

Dynnice Rosanny D. Engcoy, *Pentecostal Pioneer: The Life and Legacy of Rudy Esperanza in the Early Years of the Assemblies of God in the Philippines* (Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2014), paperback, xii + 204 pp., ISBN: 978-971-8942-12-3.

The many personalities, the crucial events and the significant dates are made alive by Dynnice Rosanny D. Engcoy in her research on the life and times of Rev. Rodrigo “Rudy” Esperanza, who was an organizer, an ecumenist, a leader, and the first General Superintendent of the Philippines General Council of the Assemblies of God (PGCAG). Originally written as a Ph.D. dissertation for the Asia Graduate School of Theology, Dr. Engcoy’s informative research appreciates the role of the Filipino Pentecostal pioneers, especially Rudy Esperanza. Engcoy’s work is legitimate. Her work is necessary. Besides the Fuller Theological Seminary M.R.E. thesis of Trinidad C. Esperanza-Seleky, younger sister of Rudy, who was a denominational leader herself for many years, there is no other reliable and detailed written academic work that exists about the origins of the PGCAG. Mrs. Seleky’s “Assemblies of God in the Philippines” was completed in 1965. The other writings on the beginnings of the PGCAG are generally based on the work of Seleky. Finally, after nearly 50 years Engcoy’s book is published. In *Pentecostal Pioneer: The Life and Legacy of Rudy Esperanza in the Early Years of the Assemblies of God in the Philippines*, Engcoy presents fresh research on Esperanza and the Filipino Pentecostals’ early years. Engcoy should be thanked for providing this invaluable work. The innovative insights she articulates about the PGCAG beginnings are still applicable for today. The author’s significant awareness of the complexity of the study of the pioneering days of the Filipino Pentecostals makes her dissertation interesting to read. Her analysis of the initial accomplishments of the PGCAG through the leadership of Esperanza offers the reader suitable and reliable impressions about what is in the future of Pentecostalism in the Philippines. The publication of *Pentecostal Pioneer* is worth the waiting. Engcoy furnishes a reflective and sensitive narrative of the early Filipino Pentecostals.

After the preliminaries, Engcoy, in her first chapter, convincingly presents the importance of studying the “impact” of Esperanza on the contemporary growth of the PGCAG. The reviewer fully agrees with the penetrating arguments given by Engcoy on why her study is indispensable to be written as a dissertation. PGCAG is “the largest evangelical body in the predominantly Roman Catholic Asian

Country.” (2-3) This contention is true. However, from the beginning pages of her book, she already states that “three major conflicts—the split of the Manila Bethel Temple in 1965, the split of the denomination in 1973, and a further split in 1980—hampered the phenomenal growth of the Assemblies of God.” (4, see also 51 and 150-159, cf. 147-150, 167-168, 169-171) In other words, Engcoy is not intending to sanitize the historical data available for her to evaluate. Since *Pentecostal Pioneer* is a Ph.D. dissertation the typical format of the introductory chapter is obvious. The statement of the problem and the research purpose are specifically expressed in terms of appreciating the growth of the PGCAG in connection with the roles of the pioneers. The importance of the investigation as well as the limits and method of the study in terms of the Filipino viewpoint and resources available are clearly mentioned. She also notes her use of oral history and literature research. The field research of the author is also crucial for the success of writing this title. For a reviewer who is well aware of Pentecostalism in the Philippines, he is immediately intellectually engaged in the introductory challenges presented by Engcoy as he begins to read her *Pentecostal Pioneer*.

It is expected in this kind of research for Engcoy to provide the necessary consideration of the circumstances accounting the “Background and Birth of the Assemblies of God USA” in chapter 2, “Background and Birth of PGCAG” in chapter 3 and “Esperanza’s Background” in chapter 4. She makes it evident that the Filipinos themselves were the ones who made the Assemblies of God grow in the Philippines and not the American missionaries. The study of the settings where both the Assemblies of God grew due to missionary zeal and Esperanza’s development as a leader is not only indispensable in understanding the PGCAG history but also provides a significant perspective on the attitude and the spirituality of the Filipino Esperanza. Although he was a migrant to the United States, his burden for the Filipino people led him to go back to the Philippines to share the Pentecostal experience to his countrymen. Engcoy reports the salient points of the background of Esperanza. Then she uses this reconstructed background of Esperanza to show how he took his job as a Pentecostal leader of the Filipinos. Her narrative is delightful to read, especially Esperanza’s story when he was a boy, his academic achievements and his call into the ministry while in the United States. (53-61) Subsequently, the next four chapters are meant to examine Esperanza’s involvement among the Pentecostals in the Philippines. Thus, Engcoy clearly itemizes these chapters in terms of Esperanza’s

“Foundational Roles in the PGCAG” in the 5th chapter and his work as “District Secretary and General Superintendent” in the 6th chapter. Afterwards she depicts his spirituality in “Personal Leadership Qualities” in the 7th chapter and his attitude as a “Visionary Leader” in the 8th chapter. Finally, in the second to the last chapter, “Assessment of Esperanza’s Leadership Role and Influence,” she comes up with Esperanza’s evaluation within the context of his time. The last chapter is a reflection of a doctoral dissertation formality of giving “Conclusions and Recommendations.” It should also be noted that the endnotes and bibliography are not only extensive but also balanced, helpful and an encouragement indeed for the reader to do further readings.

At this point it is essential to recognize the strength of Engcoy’s work as a whole. Her employment of the oral history from interviews of reliable and helpful people is a forte. At the same time, her utilization of the written sources from the United States and the Philippines is not only what is expected but also harmonizes the oral history that she presents in a very lively Pentecostal context. Through the wise and strategic use of oral and written information available for her, Engcoy is able to historically describe her answer to the statement of the problem on why PGCAG has grown so much in the midst of denominational problems. Esperanza and his leadership style worked well. Likewise, the purpose of the dissertation is successfully articulated in showing that besides the training schools and the published literature, the company of spiritual trailblazers, men with visions, such as Esperanza made the Filipino Pentecostals grow exponentially by the power of the Holy Spirit. Another major strength is the presentation of the materials. The outline is well organized. The chapters can easily be perceived as divided into 3 parts. Part 1 is seemingly the first four chapters which are basically the background study of Esperanza and his times. The succeeding chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 are the materials that specifically deal with Esperanza’s positive contributions and great impact to the Pentecostals in the Philippines that is comparable to a second part. The remaining chapters, 9 and 10, resemble a part 3, which evaluates issues and concludes views concerning Esperanza’s legacy as a leader. In addition, Engcoy’s critical insight is appreciated. Based on her data she judiciously reckons that:

. . . speaking in tongues as the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit was not yet taught among Filipino

AG churches, although many AG members spoke in tongues. It seems that Esperanza did not write about speaking in tongues. Instead, his writings emphasize salvation, healing, the second coming, and the empowering of the Holy Spirit without mentioning the doctrine of speaking in tongues as “initial physical evidence.” The early teachings of Filipino AG support Allan Anderson’s stand that describing Pentecostalism using the “four-fold pattern,” which includes *glossolalia* as the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, “can only be neatly applied to ‘classical Pentecostalism’ in North America.” (50)

It should not be forgotten to mention that the book is very readable. The author’s style of writing is dynamic and enjoyable to read with a light touch. Lastly, if there is any weakness to be pointed out, then, it is the brevity of the book. There is so much more to know regarding the early Filipino Pentecostals, the origins of the PGCAG and Rudy Esperanza. The reviewer wants more to read about Pentecostalism in the Philippines. But perhaps, it is fitting to finish this review by saying that although the limited pages of *Pentecostal Pioneer* is wanting, which may be taken as a flaw, in reality it is the very strength of Engcoy’s work because the reviewer wants to read some more.

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