in Manila, like Roxas First Assembly, or Mount Hope in Iloilo, when you go into those churches, you will see a cross section of people. You will see the tricycle drivers and the administrators of the big businesses, etc., because our pastors have confidence in the Gospel. They have seen it

work. So we have gone from the Charismatic movement, I think, to the church-planting movement. I heard Brother Sobrepeña say that he wants to see 5,000 churches. That will probably make the AG the second largest church in the Philippines, behind the Roman Catholic, if indeed that happens. I wouldn't doubt that, at this point, in number of churches, we are the largest group in the Philippines among the evangelicals. So that is where I think we are headed.

Now, with the advent of all of these new people, and many of them are already professionals, I think what is going to have to happen is we are going to have to change the Bible school setting, curriculum. I think we are going to continue to have young people coming out of our churches into the ministry. At the same time, I think we are going to have 30- and 40- and 50-year-old people who, once they find Christ and hear the call to the ministry, need a year of training. They are already engineers, they are already nurses or doctors, or whatever, but they feel the call to the ministry. And they need basic Bible training, e.g., one year of training. I don't know how that is going to happen. I know that in Roxas City it happens through a church-based Bible school, which I hear there are many of those cropping up around the Philippines, and that is where Global University comes in. That is probably where the future success of the Bible schools is going to be, like Bethel Bible College extension in Cubao. From an outside observer, now having been out of the country and not having lived there for a long time, that's what I see happening. From Charismatic to church planting, and from dealing with people out in the barrio, so to speak, dealing now with a cross-section of people. Reflecting too, probably, how Manila has matured and changed over the last few years.

E: And the great need for trained leaders.

D: Yes, a great need.

12. Final Words

E: If you would be able to speak to the Filipino churches of the twenty-first century, what would be your message to them?

D: Well, when I was among them, I preached faith. And, I would probably go back in among them preaching faith. I would probably try my best to raise their faith as leaders to believe God to do what it

might seem impossible to do. "But, with God, all things are possible." So, I would teach and train them that they are the head, not the tail; that they are not behind, but they are in front. That this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached into all the world for a witness, and the gospel has with it what, in this theology, we call "redemptive lift," that when you preach the gospel, the gospel gets into someone's heart and it lifts them, and faith causes them to be able to do things, to see things, that they have never seen and they've never done before. And, to a great extent, I preached that message among our pastors back twenty years ago. I would still probably preach that message today: that faith will help them to have a church on main street; faith will help them to have a big building. Faith will see them through to be able to accomplish great things, rather than to depend on outside resources, meaning the United States or Great Britain; rather than depending on somebody to send it in, believe God to send it down.

- E: Dr. Denbow, thank you very much for the challenge that you are giving to the Filipino pastors. And we pray that the Filipino pastors will arise and take that lead that you are envisioning for us. God bless you, too, as the pastor of Christian Chapel in Columbia, Missouri.