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The "Iglesia ni Cristo"

JOSEPH J. KAVANAGH

During the last sixty years, three separate movements have weakened the religious unity within the Catholic Church of the Filipino people. The first was led by Isabelo de los Reyes and Gregorio Aglipay. It owed much of its initial success to two factors: nascent nationalism, and the inability of the ordinary people to perceive the difference between the *Iglesia Independiente* and their traditional Faith. At the present time the movement is stagnant. Split by schism into two hostile factions, Aglipayanism has lost much of its popularity and aggressiveness. Official statistics released by the Bureau of Census place the total number of Aglipayans in the Philippines at 1,456,114.¹

The second threat to Catholicism appeared in the form of American Protestant missionaries and school teachers who followed the Army of Occupation to the Islands after the Spanish-American War. Their effectiveness has depended mainly upon American wealth and American prestige. They have not been as successful in their efforts as the indigenous movements. The Bureau of Census records a total of 444,491 Protestants in the Philippines.

The third movement was, like the first, native in origin. Its leader was, and is still, Mr. Felix Manalo. His organization, the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, made its appearance during the First World War. It did not, however, achieve either power

or prominence, till after the close of World War II. The Bureau of Census allots it a total membership of 88,125. *Iglesia* preachers contest the accuracy of these figures, and claim they have more than two million followers. This is undoubtedly an exaggeration. Yet it cannot be denied that the *Iglesia* is a large, powerful and expanding organization. It may well constitute the most vital and aggressive threat which the Catholic Church faces in the Islands at the present time. It is most certainly a force which must be reckoned with now and in the years to come by any one interested in the religious welfare of the Filipino people.

In the following pages an attempt has been made to present a summary of available information concerning the *Iglesia ni Cristo* and its chief organizer, Mr. Felix Manalo. Reliable sources of such information are decidedly limited. Sources in English are particularly scarce. There are two articles in the *Encyclopedia of the Philippines*,² and one in the *Philippines Free Press*.³ Beyond these there is very little.

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Felix Manalo Ysagun was born on May 10, 1886, in Calzada, a district of the barrio of Tipas, in the municipality of Taguig, some fifteen kilometers to the southeast of Manila on the shores of Laguna de Bay. His parents were Mariano Ysagun and Bonifacia Manalo. They had two children: Felix, and a daughter, younger than Felix by a year, named Praxedes. Felix's father died when he was only two or three years of age. His mother then married a Clemente Mozo of Tipas, to whom she bore several children—Emeterio, Tiburcio, Fausta, Simeon, Baldomero and (probably) Catalina.⁴

Of the children born to Bonifacia Manalo in her two marriages, only three survive—Felix, Fausta and Baldomero. Fausta Manalo Mozo still resides in Tipas, and is married to a shopowner there named Sangga. Baldomero married a Trinidad Feliciano, and lived for a time in Santa Maria, Bulacan. Since his wife's death, however, he seems to have

kept no permanent residence. He is a small-scale building contractor, and moves about in the barrios of Rizal and Bulacan, wherever work offers.

Felix himself has preferred to adopt his mother's name, Manalo, rather than use that of his father, Ysagun. He made the change quite early in life, but precisely when and why, it has been impossible to ascertain. Residents of Taguig assert that it was at the time he began to propagate the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. Perhaps like the old Romans he believed that "Nomen est Omen," for Felix Manalo means "Happy Triumph" whereas Ysagun has no such portentous significance.

In his boyhood, Felix had little formal schooling. At the age of seven he began to attend classes conducted by "Maestro Cario," Macario Ocampo, a school teacher from Manila who taught the barrio children the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic. But even this meager education was interrupted in 1896 as a result of the disturbances caused by the revolution. Felix thereafter remained at home, assisting his mother by doing farm work, fishing, and weaving "salakot," the native straw hat, for sale.

Although baptized and reared a Catholic, Felix came into contact rather early in life with Protestant missionaries. Shortly after 1900, he set out on a spiritual Odyssey, which is described in the *Encyclopedia of the Philippines* substantially as follows: In 1904, Felix Manalo joined the Methodist Episcopal Church. Not satisfied with its teachings, he soon transferred to the Ellinwood Presbyterian School. Still dissatisfied, he became a member of the Christian Mission, and an evangelist in the same sect. But even here he was not content. Resigning from the Christian Mission he joined the Seventh Day Adventists, among whom he devoted considerable time to Bible study, wrote occasionally for the Adventist publications, and eventually became a minister. But his study of the Scriptures engendered doubts about the doctrine and teaching of the Adventists, and he finally decided to go off on his own and preach the Gospel as it was revealed to him.⁵

Residents of Taguig claim that for a while, Manalo was also a member of the "Colorums," a rather odd, revivalist type of religious sect which made San Cristobal, Mount Banahaw, one of its chief meeting places. At any rate, his wanderings finally terminated in 1914 with the establishment of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* at Punta, Santa Ana, Manila.

Mr. Manalo is at present married to Honorata de Guzman. They have six children, four boys and two girls. The persistent report that some at least of these children have been educated in Catholic schools does not seem to have any basis in fact. One of the boys, Eraño, is General Treasurer of the *Iglesia* and is evidently being groomed to succeed his father as "Superior Minister."

Felix Manalo fulfills (besides the passage in the Apocalypse which he considers his apostolic credentials) at least one Scripture text: "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and his own household," for in Taguig his movement has not prospered. As far as can be ascertained none of his close relatives has become a member of his church. The center which the *Iglesia* has established in Tipas is of comparatively recent date. The older generation who knew Manalo personally, apparently knew him only too well. They have found it extremely difficult to believe in his heavenly mission. Many of them are convinced that the *Iglesia* is simply a commercial venture, a "*hanapbuhay*" as they put it, in which Felix has enjoyed no little success.

Manalo has been described by those who have had personal contact with him, as an efficient, personable, if somewhat "secular-looking" religious leader. A rather damaging estimate of his character was made public as the result of a lawsuit instituted by Mr. Manalo himself. It is contained in the decision rendered by the Court of Appeals, in the case "*People vs. Rosita Trillanes*," as published in the *Official Gazette*, Volume I, No. 7, July, 1942, pp. 393-395. The circumstances of the case were as follows:

A certain Rosita B. Trillanes, originally of Batangas, circulated a letter in which she accused Felix Manalo of

taking advantage of his position as head of the *Iglesia* to abuse her and a number of other women, all members of the sect. In an *Iglesia* publication, *The Roman Catholic Church* by Victor M. Nalus, the occasion for the circulation of this defamatory letter is described thus:

In 1939, Raymundo Mansilungan, Teodoro Briones, Cirilo Gonzales, and Rosita Trillanes, former members of the Church of Christ were expelled from the Church of Christ for acts not tolerated in the Church . . . After they were separated from the Church of Christ they resorted to revenge. The men persuaded Rosita Trillanes to write a letter accusing Brother Manalo of, say, taking advantage of her. It was also said in the letter that she was not the only one taken advantage of, but many others. Brother Manalo could no longer tolerate this nature of defamation so he deemed it proper to sue Rosita Trillanes in court.⁶

Manalo won his case. The result of the lawsuit as published in *Taliba* (a Tagalog newspaper published in Manila) on Saturday, January 4, 1941, and reprinted with a translation in Nalus' pamphlet referred to above, was:

A fine of two hundred pesos was imposed by Judge Fernando Jugo of the Court of First Instance of Manila, upon Rosita Trillanes expelled member of the Church of Christ, when she was convicted of libel committed against Felix Manalo, supremo of the above-mentioned religious sect. She was sentenced to suffer subsidiary imprisonment for failure to pay the fine.

The penalty imposed was light in view of the circumstances which mitigated the gravity of the crime, according to the Court, for she was merely used as a tool of discontented members of the sect, who were expelled by Manalo for certain irregularities committed in connection with the disposition of the funds of the Church. The Court also noticed that she "had a humble spirit" for which reason she was "easily used as a tool" by the enemies of Manalo.⁷

Rosita Trillanes then appealed her case. The Court of Appeals reversed the decision of the Court of First Instance, and exonerated her from the penalty which had been imposed. In rendering their decision the Justices who heard the case gave, as was said above, an extremely unfavorable estimate of Mr. Manalo's character. Some excerpts from the document are here rendered into English, the original being in Spanish:

THE PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, PLAINTIFF AND
APPELLEE, vs. ROSITA TRILLANES, ACCUSED AND
APPELLANT:

An appeal against the sentence of the Court of First Instance
of Manila, Judge — Jugo.

ENAGE, M.

[The decision begins with a brief resumé of the case and its circumstances including a transcription of the defamatory letter, of which a sufficient explanation has been given above. Then it continues:]

Such in brief are the principal allegations said to constitute libel in the letter transcribed above. The Lower Court did not accord full credence to the proofs offered by the Defense in its endeavor to establish the truth of the aforementioned allegations. We are of the opinion, however, that His Honor, the Judge who passed the sentence, erred in his evaluation.

We have examined with utmost care the proofs presented in the case and are convinced that the appellant was successful in proving the truth of the substance of her supposedly libelous allegations....

In support of this conclusion it suffices to point out that as far as the credibility of the witnesses is concerned, the Prosecution itself was compelled to admit frankly in its deposition, that in the testimony of the appellant it does appear that the offended party, Manalo, took advantage of his position as head of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, and... employed religion as a cloak to cover his... immoral practices; that he pretended to be the Messiah sent by God; and that to persuade his victims, he cited the example of Solomon and his many wives.

The Solicitor General adds that although there was some exaggeration in the proofs presented by the appellant in regard to such... immoral conduct, nevertheless, the Prosecution admits that there is reason to believe the offended party, Manalo, did commit immoral acts with some women members of the *Iglesia*. And the Solicitor concludes that he found out through the proofs presented that Manalo is a man "de baja moral", and that he took advantage of his position in the *Iglesia* to attack and sully the virtue of some of his female followers.

In view of the fact that the offended party was regarded as a religious leader, and ought for the sake of edification to have lived, and given evidence of, a virtuous life, such acts attributed to the offended party and conclusively proven by the Defense, are in our opinion, decidedly deserving of censure....

Consequently since we consider as well-established the truth of the supposed defamation of the offended party by the appel-

lant, and since the defamation in question evidently had good motives, and just aims, namely, to alert and forewarn her spiritual associates in the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, we cannot help but arrive at a verdict in favor of the appellant, especially since according to the proofs, the present suit is the third case of libel in which the offended has been the aggrieved party, and in one of the cases the person he accused was exonerated on the recommendation of the Solicitor General himself. These various charges, introduced by the offended party, tend to indicate that people had at least a general idea of his immoral conduct, and that as a result he had begun to provoke serious dissatisfaction [disgustos] within his own religious group, to the extent that he felt obliged to institute the three suits for libel just mentioned.

And this circumstance will show moreover, the rectitude and justifiable purpose of publishing the supposedly libelous letter signed by the appellant. Therefore under the legal disposition cited above, the appellant has the right to a sentence of acquittal.

For the reasons set forth, the sentence appealed is revoked and the appellant acquitted, with the payment of the cost of the trial.

HONTIVEROS, BRIONES & TORRES, M. concur.
The Sentence is revoked.

With this decision of the Court of Appeals the case was, from a legal aspect, definitively closed. But it was so injurious to the reputation of Manalo, and furnished such an excellent instrument of propaganda against the *Iglesia ni Cristo* that some move had to be made by the members of the sect to discredit it, and destroy, if possible, its effectiveness. That move was rather slow in developing. It finally appeared in the form of an affidavit signed by Rosita Trillanes and notarized by Froilan Tafalla under date of May 10, 1951. An article in *The Sentinel*, the Catholic Weekly of the Philippines, on October 4, 1952, provoked the publication of the affidavit in the *Iglesia's* organ, *Ang Pasugo*, for November, 1952. Shortly thereafter, a second form of this affidavit appeared in English, (the first was in Tagalog), signed and notarized as the first, but bearing the date, November 21, 1952.

In the affidavit, Rosita Trillanes affirms, among other things, that "concerning the libelous letter I wrote, and for which I was accused by Mr. Felix Manalo, I hereby state and

so declare that all matters therein stated and written are all false and pure fabrications without any truth whatsoever...⁸

EARLY HISTORY AND ORGANIZATION OF THE IGLESIA

As early as 1911, according to residents of Taguig, Mr. Manalo had already conceived the idea of establishing his own church. But it was only in 1914, at Punta, Santa Ana, Manila, that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* actually appeared as an organized religious body. Chief organizer was Felix Manalo himself. He had as collaborators: Justino Casanova, Teodoro Santiago, Santiago Lopez, Maximo Valenzuela, Bernardo Turla, Benito Sumbilla, Raymundo Mansilungan, Felix Pineda, Feliciano Gonzales, Igmidio Zabala, Julio de la Rosa, Mariano Castro, Andres Tucker, Francisco Abalos, Rufino Dula, Simeon Tabamo, Norberto Cruz, and Eugenio Cortez.

Manalo's position as head of the *Iglesia* from its very inception is clear from the fact that on July 24, 1914, the organization was registered with the Insular Government, "En la Jefetura de la División de Archivos, Patentes, Propriedad Literaria y Marcas Industriales de la Oficina Ejecutiva," as a "Corporación Unipersonal," under the name *Iglesia ni Cristo*. A "Corporación Unipersonal" (in English, "Corporation Sole") consists of a single person who is recognized by law as a body corporate and politic, with certain legal capacities, particularly that of succession, which the individual could not have as a natural person. In the *Iglesia* Mr. Manalo is that "single person." Consequently, the control and administration of the Church and its properties are, according to law, in his hands, and in the hands of whoever is designated to succeed him as head pastor.

The *Iglesia* was registered again eight years later, April 19, 1922, with the Bureau of Commerce and Industry, under the names "Iglesia ni Cristo," "Iglesia de Cristo," and "Church of Christ."

MEMBERSHIP AND CULT

Most of the members of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* have been recruited from the poorer, less educated, working class. The

same may be said of its ministers and preachers, whose average educational attainments are of high school level. The members are organized in cells, or small groups. Each cell-group has its leader, who works on a voluntary, no-salary basis, and endeavors to propagate the sect. He or she makes regular reports to higher officials. Among these officials are deacons and deaconesses, pastors or "guros," ministers and evangelists.

Several deacons (or deaconesses) with the groups under their supervision form a larger unit equivalent to a parish in charge of a "guro" or teacher. Above these are evangelists, who supervise a number of parishes forming a district. All the evangelists who can do so, assemble regularly at the Central Office, where they are briefed by Manalo on doctrine and procedure. The evangelists at present (1954) receive a monthly salary of two hundred pesos. There is also a class of preachers referred to as "extension workers" whose task it is to go into new territory and establish a center, where none as yet exists. Such preachers are supported by the Central Office until the new church is organized and becomes self-sustaining.

The above information was obtained through oral interview with members of the *Iglesia*. It is not based on written sources. A certain looseness was noted in the terminology used to designate the various classes of workers within the church. The terms "minister," "pastor," "guro," seemed at times to be employed interchangeably.

Services are held twice a week, on Thursdays and Sundays. They consist principally of hymns, prayers, and lengthy discourses by the preachers. Attendance is obligatory. The better organized centers have a roster of the members at the entrance to the meeting-place. As the members enter each drops his contribution into the collection box and turns his or her name down to indicate attendance, in somewhat the same fashion as workers punch a time-clock in a business establishment. Absentees are noted by the group heads, and the reason for their absence is investigated.

A member is expected to make his contribution whether he is able to attend the service or not. The contribution is "Huebes de bagol, domingo de bilion," (five centavos on Thursday, twenty centavos on Sunday). The money thus collected is for the maintenance of their meeting-places, for the salaries of the ministers, and for whatever social or charitable works the organization undertakes.

The *Iglesia* has a very efficient system of making its collections, as is evident from the expensive church buildings it has erected recently in Manila and Quezon City. The Central Office in San Juan, where Manalo resides, is a combination palace-temple, with a swimming pool adjoined. It is estimated to have cost between three and four million pesos. The interior of the "temple" resembles a modern de luxe theatre rather than a place of worship. It is air-conditioned and has a seating capacity of 1,217.

The movement is strongest in Luzon, but has begun to spread with success in some of the Visayan Islands, and in Mindanao. The *Encyclopedia of the Philippines*, Volume X, published in 1936, gives the following statistics on the *Iglesia* as of that date:

At present there are 300 ministers and evangelists, most of whom left their lucrative employments and social positions to dedicate themselves to the service of God . . . Aside from these, there are also more than 150 voluntary workers who receive no compensation . . . During the 22 years of its existence, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* converted thousands and thousands of people of different nationalities . . . It has 85,000 members, 500 churches, and 350 chapels all over the provinces of Luzon, and owns property worth ₱800,000.⁹

The official census of the Philippines for 1948 gave 88,125 as the total membership of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* at that time.¹⁰ In an interview with a staff writer of the *Philippines Free Press* in 1950 Mr. Manalo claimed that his church had more members than the Aglipayans and all the Protestant sects in the Philippines combined.¹¹ That would put the total somewhere above two million. Mr. Manalo's estimate is un-

doubtedly too high. The Census figures are probably too low. The truth lies in between.

PUBLICATIONS

The principal organ of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is the monthly *Ang Pasugo*, edited by Mr. Benjamin Santiago, with offices at 154 Riverside, San Juan, Rizal. It is a "Time"-size magazine, which averages between forty and fifty pages an issue, and has a circulation, according to its own statement, of 12,000. Two thirds or more of its articles are written in Tagalog, the rest in English. It is published by the Afan Publishing House, 629 Galicia, Sampaloc, Manila. In 1954 it completed seven years of publication.

Two of the *Iglesia's* more fundamental works are *Ang Sulo sa Ikatitiyak sa Iglesia Katolika Apostolika Romana* (The Torch to Throw Light upon the True Nature of the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church) written by Mr. Felix Manalo himself, and *Mga Katotohanan Ukol sa Mga Aral ng Iglesia Katolika Apostolika Romana* (Truths One Should Know about the Teachings of the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church).¹² In addition to these the *Iglesia* has also published a number of pamphlets of varying length, the contents of which are for the most part collections of articles reprinted from *Ang Pasugo*.

DOCTRINE

According to the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, the true Church of Christ was founded in Jerusalem by Christ Himself. It disappeared from the earth when the Roman Catholic Church came into existence, reappearing again only in 1914 with the advent of Manalo's organization.

The *Iglesia* denies the Catholic doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. The Father alone is God. The Holy Ghost is a spiritual creature sent as messenger by God. Christ is not divine, because the Scriptures assert very clearly that He was a man, and inferior to the Father. Yet, though a mere man, He was exalted by God through special gifts and graces

to a position high above all other men. He is the Founder of the one true Church on earth, and the sole Mediator between God and men. Through His redemptive death He won pardon for man, and salvation. But to share in the fruits of this redemption a man must become a member of His Body, which is the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. Outside the *Iglesia ni Cristo* there is no salvation.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass as celebrated by Catholic priests is rejected on the basis of the text in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 7/27, which, speaking of Christ the High Priest, states: "Who needeth not daily . . . to offer sacrifice first for his own sins and then for the people's, for this He did *once* . . ." There is no record, according to the *Iglesia*, of the Apostles ever having said Mass. The Last Supper was merely "memorial" in character, and not a sacrifice. Hence the *Iglesia* holds commemorative "Holy Suppers" to fulfill Christ's injunction, "Do this in commemoration of Me," but it has no daily Mass; its service, as was noted above, consists solely of worship, prayers, hymns and sermons.

Other Catholic doctrines which the *Iglesia* rejects are: the divine origin of the Catholic Church, the Primacy of the Pope, his Infallibility, the Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist, the Priesthood, Purgatory, Confession, Original Sin, Necessity of Infant Baptism, the Divine Maternity, the Immortality of the Soul, Prayers to the Saints and to Our Lady, Veneration of Images, etc.

ANG SULO

A study of the booklet *Ang Sulo*, mentioned above, is important for a correct understanding of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. It is the work of Manalo himself, and in a sense, the "gospel" of his organization, for it contains his ingenious explanation of the text in Apocalypse 7/1-3. It is his interpretation of this text which provides Mr. Manalo with credentials, guaranteeing his right to speak and be heard as a man sent by God with a divine commission. It will therefore be worthwhile to present at some length its contents, appending at the

end a brief criticism both of the contents and the methods employed by the author.

The editions of *Ang Sulo* upon which this summary is based are those of 1940 and 1947. There is little difference between them. Each contains 122 pages and is divided into seven chapters. The first four chapters are polemical, the polemics being directed, as the title would lead one to expect, almost exclusively against the Catholic Church.

Mr. Manalo points out that the Catholic Church cannot be the true Church of Christ because the true Church of Christ must bear the name "Church of Christ" ("*Iglesia ni Cristo*" in the Tagalog). This argument apparently carries great weight with simple people, for it is repeated constantly by *Iglesia* preachers and writers. It is supported by those texts in the Bible which speak of the power and preeminence of the name of Christ. It is further asserted that the Catholic Church cannot be the true Church because it considers Peter to be the rock on which it is built, whereas according to the Bible, the foundation upon which the true church is built is Christ Himself, "other foundation no man can lay but that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus." (I Cor. 3/11). The Roman Catholic Church in reality constitutes the great apostasy from Christ which was predicted by St. Paul. (Acts 20/29-30). It was due to the rise of the Roman Church with its false doctrines that the Church of Christ gradually disappeared from the face of the earth.

Fortunately for mankind, it had also been prophesied that the Church of Christ would reappear again after a time. This prophecy is to be found in the Book of the Apocalypse. *Ang Sulo's* fifth and sixth chapters undertake to interpret this prophecy, and claim that the prophecy has been fulfilled in the *Iglesia ni Cristo* as preached by Manalo. The seventh chapter is theological in character, and attempts to explain the nature of man's redemption through Christ, as well as the means of salvation—actually, as was stated above, there is for Manalo only one way to salvation, that of joining the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

APOCALYPSE 7/1-3 AS INTERPRETED BY MANALO

In the Apocalypse, chapter the seventh, verses the first to the third, God clearly reveals, according to Mr. Manalo, that the Church of Christ is to reappear on earth. He indicates too, through the inspired writer St. John, the time, place and manner of its reappearance. The text which contains these remarkable revelations is rendered thus in the King James Version, a version which apparently is considered acceptable by Mr. Manalo:

And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

And I saw another angel ascending from the East, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out 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 God in their foreheads.

To understand this text correctly, Mr. Manalo claims, it is necessary to determine as precisely as possible what is meant by the phrase "after these things." He then proceeds to determine its meaning with great exactitude. The following is a substantial paraphrase of what Mr. Manalo has written in *Ang Sulo*:

AFTER THESE THINGS: the "things" here referred to are the events of the sixth seal described in the preceding chapter of the Apocalypse. The time between Christ's Ascension and His Second Coming has been divided into seven seals, or seven periods. (Confer Apoc. 5/1 ff.) Within each of these periods a number of definite events are to take place. The events that transpire within the sixth period are, in the words of Apoc. 6/12-13:

- 1) "lo, there was a great earthquake,"
- 2) "the sun became black as sackcloth of hair,"
- 3) "and the moon became as blood,"
- 4) "and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth."

The "great earthquake" mentioned in these verses took place on November 1, 1755, and is known as the "Lisbon earthquake." (Cf. *New International Encyclopedia*, Vol. VII, p. 408.)

The darkening of the sun occurred on May 19, 1780; the moon became blood at the same time. (*Op. cit.* Vol. VI, p. 502). The falling of the stars was witnessed in the Western Hemisphere on November 13, 1833. (*Op. cit.* Vol. XV, p. 495, and *Encyclopedia Americana*, Vol. XVIII, p. 487.)

It is only after these phenomena have occurred that the events envisioned in Apocalypse 7/1-3 are to take place. Mr. Manalo then explains the meaning of these three verses.

The WIND in verse one is used as a symbol for war. This interpretation is justified by a reference to Jeremiah 4/11-13,19 where the term is so used, and also by its aptness; for the effect produced by wind and war, namely, widespread destruction, is the same.¹³

FOUR WINDS: this is not to be understood as meaning four wars. The number four indicates merely the origin of the wind, or war; that is, the four corners of the earth, north, east, south and west. The war, in other words, is to be world-wide. This world-wide war, as history informs us, occurred in 1914.

FOUR ANGELS: they represent Lloyd George, Prime Minister of Great Britain, Clemenceau, Premier of France, Orlando, Premier of Italy, and Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States. They are known to history as the "Big Four."¹⁴

STANDING ON THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE EARTH: the angels are seen in vision as standing on the four corners of the earth because the nations whose leaders are symbolized by the angels, have colonies in all parts of the world, and therefore surround the world as it were, having the power to protect or destroy it.

HOLDING THE FOUR WINDS: the "Big Four" were responsible for checking the ravages of the "four winds," that is the World War, and bringing about peace.

ANOTHER ANGEL (verse 2): the term "angel" means "one sent," or "one commissioned," or "servant of God"; it may be used either of heavenly spirits or of men. It designates not so much the nature, whether human or celestial, of the one so called, but rather his office or duty. Hence a minister chosen by God to preach the true Gospel may be called an "angel," even though his nature is that of a man.

The "other angel" mentioned in Apoc. 7/2 is not a heavenly spirit but a minister sent by God to preach. This becomes clear from a consideration of the function he performs. He holds the seal of the living God, with which he marks the true servants of God.

SEAL: this is the teaching of God. According to the Epistle to the Ephesians, 1/13 and 4/30, true believers in Christ are sealed by the Holy Spirit. How is this effected? Through the preaching of the true Gospel by those chosen and commissioned by God Himself. Whoever accepts this preaching and believes with his whole heart is sealed by the Holy Spirit. (Cf. Ephesians 1/13; Romans 10/15, Acts 10/44, 2/37-38). Therefore the seal of God which is held by the minister sent by God is the Word or teaching of God.

It follows as a consequence that the "other angel" is not a spirit from heaven but a human minister whose office and function are called "angel" to show that they come from God. The minister sent by God and represented by the "other angel" is Brother Felix Manalo.

As the prophecy states: At the time of the World War, which began in 1914, there was to appear a minister from the East to preach the true Gospel of Christ. It was precisely in 1914 that Brother Felix Manalo began to preach the Church of Christ in the Philippines. Hence the prophecy concerning the "preaching again" of the Gospel has been fulfilled. The Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant sects do not

preach the true Gospel of Christ because they have not been "sent" by God. Only one sent by God can preach the true Word of God.

The true Church of Christ which had been led into apostasy and destroyed by the Roman Catholic Church has, through the instrumentality of Brother Felix Manalo, reappeared on earth in the Philippine Islands.

ASCENDING FROM THE EAST: the prophecy in Apoc. 7/2 specifies the place where the preaching of the true Gospel of Christ is to recommence. The "other angel" is to "ascend from the East." The word "umaakyat", to ascend, which is used here, is (according to Manalo) to be understood in the same sense as one would speak of a seed's ascending when it grows and becomes taller and taller. (Cf. Matt. 13/31-32, Luke 8/11).

This "ascending" is to begin "sa sikatan ng araw," in the place of the rising of the sun, or the East. What is the precise meaning of "sikatan ng araw"? The sun is always shining, yet because of the revolution of the earth on its axis, night and day follow each other alternately. When day breaks after a period of nocturnal darkness the first rays of the sun strike the East. Which country (bansa) in the East is the first to be struck by the rays of the rising sun?

"If we answer that question ourselves," Manalo writes, "it is possible you will not believe us; here is what the *New International Encyclopedia* says: Which country in the East is the first to be struck by the rays of the sun—the PHILIPPINE ISLANDS. An archipelago forming the most northern group of islands in the Malayan or Eastern Archipelago. It LIES WHOLLY WITHIN THE TROPICS." (*New International Encyclopedia*, Vol. XVIII, p. 487).

It might be well to point out at once that the above quotation is misleading. The actual passage in the *New International Encyclopedia* begins with the words, "Philippine Islands." The preceding sentence, "Which country in the East is the first to be struck by the rays of the sun," is Manalo's own, though it is presented as part of the excerpt from the *Encyclopedia*.¹⁵ Having made the "quotation" Manalo continues:

The meaning of "tropics" according to astronomy: Either of the two small circles around the globe on each side of the equator at a distance of 23 degrees, which the sun reaches at its greatest declination north or south. There are two tropics; the one is called the Tropic of Cancer, (and it is within this one that the Philippines are situated), and the other, the Tropic of Capricorn. (*New International Encyclopedia*, Vol. XVIII, p. 487; *Webster's New International Dictionary*, p. 2205).

Which "east" is it that is specified by the prophecy in Apoc. 7/2? Assuredly it refers to the East of the whole world since the prophecy mentions the four corners of the earth. Therefore it is clear that the Philippines are meant in the prophecy, according to the testimony of the *New International Encyclopedia*, and *Webster's New International Dictionary*.

What was it that was to appear in the Philippines in 1914 by virtue of this prophecy? Nothing more nor less than the *Iglesia ni Cristo* organized by Brother Felix Manalo.

HE CRIED WITH A LOUD VOICE: the "other angel" who ascends from the East is, according to the prophecy, to cry out with a loud voice to the four angels standing at the four corners of the earth. The word "sigaw," cry, which is used here, is to be understood in the same sense it has in the words God spoke to Cain: "the voice of thy brother's blood CRIES to me from the earth." (Gen. 4/10). Blood has no voice, nor can it cry from the earth. But the evil deed of Cain was like a strong cry rising to God and demanding vengeance.

So too the cry of the minister (angel) from the Philippines was not the literal cry of a voice; but the spirit of his religious movement was opposed to the spirit of those who were at war. Hence his activity was like a loud cry to the powerful of the earth which said, "Do not hurt the earth (the world) neither the sea (the nations and their peoples) nor the trees (the lives of men) till we have sealed the servants of God in their foreheads."

The Church preached by Felix Manalo is the true church which will bring salvation and peace. This Church was founded by Christ through the power and virtue of the prophecy in Apocalypse 7/1-3. It has ministers sent by God. It bears the name of Christ and is founded on the Rock—Christ. Hence it is the true Church of Christ. Those who enter it and continue as members in it till the end will certainly be saved. All who die in the Church will be blessed for they will rise to meet their Lord at His Second Coming to earth, and will reign together with Christ in heaven for a thousand years. (Apoc. 20/6).

CRITICISM

The doctrines of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* are a pot-pourri of borrowings from several different creeds, the fruit, undoubtedly, of Mr. Manalo's spiritual wanderings described above. In his denial of the Blessed Trinity, Mr. Manalo is unitarian and rationalistic. In his professed reliance on the Bible as the sole source of revealed truth, as well as in his polemic against the Catholic Church, he is a Protestant. The Scriptural texts he cites, the arguments he adduces to refute the claims of Rome, have all been used before, and much more cogently, by Protestant divines. Very little, if anything, that the *Iglesia* has to say in its attacks on the Catholic Church is original. It has all been said (and answered) many times before.

In his movement's organization, its aggressive and not infrequently vituperative zeal, its pretension that it constitutes the elect body of the "servants of God" who alone are entitled to salvation, the *Iglesia* resembles the Jehovah's

Witnesses. It is possible that the story of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and their success in America, may have provided no little inspiration for Manalo when he first began to organize the *Iglesia*. The Witnesses, like Manalo, consider 1914 as a key date in the religious history of the world.¹⁸

In his interpretation of the seventh chapter of the Apocalypse, however, Mr. Manalo does show a bit of originality. The Apocalypse is a difficult book to understand, and the adage, "Tot sententiae, quot homines," (there are as many interpretations as there are commentators) applies with special fitness to this last book of the Bible. Mr. Manalo provides us with still another. He does not attempt to interpret the whole of the Apocalypse. His commentary is limited to a few verses taken out of context. The explanation he proposes reveals considerable ingenuity. And, to Mr. Manalo's way of thinking, it is not only ingenious, but infallibly correct. Of all the interpretations commentators have proposed in the course of the centuries for the passage in Apocalypse 7/1-3, his alone is acceptable. He considers the passage (as interpreted by himself) the seal of divine approval upon his teaching, the cornerstone of his religious organization. What is more he makes the salvation of mankind depend upon its acceptance of what he says. Unless a man believe Felix Manalo and become a member of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, as established "through the power and virtue of the prophecy in Apocalypse 7/1-3," he cannot be saved.

This procedure involves Mr. Manalo in a perfect vicious circle.

His explanation of the prophecy certainly does not commend itself as immediately evident, and therefore necessarily true. It does not impose itself upon the mind as the only possible explanation. On the contrary, to any unbiased reader it must appear far-fetched and extremely arbitrary. What guarantee does Mr. Manalo offer that what he says is true? The only guarantee he attempts to offer in the pages of *Ang Sulo* involves him, as was stated, in a vicious circle. His reasoning proceeds along the following lines.

Mr. Manalo's teachings are to be accepted because he is a minister sent by God, and only a minister sent by God can preach the true Word of God.¹⁷ That he himself is a minister sent by God is proved by the fact that he is the fulfillment of the prophecy contained in Apocalypse 7/1-3.¹⁸ But that he is the fulfillment of that prophecy depends entirely on his own arbitrary teaching concerning the meaning of the text. His argument therefore is reduced to this: Mr. Manalo's interpretation of the Scriptures is guaranteed by his divine mission, and his divine mission is guaranteed by his interpretation.

As a final point of criticism it may be asked, is Mr. Manalo really sincere in what he says? Or is he simply a clever fraud? Is he in good faith when he proclaims himself a heaven-sent minister, whose appearance was prophesied nineteen hundred years ago by the inspired author of the Apocalypse? It might be rash to assert categorically that he is not. Self-delusion can take many forms. The estimate of his moral character, however, which is reprinted above from the *Official Gazette*, combined with indications in his own writings, casts serious doubt, to say the least, upon his sincerity. In *Ang Sulo* itself there appear to be instances of conscious, deliberate deception.

For example, Mr. Manalo lays great stress upon the importance of the name "Church of Christ" (*Iglesia ni Cristo*). That name itself, he maintains, is one of the chief distinguishing marks of the true church of Christ ("isa rin sa kan-yang mahalagang katangian"). If a church is not called "Iglesia ni Cristo" it cannot be the true church; whereas if it does have that name it possesses a significant proof that it is the genuine church founded by Christ. Simple people apparently are influenced by this sort of argumentation. But it is hard to believe that Manalo himself fails to see its absurdity.

He and his collaborators establish a religious organization in 1914; they give it the name "Church of Christ" and then proceed to appeal to that name as a proof that

theirs is the genuine church of Christ. Mr. Manalo can hardly be unaware of the fact that there are at least a dozen other religious organizations, each of which calls itself the "Church of Christ." Does that title give each of them too, a right to claim genuinity? Moreover in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul addresses the early Christians as the "Church of God." Would Mr. Manalo admit that his organization is not the true church of God merely because it does not bear that name? According to his specious manner of reasoning, he should.¹⁹

A second instance of apparently deliberate deception is to be found in the passage of *Ang Sulo* which identifies the "East" of Apocalypse 7/2 as the Philippines. This passage has already been cited and attention called to the misleading "quotation" which it contains.

Mr. Manalo wishes to determine the precise meaning of the term "East" (sikatan ng araw) when the text says: "I saw another angel ascending from the East . . ." He explains that "East" must designate the place where the rays of the rising sun strike first. What country in the East is the first to be struck by the rays of the rising sun? Manalo writes:

If we answer that question ourselves, it is possible you will not believe us; but here is what the *New International Encyclopedia* says: "Which country in the East is the first to be struck by the rays of the sun—the PHILIPPINE ISLANDS. An archipelago forming the most northern group of islands in the Malayan or Eastern Archipelago. It LIES WHOLLY WITHIN THE TROPICS." (*New International Encyclopedia*, Vol. XVIII, p. 487).

The actual quotation from the *New International Encyclopedia* reads:

PHILIPPINE ISLANDS. An archipelago forming the most northern group of islands in the Malayan or Eastern Archipelago. It lies wholly within the tropics.

The preceding sentence, "Which country in the East is the first to be struck by the rays of the sun," although it is

given as part of the quotation from the Encyclopedia, is Manalo's own. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* after the exposure of this error formally denied that it was intentional. The misquotation was simply the result of a "slip" on the part of the type-setter!

That is a possible explanation, of course, but it is extremely suspect. The error occurs in the edition of 1940, and reappears uncorrected in the 1947 edition of *Ang Sulo*. Furthermore, the erroneous reading fits the context perfectly, whereas the corrected reading robs Mr. Manalo's statement, if not of its sense, certainly of all its force. It is true that he places stress upon the last sentence in the quotation, "It lies wholly within the tropics"; but the argument deduced from that fact is extremely obscure and would carry little weight with the ordinary reader of Manalo's book. It is quite difficult therefore to acquit Mr. Manalo of all guilt, and make the poor printer wholly responsible.

A third instance of what appears to be deliberate deception is Mr. Manalo's manipulation, for his own purposes, of a text in the sixth chapter of the Apocalypse. In order to obtain a general idea of the time when the angels described in Apocalypse 7/1-3 will appear, Mr. Manalo says we must first find out what the text is referring to when it states: "Pagkatapos nito" ("After this," or as the King James Version has it, "after these things").

The "things" referred to, so Mr. Manalo maintains, are the events of the sixth seal, or sixth period of time. These events are, according to Manalo:

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and lo, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became as black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken by a mighty wind. (Apoc. 6/12-13).

Mr. Manalo proposes a very clear, very precisely determined explanation of the phenomena here described. (See above page 32). He assigns to each a definite date and place of occurrence. But his explanation stops with verse the

thirteenth, although the inspired text, in detailing the events of the sixth seal, continues for four more verses.

... when she is shaken by a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places, And the kings of the earth and the great men, and the rich men and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne; and from the wrath of the Lamb; For the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall stand. (Apoc. 6/14-17).

The phenomena described in these last verses, particularly the "departure of the heavens as a scroll rolled-up," and the "moving of the mountains and the islands" obviously belong to the events of the sixth seal, and therefore to the "things" which Mr. Manalo set about so confidently to explain. Yet they are passed over in silence.

It is quite difficult to believe that having studied verses 12 and 13 so carefully, Mr. Manalo did not read on to the end of the chapter; or that having read verse 14, he did not advert to the fact that the phenomena therein described pertained to the same series of events, the date and place of which he was so accurately determining. One is prone to conclude that the encyclopedias and dictionaries, in which he found the dates of the blackened sun and falling stars, did not furnish him with any thing that would correspond with those particular details. Yet, if the interpretation he proposes is correct, the heavens should have departed as a scroll when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island should have been moved out of their places before *his* appearance as an angel in 1914!

¹ This figure, and the following statistics, are taken from the *Statistical Handbook of the Philippines*, 1952, published by the Bureau of Census and Statistics (Manila, Bureau of Printing, 1953), p. 14.

² *Encyclopedia of the Philippines*, Zoilo M. Galang, ed., 1936, Volume IX, article, "Manalo, Felix Ysagun," p. 392 f.; and Volume X, pp. 432-433.

³ Teodoro Locsin, "Felix Manalo—Or One Foot in Heaven," *The Philippines Free Press*, (Feb. 11, 1950) pp. 2-3.

⁴ The baptismal registry of the parish of Santa Ana, Taguig, from which this information was obtained, was damaged during the last war. Pages of it have been displaced or lost. What is left of it begins only with June of 1886. It was therefore impossible to verify Felix Manalo's baptism from the records. He was born on May 10, 1886 and baptized within five or six days after birth as was the custom at that time. Missing too were the entries of Baldomero and Catalina. But the registry furnishes complete data on the baptism of Praxedes Manalo Ysagun, and Emeterio, Tiburcio, Fausta and Simeon Manalo Mozo.

⁵ *Encyclopedia of the Philippines*, Vol. IX, p. 392 f.

⁶ Victor M. Nalus, *The Roman Catholic Church*, (Manila, Afan Publishing House, 1953), p. 16. The text of Rosita's letter can be found (in English) in the pamphlet *Angel ba o Haring Salomon, Si Felix Manalo*, by Lino D. Javier, on sale at Catholic Trade School.

⁷ Nalus, *op. cit.* p. 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*—a copy of this affidavit is inserted between pages 18-19.

⁹ *Encyclopedia of the Philippines*, Vol. X, pp. 433-434.

¹⁰ *Statistical Handbook*, cited above in Note 1.

¹¹ *The Philippines Free Press* (Feb. 11, 1950) pp. 2-3.

¹² The latter pamphlet, *Mga Katotohanan*, has been adequately answered by Juan C. Trinidad's *Iglesia ni Cristo*, a small booklet recently reprinted with an introduction by Rev. Gregorio de Guzman, S.J. The booklet is in Tagalog.

¹³ The term *wind* means war, according to Manalo, because it is used figuratively of war in Jeremiah. It is much more likely that the imagery in this section of the Apocalypse is borrowed from the prophet Zacharias, who says: "...behold four chariots came out of the midst of the two mountains...In the first chariot were red horses, and in the second chariot black horses, and in the third chariot white horses, and in the fourth chariot griseled horses. And I said to the angel that spoke in me, 'What are these my Lord?' And the angel answered 'These are the four *winds* of the heavens which go forth to stand before the Lord of all the earth.' " (Zach. 6/1-5).

The parallel is much more striking when we recall that in the sixth chapter of the Apocalypse, which immediately precedes the mention of the four winds, John depicted four horsemen, one on a white, one on a red, one on a black and one on a pale or dappled horse. The four winds, therefore, may and probably do represent not simply one particular war, as Manalo holds, but destructive forces in general, symbolized by the Four Horsemen. To restrict their meaning to one particular war is extremely arbitrary.

¹⁴ As the vision in the Apocalypse presents the picture, the "four angels" appear before the "other angel". Mr. Manalo's identification of the angels does not correspond with this order of appearance. Manalo, the "other angel", began his preaching and had his church established in 1914; whereas of his "four angels" three, Orlando, Clemenceau, and Lloyd George only became premiers of their respective countries in 1916 or after.

Manalo insists that the "four angels" are to be understood symbolically, but "east" literally. Why, he does not say. It would be much more in accord with the usage of the Apocalypse to see in these four angels,

real angels in charge of the winds. It was a common Hebrew concept accepted even today by many Christians, that the various forces of nature have been put in the custody of angels. Thus for example there is an angel in charge of fire (Apoc. 14/18) and one in charge of the waters (Apoc. 16/5). This is as good a reason for understanding the "four angels" literally, as Manalo can propose for taking them in a symbolic sense.

¹⁵ Attention was called to this error in Reverend Francisco Aven-
daño's mimeographed leaflet *Ang Palsipikador*, and in an article in *The Sentinel*, October 4, 1952.

¹⁶ For Charles Taze Russell, the founder of Jehovah's Witnesses, the year 1914 was to be a year full of momentous consequences. Some years before that date he wrote: "We consider it an established truth, that the final end of the kingdoms of this world and the full establishment of the Kingdom of God will be accomplished at the close of A.D. 1914"; and again, "With the end of A.D. 1914 what God calls Babylon, and what men call Christendom will have passed away, as already shown from prophecy." (As quoted by Rev. H. Thurston, S.J., in his pamphlet *Jehovah's Witnesses*, London, Catholic Truth Society.)

¹⁷ Felix Manalo, *Ang Sulo sa Ikatitiyak sa Iglesia Katolika Apostolika Romana*, Quezon City, 1940, p. 100.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 99.

¹⁹ The following is an example of Mr. Manalo's style of argumentation: "The name of the church founded by Christ is one of its important characteristics; and its name is 'Church of Christ' (Iglesia ni Cristo); this was proclaimed and taught by the Apostles (Acts 20/28; 2/36; Romans 16/16). The Apostles and first Christians belonged to the Church of Christ. (I Cor. 12/28; Acts 7/59—8/2; Romans 16/16). The name 'Catholic Apostolic Roman Church' was not even known to the Apostles or first Christians. They neither preached nor taught that name, nor can it be found anywhere in the New Testament. The Apostles and first Christians knew nothing either of the names 'Methodist,' 'United,' 'Presbyterian,' or 'Iemelif,' or of other churches founded by men... The church which the Apostles made known, taught and preached is the Church of Christ. That is the name of the true church, and that is one of its characteristics." (*Ang Sulo*, pp. 4-5).

As a point of interest—the argument is hardly worth serious consideration—it may be noted that the name *Church of Christ* in that precise form is nowhere to be found in the texts cited by Manalo. The closest he can come to it is in Romans 16/16 referred to twice in the short excerpt given above. That text reads: "The churches of Christ salute you."

The first text he adduces, Acts 20/28, reads in the King James Version, as follows: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers to feed the *Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood.*" Undoubtedly this is one case where Manalo would find the King James Version unacceptable. It asserts much too clearly the divinity of Christ. Yet it is the reading found in the better Greek manuscripts. Two other variant readings occur: *Church of the Lord* and *Church of The Lord and God*. But none of these forms offers much basis for Manalo's insistence on the name "Church of Christ."