

## Introduction

If a survey was conducted among Filipinos in the Philippines and even among the ten million Overseas Filipino Workers dispersed around the world, perhaps none or only a few would agree that there were Christians in this land before Magellan and Legaspi secured footing in Homonhon, Masaua, Cebu and Manila. And if another question were asked about the mission works of Nestorian Christianity and Gnostic Manichaeism in these parts, perhaps only those who studied Church history will recognize these two Christian sects. However, these were the most widespread religions in Asia beginning the fourth until the fifteenth century, competing with other Asian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Islam. Both Nestorians and Manicheans were followers of the gospel of Christ, but both opposed the catechism of ancient Catholicism.

The Nestorians were originally devotees of the Catholic Church in the Middle East, but they were excommunicated in the latter part of the fifth century and condemned by the emperors of the Roman Empire. Persecution forced them out of Rome and into Persia, now modern-day Iran. But during the rise of Mohammad's Islamic religion, they were again dispersed and went as far as India, Uighur, Mongolia, China, Japan, and Korea, Southeast Asia and the Pacific region, including Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

Another large sect of Christians called Manicheans actively spread their doctrines in this part of the world as early as the fourth century. This group was also condemned by the western church because of their Gnostic belief in magic, astrology, and secret knowledge (*gnosis*), combining Christianity with Zoroastrianism, Judaism (Kabbalism) and Buddhism. These wandering Gnostics traveled around India, Central Asia, Mongolia, China, and Southeast Asia, spreading their 'dangerous doctrines' in the same period. The Nestorians and Manicheans not only spread their mission works in India, Central Asia and China, but also moved actively around the islands of South East Asia from the seventh to the tenth centuries.

Because of the scarcity of ancient genuine literature containing details about Philippine history, it is hard to establish the exact locations, names, practices, rituals, liturgy, doctrines and the like of the religious groups who were in this land when Magellan and the rest of the conquistadores arrived in the archipelago. Meanwhile, Spanish historians categorized the people into either Moors (Muslim) or pagans.

I believe that among these so-called pagans, were heretic Christians.

The first five chapters of this book will bring you to the pre-Spanish era, from the early Christian period to the mission works of the Orthodox Nestorians and Gnostic Manichaeans. The next six chapters will take you to the Spanish era, from Magellan's 'discovery of the Philippines' to colonial Christianity. And the next three chapters will take you to the time of American Protestantism up to the present Evangelicalism. This sequence follows the progression of Christian revelation and God's ultimate goal in this land – that is, Orthodoxy and Gnosticism (pre-Spanish era), Catholicism (Spanish era), Protestantism (American era), and Biblical Christianity (present era). The last chapter is an affirmation of the Philippines' calling as 'one Christian nation in Asia' that will bring the gospel of salvation to the whole world. The ten million Filipinos dispersed worldwide is a sign of God's triumph in these last days in sending His witnesses to bring light across Asia and the Pacific.

In writing this book, I do not attempt to bridge some gaps in our history, nor do I unveil the mysteries of the concealed past. This book came about in the course of my study of early Christian missionary works in the East at the University of Holy Land in Jerusalem, Israel. The book is an expansion of my thesis about the mission work of the Nestorian Church and the School of Nisibis in Edessa, Mesopotamia from the fourth to seventh century *AD*. It begins with the investigation of the extent of the missionary works of the Nestorian Church, the so called 'first protestant church' in the east, to the analysis of Gnosticism during the first two hundred years of Christianity, the Patristic period.

This book is not another book in Philippine history, though written in the context of the history of the Philippines. Rather, it presents a study of the sovereign works of God within the history of this country from the time of her inclusion to the world map, to the time of her people's dispersion to many parts of the world. The focus of the book is theological rather than political: history in the eyes of a missionary rather than history in the eyes of a scholar; Christian mission rather than economic advantage; the sovereign work of God rather than the people's sovereignty; and liberation from sin rather than liberation from the colonizers. While the book of *Kings* in the Bible focuses more on the rise and triumph of the Davidic kingdom, which is political; the books of *Chronicles* focuses more on the priestly calling of the kingdom of Judah, the spiritual aspect. In this light, I am also interested in presenting the godly heritage of the country's glorious past, this nation whose founder is God.

This book also hopes to inspire this country's political and spiritual leaders who were called by God to shape and determine what is at stake for both the people and the land. The inhabitants of the so called "Christian nation in Asia," must know the purpose of the

country's existence. It is God who ordained such purpose, and it is vital for every Filipino to find out such purpose.

Hindu-Buddhism was never a dominant religion in this land in spite of Indian influences in pre-Spanish times. Confucianism was rejected wholly by the natives even though Chinese trade and cultural exchange flourished in the last one thousand years. Islam had many adherents in Luzon and Mindanao but it never became the leading religion in the entire archipelago. Unlike their Asian neighbors who opened their arms to Hindu-Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam, the natives in this land stubbornly rejected the appeal of these religions. Instead, ancient Filipinos embraced Christianity, no matter what sect it was – Heretic, Gnostic, Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, or Pentecostal. For this reason, I say that this land, from its early stage of history and up to now, is indeed a land of Christ's adherents, a Christian nation.

Christians around the world believe that we are now living in the last days. It is wise for us to take a close look at our past to understand the critical role of the Filipinos in the last days' of Biblical prophecies – '...this distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations' (Isaiah 66:19). \*

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