

## AMERICAN PROTESTANT MISSIONS IN MINDANAO (1898-1946)

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### Introduction

Although Protestantism came to Southeast Asia as early as 1605 with the first Dutch conquests in what is now Indonesia, the Philippines (along with what was then French Indo-China) remained closed to Protestant missions for nearly three more centuries. It might have been different if the Dutch had succeeded in ousting the Spaniards from the Philippines during the former's most determined efforts to do so in the first half of the seventeenth century. But Spanish might proved more formidable to the Dutch than did the waning power of the Portuguese, who in time were to lose the greater portion of their Asiatic sphere of influence. Thus, Spain's exclusive sway over the Philippines for more than three hundred years enabled her to maintain in these islands her policy of Catholic unity. The British did manage to occupy Manila in 1762-1764, but this event took place at a time when commercial interests were becoming far more important to the British East India Company than the task of "converting the heathen." Thus, partly on this account and partly for the extreme brevity of that British occupation, this contrapuntal episode in Philippine history produced no opening for Protestantism in this Spanish colony in the Far East.

Curiously enough, however, Protestant interest in the Philippines in the nineteenth century was in large measure an offshoot of the "Spanish work" of British evangelical societies in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars and the advent of liberal ideas and constitutionalism in Spain. As the process of liberalization gradually grew in Spain in the course of the nineteenth century, so did the opportunities for Protestant propaganda. The Spanish liberal revolution of 1868 introduced religious liberty the following year (though this was reduced to mere religious toleration in 1876). As a result, no less than 23 different Protestant societies, mostly from Great Britain and continental Europe though also including a few from the United States, established missions in Spain. Their combined endeavors resulted in a few thousand converts, most of whom were gathered in two churches: the presbyterian-type *Iglesia Española Cristiana* and the *Iglesia Reformada (Episcopal)*.<sup>1</sup>

From time to time since 1828, the American Bible Society (or its subsidiaries) and the British and Foreign Bible Society attempted to circulate Spanish Scriptures in the Philippines.<sup>2</sup> In 1855 the so-called "Spanish Evangelisation Society," an interdenominational, international mission based in Edinburgh, Scotland, also expressed the hope that after Spain shall have been evangelized, missionaries might be sent from there to Cuba and the Philippines.<sup>3</sup> But while Protestant propagandists had been able to work more or less openly in Spain since 1836, at times with little or no impediment offered by the government authorities, the situation in the Philippines was far from congenial to such heterodox activities. For this Spanish colony was a haven for Carlists (partisans of the pretender Don Carlos), especially among the clergy, who were fierce opponents of those liberal government ministries which had despoiled the Church in Spain on a number of occasions, but especially during the period 1833-1843. Up to the last ten years of Spanish rule, all Protestant attempts to gain a foothold in the Philippines came to nought. In 1889 two Spanish Protestants, promised assistance by Marcelo H. del Pilar, came to Manila. They had hoped to circulate a thousand Pangasinan Scripture portions printed in Madrid by the British and Foreign Bible Society, to open a local Bible depot for that society, and to secure thousands of signatures to a projected petition to extend to the Philippines the benefits of religious toleration existing in the mother country. This mission, however, ended in dismal failure due to the untimely death of one of these Protestant emissaries and the arrest and subsequent deportation of the other.<sup>4</sup> Another attempt was made about 1892 by two missionaries of the London Missionary Society, but this was summarily thwarted by their expulsion shortly after their arrival in Manila.

As the rivalry among European powers for spheres of influence in Asian waters intensified in the 1890's, some Protestant leaders expected the eventual opening of the Philippines through British or German auspices. Thus, most of them were quite surprised when it was the United States, joining as a latecomer in the Europeans' game of expansionist politics, which did so in 1898. Business interests and the peculiar persuasion of such men as George Dewey and Theodore Roosevelt plunged the United States into a commitment from which she could extricate herself only in 1946. Thus took place the Battle of Manila Bay on May 1, 1898, equalled in its one-sidedness as an American victory

perhaps only by the Japanese destruction of Russia's Asiatic Fleet at Tsushima Strait seven years later. That Manila Bay episode decided the future political course of the Philippines, and as a corollary result, also finally opened the way for Protestant missions into this country.

### The Arrival of Protestant Missions

Many evangelical Protestants in the United States though they saw the hand of God behind Dewey's astounding victory at Manila Bay, and almost immediately took preparations to send missions to the Philippines. But the first American Protestant workers to arrive were actually the various chaplains and Army-Navy YMCA secretaries, who came either with the American Asiatic Squadron or with the volunteer troop regiments who subsequently followed. These chaplains worked primarily among American troops, but by the beginning of 1899 their evangelistic services had begun to attract some Filipinos. That very same year, the first regularly appointed Protestant missionaries began to arrive, led by the Presbyterians. Then followed the Methodists and Baptists in 1900; the United Brethren, the Episcopalians, and the Disciples in 1901; and the Congregationalists (sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) in 1902. The Christian and Missionary Alliance, although it had a missionary representative in the Philippines as early as 1900, actually established its mission only in 1905, about the same time that the Seventh-Day Adventists made their first preliminary visits to this country.

The denominational background of those Protestant missions which established their work in Mindanao was largely determined by the gentleman's agreement forged by the *Evangelical Union of the Philippine Islands*, an interdenominational body founded in 1901 by those Protestant missionaries who by then had arrived in the country. Protestant work in the Philippines began in a warm spirit of comity and cooperation. As early as July, 1898, several mission boards in the United States had met in New York to decide how best to begin work in the Philippines. It was agreed that in the interest of unity, comity, and cooperation—a spirit which was then fast gaining ground among Protestant missionary societies—measures should be taken to effect fraternal harmony and avoid unseemly rivalry and needless duplication of effort and resources. Thus, in 1900 there was established at Manila a "Missionary Alliance" of individual missionaries. It was this body which

served as the direct precursor of the Evangelical Union of 1901.

There were two far-reaching actions taken by the Evangelical Union. One was the agreement that all mission churches should adopt the common name of *La Iglesia Evangelica de las Islas Filipinas* ("The Evangelical Church of the Philippine Islands"), irrespective of the mission bodies instrumental in their formation. This was to facilitate the eventual formation, so it was hoped, of only one Protestant Church in the islands. The other action was the division of the Philippines into separate geographical areas of missionary responsibility, generally following linguistic lines. Thus, the Protestants followed the same course that King Philip II, of Spain, had taken in 1594 in apportioning the same territory among the various Catholic orders at that time. The first territories divided by the Protestants among themselves were Luzon and the Visayas. Arrivals after 1901 were generally assigned to Mindanao.

For divergent theological reasons, the Episcopalians and the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA) would not join the Evangelical Union. But they did adhere strictly to the terms of the territorial division as faithfully as if they had been full signatories to it. It should be noted that the Episcopalians, under their great-hearted missionary bishop, Charles Henry Brent, a pioneer of ecumenical ideas in the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910, did not agree with the proselytizing program of the evangelical Protestants. True to the Anglican claim of being a *via media* between Catholicism and Protestantism, Bishop Brent considered the Catholic Church as a sister-communion and strictly limited his Church's program to chaplaincy among foreigners of Episcopalian affiliation and missionary work only among non-Christian Chinese, Igorots and other animists, and Muslims in Zamboanga and Sulu.

In contrast, the evangelical Protestants who had for years waited for the opening of the Philippines, thought it proper to work among Catholics and Aglipayans. Imbued with a deep sense of a God-given duty to extend to the nominal Christians among the Filipinos the legacy of the sixteenth-century Reformation faith, they understood their specific task as the proclamation of a "pure Gospel" and a "vital Christian faith." As heirs to the Protestant Reformation, they presented a bias for a strongly Christ-centered faith. Deeply influenced by the nineteenth-century American revivalist tradition, they stressed the need

for repentance, an individual experience of religious conversion, and the necessity for a regenerated and committed Christian life. By and large, they eschewed as much as possible any controversy with Catholics or Aglipayans, which they felt was bound to result only in pointless un-Christian strife. The head of the Philippine Presbyterian Mission reflected the general stance of the mainline Protestants when he said:

Our purpose in preaching to the people of the Philippine Islands is the same purpose we have in preaching to the people of any country,—to win men to faith and fidelity to Jesus Christ, to help them to have a faith that is in accord with both human and divine wisdom. Our message is positive, not negative. It is to help Christians of all classes to become better Christians.<sup>5</sup>

It was their firm conviction that God had summoned them to the Philippines for the above purpose and that, in faith, they were simply obeying this call.

On the other hand, influenced also by the "Social Gospel" movement of nineteenth-century America, the Protestant missionaries were also motivated by a faith-inspired desire to meet human need on a personal and societal level. They saw the Church's role as a catalyst for change in human society, as would later be succinctly expressed by a Disciples missionary when he affirmed that Protestantism

opened hospitals and schools, engaged in social services and preached that 'salvation is free' . . . Protestantism said, 'The church must meet all human needs or see to it that they are met.' If there were not educational facilities in a community, the church either prodded the government until it furnished them, or tried to provide them itself. The same principle applied to health and sanitation, play and recreation, social and economic improvement, and all other factors necessary to enable an individual to earn a livelihood and build a life.<sup>6</sup>

As this paper will subsequently attempt to show, the above quotations reflect in general the main objectives for which the American Protestant missionaries came to Mindanao, or to the Philippines as a whole, for that matter.

### **The Protestant Missions Assigned to Mindanao**

Initially, there were three American Protestant missions in Mindanao. There were the **missions of the Congregationalists** (of the American

Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions), the Episcopalians (the Domestic and Foreign Mission Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A.), and the Christian and Missionary Alliance. To these was added in 1925 that of the Bethel Mission by an independent Baptist group.

The American Board has now been renamed the United Church Board for World Ministries, and Congregational Church, after two mergers in 1931 and 1957, is now part of the United Church of Christ in the U.S.A. The former American Board mission churches in Mindanao formed part of the United Evangelical Church in the Philippines of 1929 and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines in 1948. On the other hand, the Protestant Episcopal Church is now simply called The Episcopal Church in the U.S.A., and its local counterpart is the Philippine Episcopal Church (which in 1961 forged a concordat of full communion with Aglipayans).

At this point, a few words might be in order about the distinctive characteristics of those Churches with missions in Mindanao.

Congregationalism arose out of the radical wing of the Puritan Movement during the English Reformation—a movement which sought to purify the English Church which it did not regard to have been sufficiently reformed. Holding on to the doctrinal positions of mainstream Protestantism, Congregationalism affirms the trinitarian position, the authority of the Scriptures for faith and practice, and the promotion of justice, peace, and human brotherhood. Congregationalism is distinctive, however, in its stress on “the freedom and responsibility of the individual soul and the right of private judgment,” “the autonomy of the local church and its independence of all ecclesiastical control,” hence, the designation “congregational.” Yet it cherishes the “fellowship of the churches . . . for counsel and cooperation in matters of common concern.” Moreover, while Congregationalists affirm the liberty of their churches and the validity of their ministry, they also “hold to the unity and catholicity of the Church of Christ, and will unite with all its branches in hearty cooperation, and will earnestly see, so far as in us lies, that the prayer of our Lord for His disciples may be answered that they all may be one.”<sup>7</sup> The history of Congregationalism, both in the United States and in the Philippines, gives ample testimonies to this desire and readiness for Christian unity.

On the other hand, both the CMA and the Bethel Mission Baptists

belong to the conservative wing of Protestantism. In theology, the CMA is generally conservative evangelical, stressing the inerrancy of the Scriptures, and Jesus Christ as savior, sanctifier, healer, and coming Lord. The life of its members is characterized by "a strong quest for personal holiness and a deep devotion to the cause of Christ."<sup>8</sup> Strictly speaking, the CMA began, in the late nineteenth century, not as a new church, but simply as an evangelistic and missionary movement, seeking to draw into itself whatever Protestant congregations and individuals may be in accord with its objectives. But as in other movements of similar original objectives, the CMA has now taken on the characteristics of a separate denomination.

The Baptists of the Bethel Mission were also theologically distinguished by the main characteristics of the more conservative among the Baptist Churches. In general, they would have found themselves largely in agreement with the Christian and Missionary Alliance. They held to the inerrancy of the Bible and to its literal application in all matters of life. They rejected infant baptism as being unscriptural, and strongly insisted on the separation of church and state and on the complete independence of their churches. Like the Congregationalists, however, they also cherish the fellowship of other but like-minded Churches.

In contrast to these three, the Episcopalians stood on very much different grounds. Holding on to the main heritage of the English Reformation, the Episcopal Church affirms the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds, and accepts as a general statement of doctrine the articles of faith of the Church of England (rejecting only one article, and slightly modifying three others). They hold the Scriptures to be the Word of God, containing "all things necessary to salvation." They profess "loyalty to the doctrine, discipline and worship of the one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, in all the essentials, but allow great liberty in non-essentials." Inclusive in outlook, they also allow for variation and individuality, independent thinking and freedom of religious thought. With an amazing capacity for "catholicity," the Episcopal Church also has room for both liberals and conservatives; for both modernists and fundamentalists; and for both "high churchmen," who cherish elaborate ritual and ceremony, and "low churchmen," who prefer less involved ritual and more evangelical emphases.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that Brent, the first Episcopal missionary bishop for the Philippines, was a "high churchman" was to determine the entire

history and character of the Episcopal mission in the Philippines. The fact that in the more recent past they have dropped the term "Protestant" from their original name of "Protestant Episcopal Church" is indicative of their present self-understanding.

For the purpose of better understanding what the American Protestant missions did in Mindanao, the period covered in this paper will be divided into three phases—from 1900 to 1916, from 1916 to 1935, and from 1935 onwards. This may be an arbitrary division, with the establishment of the Philippine Commonwealth. But it can be argued that each phase shows a discernible shift in emphasis in the work of the various missions. For it is also to be remembered that the Protestant missionaries were an integral part of the total American presence in the Philippines, and despite the remarkable independence of thought that some of them exhibited, nevertheless their perceptions and consequently their labors cannot be entirely divorced from the main characteristics of that American presence.

Indeed, with the possible exception of Bishop Brent (who in 1904 expressed fear on behalf of the tribal groups in Mindanao, "if, or when, they come under the influence of 'civilization'"),<sup>10</sup> the first Protestant missionaries in Mindanao generally applauded the American government's attempt to introduce the "blessings" of Christian (Western) civilization. Save for one notable exception, all missionaries generally enjoyed the most cordial relationships with American military and civil officials. There were not a few instances where the latter gave them encouragement and assistance in their mission work. In fact, the American Board missionaries of 1910 felt that their task in Mindanao was to take their share "along with other American Christians in ministering to the spiritual needs of this only part of the world for which the United States has become colonially responsible." They were also of the opinion that the U.S. government, in introducing schools and a new measure of justice in the courts and in maintaining peace and order, "is carrying on a work . . . that is distinctly and extensively auxiliary to the missionary undertaking."<sup>11</sup>

### **The First Phase of Missionary Work (1900-1916)**

*Christian and Missionary Alliance.* The first American Protestant missionary to engage in evangelistic activity in Mindanao was apparently the Rev. Jonathan A. McKee, a discharged soldier who first came to

the Philippines in 1898 as a hospital corps man. Though he was partly engaged as a colporteur of the American Bible Society, his primary appointment was as a volunteer missionary of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. In this latter capacity, he preached in 1900 and again two years later in Sulu and in Zamboanga.<sup>12</sup> This was a violation of the Bates Agreement of 1899 which limited the movement of Americans in Islamic areas, and not surprisingly it led to conflict between McKee and the American military authorities. No immediate Protestant advantage was gained from this zealous preaching of the Gospel, though when the above treaty was abrogated in 1904, McKee's activities had the signal result of drawing to the evangelistic possibilities of southwestern Mindanao the serious attention of the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

McKee was subsequently forced to leave the Zamboanga-Sulu area and to move to northern Mindanao, where for a time he labored at Cagayan and then at Iligan. With the help of another ex-soldier and apparently with the encouragement of the local army chaplain, the Rev. C.E. Bateman, McKee set up a mission in Iligan in 1903. For a time, he conducted an industrial arts class and began translating St. John's Gospel into Cebuano, while supporting himself through vegetable gardening and various timber contracts for U.S. government projects. McKee was thus engaged in what some religious circles would admiringly refer to as a "tent-making ministry." When the first Congregational missionary visited Cagayan that same year, he found a good number of individuals converted through McKee's efforts who were meeting in a house-church and "searching the Scriptures daily."<sup>13</sup>

*The Peniel Mission.* Perhaps through the influence of McKee's earlier work, two missionaries of the so-called "Peniel Mission," a faith-mission supported by holiness groups in the United States, came to Zamboanga early in 1903. These were the Swede, David O. Lund, and a half-Apache Indian named E.S. Lommasson, an ex-soldier who had initially become acquainted with the Subanons at Margosatubig while serving in the U.S. Army. Lund and Lommasson started their work by selling a considerable quantity of Bibles in Zamboanga town and nearby Tetuan. Both fluent in Spanish, they soon made a favorable impression on the local *chabacano*-speaking population. By April, 1903, they had a congregation in Zamboanga of some 40 Americans (half of these soldiers) and about 20 Filipinos. One of their earliest converts was a school

teacher at Isabela, Basilan named Cecilio Guerrero, an Ilocano from Vigan.<sup>14</sup>

Before very long, Lund and Lommasson had also begun to make friends among the local Muslims. The latter listened to them, for as one *pandita* reportedly put it, Lund was not a "Christian" (as he made no use of images and held services only in a simple chapel) but an "American." As a result, a number of *panditas* asked Lund to teach them about the Bible. On the other hand, Lommasson presently settled down at Margosatubig and tried to help raise the economic condition of the local people by setting up a cooperative. Years later he sold his interests in the business and with his wife devoted himself to full missionary service among the Subanons. Through contact with McKee, Lund and Lommasson were soon drawn into the service of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. As a result of Lund's flying visit to the United States in 1905 to confer with the Rev. Dr. A.B. Simpson, the founder and first leader of the Alliance, the latter adopted the work of the "Peniel men" that same year.<sup>15</sup>

*The American Board Mission.* When the first American Board missionary came in 1902, the Evangelical Union, in the interest of efficiency and economy, suggested to him to concentrate his labors in Mindanao. The man, the Rev. Robert F. Black, spent the next twelve months surveying the coastal areas of the island. Travel was immensely difficult in the absence of a convenient inter-island transportation system. Thus, to go from Iligan to Surigao, Black had to take a round-about route to Zamboanga, then to Iloilo, and then on to Leyte, before he could proceed to Surigao. To go from Surigao to Oroquieta, Black subsequently had to take an Army transport to Cagayan, then to Dumaguete, and then back to Cebu before he could take passage on a commercial steamer to Oroquieta.<sup>16</sup>

Black came to know various towns like Zamboanga, Oroquieta, Iligan, Cagayan and Surigao, which offered auspicious opportunities for the start of a mission, but in the end he decided that "Davao is the neediest and the most inviting field on Mindanao."<sup>17</sup> When Black's fiancée arrived in Manila late in 1903, they were married on the same boat on which she had come, the officiating minister being the head of the Philippine Presbyterian Mission, the Rev. Dr. James B. Rodgers. The newly-weds then settled at Davao, and before long began to lay the foundations for the American Board Mission in Mindanao.

In the first dozen years, the American Board missionaries confined their labors to the Davao Gulf area. Aside from the main station at Davao town, the Blacks also maintained two out-stations in the interior among the Bagobos, and two others along the coast. The introduction of the American public school system served to assist the mission by providing English as a medium of communication. The principal teacher at Davao, a graduate of Yale, also supported the Blacks' missionary efforts. As in other places in the Philippines, the educated and professional class was the first to respond favorably to the American presence, and at the out-station of Santa Cruz, it was the town *presidente*, Don Angel Brioso, who until his death in 1909 served as Black's sermon translator. It was also this same man who in 1906 donated a lot for the mission property at Santa Cruz.

Yet for various reasons, the evangelistic progress of the American Board mission seemed excruciatingly slow. For many years, the average Sunday attendance in any preaching station did not exceed seventy at any one time.<sup>18</sup> Although the American Board had hoped to send a new missionary as early as 1903, that Board was hard pressed for funds and personnel by its twenty other missions elsewhere. Thus, as late as 1906 Black was constantly embarrassed by anxious queries from the Presbyterians in the Visayas, whose own converts who had moved to Mindanao were pressing them to come over, as to when more Congregational missionaries would arrive to occupy the rest of the island.

A tour of northern Mindanao in 1907, conducted by Black and two young Filipino evangelists loaned by the Presbyterian Mission, convinced Black that the time was ripe for an extension of evangelistic activity into those northern coasts. In the three largest towns—namely, Oroquieta, with a population of over 17,000; and Cagayan and Surigao, each with about 9,000—they found up to 200 or 300 people well disposed to the coming of Protestant missionaries. Their visits to Dapitan, Jimenez, Misamis and Iligan likewise confirmed the same impression. These were areas where the Aglipayan schism had made some significant impact, especially in Oroquieta, Jimenez and Misamis. Although Black's party got the impression that the Catholic Church was winning back many of the schismatics, still the general population showed great interest in the Scriptures and bought Bibles and accepted literature "like hungry children." In this tour, Black and his companions sold a total of 1,185 copies of the Gospels, all of which were in Cebuano

except for 50 in Spanish and another fifty in English.<sup>19</sup> Since the thirst for the Scriptures was generally regarded as a favorable sign for Protestantism, the opinion quickly gained ground that now was the time to begin "a great revival" along the northern Mindanao coast.

The coming in 1908 of an English-born medical missionary, Dr. Charles T. Sibley, M.D., and his bride brought new life and vigor to the Davao mission. Upon his arrival, Dr. Sibley received a government appointment as chief health officer for Davao province, which had the signal result of helping to open people's eyes to the good work and intentions of the mission. Medical work had been a traditional aspect of Protestant missions since the nineteenth century, taking a position of major importance alongside the evangelistic and the educational. In 1911 Dr. Sibley founded the *Davao Mission Hospital*, one of the first hospitals in Mindanao. A missionary nurse Miss Mary R. Matthewson, who came not long thereafter, offered invaluable assistance, taking over during Dr. Sibley's many visits to the mission schools that Black had established along the coast of Davao Gulf. "It seems clearer than ever," said Dr. Sibley in 1912, "that the hospital and schools represent the best way really to reach these people."<sup>20</sup> In 1913 Dr. Sibley himself opened a new grammar school among the Mandayas, though its care after his departure in 1915 was left in the hands of other missionaries.

Under the new medical missionaries, Dr. and Mrs. Lucius W. Case, M.D. and nurse Miss Jane T. Taylor, the Davao Mission Hospital prospered far beyond original expectations. By 1917 it had become practically self-supporting, with a daily average of over 22 in-patients and 18 dispensary cases. The following year, it was described as "the best institutional work yet developed" by the American Board in Mindanao.<sup>21</sup>

*The Episcopalian Mission.* The Episcopalian work, centered in Zamboanga, began late in 1904 through the zeal of a layman, Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Davis, who gathered a small congregation of 22 Americans for Morning Prayer in the sala of his home. As a result of his endeavors, a small wooden church was built in 1905, this being dedicated to the Holy Trinity by Bishop Brent himself. A clergyman, the Rev. Irving Spencer, was shortly appointed as chaplain, and that little church soon served as the focal point of Episcopal work in Mindanao. Among the first regular worshippers in that church were Major-General Leonard Wood, the first governor in 1903-1906 of the "Moro Province," and his successor, Brigadier-General Tasker H. Bliss. It was also in that same

church that the third and last Moro Province governor, Brigadier-General John J. Pershing (1909-1913) was baptized and later confirmed by Bishop Brent.<sup>22</sup>

As noted earlier, Bishop Brent did not think it right to proselytize Roman Catholics, and thus resolved to limit his Church's evangelistic work among non-Christians. From among the Episcopalian members in Zamboanga, Brent founded a "Moro Committee," and with their help started in 1912 a mission under the direction of the Rev. Robert T. McCutcheon in the barrop pf Lawa-kawa. This barrio was intended as a settlement for converted Moros. Unfortunately, this hope quickly faded. It was soon realized that the Moros, who had successfully resisted Christianization under the Spaniards for over three centuries, were not now going to give up easily their Islamic faith, simply because evangelization was now under another Christian denomination protected by a new flag. More successful by far was the work of the Episcopal Mission clinic (later Brent Hospital) first established in 1913, and that of the school at Kawa-kawa, of which more will be said later.

### The Second Phase (1916-1935)

The second phase in American Protestant missions in Mindanao covered the years between 1916 and 1935. The enactment of the Jones Law in 1916 formally and officially bound the U.S. government to grant the Philippines political independence as soon as a stable government was established. In Protestant mission affairs, the question of church independence from mission board control had been an issue for years. The schism of the *Iglesia Evangelica Metodista en las Islas Filipinas* (IEMELIF) from the parent Methodist body in 1909 was an indication of how deeply felt and sensitive was the issue of nationalism in the churches. In 1914 the Presbyterian Board wisely allowed its mission churches to organize themselves as The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of the Philippine Islands, completely separate from the mother United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. But the leadership was still in missionary hands, and defections continued to plague both Presbyterian and Methodist ranks.

From 1916 there was a discernible shift in emphasis in the pursuit of Protestant mission objectives in Mindanao, as indeed elsewhere. While the gathering into churches of religiously converted individuals and the rendering of social, and particularly medical, services continued

to maintain a paramount position, a new emphasis on education for national leadership assumed a special significance in mission objectives. As early as 1910, the Rev. Black had anticipated the concerns that would be more insistently articulated in later years when he said: "The object of our American 'colonial experiment' in the Philippines is to find and train 'men, high-minded men.'"<sup>23</sup>

Whereas in previous years, the major emphasis in the educational work of the various missions was to train evangelists simply to assist the missionaries, after 1916 there was a conscious attempt to develop Filipino youths for leadership in both Church and nation. Some missionaries felt that religious values were an indispensable ingredient to the education that Filipinos were eagerly seeking to acquire. As one Congregationalist missionary put it in 1916:

Education is the liberator of imprisoned purpose and the fosterer of nameless yearnings. Such yearnings are welling up in the hearts of the young Filipinos. You know what the young Turks, educated but not Christianized, have done, to the amazement and horror of the world. They exemplify liberty untutored by self-control. America for seventeen years has been training a generation of young Filipinos. God grant that the American Christian churches may realize how much these young men need *the character-making influence of Christ in their new freedom!*<sup>24</sup>

This same concern was echoed the following year, in the statement: "The secular education is easily had, but what are we to do for the religious training?"<sup>25</sup>

This new concern for education for leadership is partly seen in the Episcopal mission work at Zamboanga. In 1916 a lady teacher, a Miss Frances Bartter, was brought in to Kawa-kawa, where she was to spend the next nineteen years of her missionary career. But the best illustration of this new emphasis is seen in the work of the American Board. By 1917 the educational aspect in its work had begun to assume a greater role than ever before vis-a-vis the medical and the evangelistic. It is perhaps not without significance that the Board Secretary's report for that year, in speaking of the task of reaching the peoples of Mindanao through various means, mentions "the school, the Christian doctor, and the gospel of love"<sup>26</sup> in that order.

For the first time, a more substantial number of American Board missionary reinforcements came to Mindanao—the Rev. Dr. and Mrs.

Frank C. Laubach in 1915, the Rev. and Mrs. Julius S. Augur in 1916, the Rev. and Mrs. Frank J. Woodward and Dr. and Mrs. Floyd O. Smith, M.D. in 1917, and Dr. and Mrs. Roy St. Clair, M.D., the Rev. and Mrs. Irving M. Channon, and the sisters Misses Anna I. and Florence L. Fox in 1920 and 1921. The only missionary withdrawals were the nurses Matthewson and Taylor, and the Blacks and the Cases who returned in 1921 to the United States. It now proved possible to open two new stations, one at Cagayan in 1915 under the Laubachs and another in Surigao in 1917 under the Woodwards.

From the very beginning, the Laubachs spent most of their efforts on youth work, starting a training school at Cagayan almost upon their arrival. When the *Cagayan Evangelical Church* was organized early in 1917, nearly all of its 66 charter members who signed the covenant were high school students. The wideness of the field before them so impressed Woodward that soon after his arrival, he ventured to suggest that "the only way we can begin to answer [the need] now is by training all the good young men we can find for the ministry."<sup>27</sup> The American Board mission report for 1920 also states:

There is now no longer any doubt that our finest opportunity to Christianize the islands, that are now so ready for Christianity, south of the Philippines is to let Christian Filipinos do it. This is the vision we want to give the Filipinos for the future.<sup>28</sup>

An even clearer statement of its immediate objectives is given in the mission report for 1922, as follows:

The influence of the mission is extending rapidly, so that the great fundamental demand is for trained native leaders to be used as evangelists in the newer districts, as pastors of the large congregations easily assembled at various points and many of them waiting for a preacher. For that reason emphasis is now being placed upon the training of native leaders, while the medical work is having a strong influence upon the wilder peoples hard to reach and whose confidence is difficult to win.<sup>29</sup>

The American Board managed to overcome the limitations imposed by its meager resources by cooperating with other Protestant missions in educational work. In 1921 it collaborated with the Presbyterians in opening the *Silliman Bible School*, attached to the latter's Silliman Institute in Dumaguete on Negros island. It contributed personnel to this joint venture by sending over the Channons to teach at the Bible

School. For advanced ministerial training, the American Board sent its students to the Union Bible School and Seminary at Manila, where Laubach was assigned as a professor for some years beginning 1922. The only educational institution the Congregationalists maintained in their area was the Women's Bible School in 1931.

The Congregationalists did not think it necessary to set up high schools or institutes, as the Presbyterians did in Dumaguete or the Baptist in Jaro, Iloilo. But they did establish boys' and girls' dormitories in their chief stations, of which Carruth Memorial Hall in Cagayan was an outstanding example. These dormitories served as places to train young men and women to live with others in a Christian manner. Only among the tribal groups in the Davao area, where the public school system had not yet penetrated, did the American Board maintain grammar schools.

The role played by the young generation of Filipino church leaders was reflected in the advances of mission work in northern Mindanao during the period 1916-1926. During those ten years, a total of 19 organized churches and congregations were established in northern Mindanao from Dipolog to Surigao, of which the most important ones were Dipolog, Baliangao, Plaridel, Jimenez, Clarin, Oroquieta, Cagayan, Carmen, Cabadbaran, and Surigao. From 6 Filipino church workers in 1916, the number rose to 55 (of whom 11 were ordained men) by 1926. From an original figure of 2,062, the total worshipping community in American Board mission churches also rose to 4,937 (of whom 3,694 were adult communicant members) during that ten-year period. The new generation of Filipino church leaders also took a leading role in the organization of their Congregational churches into the so-called "Presbytery of Cagayan" in 1922, a move in anticipation of the church union of 1929 which brought together the Presbyterians, United Brethren, and Congregationalists into the *United Evangelical Church in the Philippines*.

Outstanding among the youth Filipino leaders was Proculo A. Rodriguez, who had been sent by the Presbyterians in 1916 shortly after high school graduation in order to assist Laubach at Cagayan. Rodriguez quickly emerged as the natural leader of the Christian Endeavor Society, which gathered a core of zealous high school students who in time were to become the pillars of the Protestant churches in northern Mindanao. Rodriguez himself was later to become the first

bishop for the Mindanao jurisdiction of the still larger church which brought forth in 1948 the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

In the medical field, the American Board mission in northern Mindanao followed much the same pattern set by their station in Davao. In the early 1920's, there had been established a government hospital at Cagayan. But its facilities were inadequate and practically no major surgery was ever attempted. Conditions at the time were graphically described thus:

Typhoid fever was common, malaria was frequently encountered, pulmonary tuberculosis was widespread, beri-beri was prevalent, dysentery and gastro-enteritis were almost endemic, and were responsible for a heavy mortality especially among children. Midwifery was mostly practised by untrained women and a few male widwives who were considered worse for thinking up more dangerous procedures. In those days many died without any medical attention. Death certificates were made out by non-medical municipal officials, who must have been frequently puzzled about the causes of death.<sup>20</sup>

It was into such a situation that Dr. and Mrs. Floyd O. Smith, formerly assigned in Turkey, came in 1921. With the assistance of nurse Miss Florence L. Fox, the Smiths established the *Cagayan Mission Hospital* in 1922. By 1926 it had a new building with a 40-bed capacity. It was to stay in operation until the Japanese occupation forces came to Cagayan in 1942

But impressive and laudable as these evangelistic and medical developments might have been, that aspect of the American Board's work in Mindanao which subsequently was to gain the most reknown was the work of Dr. Frank C. Laubach among the Maranaws.

*Literacy Work Among the Maranaws.* When the Laubachs first came in 1915, they had hoped to labor among the Maranaws. But every army officer they met advised them that all an inexperienced missionary could do would be to wreck the peace precariously maintained in Lanao. The opportunity to work among the people of the lake area did not come until 1929, when Laubach and a colleague, the Rev. Donato Galia, came to Lanao. It did not take long, however, for Laubach to realize that he would not make any headway, if he stuck to the conventional ways of doing missionary work. Verging close to despair, he viewed his entire approach and once, while in deep reflection, he seemed

to hear God speaking thus:

My child, you have failed because you do not really love these Moros. You feel superior to them because you are white. If you forget you are an American and think only how I love them, they will respond. If you want the Moros to be fair to your religion, be fair to theirs. Study their Koran with them.<sup>31</sup>

That religious experience changed Laubach's life and thought. Curiously enough, once he opened himself to the Maranaws, they in turn accepted him with open arms. Laubach pondered upon the wall of alienation that separated the Maranaws from their Visayan neighbors, and came upon the idea that one way to break this wall was to bring literacy to the Maranaws. In the next twelve years, Laubach and Galia, with the help of their language tutor named Pambaya, reduced the Maranaw tongue, hitherto written only in Arabic script, to Roman letters. Laubach believed that the use of the Roman alphabet would facilitate the Maranaws' eventual integration into the body politic of the nation. A young man named Gani Noor, who soon became Laubach's close friend, gathered all the leading Maranaw religious and political leaders around the lake, and in the presence of the provincial governor, convinced them after much argumentation and debate to promise to study how to read and write, and to make their children do the same.

In the next few months, Laubach and his associates devised a system of literacy teaching, so simple that one can repeat every letter within ten minutes. The idea was to start with three common words that would encompass all the consonants. The words then cut into syllables, new syllables being formed by each time substituting a different vowel for the same consonant. The result was terrific. People learned to read within an hour or less, and in one instance nine Maranaws began to read within the space of but thirty minutes.

Laubach's system was virtually a miracle, and its usefulness was vastly multiplied when he introduced a peer-teaching method described by the slogan: "Each one, teach one." When his literacy program began in 1930, the whole of Lanao was but 4% literate. In two years, the literacy rate soared to 20%. Before long Laubach's system had caught the attention of the entire Philippines. By 1935 he was making the first of his world tours to share with other countries his unique literacy program. In the ten-year period just before the outbreak of World War II, the Lanao mission station produced almost 1,000,000 pages of Mara-

naw literature a year. What Laubach started as a one-page newspaper in time became under its new name of *Lanao Progress* a 16-page fortnightly publication, printed in three different languages: Maranaw, Cebuano, and English. If there was one man whose life touched so many in Lanao at that time, that certainly would be Frank C. Laubach.

*The Christian and Missionary Alliance.* The other Protestant missions in Mindanao more or less followed the course exemplified by the work of the American Board. The Christian and Missionary Alliance did not have as much financial resources as it would have wanted to support its work. But Mrs. David Lund founded in Zamboanga town—as the most significant aspect of CMA work at this time—a school for *mestizas*, the daughters of American soldiers and local Filipinas. Finding a most favorable response from among the local American residents for her plan, Mrs. Lund gathered together about sixty of these girls who were urgently in need of education and a good Christian home. Transforming her home into a boarding school, she taught the girls through grammar school, training them besides in such trades as sewing and embroidery-work. Before long she discovered that she needed to have an assistant schoolteacher, as the school curriculum developed. But more importantly, Mrs. Lund developed a system where the older girls would teach the younger ones, similar to what Laubach years later would do in Lanao. Thus, Mrs. Lund's school program concretized the idea that the education the mission provided should enable the recipients to help others. "No work in the Philippines," said Laubach in 1925, "has been so successful on such poor support."<sup>32</sup>

Figures are scanty for the rest of the work of the Christian and Missionary Alliance during these years. But Laubach noted in 1925 that they had mission stations in Margosatubig, Zamboanga town, and Jolo, with a total of six organized churches and an addition of 400 new members over the past year. They also had two day-schools with a total enrollment of 160, while their three Sunday Schools had an enrollment of 130 under the care of 18 and teachers. By 1939 the total number of communicants (baptized adults) in CMA mission churches in Mindanao had risen to 1,600.

*The Episcopal Mission.* On the other hand, the Episcopal Mission for the duration of this second phase continued its educational work

at Kawa-kawa. But apparently because the evangelistic aspect did not bring the desired results, the Rev. McCutcheon moved to Jolo in 1921 to start a new missionary venture. He thought that the best way of reaching the Tausugs would be by means of a newspaper which he called the *Surat Habur sing Sug* ("Sulu News Letter"), printed with Arabic fonts cast in Beirut. Generally containing items of local interest and feature articles on such topics as good hygiene and government, the newsletter, however, also carried only thinly-veiled Christian propaganda. McCutcheon also prepared aids to the study of Moro dialects and a Tausug translation of the Gospel of St. Luke. His work at first shone with bright prospects, but perhaps because his religious propaganda was much too apparent, this Jolo mission and the Sulu newsletter soon lost ground and finally had to be closed.

Comparatively more successful was Miss Bartter's work at Kawa-kawa, which followed along the same lines as those of Mrs. Lund's efforts. With the initial assistance of military wives from the nearby U.S. Army garrison, Miss Bartter carried on a weaving and lace-making program among young Moro girls. This opened the way for the establishment of a co-educational primary school. She campaigned stoutly for attendance by Moro girls, but this proved to be a novelty to which only a few Moro families reluctantly responded. Miss Bartter offered Christian instruction and held religious services in her school, though attendance in both on the part of the pupils was made on a purely voluntary basis. Not surprisingly, hardly any came for this religious program. Yet through her tact and sincerity and her fluent command of their language, she won the full trust of her Islamic neighbors.

As a result of Miss Bartter's influence, a number of Moro girls were encouraged to study as nurses at St. Luke's Hospital in Manila. A handful also "dared to become outcasts from their own people by baptism, one even ready to test the sisterhood in distant and alien Sagad"<sup>33</sup> at the Episcopal Mission in the Mountain Province.

Unfortunately, however, these auspicious beginnings were eventually scuttled by strong social pressures against those young Moro women who dared to become Christian. These girls were ostracized by their own families and kinfolks, and were unable to find husbands among their own people. The experiment proved too costly in terms of human relationships, for the handful of converts did not have a viable supportive community among their own kindred to whom they could

return. A high school was soon built at Kawa-kawa through the efforts of another lady missionary, Miss Georgie Brown. But when the barrio was razed to the ground in 1935, the people of Kawa-kawa moved to another site less congenial to the continuance of Episcopal mission work. The result was that by Miss Bartter's retirement that same year, the opportunities had begun to subside for carrying on the work she had pursued with great zeal for nineteen years.

A far more successful Episcopal mission soon arose in another area of Mindanao, at Upi among the Tirurays of Cotabato. This mission began in 1922 when the Rev. Leo Gay McAfee was invited by Captain Irving B. Edwards, the American deputy governor of Cotabato, to come and visit his district. Edwards had hoped to encourage the semi-nomadic Tirurays, who then numbered about 17,000, to settle at the fertile plain of Upi, by opening there a small agricultural school. He thought that if McAfee would set up alongside it an Episcopal mission, such a move would offer a further incentive for the Tirurays to settle down. In the next few years, McAfee came for several visits to Upi. On one of these occasions, he brought back to Zamboanga two Tiruray girls to study at Kawa-kawa. The two shortly thereafter returned as pioneer missionaries to their own people, paying the way for McAfee to move to Upi in 1927 to establish the Episcopal Mission of St. Francis. The subsequent coming of more immigrant settlers from the Visayas and Luzon quickly transformed Upi into an agricultural training center,<sup>34</sup> providing a favorable context for the mission which flourished through the end of the entire period covered in this present paper. In time, Upi would more than compensate for the lost opportunities at Kawa-kawa.

*The Bethel Baptist Mission.* Of the Bethel Mission established at Malaybalay, Bukidnon in 1925, little of the patterns of Protestant work that had not been exemplified in the story of the other missions can be added. This independent Baptist mission was opened by the Rev. Henry and Mrs. Gladys de Vries, the first American Protestant missionaries to enter the interior region of Bukidnon. As early as 1917, the American Board mission station at Cagayan had been sending students to preach at Malaybalay during the summer vacation. But this apparently could not be kept up for long, due to more pressing evangelistic needs in towns along the coast. The De Vrieses served as the only missionaries in that vast interior region, until they were joined in 1929 by a nurse named Miss Rhoda Little and a teacher, Miss Beatrice Kerr. Because of

the small size of their staff, the Bethel Mission concentrated their efforts on the evangelistic and medical aspects of mission work. But their interest in youth served to encourage many young Bukidnons to aspire for a good education that would prepare them for future positions of leadership in society.<sup>35</sup>

### The Third Phase (1935-1946)

The establishment of the Philippine Commonwealth in 1935 placed the reigns of government almost completely in the hands of Filipino national leaders, in anticipation of independence which was promised would take place in 1946. For the various American Protestant missions in Mindanao, the most important result of this political development was a concomitant diminution of the role of the missionary in mission church affairs. Henceforth, the American missionary, especially he who belonged to the older established missions, receded further into the background as a mere adviser, while his Filipino colleague increasingly assumed responsibility in the affairs of the church. Only in comparatively younger Bethel Baptist Mission, which in 1938 joined the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (ABWE), did the missionary continue to play a more dominant role. Thus, the opening in 1940 of a second Bethel mission station at Talakag, Bukidnon was the work of three new arrivals, namely, the Rev. and Mrs. Robert F. Kohler and nurse Miss G. Louise Lynip.

But in the older missions, not only did the missionary's role recede; the influence of his presence also diminished, as the ratio of Filipino church leaders to missionary increased. For the United Evangelical Church and the American Board mission, this ratio was 6:1 in 1931, 10:1 in 1940. In the Christian and Missionary Alliance, one also finds that by 1939, or perhaps even earlier, all the pastors of their mission churches were Filipinos.

It would thus appear that in the last ten years of American rule in the Philippines, the American missionary was generally well content to stand back and play only a supporting role. That he welcomed this development gladly is shown by the statement in the American Board annual report for 1937 that "the Filipinos seem to be proving that they can run their own affairs efficiently."<sup>36</sup>

### Laubach: Missionary Par Excellence

In some ways, the American Protestant missionaries who came to

Mindanao were ordinary men and women, who, like everyone else, had their own strengths, weaknesses, and peculiarities. Yet they distinguished themselves in service to others, because, as many of them would have put it, they were "constrained by Jesus' love" to do so. Certain typical characteristics and attitudes served as a common denominator among them, but there were a few who stood a full head above their fellows. One such man was Dr. Frank C. Laubach. By getting to know a little bit of his mind and heart, we might perhaps better understand the work of the American Protestant missions in Mindanao during his time.

Dr. Laubach was a man with a deep sensitivity for crucial social issues. In 1924 he chaired a commission of the Evangelical Union which dealt with the question of social reconstruction, particularly on such topics as recreation, health and sanitation, government and legislation, labor conditions, moral reform, and alleviation of poverty.<sup>37</sup> In many ways, he was a man much ahead of his time, and some of the issues he dared to raise still ring with relevance and freshness today. In 1926, for example, he raised such disturbing questions as:

1. . . . Whether Christians are to sympathize with the insistent demand of Temperate Zone peoples that they will have the products which the tropics are capable of producing; that since the tropical peoples are easy-going, unambitious . . . , almost stagnant . . . , they must step out of the way, allow the energetic peoples of the temperate zones to exploit their lands . . . ; or whether Christians are to sympathize with the attitude of tropical peoples that this land is theirs, since they were on it first, that they are under no obligation to develop it more rapidly than they wish, that they owe it to themselves and their children to keep out immigrants with whom they cannot compete . . . ?
2. Shall the public domain be homesteaded out to small Filipino landholders or shall it be given over to great American corporations? The Filipinos offer American business leases on land for twenty-five years, with the privilege of renewal for another twenty-five years. . . . American capital insists upon permanent ownership and upon unlimited size to its holdings . . . Regarding this question we are asked to keep silence and to shout loudly for 'Christian brotherhood.' The question in this

country for missionaries is whether Christianity is chloroform poured on a feather, with which missionaries tickle the chins of the Filipinos, while America, big business, persuades Congress to pronounce upon the Philippines the same curse of landlordism that has paralyzed Ireland for a thousand years.

3. When a moral issue becomes political does it automatically drop out of the Christian program, and is it the duty of the missionary both to ignore the question and enjoin the native church to ignore it?
4. Shall missionaries attack social problems or shall they refrain, hoping that native Christians will do this when they become strong enough? In the Philippines this question applies to war, militarism, usury, economic imperialism, exploitation of poor by rich, abominable working conditions, etc.
5. . . . How far shall missionaries be kept silent about moral issues by fear of the effect it may have upon the Home Board's efforts to raise their budgets in America?
6. Shall missionaries purchase the approval of fellow foreigners by maintaining silence about the morals, business practices and teachings of foreigners?
7. If an individual missionary feels that his fellows are unconsciously paving the way for imperialism, does he owe it to them to maintain silence until he can persuade his colleagues to go with him?
8. Shall a mission board silence a native pastor who is an agitator for independence either by threat or by transferring him another station?
9. Is silence in the presence of a great wrong equivalent to tacit approval?
10. Have or have not missions too much saved themselves by failing to try to right injustices?

These questions Dr. Laubach asked 55 years ago made him a controversial figure among his fellows. But his outspokenness became a virtue at a time when silence was for many considered a mark of prudence. The record of his apostolic efforts bears out the characteristic spirit expressed in an address to an American audience early in his missionary careers:

If I were in a battle and with no orders from my captain, I would be a coward if I fought where we were winning; I would be a man if I fought where our ranks are thin and we were losing the battle. We *are* in a battle for Jesus Christ, to conquer the world, and the ranks are thinnest and the battle hottest in the Orient.<sup>39</sup>

That was Dr. Laubach. He fought where the ranks of Christian workers were thinnest, and went where he was needed most. If for nothing else, that made him a missionary par excellence in his generation.

### Conclusion

The American Protestant missionaries in Mindanao during the period 1898-1945, in general, saw themselves as agents for change to make the lives of the people among whom they labored "more abundant." Coming with the expectation of meeting peoples needing "civilization," they were to encounter a generally responsive people, already possessing a fairly high degree of culture but eager to learn modern ways. The Protestant missionaries thought that the eagerness of this people to learn also posed the danger that they might acquire as well in the process the less desirable results of contact with the Western way of life, faster than they would learn what the missionaries regarded as "vital" Christianity. Not all of them clearly distinguished between their own Western (American) civilization and Christianity. But on the whole, they were convinced that there were certain aspects in that civilization, as secularism and materialism, which run counter to the central teachings of Christianity. To obviate this danger, the more discerning among them sought to instill into those with whom they came in contact a high degree of awareness and ethical sensitivity.

At first, their immediate goal was simply to win as many as possible to Christ's way of life. But as the U.S. government gave the first formal indication of granting the Philippines eventual independence, the American Protestant missionaries generally responded with the enthusiasm to the challenge to help educate Filipinos for leadership in

both their churches and the soon-to-be-independent nation. But for all their good work and intentions, the American Protestant missionaries were but human. They sometimes committed errors of judgment, and on several occasions their actions showed only too clearly their human limitations. There is ample evidence to show that they were sympathetic with the Filipinos to an extent far beyond what normally would have been expected of foreigners, but on the whole, they were never able to shake off entirely their American bias in the way they looked at Filipinos and their way of life.

In assessing their achievements and failures, however, those missionaries should be judged on the basis of the standards and expectations of their own time, for that was the milieu in which they moved and acted. That their preaching and example did make a profound religious and ethical change in the lives of their converts is undeniable. That their influence extended far beyond the ranks of those who joined their mission churches cannot be gainsaid. And if there was one major non-religious impact which they made upon those whose lives closely touched theirs, it was perhaps this: that the American Protestant missionaries in Mindanao stimulated a desire for learning and helped raise Filipino aspirations for a new and hopefully better way of life. And it was the Christian values which they instilled into the minds of the Filipino Protestant youth of that time which helped the latter (and the latter's children) in meeting the challenges of the new nation which these same aspirations brought into being in 1946.

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