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THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD IN THE PHILIPPINES

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A Thesis

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by

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and five of his children are in the ministry.

Rodrigo C. Esperanza

Rodrigo C. Esperanza turned "heretic" when he began attending the Methodist church in his hometown. He became quite active in the young people's activities of the local church. After high school he received an exhorter's license and a scholarship offer to attend seminary. Turning from these to his youthful ambitions, America and education, he left for Seattle, Washington in 1928 to seek his fortune in the "Promised Land of Equal Opportunity," the United States. God intervened to accomplish His will for him. He testified:

I was caught in the depression, and began to drift along with my own kind in Chinatown. My religious background was not enough to keep me, and I found myself in a life of sin. When filled with sorrow, discouraged and sick, someone invited me to attend a Full Gospel Mission. The second night the Holy Spirit's terrific conviction was upon me so that after the sermon, I rushed to the altar, and as soon as my knees hit the floor, I knew I was born again.

Inner conflicts ensued. The choice was between studying chemistry or preparing for the ministry. He had promised his father he would go back to his country a self-made man with an addendum to his name. At a Sunday morning service he made a definite decision. As he sang with the congregation, he made his consecration in the words of the song:

Though the way seems straight and narrow  
All I claim was swept away.  
My ambitions, plans and wishes  
At my feet in ashes lay.

God gave him a love and burden for his own people in Seattle. With the encouragement of some Christian friends, he opened a Mission

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<sup>1</sup>"Presenting Rudy C. Esperanza, General Superintendent,"  
The Pentecostal Voice, Sept., 1956.

Hall where many of the Filipinos found Christ. He also helped maintain a Christian home for Filipinos where they could live away from the sinful influence of the bad section of the city.

While a student at Northwest Bible College, Esperanza was one time the president of the Islands of the Sea Missionary Prayer Band. He began contacting Pentecostal preachers in the Philippines like Pedro Z. Collado, Pedro Castro, Benito Acena, and Emil Bernaldes. Their letters gave him fragmentary information that they were working independently of one another.

The Filipino Full Gospel under his supervision was helped by several Pentecostal groups. He did not know with what group he would affiliate. On New Year's Day 1938, the Spirit of the God spoke to him and said, "If you will be faithful to Me, I will make you someday a delegate to an international convention of the Assemblies of God at Springfield, Missouri." This he kept to himself and he took it as an indication of God's will for him to join the Assemblies of God.<sup>1</sup> After graduation in June 1938 he visited some Filipino Brethren in California and told them that he was going back to the Philippines to start a work in the name of the Assemblies of God. He learned that many of the Filipino Pentecostals in California had joined either the Filipino Assemblies of the Firstborn, the Foursquare, or the Church of God. Very few remained with the Assemblies of God. Some were uncommitted. One of the most pronounced Assemblies of God Filipino preachers then was Esteban Lagmay. Esperanza and

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<sup>1</sup>In April 1964 Rodrigo C. Esperanza was the Philippine delegate to the 50th Anniversary of the Assemblies of God in Springfield, Missouri where other foreign delegates participated. He wrote: "You can't possibly imagine the joy and amazement I had at the fulfillment of God's word which He had promised to me twenty-five years ago. I shook under the impact of the truth of God's word."

Lagmay agreed to organize an Assemblies of God group. They contacted those who had leanings to the Assemblies of God, and the uncommitted. Then they went to see the officers of the Northern California and Nevada District and the Rev. Narver Gortner and requested that they exert their influence on the Headquarters in Springfield, Missouri to send a missionary to the Philippines as requested by those already there. They were told that Springfield had a plan to send the Reverend Leland E. Johnson, a missionary formerly laboring in South China. Esperanza and Lagmay went to Oakland to meet Leland Johnson. R. C. Esperanza arrived in Manila on May 9, 1939. He had a "Welcome Home" in Rosario, Pozorrubio, Pangasinan. Preparations for a wedding feast were being made in his father's house. The hundreds who attended the wedding dance and feast were his first congregation when he was asked to address the crowd that evening. Most of the people knew him as the "Protestante" of the Esperanza family. Opposition later came from his family. He was asked to buy indulgences and spread a feast as a memorial service for his deceased mother, sister, and brother. He refused and took his stand, spending hours praying and interceding for souls. He faithfully preached every Sunday to a group in the old family house. In the evenings he preached in the open air in four outstations. Seven months later, the many converts built a church and dedicated it on December 30, 1939. During those months he also had been contacting the Filipino Pentecostal preachers telling them of a plan to organize the Assemblies of God in the Philippines, and that a missionary couple were coming to help them.

#### Philippine Assemblies of God Organized

Filipinos who graduated from Assemblies of God Bible Schools in the United States and had gone back to their country to preach to their