

PENTECOSTAL PIONEER:



*The Life and Legacy of
Rudy Esperanza in the Early Years
of the Assemblies of God
in the Philippines*

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*
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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

With this new volume we are pleased to restart our Pentecostalism Around the World series, of which this book is volume 4. The purpose of this series is to provide a place for historical reflection on what God is doing through the Pentecostal Movement, particularly in the Asia Pacific and Pacific Oceania regions of the world.

The three previous titles are, *Reflections of an Early American Pentecostal* by Stanley Horton, *The Cross Among Pagodas: A History of the Assemblies of God in Myanmar* by Chin Khua Khai, and *Pentecost to the Uttermost: A History of the Assemblies of God in Samoa* by Tavita Pagaialii. These books are available at the APTS Bookstore on our Baguio Campus and at the ICI Bookstore in Valenzuela City in Metro Manila.

In publishing this book, Dr. Rose Engcoy becomes the first Filipino to publish a book with APTS Press and we offer her our heartiest congratulations.

THE PUBLISHER

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Sometimes negative emotions can lead to positive actions. While working at the Asia Pacific Research Center archives in Baguio, I found out that the Philippines General Council of the Assemblies of God (PGCAG) did not yet have a book on its history. Some other much younger AG General Councils in Asia had their book, but not us. Honestly, I felt sad and jealous.

We do have records of the PGCAG's early history, but they are mostly reports and letters sent back to the United States by American AG missionaries assigned to the Philippines. As expected, the reports are on the American missionaries' activities and contributions. Many times, the participation of local Filipino workers are only mentioned in passing. One of the early Filipino ministers did write a masters thesis on the subject back in 1965, but it was never published.

My sadness and jealousy turned into a desire to write the PGCAG history. I wanted people to know what God had done in and through the lives of "imperfect saints" so that the PGCAG became one of the fastest growing denominations in the Philippines at the beginning of the 21st century.¹ Moreover, I wanted to present historical data from a Filipino pioneer's viewpoint.

To learn how to write the PGCAG history properly, I took advanced studies in Church History with the Asia Graduate School of Theology (AGST). At AGST, I realized that writing the history of the PGCAG was too broad for me to handle. Thus, I narrowed my research on one Filipino AG pioneer, Rev. Rodrigo Cabanilla Esperanza. As the first Filipino to hold the highest position in the Assemblies of God, and the one to stay longest to date in that top position, Esperanza played an important role in forming the young denomination.

This book is based on my AGST dissertation. With the history of the PGCAG as the background, I explore major roles that Esperanza played from 1940, which marked the birth of Assemblies of God work in the Philippines, to 1969, the year he died. I limit myself to discussing events in his life which impacted the PGCAG's pioneering years, especially his contributions that continue to influence the PGCAG in the twenty-first century. Many of my sources were conversations with people who knew Esperanza or were directly influenced by him. Please note that there are cases when dates, places, and events may not be perfectly accurate. People tend to forget some of those details. However, interviews are the best way to know what the past meant to people and how it felt to be a part of those times.²

Through this book, I aim to promote a greater understanding of and appreciation for the role of local pioneers in building the Filipino Pentecostal church. Sadly, many Filipinos have no idea who the Pentecostal pioneers in the Philippines were, much less what they went through to ensure that we would have the Pentecostal gospel in our generation. No wonder many contemporary Filipinos do not appreciate their Pentecostal legacy.

Moreover, I hope to encourage present-day Filipinos, especially AG constituents, to engage in further historical research to better understand their roots which helped form the character of their denomination. May this book be a catalyst for more historical research and writing on Filipino Pentecostal legacy.

Lastly, I hope this book would be a source of historical insights for present-day PGCAG leaders. May these insights help them to better understand the PGCAG's formative years and to

come up with more effective strategies for the further growth of the Assemblies of God in the Philippines.

Should this book cause faith to arise in the hearts of the present generation of Filipino Pentecostals to do greater exploits in these last days, then it would be worth all the effort and sacrifice in writing it.

To God be all the glory!

Rose Engcoy
October 2014

¹John W. Kennedy, “The Philippines: Embracing the Challenge,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, 4 June 2000, 5. “Largest Denominations: Philippines,” *DAWN Philippines: A Report on the State of the Evangelical Churches in the Philippines 2000*, with a foreword by Bishop Efraim M. Tendero (n.p. and n.d.), 40.

²Texas Historical Commission, “Fundamentals of Oral History: Texas Preservation Guidelines,” available at <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/publications/guidelines/OralHistory.pdf>, accessed January 10, 2012.

FOREWORD

Rose Engcoy's insightful study of the life and ministry of Rodrigo ("Rudy") Esperanza is important for two reasons.

The first is that all of us have much to learn from Rev. Esperanza's example. After all, he was one of the pioneers of Pentecostalism in the Philippines. His work as a church planter, pastor, educator, and long-time senior administrator of the Philippines General Council of the Assemblies of God (PGCAG) was vitally important to that denomination's early success which has situated it in the front ranks of the community of Spirit-filled believers in his beloved homeland.

Rev. Esperanza played a role in the PGCAG rather like that played by J. Roswell Flower during the Assemblies' formative years in the United States. Both men were irenic bridge-builders. Rev. Flower, who took the lead in keeping the Assemblies committed to Trinitarian orthodoxy, went on to foster fraternal relations with other Pentecostal denominations and even with non-Pentecostal evangelicals, playing a pivotal role in the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals.¹

Similarly, Rev. Esperanza, a veteran ecclesiastical firefighter who doused the flames of many a conflict that threatened to disrupt the PGCAG's unity, not only helped to pilot the United Pentecostal Fellowship but also led his fellow Pentecostals in collaboration with non-Pentecostal evangelicals in a range of evangelistic and ministry activities that went a long way toward allaying suspicions on both sides. Growing churches are always the most vulnerable to conflict and schism, so Christians who long for unity in the body of Christ can learn a lot from Rev. Esperanza. This book will help with that.

But Dr. Engcoy's study is important for another reason as well. Today the Christian community is growing rapidly in Asia,

especially East Asia, rivaling the explosive growth of the church in Africa.²

Riding the crest of the wave are Pentecostal denominations like the PGCAG. In fact, missiologist David Barrett estimates that 80 percent of East Asia's Christians are Pentecostal or Charismatic.³ Something similar is happening here in the Philippines, with the evangelical community growing steadily since the 1970s and today making up roughly 10 percent of the nation's population.⁴ Most Philippine evangelicals are Pentecostal or Charismatic, and, thanks to the impact of organizations like Mike Velarde's El Shaddai, in the Philippines even the Catholic Church is taking on an increasingly Charismatic cast.

Just as Katharine Wiegele's study of Brother Mike and El Shaddai gives us a good idea of what lies ahead for Philippine Catholicism,⁵ Rose Engcoy's study of Rudy Esperanza and the early years of the PGCAG gives us a good idea of what lies ahead for Philippine Protestantism. Together they give us an excellent idea of what lies ahead for Asian Christianity. I find that enormously encouraging.

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¹Gary B. McGee, "Flower, Joseph James Roswell (1888-1970) and Alice Reynolds (1890-1991)," in *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. ed.

²Peter Brierley, *Future Church: A Global Analysis of the Christian Community to the Year 2010* (Oxford, England: Monarch, 1998), 20-21.

³David B. Barrett, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 1989," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13, no. 1 (January 1989): 20.

⁴George W. Harper, "Philippine Tongues of Fire? Latin American Pentecostalism and the Future of Filipino Christianity," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 26, no. 2 (April 2002): 153-180.

⁵Katharine L. Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles: El Shaddai and the Transformation of Popular Catholicism in the Philippines* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The seed of this research was planted in my heart in 2000 when I accepted Dr. Paul Lewis's invitation to serve at the Asia Pacific Research Center (APRC) at the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (APTS) in Baguio City, Philippines. As I worked on the PGCAG holdings in the archives, the desire to educate the Filipino AG constituents about what our pioneers had done to ensure that the Pentecostal message would be passed on to succeeding generations gave me impetus to embark on further studies in church history. As I researched, certain persons and organizations gave me "wind beneath my wings" to press on until I finished my dissertation. I would like to acknowledge the following:

Dr. Paul Lewis, former APRC director, who believed in my vision and supported me all the way; Dr. Wonsuk Ma and Dr. Julie Ma, who gave me their constant support and encouragement; my AGTS advisers—Dr. Rodrigo Tano, Dr. Timothy Gener, and Dr. George Harper—who made sure that my program was completed; my AGST professors—Dr. Floyd Cunningham, Dr. Adonis Gorospe, Dr. Azriel Azarcon, and Dr. Anne Kwantes—who gave me invaluable guidance in synthesizing my dissertation; Dr. George Harper, who saw to the accuracy of what I wrote and whose "eagle eyes" saw typos that my computer failed to detect; and my dissertation editors, Laura DeCorte and Dr. Steve Langston. This book is an abridged edition of that dissertation.

Heartfelt thanks to Noel and Anna Manayon, who took and edited all the videos of the Rodolfo Esperanza Documentary Project; Lydia Esperanza Javier and Rebecca Lagmay Alimbuyao, who provided family photos and arranged for the interviews with Rev. Esperanza's relatives; Dr. Joseph Suico, who, in his capacity

as PGCAG General Secretary, granted me access to the PGCAG archives; the PGCAG executives and Rev. William Snider, who gave financial support for the Rodolfo Esperanza Documentary Project; and Roberto and Kathleen Garciano, my brother-in-law and sister, who never failed to welcome me into their home during the many years of my studies in Manila.

I want to thank the APTS AdCom, who approved the sponsorship of my graduate studies under the seminary's faculty development program, and Dr. Theresa Lua, AGST Dean, who provided scholarship assistance so that I could finish my dissertation.

This book could not have been published were it not for the perseverance of the APTS Press Director, Dr. Dave Johnson, and the diligent editing and formatting of the book's Project Director, Lindsay Crabtree. Thank you also to APRC's resident archivist, William Alcabedos, for his patient help in looking up documents and photos.

Finally, thank you to my family, friends, and churches, who were my faithful prayer partners all these years.

To all of you, I express my deep gratitude. May God multiply back to you what you have so generously shared with me as I journeyed through this research and writing.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to three special groups of people:

 my family: Lem, GJ, and Hazel, who unconditionally supported me with their love, encouragement, and prayers, and gave me time and space as I focused on finishing this work, especially in the last few months;

 my mentors: Dr. and Mrs. Gary and Doris Denbow, who were my spiritual parents from the beginning of my ministry, and Dr. and Mrs. Eleazer and Esther Javier, who guided and supported me in my calling to preserve the PGCAG legacy;

and

 all the PGCAG pioneers who, together with Reverend Rodrigo Esperanza, blazed the trail. May their sacrifices also be told by the succeeding generations. Most of all, may we who come after them learn from their wisdom, gained from their selfless commitment to the ministry, so we may better serve our Master and likewise hear the word, “*Well done, good and faithful servant.*”

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Chapter 1



Rev. Rodrigo "Rudy" C. Esperanza
District Secretary, 1940-1946
District Superintendent, 1946-1953
General Superintendent, 1953-1969

Source: PGCAG Headquarters, BBC Compound, Malinta, Valenzuela City

INTRODUCTION

Rodrigo Esperanza's impact on the Assemblies of God in the Philippines cannot be overstated. In his various roles as pastor, denominational leader, evangelist, writer, radio host, and Bible school teacher, Esperanza built the foundation for the modern-day Philippines General Council of the Assemblies of God (PGCAG). Much of the movement's growth can be traced back to the work of this great pioneer. This book is dedicated to examining the life and work of Esperanza and his impact on the Assemblies of God in the Philippines. However, before we can delve into the life and background of Esperanza, we must focus on the history of the Assemblies of God both in the United States and also in the Philippines. Only with the movement's background firmly in focus can we truly appreciate Esperanza's ongoing legacy.

From the time Crispulo Garsulao, the first Filipino Assemblies of God pioneer, arrived back on Philippine soil in 1928 to the turn of the twenty-first century, the Assemblies of God in the Philippines has grown by leaps and bounds.¹ Historian Arthur Tuggy gives the following statistics:

By 1949, 1822 members were reported. In 1952 there were 2,193. Then the Assemblies of God entered a new phase of rapid growth as the large Bethel Temple in Manila was begun under the ministry of Lester Sumrall. This church, which became the largest Protestant church in Manila, had its beginning...in 1952 and 1953....By 1958, the Assemblies of God reported a membership of 12,022—an increase of almost 500 percent in five years!²

Wonsuk Ma reports further:

Efforts were made to expand the ministry through evangelism and church-planting programs, especially in cities and towns. By 1979 there were 1,195 ministers, 383 churches, 16 training schools, and two cross-cultural missionaries. The next 10 years, however, proved to be a turning point for the denomination. By the end of the 1980s the number of churches had more than tripled: 1,329 churches with 2,022 ministers, 20 training schools, and 4 overseas missionaries. This was a time of social and political unrest, and also a period of explosive growth, particularly among the [P]entecostal and [C]harismatic segments of Philippine Christianity.³

John Kennedy declares that at the turn of this century the PGCAG has “2,600 churches attended by 430,830 people, making it the largest evangelical body” in the predominantly Roman

Catholic Asian country.⁴ In September 2001, *Discipling a Whole Nation* (DAWN) Philippines issued statistics placing the PGCAG with its 2,853 churches at the top of its ranking of Philippine Protestant denominations by number of congregations.⁵

In its three-quarters of a century of existence in this country, the PGCAG has experienced many ups and downs. First of all, when the Americans took over the Philippines, its population was, as it still is, primarily Roman Catholic. Furthermore, before the coming of Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Caudle, Assemblies of God missionaries who brought the Pentecostal message in 1926,⁶ other Protestant denominations had already established their bulwarks in the Philippines by means of the Comity arrangement of April 1901. In the arrangement, representatives of seven missionary and Bible societies formed the Evangelical Union of the Philippine Islands, which assigned specific geographical areas to each member of the Union.⁷ As the AG came much later, it was not part of this agreement. To make matters worse, in the early decades of the twentieth century, Pentecostals were still generally disfavored in the United States. Noted American evangelist R. A. Torrey issued this pronouncement: "The Movement as a whole has apparently developed more immorality than any other modern movement except spiritism, to which it is so closely allied in many ways."⁸ This negative attitude in the US was carried over to the Philippines. The Pentecostal newcomers were not welcomed. They were socially ostracized and persecuted not only by the Roman Catholics but also by the evangelical community. Many AG pioneers were mocked during street meetings or threatened with court cases or physical harm. A few were actually attacked. Many also endured the stoning of their churches while they were holding worship services. Even evangelicals would not allow members of their families to attend Pentecostal services.⁹ Filipino AG pioneers

urgently requested a representative from the United States AG to come and organize the group in the Philippines to give them a legal identity.

Despite persecution, the group's membership continued to multiply. However, three major conflicts—the split of the Manila Bethel Temple in 1965, the split of the denomination in 1973, and a further split in 1980¹⁰—hampered the phenomenal growth of the Assemblies of God. James H. Montgomery reports that the denomination lost its momentum during these conflicts, yet the group continued to grow, although not as fast as before.¹¹ Moreover, as Ma reports in the above quotation, by the end of the 1980s, the PGCAG had more than tripled the number of its churches, doubled the number of its ministers, and increased the number of its training schools and overseas missionaries.

Statement of the Problem

Why did the PGCAG experience phenomenal growth in spite of seasons of major conflict within the organization? What role did the PGCAG's leaders play in steering the denomination along a path for growth? What leadership style exerted a major influence in the group's pioneering years? My hypothesis is that Rodrigo Esperanza's many pioneering roles—pastor, denominational leader, evangelist, writer, radio host, Bible school teacher, etc., were foundational to the Assemblies of God in the Philippines and set the leadership pattern which helped propel the fledgling denomination into rapid numerical growth.

Statement of Purpose

In my reading of the history of various Protestant groups in the Philippines for a course on Philippine Protestantism, three main factors stood out as keys to their growth.¹² The first two

factors were the presence of Bible schools and the availability of denominational literature and other publications. However, the third factor, the presence of good denominational leaders, was the most significant. These leaders served as catalysts for their groups' growth. Their lives and ministries became role models for their contemporaries and succeeding generations. They were goal-setters, pioneers, and innovators, leading their groups to attempt bigger tasks and achieve higher goals. Without the support of good denominational leaders, Bible schools and denominational literature could not exist. Among the PGCAG pioneers, none played a greater role than Reverend Rodrigo "Rudy" Esperanza, the first PGCAG General Superintendent.

This book aims to explore the various roles that Esperanza played from 1940, which marked the birth of the Assemblies of God work in the Philippines, to 1969, the year he died. It further aims to demonstrate Esperanza's influence during the PGCAG's pioneering years and trace the ways in which his leadership continues to impact the denomination in the twenty-first century.

Significance of the Study

The majority of the records of the PGCAG's early history are reports and correspondence sent back to the United States by General Council of the Assemblies of God (henceforth, USAG) missionaries assigned to the Philippines. As such, these records reflect the American missionaries' viewpoints and primarily focus on their contributions. Many times, the participation and contributions of local workers are only mentioned in passing; at times they are not mentioned at all.

Various PGCAG district leaders have sought to make up for this lack by writing the history of their own districts. These district histories appropriately stress the contributions of Filipino

pioneers. However, the said histories have often been written without attention to scholarly historical methodologies, thus casting doubt on the credibility of their accounts.

This book will present the life of Reverend Rodrigo Esperanza with the history of the PGCAG as the backdrop. As such, it will be written from a Filipino pioneer's viewpoint. Through this book, I aim to promote a greater understanding and appreciation of the role of local pioneers in building the PGCAG. Moreover, I desire to encourage present-day Filipinos, especially AG constituents, to engage in further historical research to better understand their roots which helped form the ethos and character of their denomination. Most of all, I hope this book will be a source of historical insights for present-day PGCAG leaders to help them not only to better understand the PGCAG's formative years but also to formulate better plans and more effective strategies for the further growth of the Assemblies of God in the Philippines.

Delimitation

As previously stated, this book will be limited to the roles of Rodrigo Esperanza in the PGCAG from 1940 to 1969. Therefore, only those events or issues in the history of the denomination in which Esperanza had directly participated or exerted influence on will be included in this book. A more exhaustive research on the PGCAG's history will have to be dealt with in another book. The limitations of oral history research, one of the methods used in gathering information for this paper, also need to be kept in mind.

To ascertain the roles of Esperanza that were foundational to the Assemblies of God in the Philippines and the lasting impact of those roles, this book will focus on the following questions:

- What was Esperanza's formative background?
- What roles did he play in the history of the PGCAG?
- What factors influenced him in fulfilling his roles?
- What lasting impact did he have on the PGCAG?
- What benefits can the present PGCAG leaders receive from studying his leadership roles?

Methodology

For this study, I have conducted historical research to ascertain the influence of Rudy Esperanza that sculpted the leadership model of the early PGCAG. The historical research involved both literature and field research.

Literature Research

In my capacity as archivist of the Asia Pacific Research Center (APRC) since 2000, I have access to primary and secondary sources dealing with the history of Pentecostal denominations in the Philippines, especially the PGCAG. Other vital sources of information are the records kept in the PGCAG national headquarters archives in Metro Manila and in the USAG archives, most especially the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center and the Assemblies of God World Missions archives, both at the USAG headquarters in Springfield, Missouri. Also available are early PGCAG publications and PGCAG Bible schools' and districts' publications. The library and archives of De La Salle University Taft, Ateneo the Manila University, and University of San Carlos in Cebu were important sources of information on the sociological, economic, and political conditions prevailing in the Philippines during the timeframe covered in this book.

Oral History

I also used as sources the holdings of the APRC Oral History archives, an ongoing project of the APRC. Although the majority of Filipinos are literate, “the country has maintained its oral cognitive orientation, as witnessed by the lack of a sizable reading population and a brilliant oral culture in universities which rarely gets transcribed into written form.”¹³ I conducted the majority of the nearly fifty interviews already transcribed employing standard methods for oral history interviews to gather data from Pentecostal church pioneers, their family and friends, and local observers.

The field research also yielded a considerable quantity of photos, printed matter, and other documents kept by the pioneer or his/her family in private family archives. Said archival materials were rich sources of information on the early days of the denomination in the Philippines. Other local churches and districts gladly donated to the APRC write-ups of their respective histories.

As this research demonstrates, the footprints of the PGCAG’s pioneers are clearly seen through the movement’s history, none more than Reverend Rodrigo “Rudy” Esperanza. To fully appreciate Esperanza’s past and continuing influence in the Assemblies of God in the Philippines, let us turn our attention to the birth of its parent organization, the Assemblies of God in America.