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Author(s)	Meimban, Adriel Obar
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# **A Historical Analysis of the Iglesia Ni Cristo: Christianity in the Far East, Philippine Islands Since 1914**

Adriel Obar MEIMBAN\*

## **Introduction**

This inquiry deals on the historical analysis of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* or Church of Christ from 1914 to 1994. It starts from 1914, coincidental with the outbreak of the First World War and ends in 1994, during the Church's 80th year anniversary.

In the Far East or Southeast Asian region, in the Philippine Islands, a unique Christian religion has indigenously emerged.<sup>1)</sup> Conservatively adhering to biblical Christianity, it traces its spiritual roots to the Lord Jesus Christ, bases its faith on the Holy Scripture, believes in the last commissioning and propagates that it is the only true Church for salvation.

## **Relevance**

Its birth, rise and growth first in the Philippine archipelago as a religious organization and socio-cultural institution for the past 80 years and later worldwide for the past 26 years, has been "extraordinary" and "phenomenal."<sup>2)</sup> Scores of scholars, academicians, historians, scientists, and researchers have attempted to study it from an outsider's viewpoint. Its doctrines, administration, practices, membership, ministry,

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\* Professor of History, New Era University, ordained minister of the Iglesia Ni Cristo.

and chapels have been the objects of ecclesiastical, historical, sociological, anthropological, ethnological, and biographical studies. Unfortunately, these are incomplete, inaccurate, and laced with prejudices.

## Scope of Study

This study chronicles the doctrinal, historical, socio-cultural, and politico-economic forces that shaped the history, growth and development of the native Christian religion for the past eight decades. The time frame includes the 50-year stewardship of God's Last Messenger, Brother Felix Y. Manalo, and the 30-year administration of the present Executive Minister, Brother Eraño G. Manalo.<sup>3)</sup>

## Sources

The study draws primarily on vital church documents, archival holdings, manuscript collections, documentary sources, and oral interviews. The multi-disciplinary approach, particularly the historical method, is used in analyzing the historical and ecclesiastical development of this unique Christian religious organization. This study is a small contribution to the still-meager data of historical information regarding the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*, now recognized as a significant Christian socio-religious institution in the Philippines, Southeast Asia, and other parts of the globe for the past eighty years or four generations in the 20th century.

## Origins of The Iglesia Ni Cristo

The Iglesia Ni Cristo or Church of Christ traces spiritual linkage to the singular Church founded by the Lord Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, Israel.<sup>4)</sup> Akin to the pristine first century Church of Christ in doctrines, teachings, hierarchy, administration, norms of worship, and bonds of fellowship, it uses the Holy Bible or Sacred Scriptures as its fundamental base of faith. Biblical or scriptural in its doctrinal, hierarchical, and liturgical dimensions, it has propagated a purely Christian concept of religion.

Biblical prophecies pronounced and documented by God in the Bible's Old and New Testaments hundreds of years ago attest to the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* as the last mission of salvation prior to the day of judgment.<sup>5)</sup> The humble beginning of the Church of Christ in the Philippines in 1914 is traced to the fulfillment of God's prophecies, all written in the Bible. Historically, the Book of Acts in the New Testament accounts for three groups promised to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, thus: "*For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*" (Acts 2:39, KJV). The importance of receiving the Holy Spirit is that the people sealed with it are considered God's people, thus: "*And you also became God's people when you heard the true message, the Good News that brought you salvation. You believed in Christ, and God put his stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit he had promised.*" (Ephesians 1:13-14, TEV) No Church or

organization could claim to be God's chosen people today, unless they are included in any of the three groups of people mentioned by Apostle Peter. To the first two groups belonged the Jews and Gentiles, thus: "*Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?*" (Romans 9:24). To the third belonged the Church of Christ in these last days.

Brother Manalo was elected to shepherd the last group of God's chosen people. The Bible prophetically attests to his election as "angel" or messenger as documented in Revelation 7:2-3: "*And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.*" (KJV)<sup>6</sup> He is the "one shepherd" who will take care of the "other sheep" of Christ's "flock" as prophesied in John 10:16, KJV: "*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*" The "flock" is the Church as recorded in Acts 20:28: "*Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you overseers to feed the Church of Christ which he has purchased with his blood.*" (George Lamsa Version). Thus, the Bible is the sole authority on which the re-establishment of the Church of Christ, its beliefs, and its success are based. Another prophecy regarding Brother Manalo's divine commission is written in Prophet Isaiah's 46:11-13:

*"Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it. Hearken unto me, ye stouthearted, that are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory."* (KJV) Coming from the east or far country, the man will bring God's righteousness for the salvation of Zion or the Church.

Church history records that apostasy, i.e. separation from the true faith, overtook the first Church of Christ especially after the apostolic guardians died in the first and second centuries. After centuries of apostasy, the Church re-emerged in the Far East, or Philippine Islands, during the time element prophetically known as "ends of the earth," equivalent to man's civic calendar as 1914. Thus, emerged 80 years ago, the re-established Church of Christ in the Far East, in the Philippine Islands.

### Re-affirmation of True Doctrines

The Bible documents that the Church's re-establishment in these last days re-affirms the return of true Christian doctrines or teachings. Re-affirmation of the true doctrines has come, as willed by God, after centuries of apostasy caused by pagan, unchristian and heretical pollutions. These Christian tenets championed by the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* prove its identity with Christ's true brand of Christianity. Among the

fundamental Christian teachings of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* are its belief in the following: absolute oneness of God Almighty, Bible is God's word, existence of the "one new man" or one true Church, humanity of Christ, God's last commissioning, centralized administration, baptism by immersion, renewal of life, propagating the faith, love of brotherhood, faith-with-works, resurrection of the dead, voluntary offerings, unity, heavenly kingdom, judgment day, and eternal life.

These Christian and apostolic doctrines have been strictly extracted from the Holy Bible. What differentiated the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* from the other Christian sects and churches is its "biblicalness" or "scripturalness." Converts from various creeds, colors, and races have been attracted to the purity of doctrines derived purely from the Holy Scripture.

### God's Last Messenger

The *Iglesia Ni Cristo* believes in the commissioning of a man vested with the office as a Last Messenger of God or in Filipino, *Huling Sugo ng Diyos*. God's Last Messenger, simply addressed as Brother Felix Ysagun Manalo, was called to be the leading instrument for the Church's re-emergence and propagation. Prophecies documented among the 66 inspired Books of the Bible such as in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, Malachi, John, Acts, Matthew, and Revelation prove his divine "election."

Brother Manalo was 28 years of age when he started his heavenly calling. This was



Brother Felix Y. Manalo, God's Last Messenger ; born on May 10, 1886 ; died on April 12, 1963.

after God allowed him to undergo a three-day and three-night Bible study and meditation which marked the turning point of his life.<sup>7)</sup> For almost 50 years, Brother Manalo preached about the singular true Church and guided the Church through oppressions and persecutions. He was born on May 10, 1886 during the last quarter of Spanish colonial rule, to a Catholic parentage in Tipas, Taguig, Rizal.<sup>8)</sup> His death on April 12, 1963 at the age of 77 years ended his work as spiritual leader of Christ's "other sheep" (John 10:16). During his almost half-a-century administration from 1914 to 1963, he victoriously supervised the Church that grew from "one man to millions."<sup>9)</sup> Derided and ostracized from the outset, the Church under his capable stewardship as the man of God, weathered all storms of persecutions and forms of prosecutions.

Equipped with God-given talents in administration, propagation, and edification, the Last Messenger was undaunted. The *INC* or *INK*, as it was bitterly persecuted considering that the Philippine Islands is a Catholic-Protestant domain, steadily grew from the first locale congregation in Punta, Sta. Ana, Manila in 1914 to its first foreign mission in the Western hemisphere, in Honolulu, Hawaii, United States of America in 1968. In such a short period of 54 years, the indigenous *Iglesia Ni Cristo* started to establish overseas missions and implant religious missionaries.<sup>10)</sup> By 1994, it has manned a global network of multi-lingual and multi-racial congregations scattered in six continents, among 65 nations and territories for the past 25 years. Indeed, the

tradition of Western religion sending their missionaries to the Eastern world had been reversed by the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*. Now, it is the East sending ministers to the Western world.<sup>11)</sup> For the past four generations, the Church has played an indelible role in the spiritual and material lives of Filipinos and non-Filipinos alike.

## Growth and Development

### Pioneering Years, 1914-1924

The *Iglesia Ni Cristo*'s pioneering years during its first decade of existence from 1914 to 1924 were quite trying. Almost single-handedly, Brother Manalo organized the first locale congregations and first administrative districts. On July 27, 1914, the Church was officially registered with the Philippine government as corporation sole. From the start of his mission, Brother Manalo met fierce oppressions and rabid persecutions. Filipinos viewed his propagating the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* as a grand exercise in futility. Indeed, the Philippine society to which he preached the true Gospel was hostile. The traditional Catholic values instilled by the Spaniards and the new Protestant religion brought in by the Americans, were partly responsible for this negative attitude toward the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*.

On the non-religious front, 1914 was a year of international significance. On July 27, the First World War erupted in Europe after Austria sent her ultimatum to Serbia.

The nations at war were beset by global shortage of food, clothing, and coal. That the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* rose in such an unlikely setting is part of God's grand design for the salvation of mankind in these last days. His prophecy on the re-emergence of the true Church states His promise to keep His people until the Second Coming of His Son Jesus are recorded in the Holy Bible. Isaiah 43:5 gives the "Far East" as the specific point of the world where the chosen people would come hundreds of years after God's prophecy: "*From the far east will I bring your offspring, and the far west I will gather you.*" (Moffatt) The Philippines is in the Far East. The "bringing" of God's "sons and daughters" had been timed as "ends of the earth." (Isaiah 43:5-6) His Son Jesus was questioned by His disciples about the time element "ends of the earth," thus: "... *Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*" (Matthew 24:3, *Ibid.*) Before the "end" of the world or His coming, the "ends" will first occur. Christ answers that war signals the start of the "ends." Christ says, "*And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.*" (Matthew 24:6-8, *Ibid.*) In 1914, the First World War erupted. In this time of war, in fulfillment of God's prophecy for the salvation of His chosen people, Christ re-established His Church through the last messenger, Brother Felix Y. Manalo.

Brother Manalo's life was a constant search for the truth and reason for his existence. God called him to be the leader of His people. His commissioning as the last messenger ended his search because to him God entrusted His words and the "sealing function" which results to the emergence of God's People as written in Ephesians 1:13-14, TEV: "*And you also became God's people when you heard the true message, the Good News that brought you salvation. You believed in Christ and God put his stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit he had promised. The spirit is the guarantee that we shall receive what God has promised his people, and this assures us that God will give complete freedom to those who are his. Let us praise his glory!*" Before its official registration with the Philippine government on July 27, 1914, the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* had commenced evangelization as Brother Manalo preached the true Gospel among the workmen of Atlantic Gulf and Pacific (A.G. & P) at Punta, Sta. Ana, Manila. With four or five listeners, he began as an evangelist. Twelve converts were baptized in early 1914 in Pasig river at Sta. Ana. After a time, Brother Manalo left the small congregation at Punta. With wife Honorata and infant daughter Pilar, he headed for Tipas in Rizal, to continue his preaching task.<sup>12)</sup>

His arrival at Tipas, his birthplace, resembled that of a returning native. His beginnings were known and open to people's scrutiny. Here, he met fierce persecution. They measured the legality of any organization against the yardstick of registration papers. A townmate counsel Attorney Juan Natividad, helped the young preacher to

file the articles of incorporation with the Office of the Division of Archives, Patented Properties of Literature and Executive Office of Industrial Trade Works. On July 27, 1914, the day the First World War began, the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church of Christ) became officially registered. It was a marked distinction of his devotion and conviction that in every place he preached, he established a new locale.<sup>13)</sup> For the materially poor evangelist, privation was particularly trying. The odds of sacrifices and sickness hunted him. But the mission God appointed him must be accomplished. With absolute faith and grim determination, the young evangelist nursed himself back to health.<sup>14)</sup>

In the summer of 1915, he resumed his work in propagating the Gospel. His evangelization was concentrated in the suburban towns of Rizal around the Manila metropolis. Before 1915 ended, he changed course and began his daily visits north of Manila such as the populous Tondo district associated with the city working class. Here, Brother Manalo chose the makeshift markets for his evangelical rallies. At sundown, he began to preach amidst the strong smell of decaying left-over foodstuffs. He would take out his little notebook every night after the rallies and listed the names of prospective converts.<sup>15)</sup>

During those early days of propagation, a vendor in the market-place aided Brother Manalo in setting up a religious meeting. The sympathy and interest shown became the recurrent pattern in the succeeding years. Most of the locales began in this manner. Later, they branched out in congregations, thus necessitating partition into

two or three locales. Hence, the Church gradually developed a centralized structural set-up whereby a cluster of locales comprised an ecclesiastical "division" or "district." The central administration supervised on top of all the districts and locales. For better supervision, Brother Manalo set up the first central office in Tondo, Manila.<sup>16)</sup> The Messenger had ready knowledge of the state of all the locales and supervised their activities. All administrative and spiritual problems including the construction of the makeshift chapels were his concern. In Gabriela, Tondo, the nightly propagation work resulted in the baptism of converts. A chapel was built in 1918, from easily available native materials like palm fronds and woven bamboo. This quaint house of worship had brethren sit on long backless benches to listen to the homily. Brethren from Pateros and Tondo through self-help cooperative effort known in the Philippines as *bayanihan* built this chapel. Here, the brethren of Tondo held regular worship services on Sundays and meetings on Thursdays.<sup>17)</sup>

The Church locales increased at a rapid pace in the late 1910's and early 1920's. Brother Manalo officiated at more than one locale which necessitated his itinerant propagation and supervision. The growth of the fledgling Church was matched by the handful of ministers who helped Brother Manalo shoulder the awesome responsibility of imparting God's words to the people. In 1915, aware of the importance of the corps of missionary workers, he created the school of ministers in Tondo, Manila. In 1919, the first ordination resulted to three co-workers who aided in the pioneering work.



The Last Messenger immersed himself in the multifarious functions as leader, teacher, and administrator. With zeal and dedication, *Iglesia Ni Cristo* ministers braved persecution, ostracism, and privation amongst the strongholds of Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam.

For the first decade since 1914, all locales were directly administered by Brother Manalo. In 1924, however, Pampanga was organized as an ecclesiastical district. A district minister became the implementing arm of the Executive Minister who supervised the propagation and the establishment of additional locales. To meet the demands of pioneering evangelization, religious workers assisted. The centralized system of administration was laid out. The Last Messenger instituted weekly sessions to enable ministers to be in constant contact with him.<sup>18)</sup> Uniform homily lessons taught to the brethren and important instructions were conveyed during these sessions. In quick succession from 1914 to 1924, 42 locale congregations sprouted in the six provinces in Central and Southern Luzon such as Rizal, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, and Tarlac. An average of two to three locales per province was established for the first 10 years.<sup>19)</sup>

### **Organizational Build-up, 1924-1939**

As the incipient Church grew in membership, the need to facilitate supervision and communication arose. In 1929, the first committee prayer meeting was instituted.

Brethren, grouped in sevens, that is, each group with seven members, prayed together. Its main purpose was “to teach brethren how to pray and spread the word of God among friends and relatives.”<sup>20)</sup> As the Church grew, the prayer grouping underwent streamlining. Many brethren trace their conversion to earlier prayer meetings. The most cogent element that preserved unity was the worship services held regularly on Thursdays and Sundays. These formed the core of brethren’s activities whereby the worshippers offer their lives in adoration of the Lord. Worship service is a solemn occasion where hymn singing, prayers, preaching, and offering of voluntary contributions are integral parts. Highlight of the service is the study of the lesson prepared by the Executive Minister. Each believer, be he a minister, a deacon, chorister, or a simple member has an active part. The minister imparts the biblical lesson, the deacons and deaconesses usher brethren to their seats and collect offerings, choir members lead in the hymn-singing, and members partake in the prayers and listen to the sermon.<sup>21)</sup>

In the 1920’s, Brother Manalo focused his attention to the youth. He knew that the future belonged to them. He educated them in the works of holiness. Therefore, he taught the Gospel to the young, simply and easily. He instructed the children on the same lessons taught the adults at a lower key. The first youth worship service teacher was a lay sister. On Sundays, the lessons were taught using the Socratic method of question-and-answer. This concentrated the children’s unbounded energy on learning

the doctrines of God as the teacher asked questions and the worshippers, aged four to twelve, answered in unison. Much of the work during this period centered on the worship service. Each part contributed to the attainment of coherence, unity, and discipline in the totality of the service and in the member's participation. Congregational hymn-singing was led by a choir. In the beginning, however, there was yet no choir. Lyrics were written and taught by the ministers.<sup>22)</sup> No standard hymnal text existed until 1937, when the first hymn-book containing about 220 hymns was published.<sup>23)</sup>

The consolidated youth force was a potent arm of the Church in propagating the words of God. Thus, Brother Felix Y. Manalo conceived of their unification in 1935. The young people were then gathered to think about a proper name for their organization. However, in 1936, he gave his nod to *Tambuli ng Silangan*. *Tambuli* is the Filipino word for animal horn used for calling towns-folk to community meetings. *Silangan* means east. The first young officers of the *Tambuli* were all female from Tayuman, Manila. They added color to the evangelical rallies, held programs, and sponsored literary-musical contests.<sup>24)</sup>

During the presidential elections of the Philippine Commonwealth in the mid-1930's, the Church exercised, for the first time, collective unity at the polls. The Messenger decided that the brethren to vote as one man for presidential candidate Manuel L. Quezon who eventually won. This unity became a precedent for the next electoral

activities. And for this, the Church became a potent voting bloc in the country's subsequent local and national elections. The courtship of the Church's solid vote started by President Quezon became the pattern for the ensuing politicians.

To propagate the faith in print medium, the Church ventured into publication with the magazine *Pasugo* (God's Message) which appeared in February, 1939. Brother Manalo himself wrote the first editorial in which he outlined the magazine's four purposes, thus: first, to propagate God's words among non-believers; second, to inform peoples of the world about the words of God written in the Scripture; third, to be a vehicle of news about the activities of the Church members; and fourth, to participate in crystallizing the ideals of the nation which the Philippines was then struggling to be.<sup>25)</sup> World War II momentarily halted the Church activities. One thing never stopped, however. This was their worship to God in regular congregational services. Discipline and dedication continued to be observed during these services.

### **War Years, 1939-1945**

When the Japanese Imperial Army occupied the Philippines from 1941 to 1945 and rendered the commonwealth helpless, Church of Christ members were among those oppressed. War subjects innocent people to the severity of conflict in arms and ideology. However, it became an instrument for the Church to be tested and to prove that it could hold its ground in an extremely oppressive atmosphere. God sustained His

miraculous support to the Church during the war years.<sup>26)</sup> Every Church member did his share for the continuance of the worship services. Brother Manalo and the ministers directed members to stay together even in the evacuation camps, searched them out for the worship services and taught them the rudiments of sheer survival. Gardens planted with vegetables and sustaining crops were tended for food supply for everyone.

Brother Manalo and the ministers set the example of courage. Although the Japanese forces intended to get him, still he officiated at congregational worship services. Numerous instances came when his fearlessness was tested. Once, in late 1943, just before a worship service at the Tayuman chapel, five Japanese soldiers walked in noisily and occupied the front row. The brethren went on with the hymn singing. Then the congregation prayed before the sermon. When Brother Manalo stood to lead in the Bible study, however, one of the soldiers barked at him in broken English not to speak. Brother Manalo showed his courage at the moment when he bravely said: "I did not receive my commissioning from you but from God. I shall perform my duties."<sup>27)</sup> The brethren waited for the *samurai* sword to cut his diminutive frame. None came. The soldiers stayed on until the end of the service without lifting a finger against him. Incidents like this were repeated in other places. But tragedy befell energetic young ministers and workers who were killed like Brother Espiridion Domingo, Andres Rodriguez, Mariano Castro, Alfredo Subijano, and Emiliano Garcia.



Brother Yoshiaki Muto, the first Japanese convert, from Fukushima-Ken, Japan

Heroes of the faith, they gave their lives in defense of the Church.

The Second World War exposed the Church to all kinds of atrocities, affecting ministers and members alike. However, the war years proved to be a blessing in disguise in the intensity of faith generated among the brethren. The tremendous increase of members also occurred. The Church persisted in its extensive propagation missions, thereby gaining thousands of converts. Other religions and sects had stopped in their missionary activities. God's last mission led by the indomitable Last Messenger continued. In 1943, at the height of the war, an ordination was held at Tayuman, Manila. Four ministers were ordained. Three ecclesiastical districts were organized during the occupation period. These were: Mindoro Oriental in 1940, Manila in 1942, and La Union in 1943.<sup>28)</sup> Sometime in mid-1944, before the landing of American naval forces in Leyte, the Last Messenger was forced by the Japanese religious-military authority to "relinquish" his administrative post. To comply with this directive, he issued a circular to the brethren, telling them that he had deputized Brother Prudencio Vasquez "to act as the overall church administration in compliance with the Japanese authorities."<sup>29)</sup>

A Japanese national and a pre-war convert from Fukushima-ken, Japan, Brother Yoshiaki Muto, played a dramatic role in saving some ministers and brethren from execution by the *Kempetai*. Ultimately, when the Church leadership counted the outpouring of blessings showered unto the Church through the traumatic war experi-

ence, the credit belonged to God. God the Lord Almighty prophesied in Isaiah 41:12, 13, 20, "*they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee... That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it*" (KJV). Immediately after the Liberation in 1945, Brother Manalo officiated special thanksgiving worship services in the various regions. The Church members profusely thanked God for their miraculous survival during the excruciating four-year occupation period.

### **The Postwar, 1945-1953**

The ravages of war left their imprint not only on the physical and geographical appearance of the country, especially Manila, the capital city, but on the national economy as well. Manila, next to Warsaw, was heavily damaged. The postwar years between 1945 and 1953 were troubled years for the Iglesia Ni Cristo, which was then beginning to rise from the ashes of the world war. Rehabilitation and reconstruction were the priorities. The communist-inspired anti-Japanese guerilla forces known as *Hukbala hap* (*Hukbo ng Bayang Mapagpalaya Laban sa Hapon*) threatened to overthrow the government. They unleashed a terroristic wave of harassment against the INC members for their pro-government loyalty. The plight of the rural brethren in Tarlac,

Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, and Bulacan was indeed pitiful. In 1946, the brethren could not attend the services because of severe communist persecutions.<sup>30)</sup> In Tarlac, they were harassed through forced collection of rice harvests. Continuing in their terrorist campaign, persecutors disturbed worship services and captured missionary workers and ministers. Some ministers were mutilated and their mangled bodies brought back to the houses of worship that dotted the Bulacan, Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, and Tarlac countrysides. Brother Manalo refused to be intimidated even by an assassin's plot. He pledged total support to the government by allowing brethren to serve in the local militia forces that eventually defeated the insurgents. In the contemporary history of the Church, since the postwar era, the story of the Church's developing prominence in the Philippine society is best told by the chapels that have become a distinct part of the country's landscape. The first concrete chapel was erected on Washington Street, Sampaloc, Manila in 1948. *Iglesia Ni Cristo* records show that the campaign to construct concrete chapels in the modern Gothic style began in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Through Engineer Dominador G. Manalo, the Church began a massive program of chapel construction. Each chapel is considered a humble dedication to the Almighty God Who is generous, loving, and deserving only the best of the individual worshipper. Each edifice symbolized the reaching out of the faithful to God as evidenced by the sky-reaching spires.<sup>31)</sup>

In 1948, a permanent central office in 154 Riverside, San Juan, Rizal went under

construction. Previously, rented buildings or office spaces were used as Central Offices. In 1951, the Riverside Office was inaugurated.<sup>32)</sup> By this time, a variety of reasons have attracted would-be members to the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*. Its uniqueness, such as its pure biblical teachings, the peculiarity of its practices and the distinctiveness of its houses of worship, led the curious to cast more than a cursory glance at the Church. In 1950s, it experienced more persecutions and even ostracisms from all quarters. The grudging and gradual acceptance among the Filipino community of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* members came as a result of the steady growth of the Church conspicuously evident in two things: the magnificent chapels and the increasing number of converts.

### **Preparation and Transition, 1953-1963**

Preparation of a future leader in God's organization has been practised for hundreds of years. The Bible records two outstanding precedents when God chose a successor even though the leader to be replaced was still alive. During Israel's wandering from Egypt to Canaan, Joshua was elected to succeed Moses, assigned by God to find his successor. The other precedent was shepherd David anointed to succeed King Saul of the Israelite kingdom.

Ten years before Brother Manalo succumbed to death, he started a long-range plan of training a future leader. When the ministers' extraordinary conference on January 28, 1953 was called to choose a future leader with God's divine inspiration, the

ministers could not believe their ears.<sup>33)</sup> This was a historic convocation that proved decisive for the future of the Church. Nevertheless, they understood the Last Messenger's vision that there be no gap in the Church's missionary work and administrative functioning.

The time had come to choose the future caretaker. One day he would pass away. Like Moses before him who turned over to Joshua his leadership of the Israelite nation, Brother Felix Y. Manalo prepared the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*. Earlier leaders went through a period of preparation laid out by God Himself. Brother Eraño, then the Supervising Minister of Manila was unanimously chosen successor in the Church stewardship. At the time of his election, he had already ten years of missionary experience and administrative work in the Church. The next ten years from 1953 to 1963 proved rigorous. Then a 28-year-old bachelor, he began his intensive and extensive training at the San Juan Central Office.<sup>34)</sup> Daily, the administrative routines were shared with Brother Manalo. He became the closest confidante. During the worship services officiated by Brother Manalo, he acted as verse reader. In the propagation rallies, he led the battery of speakers. In the training of evangelical workers and ministers, he became the director. He was entrusted as the Church's chief treasurer and the adviser of the youth association. He composed worship service lessons and delivered these personally during the weekly conference.<sup>35)</sup>

Meanwhile, the Last Messenger, respectfully known as *Matanda* or *Old Man*, hopped

from one district to another, visiting the brethren. The most welcome and refreshing aspect of these last ten years was his surprise visits. He came unannounced to see if the brethren were active, and if the resident minister was performing his functions. In this impromptu way, he gradually and patiently responded to the fast-growing number of needs in a rapidly-expanding organization. Oftentimes, he delivered short lectures counselling the minister's families and scores of brethren. They listened in rapt attention to his constant admonitions and exhortations. These pastoral visitations edified the locales and districts. In the mid-50s, and early 60s, he closely supervised the building of huge concrete houses of worship in the provinces of Nueva Ecija, Tarlac, Rizal, Benguet, Pangasinan, Mountain Province, Bulacan, and around Manila. Notable among the edifices constructed at this time were at Baclaran, Solis, Paco, Caloocan, Cubao, San Francisco del Monte, and Sta. Ana. In central Philippines, in the island of Panay, Brothers Felix Manalo and Eraño came in 1954 to address a public rally in the Iloilo Sandburst Park. There, the Last Messenger hurled a challenge to the Church's detractors for a debate in public. The same was repeated in Cebu in 1955. Brethren from all Visayan provinces flocked to the Queen City to see and listen to the man whose message they had believed even without him appearing before them.<sup>36)</sup> From 1953 to 1963, the Last Messenger revisited those places where there had been established locales and pioneering missions. In 1955 he was stricken ill, thus necessitating medical treatment in the United States. He was accompanied by Brother Eraño.

God's work was assured that it would not suffer with the death of the leader. The prospect of death only spurred to prove that the institution's main source of existence and achievement was God, not the import of the personality of men.

### **The Passing Away, 1963**

Before his well-deserved rest in early 1963, Brother Manalo had laid down the groundwork of practically all the internal institutions within the Church. Perhaps the last organization he instituted on December 15, 1962 was the association of married people later called *Buklod ng Gintong Layunin* (literally *Bond of Golden Purpose*). At 35 minutes past two o'clock, in the early dawn of Friday, April 12, 1963, Brother Felix Y. Manalo succumbed to a lingering illness. Earlier, brethren who crowded the Veterans Memorial Hospital were told by the leader himself that his days were numbered. He said: "It would not be long when I would leave you."<sup>37)</sup> His words proved prophetic. The surgical operations his weak body underwent were useless. God had decreed his rest.<sup>38)</sup>

With his passing, wild speculations concerning the Church's future sprang from all angles. Many adversaries foretold that the end of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* had come. Truly, enemies of the Church looked on Brother Manalo's demise as a relief from their own fears about the growing power and influence of this young indigenous Christian religion in the Philippines. Thousands flocked to the San Francisco del Monte

"chapel" in Quezon City, then the biggest house of worship with a seating capacity of 3,200 persons. Day and night, tens of thousands of people came by foot and in all kinds of vehicles. A steady flow of faithful filed past the bier of the late Messenger.<sup>39)</sup>

In the midst of all the quiet and thoughtful lamentation that pervaded the atmosphere as the late leader laid in state, Brother Eraño G. Manalo sat in the front row middle aisle. He looked lean, scholarly and much younger than his 38 years. When he spoke, his voice was almost stern soft. To a newspaper reporter, he said in a tone that hinted about his low profile approach: "We do not want publicity, especially for myself."<sup>40)</sup> The conviction of the new Executive Minister was firm and true when he articulated, thus: "I intend to carry on, to the letter, my father's teaching and persevere according to his method, to inspire discipline and piety among my fellow brothers."<sup>41)</sup> When "Ka Erdy," as he is lovingly called, pronounced that he will do his best for, "I know I have the support and the vote of confidence of my brothers and sisters", it was a vow that despite the gigantic task, the mission would be pursued.<sup>42)</sup>

### **The Church's New Era, 1963-1994**

A new era in modern church history commenced in 1963. For the next three decades or thirty years, the newly-anointed Executive Minister, Brother Eraño G. Manalo, stamped a new era of church leadership and spiritual administration. From the moment the Last Messenger breathed his last, Brother Eraño assumed the delicate

mantle of presiding over the flock on its 49th year of existence. This “new era” or new period in church history officially started on April 23, 1963, the day of the Last Messenger’s internment. Brother Erdy or Erdie has steered the Church during these contemporary period from the Sixties to the Nineties. It is perhaps prudent to analyze the palpable progress achieved by the Church during the new era administration.

The phenomenal victory earmarked by the Lord God was earned through faith, love, sacrifice, discipline, unity, loyalty, and hard work. These were not lacking in any way amongst the growing number of ministers, workers, officers, and brethren. Those who had anticipated and predicted that the Church would fall apart after Brother Manalo’s death were proven wrong. Forty-nine years, which is the length of time Brother Manalo stood as the Presiding Elder and Chief Church Administrator, seemed to ensure a difficult ordeal of living in the shadow of a charismatic steward. Was the boyish-looking but handsome 38-year old Brother Erdie prepared for the exacting life of an Executive Minister? Would he know how to stir and administer the growing Church through the uncertain years ahead? It looked as if what the self-pronounced seers declared, who fearlessly claimed that this was the *INK* ultimatum, appeared to be true.<sup>43)</sup>

In the Philippine religious scene, the Church of Christ had become at this point in the 1960s, the center of attention, partly because of its predicted doom with the death of God’s Last Messenger, and partly because it was at this time that it assumed its vital

societal role in character molding, citizen formation, community development, agrarian reform, humanitarian concern, educational contribution, nation building, and political influence. The emergence of the Church as a religion innately geared to meet equally the spiritual and material needs of the individual member was defined through the Church mission without its ever lifting a finger to make that definition under the dynamic leadership of the new Presiding Elder. The Church’s societal role initially figured in the first decade of Brother Eraño’s spiritual administering from 1963 to 1974. At this juncture, the Church was easily identified in public and mass media as the *Iglesia*, *INC* and *INK*.

### **Golden Year Anniversary**

Among the first instances when the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* under the new church leadership of Brother Eraño G. Manalo sought to tell the world that contrary to its expectations, the Church was as alive, responsive, and dynamic as ever, was the Golden Anniversary celebration of the Church’s founding on July 27, 1964. Held some fifteen months after Brother Manalo’s death, the observance of the Church’s 50th year was made at the Araneta Coliseum, in Quezon City, reportedly the world’s largest domed stadium at that time, and attended by a throng of 65, 000 delegates. Simultaneous with this special occasion, too, was a special worship service conducted in all chapels throughout the Philippines. The crowd filled every corner of the Big Dome. The 50th Anniversary





Brother Eraño G. Manalo, the incumbent Executive Minister of the Iglesia Ni Cristo since April 23, 1963, marked his 30th year of stewardship in 1993.

year was observed with a special service officiated by the new Executive Minister.<sup>44)</sup> The unity and discipline of the crowd was impressive.

The only manifestation of the Church's grief over the loss of its departed leader was a white-draped empty chair on stage. Otherwise, the members reckoned the blessings that had been bestowed on the Church over the milestone of 50 years. The event confirmed the members' faith that the religion will live on despite the death of the Last Messenger. Ten years later, in 1974, the Church returned with a greater number of delegates and members to the coliseum for the 60th anniversary. Highlight of the affair was the special worship service led by Brother Eraño and the awarding of commemorative medallions to the 60 pioneering ministers led by senior ministers, Brothers Cipriano P. Sandoval, Teofilo C. Ramos, Sr., Benjamin J. Santiago, Sr., Glicerio T. Santos, Sr, Emilio Nemis, Andres Sadorra, Felipe Aguilar, Gavino Estrella, Daniel Lapid, SR., Andres Tucker, SR., Isaias Reyes, and Leopoldo T. Aguilar.<sup>45)</sup>

Although guided unerringly by that same spirit of solicitous concern for the Church, Brother Eraño's brand of leadership has been somewhat different from that of his father-administrator. Where Brother Felix Manalo has been evaluated as a charismatic leader, the younger Manalo is decidedly dynamic. His style of leadership has spurred the contemporaneous spiritual and worldly efforts of the fast-growing Church. 1963 was the year when the new Catholic Pope Paul VI took over from the popular pontiff John XXIII. With Brother Eraño at the helm, the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* became a

significant religious, social and moral influence in modern Philippine society.<sup>46)</sup>

### **Biblical Consistency**

When interviewed by the *Sunday Times Magazine*, Brother Eraño attributed this successful growth to God and the Church's consistent loyalty toward the Holy Bible.<sup>47)</sup> All the major and minor points of the Church's doctrines are borne out by passages in the Holy Scriptures. Students of social movements, on the other hand, consider a variety of reasons for the Church's emergence as a force to reckon with. The growth, occurring "as steadily as the birth-rate," has been attributed partly to the use of the local dialect in which the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* has established its locale congregations.<sup>48)</sup>

Subsequently, the ministers do not speak a strange tongue to the diverse, divided, and regionalistic Filipinos who inhabit the 7,100 islands and speak 87 native dialects. In the northern part in the Ilocos region, the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* speaks Ilocano, in the Visayas in central Philippines, Cebuano, in the central and southern parts of Luzon, Tagalog, and, in southern Philippines, in Mindanao and Sulu, Arabic and Chabacano. Whatever these reasons, however, the fact remains that the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* has succeeded immensely in imparting the importance of the Church for man's well-being and salvation. As its vital contribution to the formation of a national language, the Church has utilized and encouraged Filipino as the major tongue and the native dialects simultaneously in the worship services all over the archipelago.

The accomplishments of the organization, rather than the man at the helm, speak for the doctrinal authenticity upheld by the Church. Changes within the Church in the initial years of his stewardship did not touch the unchanging set of doctrines but the process of dissemination. Such reformation and implementation necessitated thorough changes in all levels within the Church.<sup>49)</sup> As a centralized administrative system, the Church operated with an efficient and effective office network. Hence, in the mid-60s, he conceived of a much larger permanent headquarters to accommodate the various needs, requisitions, and problems of the progressing Church. In early 1968, the central office, after a 20-year stay in the F. Manalo, San Juan, Rizal compound, was moved to the F.G.R. Building in Buendia Avenue, Makati City — the financial center of the Philippines.

The first level of innovations was in the finance department which the new Executive Minister himself headed as Treasurer General from 1947 to 1963. This enabled him to have full perspective of the Church's fiscal state for almost two decades prior to his assumption of the highest office. An effective system that ensured fiscal responsibility and accountability was adopted. This resulted to the gradual stabilization of the Church economy, the reassessment of the Church properties, and a timetable for the construction of houses of worship, pastoral houses, offices, and housing facilities. Indeed, his stint coincided with the rise of the houses of worship which became landmarks in every Filipino community, both in the rural countryside and in the urban

setting. From 1968 to 1971, the new and permanent central office complex at Diliman, Quezon City, just across the University of the Philippines campus, was constructed.<sup>50)</sup> The *Iglesia Ni Cristo* declares proudly that it has never had to borrow from financial institutions for its building program. The great advances made about the Church's material properties starting in the late 1960s manifest the brethren's high degree of faith. In the 1970s, the Construction Department embarked on a massive program of chapel construction.

### **Barrio Maligaya: Model Resettlement**

An exodus of more than a thousand brethren constituting some 150 families from Hacienda Luisita in Tarlac, central plains of Luzon transpired in the mid-1960s. The farmers had established a union force. Since they are, doctrinally speaking, already brothers in Christ, the brethren refused to affiliate with the union. This refusal resulted to their persecution that reached a height of intrigue and violence in 1964, until the Administration stepped into the workers' problems. Through frugal and wise budgeting, 500 hectares of virgin land in Barrio Maligaya in Palayan City, Nueva Ecija were acquired. The homeless brethren were transferred en masse there.

The exodus was a sight to behold. Brethren from varying states of life lugged their belongings to six-by-six trucks. The very young and the very old stood together, bringing with them their animal pets and baggage of imaginable shapes. As they left

the hacienda, the brethren sang the *Iglesia Ni Cristo Hymn*. To the Church that fervently prayed as one for their welfare, the exodus was a triumph in faith, sacrifice, and self-denial. The road to Barrio Maligaya was rough and dusty. On arrival at the barrio, the Luisita evacuees were visibly disappointed. There was too much work to do, so many trees to hack down, the earth covered with thick grasses. They had to carve a new home and a new community for themselves out of the frontier. Here was the promised land that had to be tilled for the first time by people used to clerical work. But, they were undaunted. The raw brown earth challenged them to work. And, the prayer of the members all over the country sustained them. Hence, within a couple of years after the pioneering efforts of the former Luisita workers, Barrio Maligaya became a symbol of the triumph of man's industry over the ruggedness of nature.

As the Church's first successful venture into agrarian reform movement which antedated that of the Philippine government, it became the enviable model of cooperative movement of a people united in faith and action. Thus, it was transformed into a self-sustaining community having its own school building, medical-dental unit, and transportation line. The people in the community have taught themselves to go back to the soil for subsistence and for the power of their faith. In the mid-60s, which was the presidential elections, Maligaya evolved to be the Church's showcase in agrarian reform and socio-economic action. Incumbent President Diosdado Macapagal person-

ally visited the model community project, accentuating the government's recognition of the Church's socio-economic contribution. A host of top government officials and foreign specialists from Japan, Taiwan, Australia, and United States subsequently visited the thriving community. The educational needs of the young residents were also ensured. The elementary school was attended by the children. The teachers were composed of brethren. The barrio is equipped with complete utilities and facilities including power generators for electricity and water supplies.

A river that flows through the vast property is harnessed for irrigation. Stores supplied the brethren with their needs. To top it all, the house of worship stands on a hill that overlooks all of Barrio Maligaya, fittingly dedicated to a just and benevolent Creator. And for the brethren's spiritual life, the Church Administration has assigned a resident minister to supervise the community. Brother Isaias Reyes, a trusted senior minister, became the first resident minister who was directly accountable to the Executive Minister.<sup>51)</sup>

### **Stand on Family Planning**

Birth control and family planning issues were addressed head on in the mid-Sixties. An added reason why these movements in this population-booming world failed to gain foothold in the Philippines is the view maintained by the Roman Catholic Church that has entrenched itself in the Philippine society since the 16th century. Even in a modern

world, it is not an easy task to do away with centuries-old norms especially when these concern religion. The Catholic Filipinos, in obedience to the decree, shirk from family planning and birth control because to practise either is to commit a sin as ordained by the Catholic Church. The Church of Christ has earned the recognition of the United Nations Organization as testified to by the UN's population expert, the late Honorable Rafael Salas. Indeed, it is true that the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* is considered a responsive and progressive organization because of its realistic and pragmatic view about birth control and family planning.<sup>52)</sup>

The Church in the late Sixties and early Seventies even maintained mobile clinics to see to it that members were counselled on the wise planning of families. Wise planning here meant that would-be parents, commit a sin if they beget a child whose physical, emotional, educational, and spiritual needs cannot be met by parents extremely busy with their other children. Awareness of the individual's spiritual functions prompted the Church to endorse family planning and birth control. And largely because of the Church's realistic view towards the ever-increasing birth rate in all parts of the world, the United Nations Fund for Population Assistance (UNFPA) has lauded the Church as an important religious group in its birth control projects. Tristrom Eastwood of the UNFPA was surprised to find this "very unusual Pilipino Church" as the "most successful in the Philippines and possibly in the world."<sup>53)</sup> In the period of one month in 1971, the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* Mobile Clinic has recruited, with the cooperative support

of *Buklod* officers, over 1,000 acceptors of birth control devices of which nearly half are IUD (intra-uterine device) acceptors. Again, this success termed by Eastwood as “extraordinary” was attributed to the disciplined nature of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* members.<sup>54)</sup> The pilot project on family planning and birth control consisted of 12 mobile clinics which moved from locale to locale in the populous Metro Manila area and other provinces. The Fund for Population Assistance used the mobile clinic in its campaign for nationwide acceptance of family planning and birth control measures. Among the religious organizations in the country, the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* was at the vanguard.<sup>55)</sup>

## Birth of the Foreign Missions

Barely five years after the demise of the Last Messenger, the Church of Christ crossed the Pacific Ocean in fulfillment of God’s divine prophecies. God had prophesied several centuries ago, through the Prophet Isaiah, that the Church will reach beyond the seas, reaching initially the United States in the Far West.” On July 27, 1968, on the Church’s 54th year, something unusual happened in the contemporary Church history: the start of the first foreign mission outside the Philippines. Brother Erdy himself declared that the extraordinary “event boosted the morale of the whole Church.”<sup>56)</sup> A trio of ministers, led by the Executive Minister, went to Honolulu, Hawaii, United States on that fateful day. Isaiah, the Prophet, recorded God’s

predictive will, that when the Church had reached the glorious stature in the Far East, then: ” ... from the far west I will gather you.” (Isaiah 43:5, Moffatt Version)

Exactly 54 years since the reestablishment of the Church of Christ in the Philippines, the prophecy was palpably fulfilled. What was once a group of “odd” individuals worshipping in a unique manner, derided for their poverty and ignorance were able to establish overseas missions. It was an incredible feat that astounded quite a number of people! In six years’ time, from 1968 to 1974, the foreign mission multiplied into 32 locales at the average of five locales per year. The first foreign mission was an answer to the brethren’s devotional prayers whose religious discipline in their home country rendered them spiritually hungry when they went abroad.<sup>57)</sup>

A uniform pattern of spiritual need attends to the birth of an overseas locale congregation. A similarity of events was evident -- that God “gathered” His children together. First, an immigrant, suddenly stopped in his or her tracks wearily, searching for the congregational gatherings he used to attend in the Philippines. His reason for a forlorn existence is more than just homesickness and deeper than a search for cultural roots. What is absent in the new existence is an unsatisfied spiritual thirst to worship and glorify God. Indeed, the discipline the individual acquired is the spiritual commitment of not forsaking congregational worship service, wherever he may go, at home or abroad. As always, when the brethren’s spiritual needs in the foreign missions must be met, the ministers shouldered the burden of the mission. The earliest overseas

missionaries sent abroad to attend to the brethren's spiritual welfare were Brothers Cipriano P. Sandoval and Pedro R. Meimban II who personally joined Brother Eraño when the first foreign locale was established in 1968.

## **New Permanent Central Office**

The Executive Minister's vision and foresight was proven once more with his noble project of building a new and permanent central office complex. In 1968, he bought ten hectares of land in Diliman and immediately instructed the Engineering Department to start the multi-million office structure. After three years, on May 10, 1971, the huge complex was inaugurated. For the first time in its history since 1914, the Church acquired a permanent office edifice. From the rented FGR building in Makati City, the Church's various office departments were transferred. Volunteer employees, regular workers, and ordained ministers became the backbone of these executive functions. Brethren from all over the Philippines and the world over came to bring their problems, needs, and petitions to the new headquarters. Even the Church's radio studio was moved to Diliman. The weekly conference-classes of the ministers and "*balikbayan*" receptions for foreign brethren were held in the same complex, too.

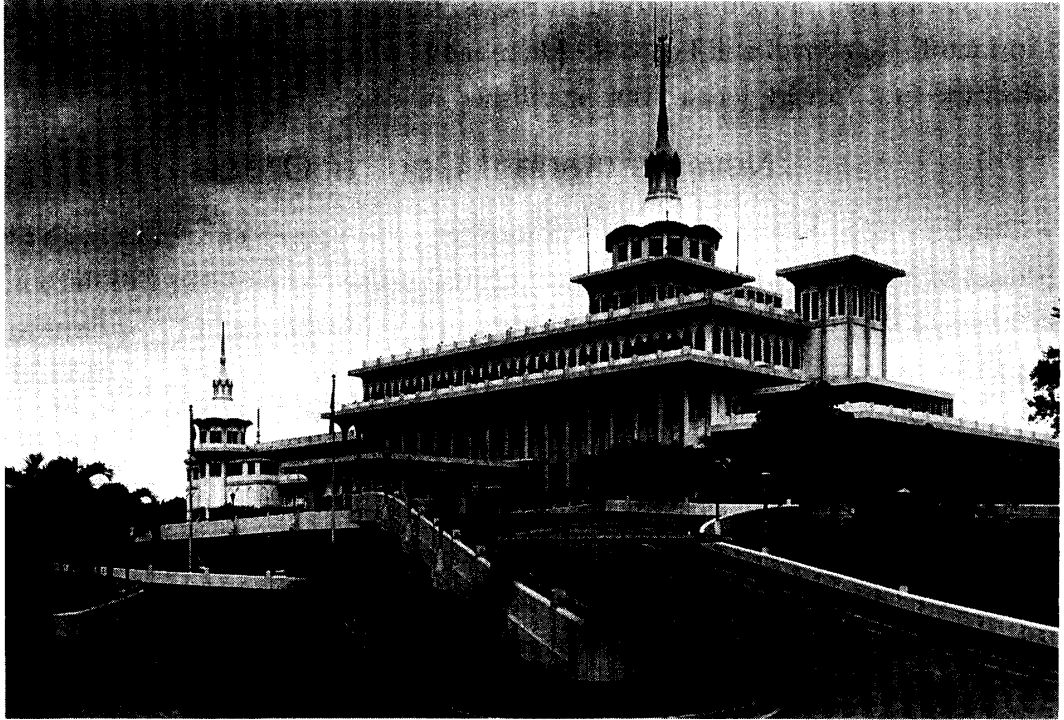
## **Martial Law**

On September 21, 1972, the Philippines was placed under military rule by strongman

President Ferdinand E. Marcos. The Church was greatly affected. On the night of the imposition of martial law regime, bloodshed occurred in the INC Central Office compound. Ironically, it proved to be the only violence when martial law was declared. A military contingent sent to padlock the religious station DZEM met stiff resistance from the Church volunteer security forces. A shooting encounter took place that resulted to the loss of lives on the part of the government forces. The Church incurred one fatality. As part of the Church's peaceful co-existence with the newly-constituted authorities, Brother Eraño issued a pastoral letter to all the brethren.<sup>58)</sup> In it, he clarified the Church's stand to cooperate with the government authorities who affirm the rule of law and preserve the freedom to worship. Nevertheless, the curfew hours imposed from 12:00 midnite to 4 o'clock a.m. altered the activities on evangelization, congregational gatherings, and other projects. But as the martial rule persisted in the mid-Seventies, the Church's Executive Minister became a vocal critic of the regime's oppressive and undemocratic measures.

## **School for Ministers**

An important barometer of Brother Eraño's management expertise was the establishment of a formal school for ministers on September 16, 1974. This meant the timely injection of a better systematized exposition of God's doctrines. The Executive Minister, tapping spiritual and intellectual gifts, formed the foundation for an educa-



Built from 1968 to 1971, the Central Office of the Iglesia Ni Cristo is the seat of the worldwide centralized administration. It is located just across the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City.

tional institution. The school was not to be an ordinary learning institution. Under the scheme, would-be ministers were rigidly trained in the holy ministry, doctrines, Bible and Church History, history, social sciences, languages, psychology, and humanities.<sup>59)</sup> The chief reason is the nature of the world at present. Hence, academic courses were incorporated in the five-year program leading to graduation and ordination. The dearth of young men entering the priesthood is a problem that has plagued the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant sects. The stock reason given is the strict and unjustifiable code of behavior imposed on seminarians and priests. Thus, there are either many defectors or men who shun the mere idea of entering the priesthood.

This is in contrariety to the situation in the Church. First, because the Church does not impose unrealistic prescriptions on the men who are in quest of the ministry. A would-be minister need not go through the unnatural and abnormal restrictions that a man inclined for the religious life encounters in the Roman Catholic Church. The INC believes that imposition of celibacy is unbiblical. It advocates marriage for its ministers because family responsibilities render them more capable of meeting with socio-religious problems head on. A former priest who became an ordained minister in the Church has called on his former “father-brothers” to stop being slaves of the religious myth that they have the right to be called “Father.”<sup>60)</sup> Another reason why the Church ministry is more responsive than those of other religions is because it has maintained a stature not far removed from the social milieu.<sup>61)</sup>

## The Church's Impact on Society

The *Iglesia Ni Cristo* under the “new era” for the past three decades has created a solid impact on Philippine society and global humanity. At first, the qualities required of God’s leader — insight, foresight, intuition, perception, and judgement — were quickly cultivated. As Brother Erdy labored as the leader, God willed that these characteristics be more polished. Until now, among the brethren, he remains a man who warmly greets his fellow Church members and makes them respect him.

Setting out to streamline the administration in 1963, he chose the ministerial level as the top priority of reforms. This was in pursuit of the biblical model leadership. His primary task, is to see to it that the Church remains conservatively committed to God and to His doctrinal precepts until the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is concerned with the true Gospel being disseminated through modern techniques of exposition, hence the use of radio, television, computer, fax, and video conferencing. He voiced his desire that the Church members maintain a thorough knowledge of tenets through doctrinal seminars and lectures. Learning to him is a living and continuing endeavor. Techniques change with the times, thus, he upgraded the level of pastoral teaching and ministerial preaching among the corps of ministers.

The Executive Minister lays no claim to any success that the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* has had or will ever have. While it is true that the Church’s achievements in both religious

and non-religious endeavors speak plainly of the strength of its leaders, yet the Church and its development are viewed by ministers and members alike as events that occurred because of divine intervention. Every member, indeed, is an instrument for the success of the Church in any field. To say, therefore, that the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* has become a stable social institution within the span of 80 years because Brother Felix Y. Manalo or Brother Eraño G. Manalo were possessors of strong will is to presume that both are just like any other leader. Furthermore, such presumption denies the mercy and power of God. The valid premise is that the Church has arrived at this milestone in its history because God has divinely willed that it be so.

The most important link in the entire organization is the paramount leader himself. For all the circulars, *Pasugo*, (God’s Message) locale visitations, letters, video-conferences, fax, and radio combined are incomparable to a pastoral visit of the Executive Minister to any locale in and out of the Philippines. This is because the overall administrator has always made himself readily approachable and available. This he accomplishes by proper scheduling of his activities for pastoral visitations. Brethren, old and new, weak and strong, strive to come and listen to his delivery of a special sermon. During these visitations, the brethren feel how close they are to him.

To lend importance to their affairs and problems, he takes pains to come all the way from the Central Office to visit even a very small locale. His concern for an efficiently working system of communication expresses his dynamism. He knows downward and



upward that communication is indispensable. He does not live nor lead from an ivory tower. Very much in command of information that concerns his globally-scattered and multi-racial constituents, he does not stay behind an office desk. Aside from his functions as minister, administrator, adviser, teacher, and pastor, he produces scholarly works. He has done extensive researches on the Bible, on world history, and particularly on the Holy Land, on philosophy and lately, on education.

Brother Eraño has steered the Church through a leadership described as “Joshua-like.”<sup>60</sup> Parallelism may be drawn between the transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua and that from the Last Messenger to Brother Eraño. In Moses and Joshua’s case, Joshua was chosen even while Moses was still living because God knew that Moses would not live long enough to lead Israel into the Promised Land. All the original measures and the employment of modern procedures responsive to the member’s spiritual needs in a changing society are but instruments for the final attainment of goals. Hence, these must be viewed in relation with the doctrinal tenets that developed the admirable discipline one now sees among the Church members in various continents. Anywhere they lead exemplary lives as model citizens and behave as good Christians.

The Executive Minister undeniably proved his mettle in instruction. An indefatigable stickler to discipline, Brother Eraño was strict as a teacher, putting his students to task when they needed to be reminded. A born teacher, one simply cannot afford

to lose track of the smallest utterance from him. He speaks with import that one can expect to benefit. The basic formula is hard work and concentrated studying well guided by intense prayer. To the ministers and members, the power he wields are attestations of heavenly graces. He is one man likened to a human father steeped in compassion and discipline. He is very real. He has learned the art of touching one’s heart, intellect, and outflow of creativity. His moral authority led to the strengthening of the moral fibers of the *INC* members.

Upholding the biblical procedure of centralized administration for the true Church, Brother Eraño has fully used the Central Office to the maximum degree. In the tastefully decorated central headquarters, his authoritative presence is felt. An undercurrent of striving pervades to see to it that the Church’s needs are met by giving him the correct data vital to his decision-making. The smoothness of the flow of work is creditable to the collective efforts of the cog wheels — the Finance, Records, Research, Publications, Secretariat, Engineering-Construction, Social Services, Personnel, Foreign Missions, Legal Affairs, and Education departments.

In the mid 1970’s, Brother Eraño defined the administrative functions of the top executive departments. The offices exist because the flow of action within the Church demands it. But more than this, a central office complex exists because of the multifarious needs and problems of the faithful Christians all over the globe. It needs to be informed of what transpires in all locale congregations. Hence, the urgency of

decision-makings are intended to make the brethren secured in their true faith. Thus, the Executive Minister's auxiliary offices functioned like well-oiled machines. These are all the God-gifted indications of the Church's rise to glorious prominence in terms of riches, fame, and honor since the Sixties. Humbly, the Church through the Presiding Elder had oftentimes expressed: "Praise be the Lord! Glory to His exalted Name."<sup>63</sup>

### **Spiritual, Glory, and Material Prosperity**

As the Church had scaled greater heights of spiritual glory and material prosperity from the Seventies to the Nineties, it confidently conserved the doctrinal heritage received through God's Last Messenger. Through Brother Eraño's capable spiritual administration, the purity of the tenets and teachings is a continuing primordial concern. Undoubtedly, no second apostasy would recur in the re-established one true Church founded by the Lord Jesus Christ to which the third group of God's people belonged. Hence, as the current Church Leader emphasized on the prudent conservation of the pure gospel teachings, he upgraded the level of their dignified existence in this impoverished and chaotic social environment.

Still blessed in 1994 with the divine authority as the overall administrator of the globally-expanding Church on its 80th year is Brother Eraño. Since 1963, for the past three decades or thirty years, he has been the sole administrative authority. On April 23, 1993, he marked his triumphant three decades of divinely-inspired administration.

Presiding over the inception of the overseas missions since 1968, he has also supervised the irreversible global expansion featuring the transformation of the church population with international membership. He has seen the palpable manifestation of "the hand of the Lord" as evident realization of the biblical prophecies documented in the Holy Writ. The contemporary history of the *INC* corroborates this truism.

As the biblical prophecies pertaining to the last mission of salvation gradually unfolded, the Church expanded in all aspects which gained the notice of non-members the world over. It became the fortunate recipient of God's immeasurable blessings, both materially and spiritually. During these recent three decades of epochal period under the "new era", the Church marked its 60th year of existence in 1974, its 70th year in 1984, its 75th diamond jubilee in 1989, the 30th year of Brother Erdy's administration in 1993, and the historic 80th anniversary in 1994. All of these had been profusely bestowed by the merciful power and mercy of the Lord God Almighty.

Through the incumbent Executive Minister, the Church has embarked on meaningful socio-economic and educational projects. Demonstrably through its educational flagship, the New Era College and the Civic Action for Citizens or *Lingap sa Mamamayan*, the Church vigorously pushed its social commitment especially the poor and deprived people. Wider usage of mass media, specifically the print medium, radio, and television has exposed the Church to more people, Filipinos and non-Filipinos alike. Administratively and organizationally, the Church restructured the network of

districts. Chapel construction was further given impetus. In the overseas missions, the Church penetrated more nations, races, and languages with this worldwide expansion program. The cosmopolitan membership of the Church multiplied proportionately through the 65 nations and territories it had reached.

Realizing that it is a religious and social institution within the society, the Church contributes to the social and humanitarian welfare of the human beings who must be spiritually ministered to. The individual's non-spiritual aspect, that is, his material welfare, has also been taken cared of. Under Brother Eraño in his second and third decades of spiritual management, the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* has manifested its compassion for the individual having a body, soul, and spirit to be preserved. At no time since the Church re-emerged in 1914 has this concern been manifest on a wider scale in national and global terms than in the Nineties. Brother Eraño has demonstrated through his enlightened administration that man should be nurtured both spiritually and materially in this temporal world. Duly emphasized in all dimensions was the totality or "wholistic approach" of the members' well-being.

From the mid-Seventies to the early Nineties, the Church as a religious organization has been modernized by programmed expansion, uniformed standardization, and planned systematization. These are the achievements and accomplishments from 1973 to 1994, a period in Philippine and world history characterized by wars, terrorism, calamities, tragedies, and adversities. Paralleling these extraordinary events, how-

ever, were the much-heralded progress, prosperity and glorious ascent of the Church. This twenty-year period coincided with the second and third decades of Brother Eraño's executive ministership.

### **Making of New Era University**

Because of the increasing problems encountered in the Seventies by parents regarding their children persecuted and harassed in the Philippine public and private schools, the Church Administration created a formal institution in 1975.<sup>64)</sup> The making of New Era University started inauspiciously with the creation of the high school known as the New Era Educational Institute. Purchasing a building compound previously owned by the San Miguel Corporation at the heart of Metro Manila, Brother Erdy started the formation of a private, non-sectarian secondary school which admitted first the brethren in Metro Manila and nearby provinces. He summoned the Church's top educational experts led by Dr. Dolores G. Garcia. The faculty staff came from the ranks of the lay members. They were challenged to assist in the vision of Brother Eraño to provide quality but affordable education for the youth. The NEEI was accommodated, along with non-formal education, and technical-vocation training unit, in the Iglesia Ni Cristo Development Center. To supervise his pet educational project, Brother Erdy built an extension of his executive office. Once or twice a week, he visited the school campus in the mid and late Seventies.

In 1978, the Executive Minister elevated the Church's educational commitment. By establishing the collegiate level christened as the New Era College, quality education to the young and promising but needy brethren was assured. His brainchild pertaining to an ideal educational center blossomed in the Eighties and Nineties. The initial batch of students came from the New Era Educational Institute. On June 12, 1978, a brand new four-storey edifice along the Commonwealth Avenue, Diliman, Quezon City, across the University of the Philippines campus, was inaugurated. It also became the first concrete building planned for the new campus situated in Milton Hills Subdivision, adjacent to the Central Office. A long-range 15 year-plan stretching to the 21st century called for the erecting of physical infrastructure for the envisioned university system. Today, it has 15,000 student population.

During the inauguration of the first college edifice, Brother Eraño eloquently explained about the noble philosophy and rationale behind the establishment of the non-sectarian, non-profit institution. He aptly declared, thus: "The prime purpose of this school is for the glory of God. Let no one teach here anything that will alienate man from God. Let not this school be the battleground of warring students and ideologies. Let no one destroy the brotherly love that should exist between the faculty and the studentry. Above all, let the implementation and fulfillment of the words of God be the prevailing atmosphere inside this structure where true wisdom dwells."<sup>65</sup>) Primarily, he enjoined the Church faculty members especially the minister-instructors, to uphold the

noble principles and philosophy behind the New Era University.

Among Filipino educators engaged in non-formal education and distance education, the NEU is now well-known for its socially meaningful and effective training in livelihood skills which has enabled both members and non-members to be productive assets of the community. Distance education for some 2,600 ministers assigned in various parts of the world has been pursued since 1992.

Graduates of New Era University, particularly in education, engineering and accounting have invariably landed in the first ten places at professional board examinations.

## Church's Social Relevance

At no point in the history of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* has its social relevance as a religious institution been more scrutinized as now. Other religions have professed in their creedal pronouncements and papal encyclicals that they are "pro-poor." However, the Church has steadfastly committed itself to this end ever since its inception. Majority of the INC's come from the lower-income bracket or masses. That man to gain salvation in heaven must also be cared for materially in this temporal world cannot be overlooked nor underestimated. Hence, it cannot dissociate itself from the society whose moorings are necessarily material in its aspects. On November 19, 1981, the Church Administrator launched the *Lingap sa Mamamayan* mission. Literally

meaning “civic action for the citizenry,” the *Lingap* is oriented towards service to humanity. Since then, the *Lingap* projects had been held during the historic church dates such as the Church anniversary on July 27, and the natal days of the Last Messenger (May 10) and the present Executive Minister (January 2).

In conducting its regular social service activities, the Church has adhered to the laws of God. In serving and helping others, the Church has shown its genuine love to the Lord Almighty. The true Iglesia member has fully committed himself to the Christian practice of genuine love and compassion. Free legal assistance was also accorded to the needy brethren. Indeed, this is a demonstration of true Christian charity under the INC’s compassionate and humanitarian leadership. Starting in 1986, all the *Lingap* missions were coordinated through a new department, the Social Services Office (SSO). By the late 1980s, the Church Administration received numerous requests from corporate agencies that they be staffed with INC employees. By this time, the integrity, efficiency, and honesty of the INC worker had become a by-word in the Philippine business, labor, and industry. In response to this need, the Job Placement Bureau assured the livelihood opportunities as the Philippines faced a critical period in its ailing economy.

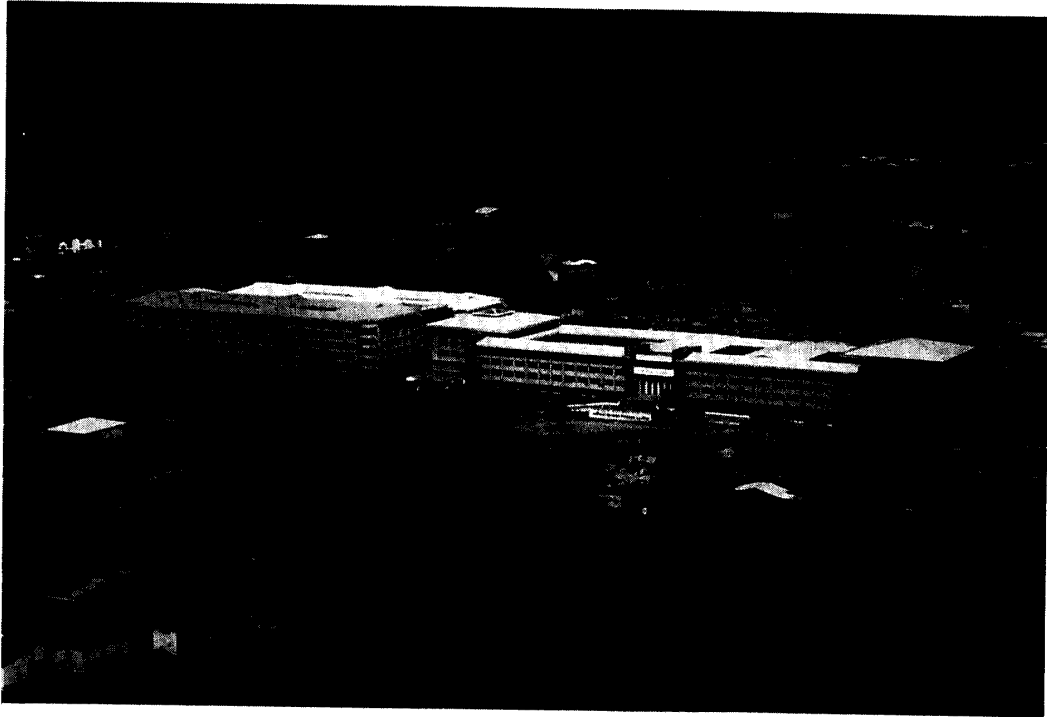
The years 1990 to 1994 had been unfortunate for the country. A series of devastating natural calamities such as typhoons, earthquakes, floods, and volcanic eruptions, crippled the economy and shook the political foundations. During these contingencies,

the Executive Minister had been quick to act. With dispatch, he has mobilized the Social Services Department as disaster relief center. The earthquakes in Northern and Central Luzon in 1990–1993, Mount Pinatubo eruption in mid-1991, the Ormoc City flood in late 1991, the Mayon Volcano eruption in 1992, the lahar overflow in 1993–1994 forced the Church to extend further its humanitarian services.

The hundreds of families evacuating from Zambales, Pampanga, and Tarlac as a result of the Mount Pinatubo eruption had to be relocated in 250 duplex houses. Brother Erdy bought several hundreds of hectares of land in Palayan City, adjacent to the Maligaya Farms. Now known as *Barangay Bagong Buhay*, love, faith, and hope for the displaced families find eloquent expressions. He directed the brethren not to be merely refugees. Thus, he provided the new livelihood opportunities and a new community for their material needs. Brother Erdy has not overlooked the immediate needs of his co-workers and brethren. In 1989, he inaugurated mass housing units for ministers’ families in Dasmariñas, Cavite. On April 23, 1993, on the occasion of Brother Eraño’s third decade of triumphant administration, the New Era General Hospital (NEGH) was inaugurated within the Central Complex that by this time had a larger territorial size than the state of Vatican.

## Infrastructure

During the past three decades of Brother Erdy’s supervision, an unparalleled pro-



The New Era University, the flagship contribution of the Iglesia Ni Cristo to education, is located in Diliman, Quezon City.

gram of infrastructure was undertaken. The center structure upon which an INC community revolves is the chapel with the now familiar spiral tower dotting the urban skylines and rural countrysides. It is either located in the main street of a city, sometimes in the heart of a town, barrio or *barangay*. By these edifices, the *INC* has been easily identified particularly by local and foreign tourists. Most observers use these as points of reference in evaluating the religion and its leadership. However, these are only visual and outward physical symbol of the Church's glory. Below these material infrastructure is the pervading Christian spirituality led by the man endowed with God's power, wisdom, and guidance.

In 1971, the Engineering and Construction Department was streamlined to be the lead agency in the planned massive infrastructure. For the three decades of relentless building, uncommon edifices have emerged to radically alter Philippine architecture and the geographic landscape. In 1967, the biggest chapel built in Moriones, Tondo, with a seating capacity of 5,000 spectators towered proudly over the Manila landscape close to the Manila Bay harbors. In the 1970s, the eye-catching and tourist-attraction Central Office was erected. In the 1980s, the 15,000 seater magnificent Temple and Tabernacle were constructed. In the late 1980s, the Central Annex Complex was added. In the 1990s, the imposing NEU edifices and mass housing units were built.

## Worldwide Expansion

By 1994, the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* foreign missions had reached six continents thus creating a cross-cultural and inter-racial church membership among Americans, Japanese, Germans, Australians, Chinese, Singaporeans, Africans, Mexicans, and others. A quarter of a century (25 years) of existence since 1968, the overseas propagation has indeed stretched to global dimensions. The sending of missionaries to man the international outposts has been entrusted with the New Era University College of Evangelical Ministry. Thus, the Church has developed missionaries to the various countries of the world. Even non-Filipinos who aspired to become ministers were trained in the ministerial college prior to their foreign posting.

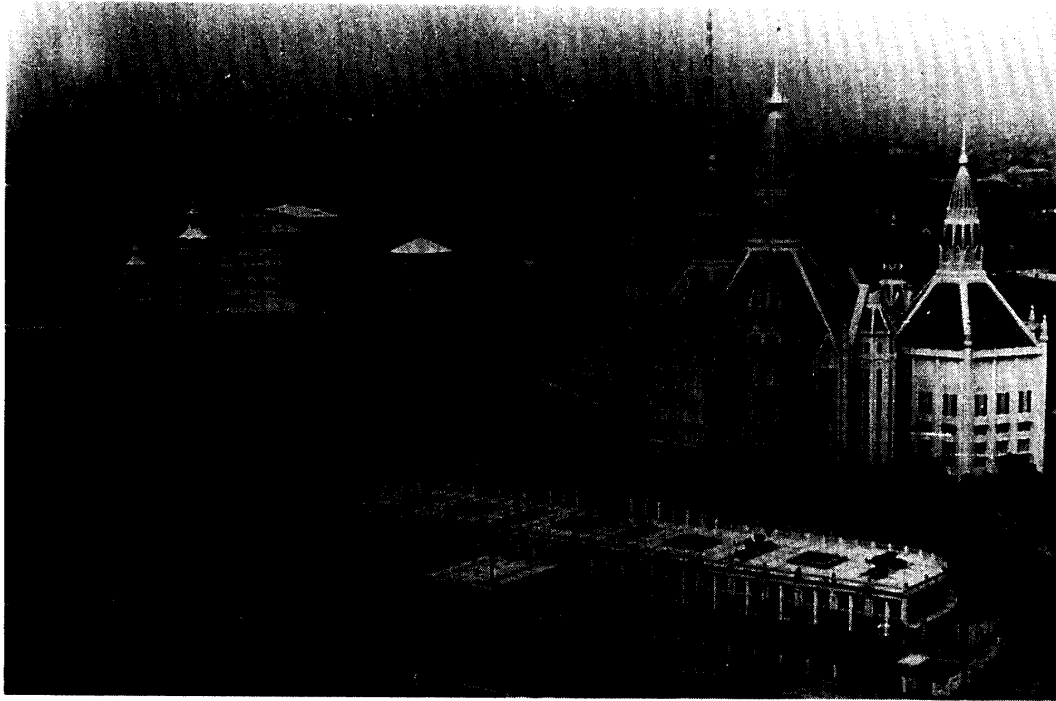
As early as 1980, the Intensive Training Program, a seminar-type class, trained ministers for foreign missions.<sup>66)</sup> Brother Cipriano P. Sandoval, taught selected ministers lessons in Doctrines, Ministerial, and Preaching in the English medium until he died in 1984. By the mid-1980s, a more systematic module for training, the Advanced Studies for Overseas Missions (ASFOM) replaced the original program. Currently, written petitions are received by the Executive Minister emanating from countries requesting for resident missionaries to minister to the multi-racial and multi-lingual brethren.

## Diamond Anniversary

On July 27, 1989, the *INC* brethren from all over the Philippines and foreign delegations converged for its 75th or Diamond Anniversary celebration. Brother Erdy articulated the prophetic future of God's ultimate Chosen People. In his fiery hourlong sermon at the Temple, he articulated the greater glorious future intended by God to this Church. Citing biblical predictions, he pointed out to the 15,000 attendees, the coming of a more prominent, more successful and more stable posture for the once-upon-a-time derided and persecuted *INC*.

*"There will be no more apostasy, period,"* thundered the Executive Minister during his eloquent delivery of the message of God.<sup>67)</sup> Unlike Israel and the first-century Church of Christ, the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* is destined to attain more glory, fame, and power in the coming years ahead. For non-Filipino brethren, the sermon was translated in the international lingua franca. Hence, he called upon the Church members to be more dedicated, firm, and steadfast in their divine calling to benefit from the promises of the Lord God. He admonished them to be more unrelenting in their faithfulness, dutifulness and worshipfulness.

It was unlike any other grand celebrations in the 75-year history of the Church. The preponderance of the attendees stunned not only the metropolis of Manila and the nation but the world at large. It was reminiscent of the EDSA "people power" of 1986



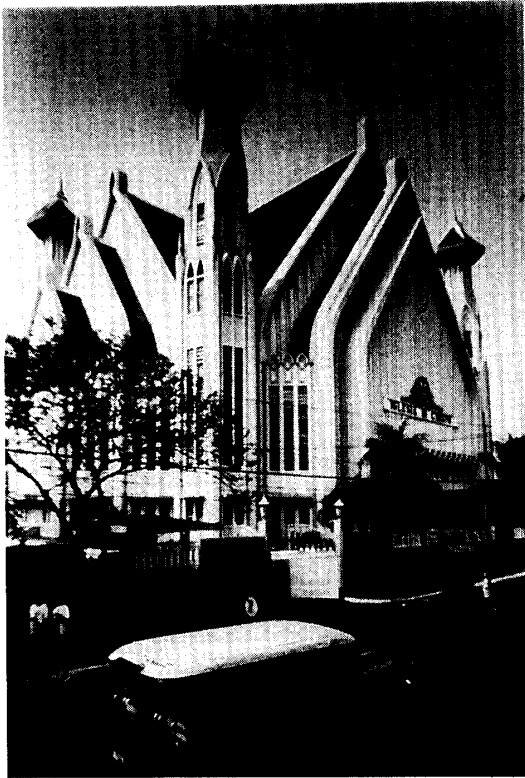
An aerial view of the Iglesia Ni Cristo Central Office complex showing the Temple Central on the right side ; New Era University College of Evangelical Ministry building on the left side ; the Central Office at the center ; and the New Era University campus at the background.

in terms of the sheer number of people. For 24 hours, Metro Manila especially in Quezon City experienced a traffic gridlock as the estimated 1.5 million delegates gathered together in the premises of the Central Offices. Crowds spilled over to the adjoining streets, subdivisions, parks, and school campuses. Vehicles were at a standstill in the main avenue and sidestreets as people walked. Not intending to boast about its increasing numbers that have swelled for the past three decades, the Church sent a signal to the world that it can no longer be ignored by anyone. Its presence in the society has become all the more obvious. Beyond its attraction to non-members for its uniqueness, and distinctiveness of its edifices, the Church now elicit recognition and respect. Before, the Church indeed had experienced ostracisms and criticisms from all quarters. In the late 1980s, the Church participated in ecumenical prayer gatherings on independence day celebrations, opening of Congress legislative sessions, state-of-the-nation addresses of the President, and others.

### **The Executive Minister**

The Executive Minister as a religious leader is a very humane and kind administrator. Even when the burdens of church leadership would have rendered just any man more temperamental and rude, he has displayed coolness under fire. In the Church, there has never been a crisis of leaders. In any organization where the leader must end his leadership because of demise, chaos ensues in the hierarchical levels as the





One of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*'s largest edifices of worship in Tondo, Manila with the familiar jeepney cruising in front of it.

members elect a leader. Because the future interests of individuals come in conflict with the personal pursuits, what generally follows is a crisis of would-be leaders. As administrators, both Brothers Manalo and Eraño have taken cognizance of the limitations of human beings. Hence, they have instituted a three-tiered level of preparing potential leaders who, because of exigencies, assume the vanguard of leadership at any given notice. Firstly, there are actual combatants in the field. The moment they fall, the next in line and the reserves take over. This Brother Eraño explained to the corps of ministers in the mid-1980s and early 1990s.

In 1983, the first television program of the Church was launched as an arm for propagation and edification. Then, the computerization of the Central Office units followed. In all these standards, Brother Eraño is the epitome of the continuing quest for excellence and perfection. From 1986 to 1994, he has conceived of refresher instruction courses. Periodic seminars on administration and regular classes on the worship service lessons had been held on a continuing basis. But he wanted to always upgrade the level of teaching and preaching so that the brethren would easily comprehend God's message. He really worked for the doctrinal education of the Church constituents.

From 1977 until 1994, the yearly ordinations have dramatically added to the roster of evangelists and ministers. Under the new curricular programs called the Evangelical College (EVCO) program and Bachelor of Evangelical Ministry (BEM), thousands

of young men were ordained as ministers and sent throughout the archipelago and in the other parts of the world. Brother Erdy has ordained as minister of the Gospel some 4,000 men of various races and backgrounds who now cater to Filipinos and non-Filipinos brethren in 65 countries.<sup>68)</sup> All are one in Christ, regardless of their nationalities.

For the past thirty years or three decades, one man has been entrusted by God to centrally administer the Church: Brother Eraño G. Manalo. He has been at the helm of the Church, presiding over a rapidly-expanding organization in the Philippines and in other parts of the globe. His 30th year of stewardship coincided with the silver (25th) anniversary of the foreign missions. Tribute was thus due to the man whom God anointed to administer the Church since the passing away of the Last Messenger in 1963. On April 23, 1993, the entire Church marked the milestone of Brother Erdy's administrative record through a special worship service in the Central Office pavilion. Geneval Evangelist Brother Teofilo C. Ramos, Sr. his principal aide for the past four decades, led the opening prayer in thanking the Lord God for providing a powerful leader to the Church. It was indeed timely opportunity for the Church to reckon the immeasurable blessings granted to the INC. Brother Erdy's contributions have projected the Church to its prestigious and glorious stature as recorded in modern church history. Very unassuming and humble, he has helped make mankind understand the supreme value of true worship and the Church's indispensability as Christ's

scheme for the approaching salvation.

During his 25-minute sermon, Brother Eraño enumerated the track record of his administration for the past 30 years as a stirring testament of God's continuing love and mercy exclusively for His Chosen People. His divinely-inspired administration, as a continuation of the Last Messenger's stewardship, has become part of the history of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*. Indeed, the Church in six continents paused as one in meditating on the profound impact of Brother Eraño's gifted administration that has reverberated around the world. It gratefully paused to observe this historic milestone in church history. It was a solemn occasion to humbly count once again the immense blessing bestowed to the Church and its godly-anointed leader. The Church invoked that the "hand of the Lord" had been all too manifest through Brother Eraño's dynamic leadership. His stamp of church supervision has indubitably touched countless souls and numerous lives the world over. For all the administrative gifts and ministerial talents bestowed to him, the Church reciprocated with thankful supplications to the Lord God Almighty.

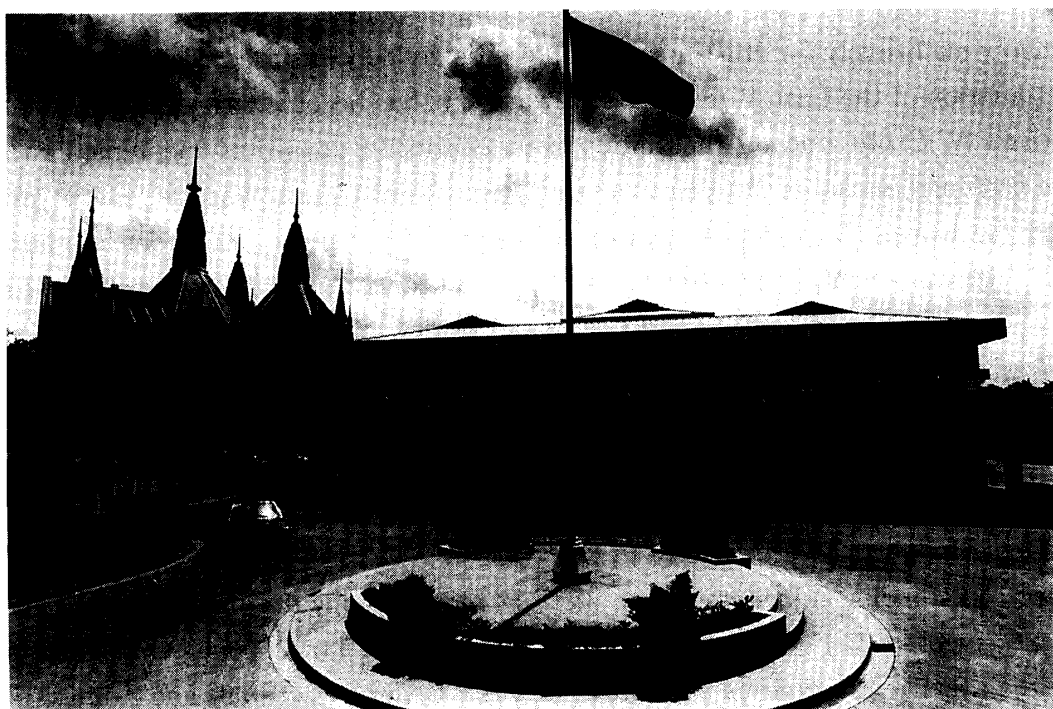
Thirty outstanding ministers whose sterling record of loyalty has been their hallmark received special commendations and medallions. Three young ministers formally took their oath of office as General Auditor, General Secretary and Administrative Secretary to assist in the overall supervision of the global church organization. Shortly before noontime, the new hospital christened New Era General Hospital,

located beside the Central Temple, was inaugurated by Sister Cristina V. Manalo, the charming wife of the Executive Minister. The following day, the national daily *The Manila Times* featured a whole page on the biography of the Executive Minister.<sup>69)</sup>

### Summary of Growth and Progress

The endeavors of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* under the “new era” starting in 1963 up to 1994 are but an extension of God’s immense blessings to the Leader of His Chosen People. With the passing of the last Messenger in 1963, Brother Eraño assumed the executive reins of church administration. The number of provincial districts multiplied tremendously during the 30-year period. In 1963, there were only 50 provincial districts. By 1994, the number had reached 95 with the addition of 45 new ecclesiastical districts. Locales established numbered almost 2,800 across the breadth and depth of the archipelago. New edifices of worship totaling 1,600 were built with 4,500 new parsonages.

The *INC* foreign mission as listed in the **PASUGO’s** inside back cover has already reached 65 countries in six continents, thus creating a “United Nations” profile of church constituency. For the past 26 years, by 1994, the overseas propagation had indeed stretched to global dimensions. There are now 16 foreign administrative districts, with 420 congregations, extension locales, and committee prayer groupings.<sup>70)</sup> The number of edifices of worship constructed is 77.



The New Era General Hospital (NEGH), beside the Central Temple, accommodates brethren and non-brethren alike.

As the *INC* marked its diamond jubilee year in 1989, Brother Eraño's vision for the Church became transparent. Since then, he has emphasized the need to commemorate the Church's historic 80th year anniversary in 1994 but more so for the approaching second advent of the Savior, Lord Jesus Christ. He has called upon his co-ministers to sanctify the members towards the ultimate degree of perfection to enter the kingdom of heaven. "No one," Brother Erdy oftentimes remarks, "is certain of tomorrow and the future."<sup>71)</sup> What must be made certain is the quality of the Christians to qualify for the impending salvation. Hence, he visualizes that each family be filled with righteousness, renewal of life, and greater adherence to the unadulterated teachings, coupled with the strict implementation of regulations. This, he points, ensures that no more deviation from the faith or apostasy will ever repeat.

In his weekly homilies, pastoral letters, and personal lectures, he has admonished time and again that the centralized and compassionate nature of the Church Administration be preserved.<sup>72)</sup> Likewise, he has prepared the training of several layers of potential leaders as a continuing factor in the centralized management. Although the manifestations of power, influence, and wealth had been unmistakable for the Church especially in the past decade, he has shown these as the blessed endowments of God to His Chosen People. As the Church enters into the next generation towards the 21st century, problems and needs abound. Not to mention the tests, trials, and tribulations that the faithful must undergo to gain redemption on Judgement Day. Parents and

children must be more worshipful and prayerful holding family devotions so that the entire household may one day be united in heaven.<sup>73)</sup>

Primordially, Brother Erdy has strengthened the pillars of the family amidst modernism, permissiveness, and materialism. He has institutionalized the household, since 1973, as the very core unit for the holding of weekly prayer-meetings in the locale congregations. He has underscored it as the fundamental unit of the church organization. 1986 was proclaimed as "Year of the Family," focusing on the value of the home in developing the Christian personality, character, and citizenship of the members.<sup>74)</sup> In 1992, the basic church unit was energized with the theme "Solidify Each Household." Evidently, his vision for all families to be continuously edified and fortified finds its initial fulfillment in the inner sanctum of the Church's first family. This, Brother Erdy, has carefully nurtured through the years and hopes to accomplish more in the future. Indeed, the Church realizes the invaluable role that Brother Eraño has played for the sake of the member's forthcoming destiny. On the eve of the Church's eighth decade anniversary on July 27, 1994, the flock was on the threshold of a new tomorrow, a much promising brighter future prophesied in the Holy Scriptures.<sup>75)</sup>

### **80th Anniversary: The Global Church**

Prophecies recorded in the Bible have foretold the glorious stature which the Church of Christ founded by the Lord Christ Jesus would attain. Indeed on its eighth decade

of existence on July 27, 1994, the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* held its 80th year worldwide celebrations in 65 countries and territories. Center of spiritual commemoration in Rome, Italy, where Brother Eraño conducted a very rare pastoral visitation. On July 27th, the Church was officially registered as **Chiesa de Cristo** (Italian for *Iglesia Ni Cristo*) with the *Tribunale Civile di Roma Cancelleria Provvedimenti Speciali* of the Italian government. This signalled the start of reconciliation to God of the people who had previously embraced apostasy.

Brother Erano officiated a power-packed special worship service in Rome on the historic date that was beamed through simulcast video conferencing to Los Angeles and San Jose, California, USA, Sydney, Australia, Hawaii, USA, and Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.<sup>76)</sup> A few days later, on August 4th a brand new edifice of worship, built by Brother Masami Nishioka, a Nippon convert, was dedicated in Ibaraki, Japan by the Executive Minister. Its architectural style resembled the now-familiar *Iglesia* edifices of worship.<sup>77)</sup> Assisting in the Rome and Ibaraki activities was Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, the new Deputy Executive Minister.

The Church of Christ thus realized the fulfillment of God's sustained blessings to His Church for the past four generations. He had guaranteed for this mission of salvation through the Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 43:13, "... *I work and who will hinder it*" and in Isaiah 41:20 "*that the hand of the Lord hath done this.*"<sup>78)</sup>

Therefore, the entire global Church composed of cosmopolitan membership humbly

supplicated to the Lord, with profound thankfulness. Just as the Lord God used Brother Felix Y. Manalo in shepherding the flock for almost 50 years, Brother Eraño was likewise utilized for the past 30 years for the Church's spiritual and material well-being. It is but fitting then for the Church to patiently wait and hope for the approaching salvation as written in Isaiah 25:9, thus: "... *Let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation.*"<sup>79)</sup> The overall theme of the 80th anniversary was "*Ipagdiwang ang Kanyang Pagliligtas*" (Rejoice in His Salvation). Many incredible things have happened with the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* that even the most extraordinary has come to be an expected occurrence within the Church.

The non-*Iglesia Ni Cristo* observers have taken cognizance of the *Iglesia*'s phenomenal growth. An American author, for instance, had classified the *INC* as one of the "rapidly growing religious movements around the world."<sup>80)</sup> American Protestant pastor Leonard Tuggy had also written that the *Iglesia* has become one of the world's dynamic religious organizations and a leading Philippine religious body.<sup>81)</sup> He writes, thus: "The *Iglesia Ni Cristo* is significant not only in the Philippines. As one of the largest, most powerful and dynamic independent, indigenous churches in the Third World, the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* demands our careful study."<sup>80)</sup>

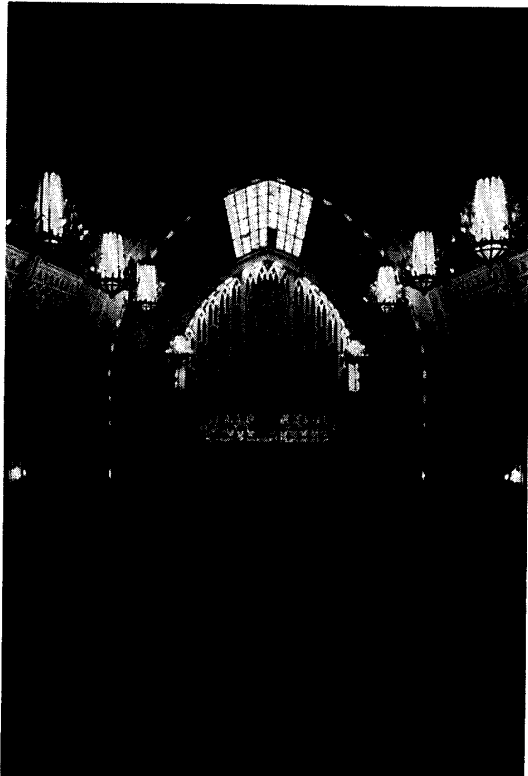
## Conclusion

The *Iglesia Ni Cristo* or Church of Christ is a unique Christian religion that has

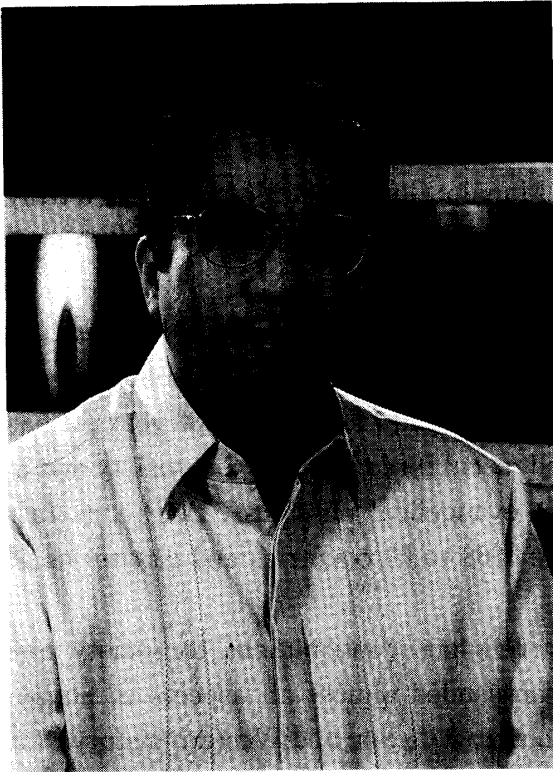
indigenously emerged in the Islands Philippines of the Far East or Southeast Asian region in 1914, at the outbreak of the First World War. Tracing its spiritual roots to the Lord Jesus Christ and His singular Church in the first century, it adheres strictly to pure Christianity based on the Holy Bible or Sacred Scriptures. Its historicity and history are anchored on biblical prophecies. Phenomenally, it has progressed from “one man” in the person of Brother Felix Y. Manalo, God’s Last Messenger, to a truly dynamic church composed of millions of cosmopolitan members in six continents all over the world.

Today, 1994, after 80 blessed years of existence firstly during the half-a-century administration of Brother Felix Y. Manalo, and secondly under the current supervision of the Executive Minister, Brother Eraño G. Manalo for the past 30 years, it has become a dynamic socio-politico-religious and moral force in Philippine society and in various parts of the world where it has sent evangelical missions. Due to its fast expansion beyond the Philippine Islands since 1968 to 65 countries and territories, it has been hailed as a “global church.”<sup>83)</sup>

The *Iglesia Ni Cristo*’s religious and non-religious contributions to society and mankind for the past eight decades have transcended almost all aspects of human endeavor that now form part of Philippine, Southeast Asian, and Western history.<sup>84)</sup> It has indeed awakened the world to the existence of Christ’s re-established true Church, for man’s salvation and for God’s glory.



Interior of the Cubao, Quezon City edifice of worship.



Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, the new Deputy Executive Minister

## Notes

- 1) The official registration document of the Church of Christ (Iglesia ni Cristo) filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission, Quezon City, Philippines.
- 2) Robert Villanueva, "The Church in Every Valley," in *Philippines Free Press*, July 30, 1994, pp. 24-26.
- 3) *Commemorative Program of the 30th Year of the Administration of Brother Eraño G. Manalo*, April 23, 1993.
- 4) The Holy Bible, Matthew 16:18, Luke 21:1, 4, King James Version.
- 5) Benjamin J. Santiago, Sr., "Ang Pagtatatag ni Cristo ng Iglesia Ni Cristo sa Pilipinas," *PASUGO*, Hulyo, 1964, pp. 17-20.
- 6) Tomas C. Catañgay, "The Commission of Brother Felix Y. Manalo," *PASUGO*, May-June, 1986, pp. 24-26.
- 7) *Souvenir Program, Dedication of the New Chapel of Punta, Santa Ana, Manila*, July 27, 1989.
- 8) Historical marker, INC House of Worship, Tipas, Taguig, Metro Manila, April 15, 1994.
- 9) Cipriano P. Sandoval, "Editorial: From One To Millions," *PASUGO*, July, 1964, pp. 177-178.
- 10) Brandon V. Rosquites, "Our Foreign Missions," *55th Anniversary of the Iglesia Ni Cristo*, pp. 10-15.
- 11) Sermon of the Executive Minister during the 17th Graduation-Ordination held at the INC Central Temple, on May 7, 1994, beamed via simulcast video-conferencing to Hawaii,

California, Illinois, Maryland, USA.

- 12) Interview with the oldest child of the Last Messenger of God, Sister Pilar Manalo Danao, Choir Directress, INC Chapel Compound, Baguio City, December 12, 1980.
- 13) *Ibid.*
- 14) *Ibid.*
- 15) Interview with Brother Marcelo Lemen, bishop of Tondo congregation, Manila, EVCO Building, June 12, 1978.
- 16) *Ibid.*
- 17) Interview with Minister Andres Tucker, Sr., pioneer minister and senior instructor, Ministerial Institute of Development Center, Quiapo, Manila, November 22, 1974.
- 18) *Ibid.*
- 19) "List of Locales Established Between 1914 to 1924." Document kept by the INC Custodian of Records, INC Central Office, Diliman, Quezon City.
- 20) Interview with Minister Benjamin J. Santiago, Sr., Editor in-chief, **PASUGO** and Supervising Minister, Institute of Evangelical Ministry Building, INC Central Office Compound, April 23, 1984.
- 21) *Ibid.*
- 22) Interview with Sister Pilar Manalo Danao, Church Choir Directress, December 22, 1974, INC Compound, Baguio City.
- 23) *Ibid.*
- 24) Interview with Minister Cipriano P. Sandoval, Church's Administrative Secretary, INC Central Office, January 17, 1974.
- 25) **PASUGO** (*God's Message*), official magazine of the Iglesia Ni Cristo, February, 1939.

- 26) Interview with Minister Glicerio T. Santos, Sr. Supervising Minister, Laguna, November 29, 1975, INC Compound, San Pablo City.
- 27) Interview with Brother Victor Muto, son of the first Japanese INC brother, INC Chapel, Balintawak, Kalookan City, M.M., June 26, 1994. His father's residence was in Yamada, Tasawa-Towa Modi, Adachi Gun, Fukushima-ken, 964-02, Japan.
- 28) "List of Ministers Ordained from 1941 to 1943." Document kept by the Custodian of Records. INC Central Office, Diliman, Quezon City.
- 29) "Document: Wartime Circular Naming Prudencio Vasquez as Acting Executive Minister," June 29, 1944.
- 30) Interview with Minister Daniel J. Lapid, Sr., Supervising Minister, INC Central Office, January 17, 1975.
- 31) Interview with Engr. Dominador G. Manalo, Chief, Construction Department, INC Central Office, August 22, 1979.
- 32) Interview with Brother Bienvenido G. Manalo, Chief, Engineering and Construction Department, INC Central Office, August 28, 1985.
- 33) Interview with Minister Glicerio T. Santos, Sr., Supervising Minister, INC Central Office, January 2, 1975.
- 34) Interview with Executive Minister, Brother Eraño G. Manalo, INC Central Office, January 2, 1975.
- 35) Interview with Minister Cipriano P. Sandoval, Administrative Secretary, INC Central Office, January 17, 1975.
- 36) Interview with Minister Felimon Bautista, Sr., Deputy Auditor General, INC Central Office, November 22, 1974.



- 37) Interview with Sister Viring Almedina, a nurse of the Last Messenger, INC Central Office, June 3, 1994.
- 38) Interview with Minister Teofilo C. Ramos, Sr., General Evangelist, INC Central Office, March 6, 1974.
- 39) *Ibid.*
- 40) Interview with Executive Minister Eraño G. Manalo, INC Central Office, January 2, 1975.
- 41) *Ibid.*, January 2, 1976.
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(Minister Adriel Obar Meimban, is an ordained Minister of the Iglesia Ni Cristo/Church of Christ since 1979; has a doctorate in history from the University of the Philippines, 1989. He has been a writer-editor of the *Pasugo* (God's Message), history professor, Dean and President of the New Era University. He is the Vice-President of the Philippine Historical Association. Currently, he serves as Secretary for Research of the Iglesia Ni Cristo, holding office at the INC Central Office, Diliman, Quezon City. Acknowledged as the Church's historian and chronicler, his ministry is focused on research and church history. He is the author of a new book entitled **The Iglesia Ni Cristo: The History of the Church Founded by Christ**).