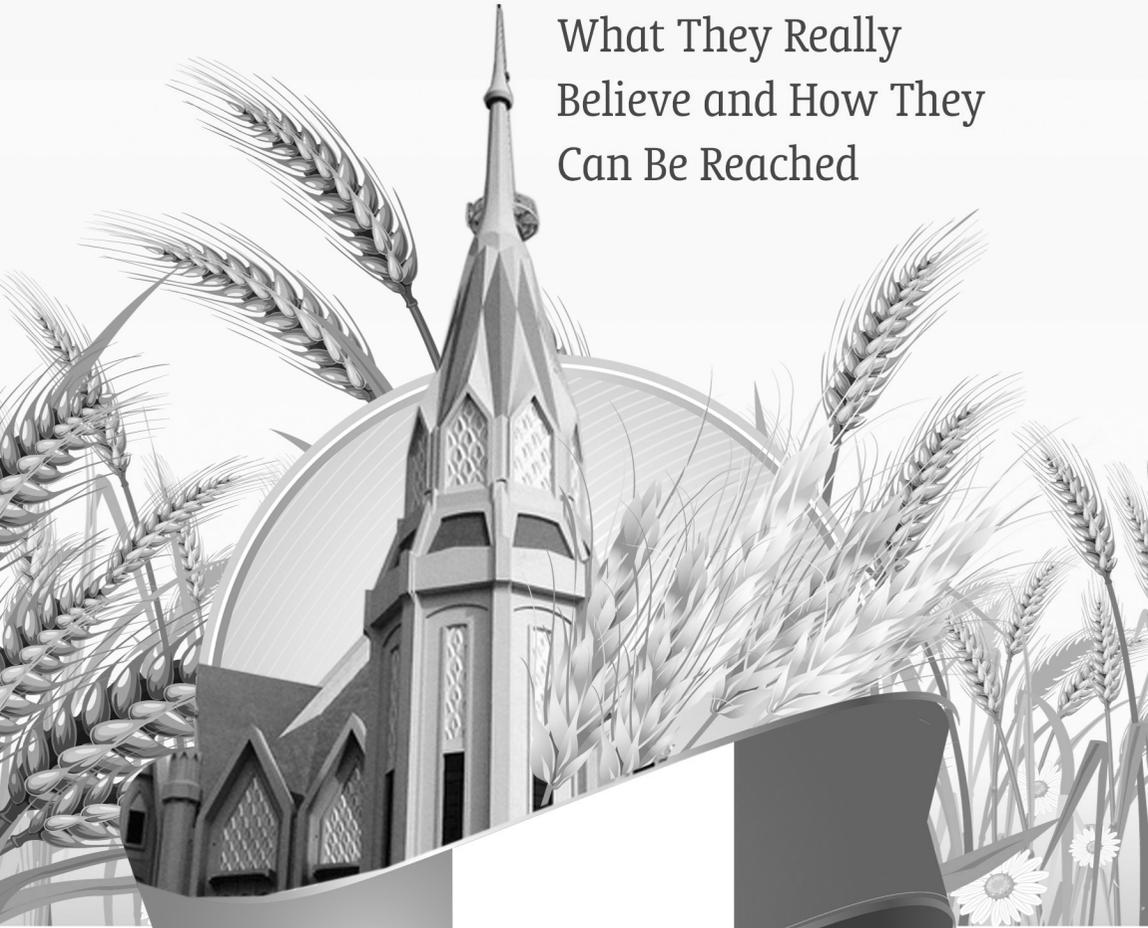


UNDERSTANDING THE IGLESIA NI CRISTO

What They Really
Believe and How They
Can Be Reached



ANNE C. HARPER

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

We are pleased to introduce this third volume of the APTS Press Monograph Series. As the author mentions in her preface, this book is an abridged edition of her doctoral dissertation, which she completed at the Asia Graduate School of Theology—Philippines (www.agstphil.org) in 2011. The purpose of this series is to give our readers broader access to academic scholarship that would otherwise be unavailable outside of the academic community. This is part of our ongoing commitment to discipleship through publishing.

The other two monographs in this series, *Theology in Context: A Case Study in the Philippines*, by Dr. Dave Johnson and *Leave a Legacy: Increasing Missionary Longevity*, by Dr. Russ Turney, are now available. For information on where to purchase these and other APTS Press books, please contact us through our website, www.apt.edu.

We hope you enjoy the book.

THE PUBLISHER

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I began my journey with the Iglesia ni Cristo in 1994 when we first arrived in Manila as academic missionaries to the Philippines. I immediately noticed their beautiful chapels throughout Metro Manila and asked about them. Other missionaries in our agency, Blair and Debbie Skinner, had collected some of the publications of the group and showed them to me.

The lifestyle and teachings of the group fascinated me. So for 20 years I have read their monthly publication, *Pasugo*, and any other publication with information about them, and interacted with numerous members and those who have left the group. In 2005 I began doctoral work and chose to focus my research on this church. Six years later I graduated after submitting "The Iglesia ni Cristo: A Case Study of a New Religious Movement and Exploration of Culturally Appropriate Outreach Methodologies" as my dissertation.

This monograph is an edited version of that dissertation for the Filipino evangelical audience. Sections dealing with culture and values, background information on New Religious Movements and a number of appendices have been deleted due to space limitations and the expected audience for this book.

My desire and, I believe, God's desire is to see members of the Iglesia ni Cristo discover the true Christ, both God and human, and experience the freedom of forgiven sins and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. I pray that those reading this book will catch God's heart and use their creativity in reaching out to these people so that we may rejoice with them in heaven. *"Because of our love for you we were ready to share with you not only the Good News from God but even our own lives. You were so dear to us!"—1 Thess. 2:8 (GNT)*

Anne C. Harper, D.Miss.
Quezon City
June 2014

FOREWORD

New religious movements normally either start out as a new movement to their followers or as a reaction to existing church beliefs. The intention of any new religious movement would be good, as viewed by its leaders and followers. For non-followers, they might have different opinions. As evangelicals, we normally approach any new religious movement by non-involvement or by being defensive with direct confrontation.

The Iglesia ni Cristo is a new religious movement that anyone who lives in the Philippines and anywhere beyond Asia with Filipino populations should understand. With its beautiful sanctuaries and its church buildings with similar edifices throughout the world, many will be attracted to the outward features of the church. The Iglesia ni Cristo has passed its test of continuity from her founder to her third-generation leader. With various labor disputes and complaints in the Philippines, many industries and chain stores are hiring this group's members because of their close-knit obedient relationships with church leaders. Even some evangelical churches have hired Iglesia ni Cristo members to work as janitors and drivers because of their faithful characters. By the command of their great leader, the Iglesia ni Cristo is quite strong in politics with solid bloc voting for selected candidates or a particular political party. With rewards given to this new religious movement, its members have become influential leaders in the marketplace, higher education, the judiciary, and even governance in the public arena.

This is an important and interesting book on the Iglesia ni Cristo. The author has done extensive research in the primary sources of this religious movement in the Philippines in her doctoral dissertation. She continues to teach a course on this and has benefited from interaction with the input of her students. It is a scholarly book with its comprehensive understanding of the movement and practical with its case studies. It is a balanced book,

both for the novice, as well as those who care for the members of the Iglesia ni Cristo. In reading the book, the reader will be exposed to the formation and growth of the Iglesia ni Cristo. The belief system is presented in a readable manner. The church culture of the Iglesia ni Cristo is discussed with its intersection with existing Philippine culture.

Filipinos are now in at least 200 nations in the world. With globalization, this book will give you an understanding of a very special phenomenon in the Philippines. For missiological concern, by following the recommendations of the author, some churches may want to re-think their creative way of worship or even their solemn teaching of Bible.

We hope that this book will be a blessing to the critical thinker of theology, the fervent seeker of truth and the passionate Christian worker.

Dr. Joseph Shao
General Secretary, Asia Theological Association

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply indebted to many people who assisted me during the course of this lengthy study, and it would be impossible to acknowledge and thank them all. However, a few names stand out.

First, I am grateful for my dissertation advisor, Dr. James Chancellor, *W. O. Carver Professor of Christian Missions and World Religions at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*, for bearing with me during delays caused by several continental moves and illnesses. His knowledge and guidance were invaluable in broadening my understanding of New Religious Movements and their members. Dr. J. Gordon Melton, Director of the Center for the Study of American Religion, graciously served as mentor for two of my D. Miss. research tutorials. I also thank Dr. Timoteo D. Gener, Professor of Theology at and President of Asian Theological Seminary, for serving as outside reader, and Dr. Larry Caldwell, Director of the Doctor of Missiology Program at Asia Graduate School of Theology-Philippines for encouraging me to pursue study of the Iglesia ni Cristo in doctoral work.

Editors Frank McNelis and Dave Johnson offered very helpful guidance in editing and reducing my original dissertation into a form suitable for this monograph.

I could not have accomplished this work without the indulgence of administrators and colleagues at Action International Ministries and Evangelical Theological Seminary, Osijek, Croatia, who encouraged me to pursue doctoral work and allowed me the necessary time to pursue this research.

John Morehead and colleagues serving with me on the Lausanne 2004 Forum Group Sixteen gave invaluable insights, feedback and discussion.

A number of Filipino colleagues assisted me in finding former members of the group to interview: Pastors Jun Divierte, Roberto de Fiesta, R.G. Foncardas, Fernando Lua, Leonardo Tan, and

Joselito Zafra. I am greatly appreciative of the former Iglesia ni Cristo members I interviewed for their candor and vulnerability. They helped me gain major insights for parts of this book. My students at several schools were invaluable in allowing me to test run some of my ideas, and they also assisted me with observations and gathering first-hand information.

Dr. Timothy C. Tennent, formerly Professor of Missions at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and now President of Asbury Theological Seminary, spurred my interest in anthropological study of different cultures and gave helpful feedback on some of my earliest insights and writing about the Iglesia ni Cristo.

Action missionaries Blair and Debbie Skinner began the work of collecting materials published by the Iglesia ni Cristo back in the 1990s and graciously allowed me access to them. Their work on the teachings of the group served as a catalyst for me to initially begin studying the group.

Finally, I thank my family for their support and prayers. While growing up in the Philippines my daughters Ruth and Meg bore the embarrassment of a mother who was always stopping to talk to “strangers” about their experiences in the Iglesia ni Cristo. My husband has stood with me over the many years of study and research—cooking meals, doing housework, and being a sounding board for my observations and ideas. He lightened my work load, lifted my spirits in times of discouragement, and sharpened my thinking.

DEDICATION

*To my husband George
with love and thankfulness for our journey together
over thirty-six years
in three continents
serving the Lord Jesus Christ.*

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEM	Chief Executive Minister of the Iglesia ni Cristo
CEM	College of Evangelical Ministry
CWS	Children’s Worship Service
DEM	Deputy Executive Minister of the Iglesia ni Cristo
GEM	Grand Evangelical Mission
IEMELIF	Iglesia Evangelica Metodista en las Filipinas
INC	Iglesia ni Cristo
KKK	Kataastaasang Kagalanggalangang Katipunan Ng Mga Bayan (Highest and Most Respected Sons of the People)
NEU	New Era University
NRM	New Religious Movement
PNK	Pagsamba ng Kabataan (“Children’s Worship Service”)
SDA	Seventh-Day Adventist
WCG	The Worldwide Church of God, now called Grace Communion International

