



PASUGO

FEBRUARY 2017

GOD'S MESSAGE

The Magazine of the Iglesia Ni Cristo (Church Of Christ)

**FOR GOD
SO LOVED
THE WORLD**



SHARING GOD'S LOVE

Listen to the joy in your heart,
Hear the peals of laughter untold;
Look at how much peace—
You can share with the world.

Many have long stayed in the gloom,
Wailing about their woes and throes;
A ray of hope is what they need—
A spark in the dark that glows.

Many have been drawn to despair,
Knowing not what to do;
Sharing with them some words of wisdom—
May make the difference or so.

Don't turn your back on anyone,
Never say, "There's nothing I can do";
Say, "Let's go over the matter," instead—
"Let's figure out a way or two."

Imagine yourself being told to leave,
With a heavy load on your shoulder;
Would not a word of encouragement—
A light pat make you feel better?

Put yourself in the other person's shoes,
Don't you feel the discomfort?
Having gone to so much length—
Don't you feel a waste of effort?

"I shouldn't have come at all."
You hear yourself wishing;
In a moment of despair, you muttered,
"I knew I had this coming."

You don't want this to happen for sure,
To loved ones, or to anyone at all;
In your own little way extend a hand—
Spare someone from a fatal fall.

Listen to the joy in your heart,
Pleasant is the melody of mirth;
May contentment, goodwill, and respect—
Dwell in all peace-loving men on earth.

But more than wishing humanity well,
Show them a horizon that's truly bright;
Share with others God's promise of salvation—
His love for the Church Of Christ!

Nicanor P. Tiosen • Quezon City, Philippines





MUCHÍSIMAS GRACIAS. Brethren from Mexico City happily thank Brother Eduardo V. Manalo for visiting them (Story on page 18).

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OUR COVER

A photo of the aurora borealis (northern lights) over snow-covered hills in Fairbanks, Alaska by Brother Marlene Balason





"White Christian America is dying"

Robert P. Jones is the CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) and author of the book, *The End of White Christian America*. In an interview with him by John Sides, an Associate Professor of Political Science at George Washington University, regarding his book, Jones spells out the profound social implication of a new reality: America is no longer a majority white Christian nation.

"Let's start with a graph from the book ... tell us what you see and how you interpret it."

"The chart below reveals just how quickly the proportions of white, non-Hispanic Christians have declined across generations.

"Like an archeological excavation, the chart sorts Americans by religious affiliation and race, stratified by age. It shows the decline of white Christians among each successive generation.

"Today, young adults ages 18 to 29 are less than half as likely to be white Christians as seniors age 65 and older. Nearly 7 in 10 American seniors (67 percent) are white Christians, compared to fewer than 3 in 10 (29 percent) young adults.

"Although the declining proportion of white Christians is due in part to large-scale demographic shifts—including immigration patterns and differential birth rates ... the other major cause: young adults' rejection of organized religion. Young adults are three times as likely as seniors to claim no religious affiliation (34 percent versus 11 percent, respectively).

"What's the broader implication of this generational pattern?"

"The American religious landscape is being remade, most notably by the decline of the white Protestant majority and the rise of the religiously unaffiliated. These religious transformations have been swift and dramatic, occurring largely within the last four decades ...

"I think the decline in the 'white' part of 'White Christian America' is well known, given the country's obviously increasing ethnic diversity. But let's talk about the decline of the 'Christian' part and particularly the increasing number of people who aren't affiliated with any religious tradition. Why are the ranks of the unaffiliated increasing?"

"The rise of religiously unaffiliated Americans over the last few decades is one of the most important and dramatic shifts in American religious history. As recently as the 1990s, less than 1 in 10 Americans claimed no religious affiliation ...

"Looking ahead, there's no sign that this pattern will fade anytime soon. By 2051, if current trends continue, religiously unaffiliated Americans could comprise as large a percentage of the population as all Protestants combined—a thought that would have been unimaginable just a few decades ago. ..."

Source: *The Washington Post*; *White Christian America is dying*, August 15, 2016

Marrying unbelievers



I am interested in a girl who attends your Church but she tells me outright she would be cast away if she marries outside of your Church. I am also a Christian, attending Joel Osteen Church in Houston, Texas, and I know that Jesus is the Son of God and there is only one Mighty God. I do not understand why we can't marry when we are both Christians and believe in the Bible. Please explain.

Elijah Nielsen
Houston, Texas, USA

Editor's Reply:

The Lord God, through the apostles, forbids Christians to unite in marriage with unbelievers:

"Do not unite in marriage with unbelievers, for what fellowship has righteousness with iniquity? Or what mingling has light with darkness? Or what accord has Christ with Satan? Or what portion has a believer with an unbeliever? Or what harmony has the temple of God with idols? ..." (II Cor. 6:14-16, *Lamsa Translation*)

Apostle Paul explained that just as righteousness has no fellowship with iniquity, a believer also has no accord or portion with an unbeliever. The true believers or Christians are found in only one Church, the body of Christ or the Church Of Christ (Mark 16:15-16; I Cor. 12:13; Col. 1:18; Acts 20:28, *Lamsa Translation*). Unbelievers are those who are not among the sheep of Christ or not in His flock or the Church Of Christ (John 10:26; John 10:9 *Revised English Bible*, Acts 20:28 *Lamsa Translation*).

Since the earliest times, God has prohibited His people to intermarry with those who do not belong to His nation. One of the reasons for this prohibition is that by marrying those who do not belong to His nation, God's children would be drawn away from following Him "to serve other gods" (Deut. 7:3-4).

For questions, comments, and suggestions, e-mail us at pasugo@iglesianicristo.org.ph or pasugo@inc.org.ph or send your letters to any of our editorial offices (see staff box). We reserve the right to edit letters for reasons of space and clarity. Sender's name may be withheld upon request.



God wants all men to be saved

WHILE IT HAS BEEN many years now since the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ) first established a missionary foothold in Africa, the past two and a half years marked a defining moment in the Church's work of evangelization in the continent.

On August 30, 2014, when Brother Eduardo V. Manalo conducted a pastoral visitation in King William's Town (KWT), South Africa—the first ever for the Executive Minister—he officiated at a worship service where close to 4,000 locals listened to God's words as interpreted in English and in their native languages, *Xhosa* and *Sesotho*. That event served as a turning point for the Church's rapid expansion in that part of the world.

Back then, KWT used to be the sole full-fledged local congregation of the Church in Africa, with one minister assigned. Thirty months later, the Church now has seven local congregations, two extensions, and 25 Groups Worship Service (GWS) in 17 countries—with 28 ministers and ministerial workers spreading the gospel in the remotest villages in the vast continent. Now, the Church's evangelization has reached another 14 countries where hopefully local congregations will also be established. As of this writing, there are 4,162 Africans undergoing instructions in biblical doctrines and 512 being prepared for baptism.

The Church's thriving work of evangelization in Africa mirrors its success elsewhere in the world. In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Brother Eduardo's pastoral visit on January 7—with 75 Brazilian guests in attendance during the worship service—has fueled a more concerted effort in spreading the message of salvation in that largest South American country of about 206 million Portuguese-speaking people. The *favelas* or shantytowns (also called *comunidades*) are now venues for the Church's missionary activities.

Why does the Church Of Christ go the extra mile in reaching out to people—regardless of ethnicities or cultural backgrounds? What drives our desire to share the Good News with them? Apostle Paul provides the answer:

“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (I Tim. 2:3-4, *New King James Version*)

God Himself wants all men to attain salvation. But how can man be saved? He needs to “come to the knowledge of the truth.”

What is a biblical truth that man should know, believe, and obey? “So Jesus spoke again: In very truth I tell you, I am the door of the sheepfold ... I am the door; anyone who comes into the fold through me will be safe” (John 10:7, 9, *Revised English Bible*).

The fold or flock that man must come into is the Church Of Christ: “Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, to feed the church of Christ which he has purchased with his blood” (Acts 20:28, *Lamsa Translation*).

This is the rationale behind the Church Of Christ's intensive propagation of the gospel: to proclaim to all and sundry that joining the true Church is not only an extremely necessary but also a mandatory step toward the attainment of salvation on Judgment Day. So, its propagation efforts are not confined to big cities and towns. In the Philippines, brethren go to far-flung neighborhoods to share the true faith, even to indigenous or ethnic minorities, such as the *Kabihugs* of Bicol Region, *B'laans* of Southern Mindanao, *Dumagats* of Southern Luzon, *Aetas*, and other tribal groups. In North America, the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* has begun to make inroads into Native American communities, such as the Quinault Indian Reservation in Taholah, Washington where a village chapel was built to benefit the growing number of members and those who are now joining the Church.

Indeed, the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* intensively propagates the gospel to all corners of the earth to fulfill God's desire that all people know the truth and be saved on Judgment Day. 🗨️

— DENNIS C. LOVENDINO
Editor-in-Chief

Receiving and remaining in God's love

By REMUEL V. CASIPIT

CERTAINLY, A RECIPIENT of God's love is assured of great fortune and bounteous blessings. Hence, we can easily imagine how miserable one's life is if it is apart from God's love, so also those who, after having received it, fail to remain in His love.

No one who truly believes in God will ever refuse His love. But, sad to say, there are those who, without knowing it, commit the mistake of rejecting His love. But an unintentional rejection of His love does not make it a lesser sin neither will it bring a lesser punishment. Thus, we should be cautious not to fall into rejecting God's love. How is His love manifested?

How is God's love manifested?

"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life." (John 3:16, *Common English Bible*)

This verse is commonly misinterpreted by many as though it taught people that only believing in Christ is enough to have eternal life. But the verse does not say "only believe." There are still other commandments of God that have to be followed for one to prove that he truly believes in Christ.

This is why when the jailer asked Apostle Paul and Silas of what must be done to be saved, Apostle Paul did not say to him to simply believe in Christ to be saved.

What did Apostle Paul do to make sure that the jailer and his household truly believe in Christ? He preached to them the words of God and baptized them (Acts 16:30-33).

Hence, to benefit from God's love through Christ, one should not only believe in Christ but also believe in the words of God preached to him and be baptized into one body or Church—the Church Of Christ (Mark 16:15-16; I Cor. 12:13; Col. 1:18; Acts 20:28, *Lamsa Translation*).

Believing is obeying

True believers are true followers of Christ; thus, they follow and obey Christ's teachings:

"So Jesus said to the Jews that believed in him, 'If you continue to obey my teaching, then you are truly my followers.'" (John 8:31, *Easy-to-Read Version*)

What is one of Christ's commands that will guarantee the one who obeyed it eternal life? In John 10:9, this is written:

"I am the door; anyone who comes into the fold through me will be safe." (*Revised English Bible*)

It is clearly stated here by our Lord Jesus Christ that one needs to enter into the fold for him to be saved. The fold or flock being referred to is the Church Of Christ:

"Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, to

feed the church of Christ which he has purchased with his blood." (Acts 20:28, *Lamsa Translation*)

Therefore, if one wants to be a true believer of Christ and be saved, he must follow Christ's command to enter the Church Of Christ. To be included among those purchased or redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ by entering the Church Of Christ is to benefit from the love of God through His Son. On the other hand, refusing to join the true Church Of Christ is equivalent to rejecting God's love.

Members of the true Church—believers and well-loved

What further proves that members of the Church Of Christ are indeed the true believers, well-beloved by God and are His chosen people? The Bible explicitly teaches that there are people whom God has chosen as His own, whom He has set apart and sanctified, and who are well-loved by Him. They are the members of the one body of Christ:

"Clothe yourselves therefore, as God's own chosen ones (His own picked representatives), [who are] purified and holy and well-beloved [by God Himself, by putting on behavior marked by] tenderhearted pity and mercy, kind feeling, a lowly opinion of yourselves, gentle ways, [and] patience [which is tireless and long-suffering, and has the power to endure whatever comes, with good temper].

“And let the peace (soul harmony which comes) from Christ rule (act as umpire continually) in your hearts [deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds, in that peaceful state] to which as [members of Christ’s] one body you were also called [to live]. And be thankful (appreciative), [giving praise to God always].” (Col. 3:12, 15, *Amplified Bible*)

It is God who called the members into the one body, that is, the Church:

“He also is the Head of [His] body, the church.” (Col. 1:18, *Ibid.*)

The true Church, the Church Of Christ, is the one body of Christ and its members are the true believers. But while waiting for the promised salvation, the members of the Church Of Christ must keep themselves secure in the love of God:

“Guard *and* keep yourselves in the love of God; expect *and* patiently wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah)—[which will bring you] unto life eternal.” (Jude 1:21, *Ibid.*)

Who in the Church Of Christ will be utilized by God to make the Church worthy of the promised salvation?

The Church Administration is motivated and inspired by God’s love for us

Church leaders like Apostle Paul devote themselves to ministering to the members of the Church, motivated and inspired by God’s love for the Church:

“Him we preach *and* proclaim, warning *and* admonishing everyone and instructing everyone in all wisdom (comprehensive insight into the ways and purposes of God), that we may present every person mature (full-grown, fully initiated, complete, and perfect) in Christ (the Anointed One). For this I labor [unto weariness], striving with all the superhuman energy which He so mightily enkindles *and* works within me.

“In it I became a minister in accordance with the divine stewardship

which was entrusted to me for you [as its object and for your benefit], to make the Word of God fully known [among you].” (Col 1:28-29, 25, *Ibid.*)

God loves the members of the Church and He placed the Church Administration to continuously teach them His words that they may present them to Christ worthy of salvation on the day of His coming.

Discipline is love

So when a member departs from following God’s commands, the Church Administration is compelled to impose discipline but still out of tender and dear love:

“Those whom I [dearly and tenderly] love, I tell their faults and convict *and* convince *and* reprove and chasten [I discipline and instruct them]. So be enthusiastic *and* in earnest *and* burning with zeal and repent [changing your mind and attitude].” (Rev. 3:19, *Ibid.*)

We must remember that it is God’s way of loving those who had gone astray to impose on them discipline. He wants them to repent and leave their sinful behavior immediately, as long as Judgment Day has not yet come, that they, too, may be saved. Thus, the Church Administration always exhorts the brethren to live a holy life, always obeying God. They also impose appropriate disciplinary action, if need be, to the members of the Church who fall into sin. The members view it as an act of love. If after being reminded, corrected or disciplined, one refuses to repent and change his sinful behavior, that, too, is equivalent to refusal of God’s love and belittling God’s favor and kindness.

The Church being united and protected is God’s love for Christ

True Church Of Christ members will never exchange God’s love for this world or anything or anyone in this

world—even if because of this the world will hate them.

Christ already foretold that the world would hate His disciples, for they have received and kept His words. That is why He prayed to God for the protection of His chosen ones. Christ asked God to make the Church united and, being so, their love for the Church be made known to the world:

“For I have passed on to them the words you gave me; and they accepted them and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me. My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. And all of them, since they are mine, belong to you; and you have given them back to me, so they are my glory! Now I am departing the world; I am leaving them behind and coming to you. Holy Father, keep them and care for them—all those you have given me—so that they will be united just as we are.

“I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not. I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They are not part of this world any more than I am.

“My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father—that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are—I in them and you in me, all being perfected into one. Then the world will know that you sent me and will understand that you love them as much as you love me.” (John 17:8-11, 14-16, 21-23, *New Living Translation*)

Therefore, members of the Church Of Christ who remain one, as the true recipient of God’s love, will never quit obeying His words no matter what and, hence, will never waste the love of God for them. ●

FURTHER VICTORIES

IN THE WORKS OF THE CHURCH

Rio de Janeiro

BRA

Moscow

RUSSIA





The Executive Minister of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ), Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, continues to visit the brethren around the world. Conducting a series of visitations in Russia, Brazil, and Mexico, countries of varying climate conditions, he endured both the intense cold and extreme heat in order to deliver God's message to His people. These visits are the first to be conducted by the Executive Minister in these countries since the reemergence of the Church Of Christ in these last days.

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31 Dec 2016



Moscow

RUSSIA



SINCE BECOMING AN independent country and its society becoming a more open one, not only have many of its people gone abroad, bringing their warmth, humor, and culture to the world, but also, many people have immigrated to Russia and experienced its people's hospitality. Brother Norberto Noto Jr., who has been in Moscow for six years, says of the Russians: "They have great respect for their elders and they love their children. They also have a high regard for the government and their leaders. If you are a stranger to them, they are very welcoming and helpful, even friendly and caring."

The Philippine Ambassador to Russia, H.E. Carlos D. Sorreta, explains how the government supports and encourages Russians

to hold on to their values: "The Russians are very dedicated to religion. You can see it in the way they maintain their chapels ... The Russian Administration really wants its people to be religious because they want to preserve the people's morality. They don't want their country to fall into decadence."

His Russian counterpart in the Philippines, H.E. Igor Anatolyevich Khovae, mentioned in a recent interview concerning Russia's foreign policy, "We are open. We need to make new discoveries, to discover new countries, new peoples, and so on, to establish new contacts."

Moscow is Russia's most cosmopolitan city, embracing people of different cultures and needs from around the world. One group that Moscow

has opened its doors to is the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ), which has brought true Christianity to the country. Many of its members arrived in Russia as part of the stream of Filipino teachers, caregivers, and domestic workers.

In 2009, the congregation of Moscow was established, followed by the inauguration of Saint Petersburg Group Worship Service after a few years. Sister Esmeralda Coloma, a deaconess, recalls her first arrival and her experiences as one of the Church's pioneers in Russia: "When I moved to Moscow, I never forgot my membership in the Church. I didn't stop praying that God would allow more brethren to join us, and it didn't take long for that to happen. God has not neglected us. All of our prayers, since we



Among the many guests who attended the gathering and listened to the biblical message delivered by the Executive Minister, Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, was the Philippine Ambassador to Russia, H.E. Carlos D. Sorreta. (left)



started until now, have all been answered."

The emergence of the Church Of Christ here was not a matter of coincidence, but God's will. This is the firm belief of Brother Elmer Luminarias. "I've been here for four years. I came here to work, but when I got here it was hard to find a job. Recently, my wife and I decided to go to another country because it was hard to find work again. But we were inspired to stay and we feel that we are here to help the Church spread in the country. I believe that God brought me here and I've been able to stay here to help with the work of God in these last days," he recounted.

Though far from the Church's Central Office in the Philippines, the brethren in Moscow are not far from the heart and mind of the Executive Minister, Brother Eduardo V. Manalo. For that reason, on December 31, 2016, one of God's works came to fruition. On the eve of the New Year, members of the Church Of Christ based in Russia and Northern Europe welcomed Brother Eduardo to Moscow at the Radisson Royal Hotel.

Sister Flordalita Baltazar Porneso expressed, "We really didn't expect that Brother Eduardo would visit us here in Moscow because we are so far away. But through the efforts he has made to be here, we can really see and feel his love."

Brother Eduardo Manalo is the first Executive Minister of the

Church to conduct a pastoral visit to this part of the world. Brethren traveled from distant places to witness this milestone.

Brother David Dimatulac said, "We left Marseille in the morning and then we stopped over in Germany. We waited

"All you need to remember is that **God will never let you down** ... he'll always be there to help you come through it."

I Corinthians 10:13 The Message



there for five hours. Then from Germany, we came here. We are happy because this would be the first time that he would officiate at a worship service in Russia."

One of the Executive Minister's great expressions of love is to teach God's words.

In his homily, Brother Eduardo emphasized the importance of the divine election of the Church Of Christ as God's nation. He urged the brethren to preserve this privilege, so that the ardent desire of the Lord Jesus Christ that His true servants will be saved will be fulfilled. The Executive Minister admonished them to remain steadfast despite the great turmoil in the world, for God will never forsake His people.

Madilene Barrion from Moscow was greatly touched by the lesson. "It really moved me and I cried. When I was a Catholic, I never heard these things. From the beginning of his lecture, I heard the pure teachings from the Bible," she said. Close to finishing the process of becoming a member of the Church, Madilene will soon become a candidate for baptism in the Church Of Christ. About the Church Of Christ's future in Russia, she went on to say, "Because of what the Church teaches, I hope that many people will open their minds

and be convinced like me to study the Bible." Aside from the Executive Minister's visit and message, Sister Luvie Hacke from Hamburg, Germany was also moved by the spiritual enthusiasm of the brethren in Russia. "We know the brethren





in Moscow to be active and really devoted to serving God. They are truly inspiring. I spoke to many of them and they are so happy. What was touching was they said, in their whole lives, there's been no better end to the year than what happened today, when they were visited by the Executive Minister," she said.

Like their hosts and the city of Moscow itself, the members of the Church Of Christ in Russia have not forgotten their roots even as they try to make their lives better for themselves. Many of the brethren left their families to come to Moscow with the hope of giving financial stability to those they left behind.

"I may be far from my family, but as long as I receive God's teachings and admonitions they become my strength," conveyed Sister Esmeralda.

Many of the brethren have this same conviction. Despite the various cultures in the world, Church Of Christ members hold on to their spiritual values and have never let go of the true Christian way of life.

"Being obedient to God and not forgetting His commandments have great benefits. Through this, I am guided in my everyday life," Sister Esmeralda also added.

Through the pastoral visitation of the Executive Minister, the brethren in Moscow, along with the brethren from the

various congregations in Europe who attended, are renewed in their strength and faith to continue serving God as they welcome the New Year. ☺

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Sumário

No dia 7 de Janeiro de 2017, os membros da Igreja de Cristo no Brasil convidaram seus amigos para assistir a um culto oficiado pelo Ministro Executivo, Irmão Eduardo V. Manalo. Na lição dada pelo Ministro Executivo, ele enfatizou o ensino bíblico de que para que as pessoas recebam a salvação no Dia do Juízo Final, elas devem tornar-se membros da Igreja de Cristo que vivem com auto-controle, boa conduta e completa devoção à Deus.

O Irmão Ricardo M. Vaz, brasileiro morador de São Paulo, foi batizado na Igreja em 2000. Ele foi apresentado pela primeira vez à Igreja quando visitou seus parentes, a Irmã Roseli M. Serna, sua tia, e a Irmã Andrea M. Vaz- Ortega, sua irmã, ambas brasileiras natas que vivem nos Estados Unidos e membros da Igreja há mais de 20

anos. Embora a linguagem tenha sido um desafio no início, isso não impediu o crescente interesse do Irmão Ricardo pela Igreja.

“Depois que começamos a receber instruções bíblicas em português, eu compreendi ainda mais que os ensinamentos da Igreja vem da Bíblia”, ele expressou. “O que mais me atraiu foram os ensinamentos na Igreja de Cristo - não há mistérios e segredos envolvidos. É, simplesmente, a pura verdade.

A Irmã Andrea também atestou que “os ministros da Igreja de Cristo pregam diretamente da Bíblia. Sempre que você for abordá-los com um problema ou uma pergunta, eles nunca vão lhe dar uma opinião. Eles sempre usarão a Bíblia como referência.”

A irmã Roseli acrescentou que “Deus quer que sejamos

salvos congregando-nos à esta Igreja e, para manter este direito, devemos obedecê-Lo e servi-Lo sob a liderança da Administração que Ele colocou”.

“Agora que estou na Igreja Ni Cristo há mais de 16 anos, sei que estou no lugar certo onde posso receber a salvação prometida. Enquanto ainda estamos neste mundo, sabemos que vamos enfrentar dificuldades em nossas vidas. Mas estamos seguros de que Deus está conosco, guiando nossos caminhos e nos ajudando a superar todas as dificuldades que enfrentamos neste mundo”, disse o Irmão Eidio Maekawa Mihajlov. “Como um brasileiro, oro, que este trabalho de salvação cresça rapidamente aqui para que muitas pessoas tenham a oportunidade de serem salvas.”

BRAZIL IS FAMOUS for many things—the beaches in Rio de Janeiro, the love for football (soccer), the Amazon river and rainforest, the musical style called Bossa Nova, and many others. Brazilians are known to be vibrant. “Brazil is a wonderful country with wonderful people. Brazilians are always ready to help. They are always optimistic,” said Brother Ricardo M. Vaz, a Brazilian native who lives in São Paulo.

People all over the world come to Brazil not only to visit; some have even decided to stay to earn a living. One of them is Sister Buena C. Gascon.

“I was assigned to work at the Philippine Embassy in Brasilia in July 1992. I have lived in Brazil since then, along with my husband,

Brother Ferdinand P. Gascon, and my daughter, Sister Edelweiss,” she said. It was not easy at the beginning—they also experienced difficulties. “When we arrived here in Brazil, we encountered many trials,” Sister Buena recalled.

Some of such trials are loneliness, illnesses, and work problems. But despite facing these challenges and being busy with obligations in life, it is always clear to them what is most important.

“In spite of these experiences, we never abandoned our worship services to God. Being a member of the Iglesia Ni Cristo is in my heart,” Sister Buena said, adding that “since childhood, God’s commands have been instilled in me. My family’s membership in the Church is what we held on to

in order to overcome the tests we faced while in Brazil.”

Because of their trust in God, they continued to receive His blessings and overcome trials.

Though the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ) in Brazil started with just one family, over the years, more and more people were added. One of those introduced to the Church Of Christ was Brother Ricardo who, along with his parents, was baptized in the Church in 2000. He was first introduced to the Church when he visited his relatives in the United States of America—his aunt, Sister Rosali M. Serna, and his sibling, Sister Andrea M. Vaz-Ortega, who are both Brazilian natives living there. They have been members of the Church for more than 20 years now.



"When I first attended the worship service, I was impressed by the orderliness of the service and also the hymns," Brother Ricardo said.

Although language was a challenge in the beginning, it did not hinder his growing interest in the Church.

"After receiving biblical instructions in Portuguese, I all the more understood that the teachings in the Church come from the Bible," he emphasized.

Sister Andrea also attested, "The ministers of the Church Of Christ preach directly from the Bible. Whenever you approach them with a question, they will never give you an opinion. They will always use the Bible as a reference."

Brother Ricardo noticed major differences between his former religion and the Church Of Christ, even though both use the Bible.

"There are so many differences. One of them is the brotherly love among the members that you can experience wherever you go. You can be a member of the Church in Brazil, the Philippines, the United States, Europe, or anywhere in the world, you will always be embraced by the love of the brethren," he said. "What caught my interest the most are the teachings in the Church—there are no mysteries

and secrets involved. It's simple, plain truth."

"The other religions are basing their teachings on their opinions and others' opinions," expressed Sister Shyla Angeles-Vaz, Brother Ricardo's wife, a Filipina who joined the Church Of Christ when she was already in Brazil. "When I was in the Philippines I heard about the Church, but I was not yet interested. When I came to Brazil, I was invited to attend worship services. The lessons got my attention."



"for the LORD loves what is right

and does not abandon

His faithful people.

He protects them forever ..."

Psalms 37:28

Good News Bible

In 2002, she was baptized. Like her husband, she too noticed the evident difference between other religions and the Church Of Christ.

"I was convinced to join the Church because the teachings are based on the Bible," she said.

"In other churches, what usually happens is that the preacher reads a verse, then he himself starts speaking, using his own words and gives his own opinion on the topic," shared Brother Eidio Maekawa Mihajlov. Before he made the decision to join the Church, this Brazilian brother also observed the uniqueness of the Church.

"The teachings are based only on the Bible," he expressed. "In the Iglesia Ni Cristo, I am serving the one true God in the true Church built

by our Lord Jesus Christ."

Firmly believing in biblical truth taught in the Church Of Christ is the reason many members are active in sharing their faith with their fellowmen. In fact, the members of the Church in Brazil invited their friends to attend a worship service officiated by the Executive Minister, Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, at the Royal Tulip Hotel on January 7, 2017.

In the lesson delivered by the Executive Minister, he emphasized the biblical teaching



that for people to receive salvation on Judgment Day, they should join the Church Of Christ and become members who live with self-control, right conduct, and complete devotion to God.

"When you see Brother Eduardo go out of his way to visit the members of the Church in various parts of the world, to me it really shows his genuine care and concern for all of us," stated Sister Andrea. "I am convinced that I am a member of the only true Church built by our Lord Jesus Christ. By listening to and obeying the commandments of God written in the Bible and by submitting to the

Church Administration, I will receive salvation on Judgment Day."

"My conviction remains the same that this is the only true Church," Sister Rosali said. "God wants us to be saved by joining this Church and, to maintain this right, we must obey and serve Him under the leadership of the Administration God placed in the Church."

"We know from the Bible that God has always appointed an administration to care for His people. The Church Administration led by our current Executive Minister has been very active and dynamic in spreading the works of salvation throughout the



world," said Brother Eidio. "Having an active and energetic Executive Minister is one proof that God is the One Who sustains and protects the Church Of Christ. Now that I have been in the Iglesia Ni Cristo for more than 16 years, I know that I am in the right place where I can receive the promised salvation. While we are still in this world, we know that we will face difficulties in our lives. But we are sure that God is with us, guiding our way and helping us to overcome all the difficulties that we face in this world."

He also hopes that many more people would join the Church in Brazil, saying, "As a

Brazilian, I pray, that this work of salvation grow rapidly here so that many people may have the opportunity to be saved." 🙏

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Summary

The first time that the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ) was introduced to the Mexicans was in 1990 through the relatives of Brothers Hugo and Jorge Becerril from the local congregation of San Jose, California. They had a series of evangelical missions for four consecutive days at the house of their parents together with their relatives and friends. Years after, the Church Of Christ was again presented to the Mexicans through Brother Jose Ventilacion who, with the approval of the Church Administration, came to Mexico City along with

Brother Juan Medina Aragón who had returned from the United States of America. Finally, the Church Of Christ was registered in Mexico on April 9, 1999, having as its resident minister Brother Arthur Agag. Having heard the biblical teachings of the Church Of Christ, converts in Mexico had no intention of letting go of their faith. "There is nowhere else to go. The Bible only mentions the Church Of Christ. The teachings are pure and the trials are part of strengthening your faith," Sister Reyna Ramirez, a choir member

in the local congregation of Mexico City, expressed. "It is written in the Bible that it is the only one redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ with His blood," she added. "For me it is very important that the Church Of Christ be known in my country as it is an important requirement for the salvation of people," expressed Sister Anatolia Cuevas of the Group Worship Service of Oaxaca. Brother Rene Ramirez Miguel, a deacon in the local congregation of Mexico City, stated, "My promise to God is to bring more people to the Church."

ESTADOS UNIDOS MEXICANOS, comúnmente llamado "México", es el segundo país más grande de América Latina con una población de más de 100 millones. Es el segundo país con más Católicos en el mundo—82% de su población es Católica. El resto pertenecen a otros grupos religiosos incluyendo los Protestantes, Mormones, y Testigos de Jehová. De hecho, México tiene incluso una de las mayores concentraciones de Testigos de Jehová en el mundo.

La Ciudad de México, es la capital del país con una población de unos nueve millones de habitantes, es una de las ciudades más grandes en población y territorio. La ciudad yace sobre el que fue el poderoso y próspero Tenochtitlan, la antigua capital

del Imperio Azteca. La Ciudad de México es muy famosa internacionalmente por sus fascinantes lugares arqueológicos y edificios que datan de la época de la colonización española.

La primera vez que la *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Iglesia De Cristo) fue introducida a los mexicanos fue en 1990 a través de los familiares de los Hermanos Hugo y Jorge Becerril de la congregación de San José, California. Durante cuatro días consecutivos, tuvieron una serie de misiones evangélicas en la casa de sus padres junto a sus familiares y amigos. Después de seis años, en 1996, la Iglesia De Cristo fue introducida otra vez a los Mexicanos por el Hermano Joe Ventilación quien, a través de la aprobación de la Administración de la Iglesia, vino a la Ciudad de México con el Hermano

Juan Medina Aragón, quien ha regresado de los Estados Unidos de América después de haber vivido ahí por un largo periodo de tiempo. Finalmente, la Iglesia De Cristo fue registrada en México el 9 de abril de 1999, teniendo como su primer ministro destinado, al Hermano Arturo P. Agag.

En estos tiempos, cuando el mundo está sumergido en una crisis mundial, la condición de los miembros de la Iglesia De Cristo en México se ha visto afectada por muchas pruebas con las que se han enfrentado. Tales incluyen las dificultades en lo financiero debido a la falta de trabajo y debido al bajo salario que los empleados reciben en la actualidad, los cuales hacen que vivir ahí sea difícil para ellos. "He tenido que cambiar cuatro veces de trabajo porque me impedían atender a los



servicios de adoración. Otro es el lugar donde vivía. No tenemos nuestra propia casa y solamente estamos alquilando. Hemos cambiado de hogar unas cuatro veces," ha afirmado la Hermana Reyna Ramírez, miembro del coro y también tesorera de la congregación. Otra prueba que tenían que superar fueron las persecuciones. "Hubo un tiempo, en el cual mi padre dejó de hablarme, y mis hermanos me criticaron. Incluso una de mis hijas me preguntó por qué había cambiado de religión," dijo el Hermano Luis Miguel Medina, líder de los diáconos en la congregación de la Ciudad de México.

A pesar del duro trato recibido, nunca les retuvo entrar y permanecer como miembros de la Iglesia De Cristo. "No hay otro lugar a donde ir. La Biblia sólo menciona la Iglesia De Cristo. Las enseñanzas son puras y las pruebas son para fortalecer la fe", dijo la Hermana Reyna. "Está escrito en la Biblia que [la Iglesia De Cristo] es la única que fue redimida por nuestro Señor Jesucristo con Su sangre," ella añadió.

Cuando recibieron la noticia de que el Ministro Ejecutivo de la Iglesia De Cristo, el Hermano Eduardo V. Manalo, haría una visita pastoral a la Ciudad de México, los hermanos, con la





ayuda del Hermano Arnel Guinto y el Hermano Ezekiel Silva, obreros del ministerio asignados en la Ciudad de México y Oaxaca, respectivamente, comenzaron todas las preparaciones. Es una gran bendición que el Señor Dios está a punto de dar a la Iglesia en esta parte del mundo. Comenzaron sus oraciones devocionales al Señor Dios y a Su querido Hijo para pedir la ayuda y guía para este extraordinario evento. También empezaron a buscar un lugar donde realizar el servicio de adoración tan esperado, liderado por el Ministro Ejecutivo. Con la ayuda de Dios, encontraron el salón principal del Hotel Hilton Santa Fe en la Ciudad De México.

El sábado, 21 de enero de 2017, los hermanos viajaron hacia el Hotel Hilton a las cinco y media de la mañana, ansiosos de ver y oír al Ministro Ejecutivo, el Hermano Eduardo V. Manalo. Desde el canto de los himnos de alabanza se pudo percibir cómo muchos hermanos y sus invitados sintieron el gran poder del Espíritu Santo, por lo cual pudieron contener sus lágrimas.

Durante la predicación de las palabras de Dios, el Hermano Eduardo Manalo habló sobre la condición del mundo en estos últimos días—los problemas,





las calamidades, la hambruna y todo lo que está afectando a las personas. Enfatizó que los miembros de la Iglesia De Cristo no tenían que preocuparse por todo lo que está pasando a su alrededor porque el Señor Dios y el Señor Jesucristo prometieron escuchar sus oraciones y ayudarles en tiempos de dificultades. También enseñó sobre la importancia de la pertenencia a la Iglesia De Cristo.

Después del servicio de adoración, los hermanos e invitados expresaron su gran felicidad y la paz que sintieron en sus corazones. “Dios está realmente con el Ministro Ejecutivo. No tengo duda. Él se preocupa mucho por los miembros en el mundo entero y por eso está constantemente viajando para visitarnos, saber cómo estamos, fortalecer nuestra fe para que podamos alcanzar la vida eterna. Él siempre nos exhorta a obedecer los mandatos de Dios,” ha expresado la Hermana Reyna.

Ignacio Díaz Bossero, bisnieto del General Porfirio Díaz Mori, presidente de México durante los últimos años de 1800 y a principios de 1900, dijo, “La manera que el Hermano Eduardo V. Manalo predica, es excepcional. Predica con gran confianza, poder y claridad. ¡Me

ha gustado! Y la unidad de la Iglesia De Cristo, ¡es única!”

Cristina Salazar ha afirmado. ¡Fue algo maravilloso, algo que nunca experimenté en mi vida. Al comienzo de los himnos, pude sentir algo dentro de mí, algo

“Por tanto, tengan cuidado de ustedes mismos, y de todo el rebaño sobre el cual los ha puesto el espíritu santo como supervisores para apacentar la Iglesia del Cristo, la cual Él compró con su sangre.”

Hechos 20:28

Peshitta



profundo dentro de mí!” Ella está en el proceso de ser miembro de la Iglesia.

Después de esta gran bendición que los hermanos en México han recibido, hicieron una promesa a nuestro Señor Dios de ser aún más fuertes en su fe y continuar compartiendo con sus prójimos el conocimiento sobre la verdadera Iglesia De Cristo para que tengan la oportunidad de recibir la salvación. La Hermana

Anatolia Cuevas del grupo de servicio de adoración de Oaxaca ha expresado, “¡Para mí es muy importante que la Iglesia De Cristo sea conocida en mi país, porque es un requisito muy importante para la salvación de las personas!” Debido a que valora mucho su obligación como miembro del coro en Oaxaca, ella viajó una semana antes del evento para ensayar con los miembros del coro quienes iban a cumplir su obligación en este evento.

El Hermano Rene Ramírez Miguel, diácono en la congregación de Ciudad de México, dijo, “Mi promesa a Dios es llevar más personas a la Iglesia.” Incluso su sobrina, la Hermana Reyna, expresó, “Mi promesa es que continuaré en la Iglesia De Cristo. Continuaré mientras Dios me de vida o hasta el fin del mundo. Sabemos que llegarán

muchos problemas, como hemos escuchado, pero a pesar de eso seguiremos avanzando.” 🌟

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Who are the children of God?

By BENILDO C. SANTIAGO

WHO ARE THE CHILDREN of God? To that question, we can only trust the Bible for a definitive answer. Anything else's or anyone else's answer is say-so—questionable, unreliable.

Based on the teachings of the Bible, people are divided into two groups only: children of God and children of the devil. A person either belongs to the Father or to His adversary. This dichotomy may not sit well with many, especially the proponents of the so-called political correctness, as well as those who have been repeatedly told that “all people are children of God,” yet it is firmly established, final and in no uncertain terms, in the Scriptures.

One of the inspired writers who reveal this truth is Apostle John. Without mincing words, he tells the true Christians:

“We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” (1 John 5:19, *New International Version*)

The *Living Bible* renders this verse thus, “We know that we are children of God and that all the rest of the world around us is under Satan's power and control.”

From this, it is very clear that while it is true that all people were created by God, not all, however, are His children. There are those who are “under Satan's power and control.” In the Christian dispensation, the “whole world” or “all the rest of the world” mentioned by Apostle John refers to the people who are separate or apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, as pointed out by Apostle Paul.

Those “separate from Christ” have no God

In his epistle to the Ephesians, Apostle Paul says:

“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.” (Eph. 2:11-12, *NIV*.)

Despite knowing full well that those who are “separate from Christ” were also created by God, yet Apostle Paul declares they are “without God.” This proves that not because all were created by God all are His children. Needless to

say, the children of God referred to by Apostle John in his epistle cited earlier are the ones who are of Christ.

Those “separate from Christ,” according to Paul, have no God—they have no right to deify God. This situation is similar to the one that existed during the time of ancient Israel, in which those who were outside of Israel had no God. The II Kings 5:15 records, “... there is no God in all the world except in Israel ...” (*Ibid.*).

It was the ancient Israelites who were acknowledged as God's people and exclusively given the right and privilege to worship the true God and its concomitant promises were further explained by Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans:

“They are God's people; he made them his children and revealed his glory to them; he made his covenants with them and gave them the Law; they have the true worship; they have received God's promises.” (Rom. 9:4, *Today's English Version*)

Who are of Christ?

Clearly, therefore, just as the Israelites were God's chosen people during the prophetic era, so the ones who are of Christ are God's chosen

people in the Christian era. They are the children of God.

It behooves us to ask: who are of Christ? How does one become Christ's own and thus be counted as a child of God? It is an easy enough mistake to make to say that all who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are automatically not separate from Him but of Him; that those who say they are "followers of Christ" are indeed already true Christians and therefore are children of God.

However, a person becomes of Christ neither by merely professing faith in Him nor by simply accepting Him as Lord and personal Savior, as so many people have been made to believe. It is, in fact, not by dint of a person's own initiative that he can become entitled to this great privilege. Many may find this hard to believe but the Bible verifies and confirms it.

In His prayer to the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ makes known the way by which a person becomes His own and thus belongs to God. He says:

"I have made you known to those you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me. They have obeyed your word." (John 17:6, *Ibid.*)

Given to Christ, called by God

According to the Lord Jesus Christ, the people who are His own were given to Him by the Lord God out of the world. Why must one be taken "out of the world"? Because, as Apostle John who recorded this prayer of the Lord says in his first epistle that we initially cited, "the whole world" is "under Satan's power and control."

This is contrary to the faith-alone teaching. For a person to be of Christ, he must first be given by God to Christ out of the world. It is a divine process

that everyone who wishes to be of Christ needs to go through.

Is there any exception to this? Can anyone come to Christ without the benefit of being given to Him by God? "No one can come to me," declares Christ, "unless the Father who sent me draws him to me; and I will raise him to life on the last day" (John 6:44, *TEV*).

Nothing can be more pronounced and more conclusive than the testimony of the Savior Himself. No one can come to Him and become His own at one's own initiative, by his own will, and through his own way. Everyone who desires to be of Christ needs to be drawn to Christ by God Himself. A person may sincerely, zealously, and wholeheartedly have faith in Christ and accept Him as Lord and personal Savior, but if he is not given by God to Christ, then he cannot come to Christ and cannot be of Christ.

The pronouncement of the Lord Jesus Christ on who can come to Him is echoed by Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians:

"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Cor. 1:9, *New King James Version*)

The people whom Christ said were drawn to Him by God and can come to Him were, according to Apostle Paul, called into Christ's fellowship. They were called by God.

Today, however, many claim they were called by God. Some say they dreamed about it while others say they could feel it in their hearts. But according to the Bible, how can the true called-out ones whom God had drawn to Christ be identified? Where exactly are the people who were called by God into the fellowship of Jesus Christ found? Are they scattered in many different religious bodies? Precisely where were they called?

Church Of Christ

According to Apostle Paul, the people who were called by God are in "one body" which is the Church headed by Christ:

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful." (Col 3:15, *NKJV*)

"And He is the head of the body, the church, ..." (Col. 1:18, *Ibid.*)

The Church headed by Christ is the Church Of Christ:

"Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, to feed the church of Christ which he has purchased with his blood." (Acts 20:28, *Lamsa Translation*)

It is also the flock which the Savior is commanding everyone who wishes to be saved to come into:

"I am the door; anyone who comes into the fold through me will be safe. ..." (John 10:9, *Revised English Bible*)

The fold or flock is the Church Of Christ. This is the Church where the people who have been called by God are found. Its members are, therefore, the ones who are of Christ and are the children of God.

So when Apostle John categorically states that "We know that we are children of God and that all the rest of the world around us is under Satan's power and control" he is obviously addressing the members of the Church Of Christ.

For one to be taken out of the darkness and freed from the devil's power or control, he must follow Christ's command to enter the true Church Of Christ. This is because, based on the teachings of the Bible, the true children of God are the members of the Church Of Christ. ●

Those worthy of God's blessings and salvation

By ROLAND A. AGUIRRE

Based on the lesson preached by Brother Eduardo V. Manalo at a worship service in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on January 7, 2017

MUCH HAS BEEN SAID and written about salvation on Judgment Day. However, what is more important is what the biblical truths teach about this day which is swiftly drawing near.

So, who will be saved on Judgment Day? What are the characteristics that God seeks in those who will be the recipients of His blessings?

The household of God

The truth and reality about receiving salvation is that people need to become members of the household recognized by Christ. This was made clear by the Savior Himself:

"When once the Master of the house gets up and closes the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door [again and again], saying, Lord, open to us! He will answer you, I do not know where [what household—certainly not Mine] you come from. Then you will begin to say, We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets. But He will say, I tell you, I do not know where [what

household—certainly not Mine] you come from; depart from Me, all you wrongdoers!" (Luke 13:25-27, *Amplified Bible*)

The household being referred to is the household of God as the Bible attests: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens [outsiders without rights of citizenship], but you are fellow citizens with the saints (God's people), and are [members] of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the [chief] Cornerstone" (Eph. 2:19-20, *Amplified 2015*).

Thus, salvation entails not only knowing Christ as the Savior and doing His will, but also belonging to the household of God. The apostles further explained that this household of God that was built on the foundation of the apostles, who is Christ as the chief cornerstone, is none other than the Church Of Christ (Matt. 16:18, *Today's New International Version*; Acts 20:28, *Lamsa Translation*).

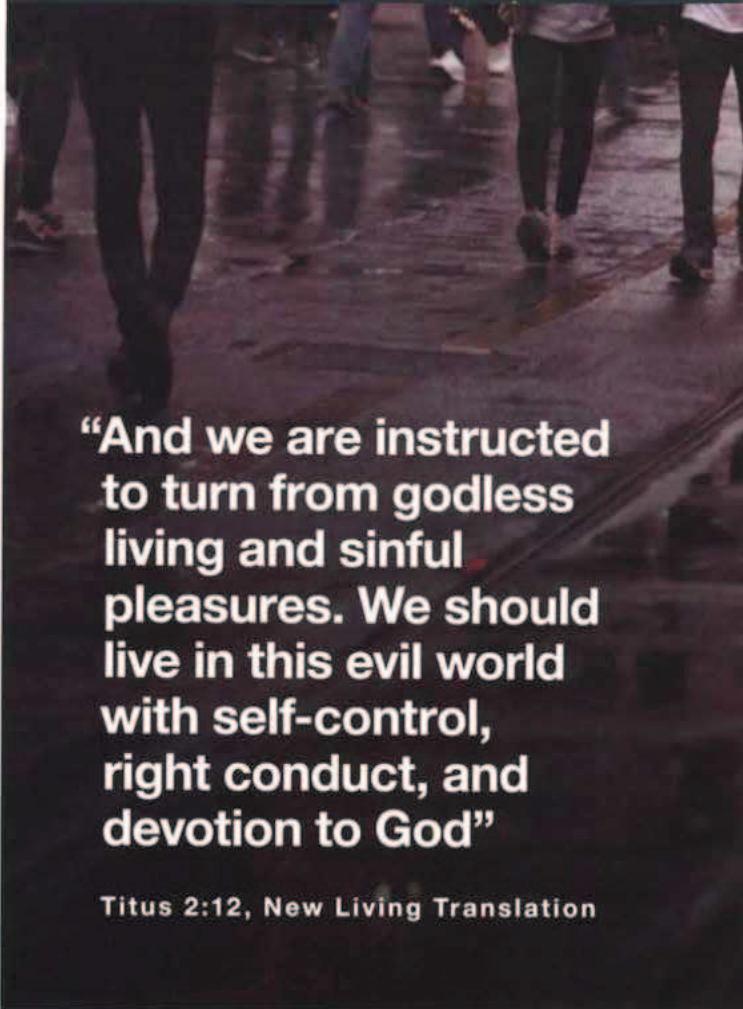
Invoking Christ's name in prophecies, acknowledging Him

as Savior and even doing works of wonders, are not enough for people to be assured of salvation. In fact, Christ Himself expressed His repugnance to those who do so but are not in God's household when He stated: "And then I will say to them openly (publicly), I never knew you; depart from Me, you who act wickedly [disregarding My commands]" (Matt. 7:23, *AMP*).

True believers of Christ can be found in God's household; as He commanded, they entered Christ's fold or flock, which is the Church Of Christ (John 10:7, 9, *Revised English Bible*).

True members of God's household

While the Bible proves that people must first belong to God's household or the Church Of Christ so that they will receive His blessings, it also teaches the kind of life that they must live to be certain of His rewards. This is what the Bible says: "And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world



“And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with self-control, right conduct, and devotion to God”

Titus 2:12, New Living Translation

with self-control, right conduct, and devotion to God” (Titus 2:12, *New Living Translation*).

Thus, a very vital characteristic of true members of God’s household who will be worthy of His blessings especially on the day of Christ’s Advent is that they renew their lives completely—from godless living to a life that is moral, decent, righteous, and devoted to God. Apostle Paul expounds on how renewal of life can be achieved—that God’s people must never allow any part of their body to become “a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning”, instead, they should use their whole body “as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God” (Rom. 6:13, *Ibid.*).

Moreover, the Holy Scriptures state in no uncertain terms the evil result if members of God’s household which is the Church Of Christ do not live righteous and holy lives:

“I will teach you about God’s power. I will not hide God All-Powerful’s plans... If a person does not care about God, then there is no hope for that person when he dies. That person has no hope when God takes his life away. That evil person will have troubles, and he will cry to God for help. But God won’t listen to him! That person should have enjoyed [talking with] God All-Powerful. That person should have prayed to God all the time.” (Job 27:11, 8-10, *Easy-To-Read-Version*)

When troubles beset the lives of God’s servants who do not live in holiness and they call on Him, their prayers will not be answered. Moreover, they will die without hope for salvation.

God’s chosen ones should not allow this to happen to them. And so, they must always uphold the intensive renewal of life as true members of the household of God.

The value of being righteous

Apostle Paul underscored the utmost significance of being righteous and holy amid widespread wickedness in this world: “Good people might have many problems, but the LORD will save them from every one of their problems” (Ps. 34:19, *Ibid.*).

In addition, God does not abandon, but protects and helps the true members of His household who lead holy lives: “for the LORD loves what is right and does not abandon his faithful people. He protects them forever, but the descendants of the wicked will be driven out. The righteous will possess the land and live in it forever.”

“The LORD guides us in the way we should go and protects those who please him. If they fall, they will not stay down, because the LORD will help them up” (Ps. 37:28-29, 23-24, *Good News Bible*).

Hence, righteous servants of God are not on the losing end. Even amidst troubles, if they cry out to the Lord for help, plead

with Him, and bring to Him all their complaints, He will help them and be their protector (Ps. 142:1-5, *Ibid.*).

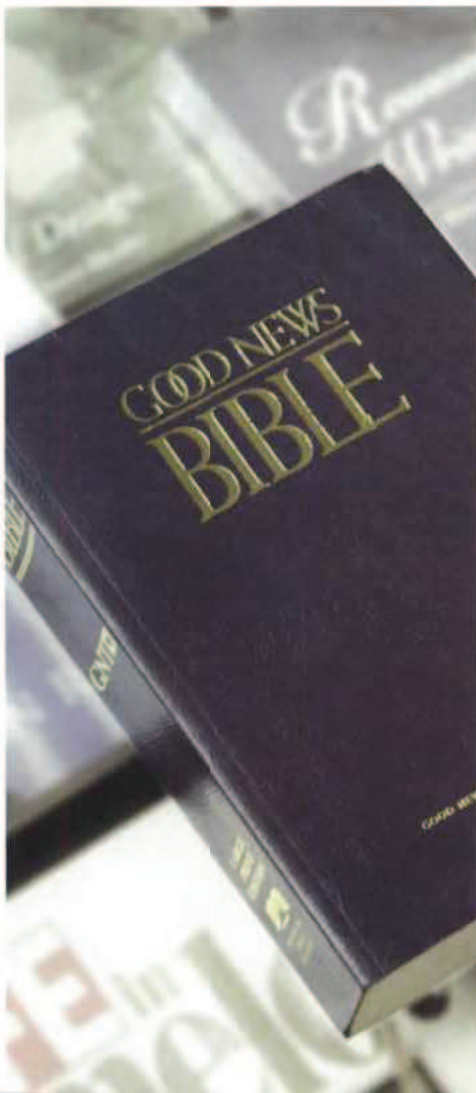
Holiness and salvation

More importantly, as Judgment Day draws nearer, God will not fail the righteous members of His household or the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*: “Therefore the LORD waits [expectantly] and longs to be gracious to you, And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; Blessed (happy, fortunate) are all those who long for Him [since He will never fail them]” (Isa. 30:18, *AMP 2015*).

Undoubtedly, the reward to those who keep on doing what is good and lead holy lives is well worth their struggles and sacrifices, for eternal life awaits them on the Second Advent of Christ. 🕊

The Bible and the true faith

By REYNALDO G. ARIZALA JR.



“WHAT SHOULD BE my basis in serving God?” Oftentimes, one asks this question because he wants to perform acceptable and sound worship to God. In this modern age, many people base their faith only on things that personally matter to them or on their own point of view. For instance, if family and friends are members of a certain church, others feel obliged to go to the same church. Some people seek only convenience such that the church should not interfere with their work, school, and lifestyle. If man wants his worship to be deemed worthy by God, his basis should not be his personal opinion, convenience, or understanding but the will of God as Jesus Christ clarifies in Matthew 7:21:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” (*New King James Version*)

Doing the will of the Father is essential for man’s worship to be worthy and acceptable. Even if one recognizes Christ—and calls Him Lord—such will be immaterial before Him if one does not fulfill the will of God. If man wants to worship God, he must follow not what he wants to do but what God wants man to do. But how can one understand the will of God? Where can man find the will of God that he needs to fulfill? Apostle Paul stated: “and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (II Tim. 3:15-17, *Ibid.*).

The Holy Scriptures or the Bible should be man’s sole basis in

serving God because it is inspired by Him. Written in it are the pristine words of God that man must fulfill. The Bible provides profitable and sound doctrine that will lead man to righteousness. Thus the Bible must be the basis of man's faith in fulfilling his obligation to serve God. Why is it important that man's faith be based on the Bible and not on his own reasoning? What will happen if one will perform services based on the commandments merely created by man? It will be in vain.

"And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:9, *Ibid.*)

In vain or useless is one's worship of God that He considers unacceptable and displeasing before His sight. Even if man devotes time, dedication, financial resources, and perseverance in serving God, but if his services to God are based only on man-made teachings, it will be of no value or worthless before God (Col. 2:22-23, *New International Version*). Anyone in his right frame of mind who worships God would never want his devotion be in vain; rather he wants his worship to be pleasing before God.

So that man's worship be acceptable to God, what is the will of the Father that man must first fulfill? Apostle Paul teaches: "having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him." (Eph. 1:9-10, *NKJV*)

It is God's will that all be gathered in Christ. But how can this will of God be accomplished? In Romans 12:4-5, the Bible states:

"For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." (*Ibid.*)

Those who are gathered in Christ are not those who just profess their faith in Him but rather, they are members of the one body. What is the one body being referred to by the Bible?

"And He is the head of the body, the church ..." (Col. 1:18, *Ibid.*)

The Church that is headed by Christ is the one body being referred to in the verse. It is only reasonable that if Christ is the head of the church, it follows that the Church is named after Him. What is the name of the Church headed by Christ?

"Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, to feed the church of Christ which he has purchased with his blood." (Acts 20:28, *Lamsa Translation*)

The one Church being referred to by the Bible in which God wants all men to be gathered, is the Church Of Christ. This is the commandment of God that all men need to follow so that his

services to God will not be in vain. Why is it necessary for one to become a member of the Church Of Christ before he can perform worthy and acceptable service to God? The Church Of Christ is the only Church redeemed with the blood of Christ. Remember that the members in particular are many but the body or the church remains only one.

If man wants redemption, he needs to become a member of the true Church Of Christ. Why is it very

"And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

**II Timothy 3:15
New King James Version**

important for one to be redeemed with the blood of Christ? "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:14, *NKJV*)

A person cannot perform worthy service to God unless he is redeemed with the blood of Christ. Redemption can only be achieved through membership in the Church Of Christ. This is the will of God that man needs to fulfill in order to attain the true faith prescribed by the Bible. ●

Jacob wrestles with an angel

DO YOU KNOW WHY JACOB, son of Isaac, was later renamed "Israel"? What does that name mean? Find out by reading this story from the Bible.

That same night Jacob got up ... Then a man came and wrestled with him until just before daybreak. When the man saw that he was not winning the struggle, he hit Jacob on the hip, and it was thrown out of joint. The man said,

"Let me go; daylight is coming."

"I won't, unless you bless me," Jacob answered.

"What is your name?" the man asked.

"Jacob," he answered.

The man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob. You have struggled with God and with men, and you have won; so your name will be Israel."

Jacob said, "Now tell me your name."

But he answered, "Why do you want to know my name?" Then he blessed Jacob.

Jacob said, "I have seen God face-to-face, and I am still alive"; so he named the place Peniel. The sun rose as Jacob was leaving Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. Even today the descendants of Israel do not eat the muscle which is on the hip joint, because it was on this muscle that Jacob was hit. (Excerpted from Genesis 32:22, 24-32, *Today's English Version*)

This account on Jacob's life illustrates what true servants of God are willing to do to attain His promised blessings. Church Of Christ members are exhorted to "earnestly desire the greater gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31), among which are the duties and obligations in the Church (Rom. 12:6-7). Thus, even if they have to face dangers and endure pain and suffering, the faithful Church officers willingly make the sacrifices to fulfill their duties to God. For, it is their faith that nothing they do for the work of the Lord will ever become useless but will result in their receiving the great reward. (1 Cor. 15:58; Phil. 3:14) ☪



ILLUSTRATION BY NESTOR G. MARGAPO SR.



Nais ng Diyos na ang lahat ng tao ay maligtas

BAGAMA'T MARAMING TAON na ang nakalipas mula nang makarating ang *Iglesia Ni Cristo* sa Africa, sa nagdaang dalawa't kalahating taon ay kinakitaan ng malaking pagsulong ang Iglesia sa kaniyang gawaing pagpapalaganap sa nasabing kontinente.

Noong Agosto 30, 2014, nang dumalaw ang Kapatid na Eduardo V. Manalo sa King William's Town (KWT), South Africa—ang kauna-unahang pagkakataon para sa Tagapamahalang Pangkalahatan ng Iglesia—pinangasiwaan niya ang isang pagsamba kung saan may 4,000 panauhing Aprikano ang nakapakinig ng mga salita ng Diyos na kaniyang itinuro na isinalin sa Ingles at sa mga katutubong wika roon, ang *Xhosa* at *Sesotho*. Ang pangyayaring yaon ang naging simula ng mabilis na paglaganap ng Iglesia sa panig na iyon ng daigdig.

Noon, ang KWT ang kaisa-isang lokal ng Iglesia sa buong Africa at may isa lamang ministrong nakadestino. Makalipas lamang ang 30 buwan, ang Iglesia ay mayroon na ngayong pitong lokal, dalawang *extension*, at 25 na mga *Group Worship Service* (GWS) sa 17 bansa, at may nakadestinong 28 ministro't manggagawa na nagpapalaganap ng ebanghelyo maging sa mga liblib na pamayanan sa malawak na lupain. Ngayon, ang gawaing pagpapalaganap ng Iglesia ay nakarating na sa 14 pang bansa at inaasahang doo'y magkakaroon din ng mga lokal. Habang sinusulat ito, mayroon nang 4,162 Aprikano ang kasalukuyang dinudoktrinahan o tinuturuan ng mga pangunahing aral ng Biblia na sinasampalatayanan ng *Iglesia Ni Cristo* upang maging kaanib sa Iglesia, at may 512 naman ang inihahanda na sa kanilang bautismo.

Ang tagumpay na tinatamasa ng Iglesia sa gawaing pagpapalaganap sa Africa ang siya ring namamalas sa ibang dako. Sa Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, ang pagdalaw ng Kapatid na Eduardo noong Enero 7—na dinaluhan ng 75 panauhing Brasilyano—ang nagbunsod sa mas pinaigting na pagpapalaganap ng Mabuting Balita ng kaligtasan sa pinakamalaking bansa sa South America kung saan naninirahan ang may 206 na milyong mamamayan. Ang mga *favela* (na tinatawag ding *comunidades*) ay pinagdarausan na ngayon ng mga gawaing pagmimisyon ng Iglesia.

Bakit gayon na lamang ang pagsusumakit ng Iglesia na maabot ang mga tao anuman ang kanilang lahi, kultura, at kalagayan sa lipunan? Ano ang nagbubunsod sa mga kaanib nito upang ibahagi sa marami ang Mabuting Balita? Si Apostol Pablo ang nagbigay ng kasagutan:

“Ito’y mabuti at nakalulugod sa paningin ng Dios na ating Tagapagligtas; Na siyang may ibig na ang lahat ng mga tao’y mangaligtas, at mangakaalam ng katotohanan.” (I Tim. 2:3-4)

Ang Diyos mismo ang may nais na ang lahat ng mga tao ay maligtas. Pero paano maliligtas ang mga tao? Kailangan nilang malaman ang katotohanan.

Ano ang isa sa mga katotohanang itinuturo ng Biblia na dapat malaman, sampalatayanan, at masunod ng tao? “Kaya muling nagsalita si Jesus: Buong katotohanang sinasabi Ko sa inyo. Ako ang pintuan ng kulungan ng mga tupa. ... Ako ang pintuan; ang sinumang taong pumasok sa loob ng kawan sa pamamagitan ko ay maliligtas. ...” (Juan 10:7, 9, *Revised English Bible*, isinalin sa Filipino).

Ang kawan na dapat pasukan o aniban ng tao ay ang *Iglesia Ni Cristo*: “Ingatan ninyo kung gayon ang inyong mga sarili at ang buong kawan na rito’y hinirang kayo ng Espiritu Santo na mga katiwala, upang pakanin ang iglesia ni Cristo na binili niya ng kaniyang dugo” (Gawa 20:28, *Lamsa Translation*, isinalin sa Filipino).

Ito ang dahilan ng puspusang pagpapalaganap ng ebanghelyo na itinataguyod ng *Iglesia Ni Cristo*: upang maipaalam sa sangkatauhan na ang pag-anib sa tunay na Iglesia ay di-maiiwasang hakbang tungo sa ikapagtatamo ng kaligtasan sa Araw ng Paghuhukom. Kaya naman, ang gawaing pagmimisyon ng Iglesia ay isinasagawa hindi lamang sa malalaki at hayag na lungsod at bayan. Sa Pilipinas, nagtutungo ang mga kapatid maging sa mga pinakaliblib na komunidad upang ibahagi ang tunay na pananampalataya maging sa tinatawag na *indigenous* o *ethnic minorities*, gaya ng tribung Kabihug sa Bicol Region, B’laan sa Southern Mindanao, Dumagat sa Southern Luzon, Aeta, at iba pang tribu. Sa North America, ang *Iglesia Ni Cristo* ay nakapagtatag na rin ng misyong pagpapalaganap sa *Native American communities*, gaya ng *Quinault Indian Reservation* sa Taholah, Washington kung saan itinayo ang isang *barangay chapel* para matugunan ang pangangailangan ng lumalaking bilang ng mga kapatid at ng mga taong umaanib sa Iglesia.

Tunay nga, ang *Iglesia Ni Cristo* ay puspusang nagpapalaganap ng ebanghelyo sa bawat sulok ng daigdig upang matupad ang hangarin ng Diyos na ang lahat ng tao ay makaalam ng katotohanan at maligtas pagdating ng Araw ng Paghuhukom. ●

— DENNIS C. LOVENDINO
Punong Patnugot

Dalawang lahi

Sinulat ni NICANOR P. TIOSEN

LAHAT NG TAO, anoman ang kaniyang lahi, ay nilalang ng Diyos. Kaya lahat tayo ay sa Diyos!" Ito ang karaniwang paniniwala ng marami. Ang hindi alam ng marami, mayroon ding lahi ng diablo!

Lahing sa Diyos

Sa sulat ni Apostol Pedro sinabi niyang:

"Datapuwa't kayo'y isang lahing hirang, isang makaharing pagkasaserdote, bansang banal, bayang pagaaring sarili ng *Dios*, upang inyong ipahayag ang mga karangalan niyaong tumawag sa inyo mula sa kadiliman, hanggang sa kaniyang kagilagilalas na kaliwanagan." (I Ped. 2:9)

Tiniyak ng apostol na mayroong isang lahing hirang, na siya ring bayang pag-aaring sarili ng Diyos.

Sa sulat naman ni Apostol Pablo ay ipinahayag niya ang ganito:

"Samakatwid, hindi na kayo dayuhan o taga-ibang bansa, kundi kababayan ng mga hinirang ng Diyos at kabilang sa kanyang sambahayan." (Efe. 2:19, *Magandang Balita Biblia*)

Kung pare-parehong sa Diyos ang lahat ng tao, hindi na sana sinabi ng mga apostol na may lahing

hirang, bayang pag-aaring sarili ng Diyos, at sambahayan ng Diyos.

Lahing sa diablo

Ang ating Panginoong Jesucristo ay mayroon namang binabanggit na mga "lahi ng mga ulupong":

"Kayong mga ahas, kayong mga lahi ng mga ulupong, paanong mangakawawala kayo sa kahatulan sa impierno?" (Mat. 23:33)

Ang ahas na tinutukoy ay ang diablo o si satanas (Apoc. 12:9). Mariin ding sinabi ng Panginoong Jesucristo na:

"Kayo'y sa *inyong* amang diablo, at ang mga nais ng inyong ama ang ibig ninyong gawin. Siya'y isang mamamatay-tao buhat pa nang una, at hindi nananatili sa katotohanan, sapagka't walang katotohanan sa kaniya. Pagka nagsasalita siya ng kasinungalingan, ay nagsasalita siya ng sa ganang kaniya: sapagka't siya'y isang sinungaling, at amano." (Juan 8:44)

Kaya, may lahi o anak ng diablo. Natitiyak natin na sila'y hindi mga anak ng Diyos!

Iisa lamang ang Diyos na lumalang o lumikha sa lahat. Ngunit, bakit may mga taong bagama't nilalang ng Diyos ay naging lahi o anak ng diablo? Ganito ang sagot ni Apostol Pablo:

"Ngunit nag-aalaala akong baka malason ang inyong isipan at mailayo kayo sa tapat at dalisay na pananalig kay Cristo, tulad ni Eva na nalinlang ng ahas." (II Cor. 11:3, *MB*)

Kaya nagkaroon ng lahi o anak ng diablo ay sapagkat nalinlang sila ng ahas o ni satanas, "ang dumadaya sa buong sanglibutan" (Apoc. 12:9). Ipinaliwanag ni Apostol Pablo kung paano nagagawang linlangin ng diablo ang tao:

"Lilitaw ang Suwail na taglay ang kapangyarihan ni Satanas. Gagawa siya ng lahat ng uri ng himala at nakalililang na tanda at kababalaghan. At gagamit siya ng lahat ng uri ng pandaraya sa mga mapapahamak—mga taong maliligtas sana kung kanilang tinanggap at inibig ang katotohanan. Sapagkat hindi nila tinanggap ang katotohanan, ipinaubaya ng Diyos na sila'y malinlang ng espiritu ng kamalian at papaniwalain sa kasinungalingan." (II Tes. 2:9-11, *MB*)

Kaya dapat mag-ingat ang tao. Kapag binulag na ni satanas ang isipan ng tao, kahit ang maliwanag na isinasaad ng ebanghelyo ay hindi na niya makikita (II Cor. 4:4). Sa halip, kasinungalingan na ang paniniwalaan niya. Ang ganito ay mapapahamak—sabi ni Cristo'y

hindi sila “mangakawawala ... sa kahatulan sa impiyerno.”

Pagbabagong lahi

Palibhasa ang Diyos ay pag-ibig, isinugo Niya ang Kaniyang Anak upang magkaroon ng pagkakataon na maligtas kahit ang mga nalinlang ng diablo:

“At sinabi ni Jesus sa kanila, Katotohanang sinasabi ko sa inyo, na kayong nagsisunod sa akin, sa pagbabagong lahi pagka uupo na ang Anak ng tao sa luklukan ng kaniyang kaluwalhatian, kayo nama’y magsisiupo sa labingdalawang luklukan, upang magsihukom sa labingdalawang angkan ng Israel.” (Mat. 19:28)

Kailangang sumunod sa pagbabagong lahi. Kailangang sumunod sa ating Panginoong Jesucristo. Ito ang pag-asang ibinibigay ng Diyos.

Kapag naalis na sa pagiging lahi ni satanas, magiging anak na ng Diyos. Ito ang tiniyak ni Apostol Pablo:

“Sapagka’t kayong lahat ay mga anak ng Dios, sa pamamagitan ng pananampalataya, kay Cristo Jesus. Sapagka’t ang lahat na sa inyo ay binautismuhan kay Cristo ay ibinihis si Cristo. Walang *magiging* Judio o Griego man, walang *magiging* alipin o malaya man, walang *magiging* lalake o babae man; sapagka’t kayong lahat ay iisa kay Cristo Jesus.” (Gal. 3:26–28)

Magiging anak ng Diyos ang tao kung sila ay magiging iisa kay Cristo.

Si Apostol Pablo rin ang nagpaliwanag kung sino ang iisa kay Cristo. Sa sulat sa mga taga-Roma ay sinabi niyang:

“Sapagka’t kung paanong sa isang katawan ay mayroong tayong maraming mga sangkap, at ang lahat ng mga sangkap ay hindi pareho ang gawain: Ay gayon din tayo, na marami, ay iisang katawan kay Cristo, at mga sangkap na samasama sa isa’t isa.” (Roma 12:4–5)

“At siya ang ulo ng katawan, sa makatuwid *baga’y* ng iglesia. ...” (Col. 1:18)

Kung gayon, kailangang maging iisang katawan kay Cristo o magsama-samang sangkap sa

“Samakatwid, hindi na kayo dayuhan o taga-ibang bansa, kundi kababayan ng mga hinirang ng Diyos at kabilang sa kanyang sambahayan.”

**Efeso 2:19
Magandang Balita
Biblia**

Iglesia Niya upang maging iisa kay Cristo at maging mga anak ng Diyos.

Ang mga hinirang ng Diyos

Tiniyak ng ating Panginoong Jesucristo na mayroon Siyang itinayong Iglesia, at iyon ang Kaniya:

“At sinasabi ko naman sa iyo, na ikaw ay Pedro, at sa ibabaw ng batong ito ay itatayo ko ang aking iglesia; at ang mga pintuan ng Hades ay hindi magsisipanaig laban sa kaniya.” (Mat. 16:18)

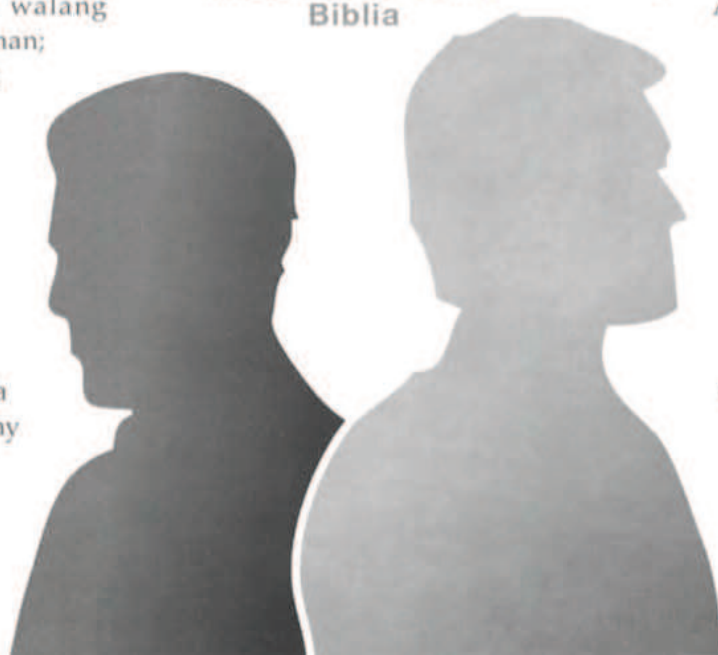
Ang Iglesiang kay Cristo ay ang sinabi Niyang “aking iglesia.” Tinawag ito ng mga apostol na *Iglesia Ni Cristo*:

“Magbatian kayo ng banal na halik. Lahat ng iglesya ni Cristo ay bumabati sa inyo.” (Roma 16:16, *New Pilipino Version*)

Ano ang halaga ng maging *Iglesia Ni Cristo*? Saan sila kabilang? Ganito ang sagot ni Apostol Pablo:

“Samakatwid, hindi na kayo dayuhan o taga-ibang bansa, kundi kababayan ng mga hinirang ng Diyos at kabilang sa kanyang sambahayan. Kayo’y itinayo rin sa saligan ng mga apostol at mga propeta, na ang batong panulukan ay si Cristo Jesus.

At sa pamamagitan niya, nagkakaugnay-ugnay ang bawat bahagi ng gusali at nagiging isang templong banal. Dahil din sa inyong pakikipag-isa sa kanya, kayo ma’y kasama nilang naging bahagi ng tahanan ng Diyos sa pamamagitan ng Espiritu.” (Efe. 2:19–22, MB) ●



Ang ipinangakong Espiritu Santo

Sinulat ni GREG F. NONATO

Sino ang pinangakuang tatanggap ng Espiritu Santo?

MAHALAGANG matanggap ng mga tao ang ipinangakong Espiritu Santo sapagkat ito ang patotoo ng katubusan at pagiging pag-aaring sarili ng Diyos: “Na sa kaniya’y kayo rin naman, pagkarinig ng aral ng katotohanan, ng evangelio ng inyong kaligtasan—na sa kaniya rin naman, mula nang kayo’y magsisampalataya, ay kayo’y tinatakan ng Espiritu Santo, na ipinangako, Na siyang patotoo sa ating mana, hanggang sa ikatutubos ng sariling pagaari ng Dios” (Efe. 1:13-14). Dahil dito, dapat sikapin ng tao na mapabilang sa mga tumanggap ng Espiritu Santo.

Ang pinangakuang tatanggap

Sino ang pinangakuang tatanggap ng Espiritu Santo? Ganito ang pahayag ni Apostol Pedro:

“At *sinabi* sa kanila ni Pedro, Mangagsisi kayo, at

mangagbautismo ang bawa’t isa sa inyo sa pangalan ni Jesucristo sa ikapagpapatawad ng inyong mga kasalanan; at tatanggapin ninyo ang kaloob ng Espiritu Santo. Sapagka’t sa inyo ang pangako, at sa inyong mga anak, at sa lahat ng nangasa malayo, maging ilan man ang tawagin ng Panginoon nating Dios sa kaniya.” (Gawa 2:38-39)

May tatlong grupo ng mga tao na pinangakuang tatanggap ng Espiritu Santo. Ang una ay ang sinabihan ni Apostol Pedro na “sa inyo”. Sino ang “sa inyo” na tinutukoy ni Apostol Pedro? Ang kausap niya noon ay ang mga Judio:

“Pakatalastasin nga ng buong angkan ni Israel, na ginawa ng Dios na Panginoon at Cristo itong si Jesus na inyong ipinako sa krus.” (Gawa 2:36)

“Kayong mga lalaking taga Israel, pakinggan ninyo ang mga salitang ito: Si Jesus na taga Nazaret,

lalaking pinatunayan ng Dios sa inyo sa pamamagitan ng mga gawang makapangyarihan at mga kababalaghan at mga tanda na ginawa ng Dios sa pamamagitan niya sa gitna ninyo, gaya rin ng nalalaman ninyo.” (Gawa 2:22)

Sila ang mga Judio na nagkakatipon sa Jerusalem nang araw ng Pentecostes. Bumaba sa kanila ang Espiritu Santo na gaya ng isang humahagibis na hanging malakas at pinuno ang buong bahay na kanilang kinaroroonan (Gawa 2:1-2).

Ang ikalawa

Ang ikalawang grupo naman na pinangakuang tatanggap ng Espiritu Santo ay ang binanggit ni Apostol Pedro na “sa inyong mga anak.” Ang tinutukoy niya ay ang mga Gentil na “ipinanganak” ng mga Judiong Cristiano sa pamamagitan ng pangangaral ng ebanghelyo (I

**“Sapagka’t sa inyo ang pangako,
at sa inyong mga anak, at sa lahat
ng nangasa malayo, maging ilan man
ang tawagin ng Panginoon
nating Dios sa kaniya.”**

G a w a 2 : 3 9

Cor. 4:15). Pinatutunayan ng Biblia na ibinuhos din ang Espiritu Santo sa mga Gentil na umanib sa *Iglesia Ni Cristo*, katulad ni Cornelio at ang sambahayan niya:

“Samantalang nagsasalita pa si Pedro ng mga salitang ito, ay bumaba ang Espiritu Santo sa lahat ng nangakikinig ng salita. At silang sa pagtutuli na nagsisampalataya ay nangamanghang lahat na nagsiparoong kasama ni Pedro, sapagka’t ibinuhos din naman sa mga Gentil ang kaloob na Espiritu Santo.” (Gawa 10:44-45)

Ang ikatlo

Ang ikatlong grupo na pinangakuang tatanggap din ng Espiritu Santo ayon kay Apostol Pedro ay ang “nangasa malayo, maging ilan man ang tawagin ng Panginoon nating Dios sa kaniya.” Ang tinutukoy ay ang nasa malayong dako at malayong panahon (Gawa 2:39, *Rieu Translation*).

Alin ang malayong dako na roon magmumula ang ikatlong grupo na tatanggap ng pangakong Espiritu Santo? Ito ay tumutukoy sa “malayong silangan”: “From the far east will I bring your offspring, and from the far west I will gather you” (Isa. 43:5, *Moffatt Translation*), na ganito kung isasalin sa wikang Filipino, “Mula sa malayong silangan ay dadalhin ko ang iyong lahi, at mula sa malayong kanluran ay titipunin kita.”

Kailan naman ang tinutukoy na malayong panahon na siyang paglitaw ng ikatlong grupo na tatanggap ng pangakong Espiritu Santo? Ito ang tinatawag na “mga wakas ng lupa”:

“Aking sasabihin sa hilagaan, bayaan mo, at sa timugan huwag mong pigilin; dalhin mo rito ang aking mga anak na lalake na mula sa malayo, at ang aking mga anak na babae na mula sa mga wakas ng

lupa.” (Isa. 43:6, *King James Version*, isinalin sa Filipino)

Ang “mga wakas ng lupa” ay tumutukoy sa panahong malapit na ang wakas o ang Araw ng Paghuhukom (Mat. 24:3, 33). Ang isa sa mga palatandaan na nagsimula na ang panahong “mga wakas ng lupa” ay digmaan na kasangkutan ng mga bansa at aalingawngaw o mapapabalita sa buong mundo (Mat. 24:6-7). Ito ang Unang Digmaang Pandaigdig na sumiklab noong Hulyo 27, 1914 kaalinsabay ng opisyal na pagkakatatag ng *Iglesia Ni Cristo* sa Pilipinas na siyang tinutukoy na “far east” o “malayong silangan”.

At dahil sa tinanggap na pangakong Espiritu Santo, ang *Iglesia Ni Cristo* ay kinikilala ng Diyos na Kaniyang sariling pag-aari at nagtamo ng katubusan. Ibig ba ninyong maging sariling pag-aari ng Diyos at makabahagi sa katubusan? Halina kayo sa *Iglesia Ni Cristo*. ☪

Let us be of help to others

By ROMMEL T. SANVICTORES

WHEN THE LORD JESUS Christ was asked as to which is the first and greatest commandment, He explicitly answered, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind" (Matt. 22:37, *New Living Translation*). After saying this, the Savior emphasized an equally important command that ought to be fulfilled by stating, "A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:39, *Ibid.*). This second pronouncement of the Lord is being used by many people nowadays as basis for the way they treat their fellowmen. This is why it is truly heartwarming to hear people uttering compassionate and consoling words upon seeing the sufferings of the less fortunate and impoverished, and of victims of disasters and calamities. But in view of the popular saying, "Put your money where your mouth is," it is undeniable that not a few fall short.

Proving one's love and compassion

Though it warms the heart to hear kind words as a sign of love for our fellowmen, such is not good enough, for the Lord expects that our love should not be just through

words and talk but through action. This is what Apostle John who learned from the Savior taught to the Christians:

"My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action." (1 John 3:18, *Good News Bible*)

Translating our love for our fellowmen into meaningful action proves the kind of love we have. This also has something to do with fulfilling the first and greatest commandment, which is to love the Lord God, as attested to by the same apostle:

"If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God?" (1 John 3:17, *Ibid.*)

One way by which we can prove our love and compassion through action is by being openhanded toward the poor and needy, as stated in Deuteronomy 15:11: "There will always be poor people in the land, So I command you to give freely [open your hand] to your neighbors [or relatives; or countrymen; brothers] and to the poor and needy in your land" (*Expanded Bible*). To be openhanded is done by sharing food with the hungry, giving clothes to those who need them, and providing shelter to

the homeless, as what God Himself said, "I want you to share your food with the hungry. I want you to find the poor who don't have homes and bring them into your own homes. When you see people who have no clothes, give them your clothes! Don't hide from your relatives when they need help" (Isa. 58:7, *Easy-to-Read Version*).

This is the reason for the humanitarian missions of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ) through the *Lingap sa Mamamayan* or Aid to Humanity program it conducts for the less privileged and indigent members of society. The Church provides them with basic necessities such as food and clothing as well as medical services which are also given for free especially to those affected by calamities. Through its housing projects, the Church also endeavors to provide suitable homes to victims of disasters who have lost their belongings. All these are in fulfillment of the biblical precept of showing our love through action.

When help is all the more needed

The Church Of Christ intensifies its efforts to help those in need in view of what Apostle Paul forewarned:

“Remember that there will be difficult times in the last days” (II Tim. 3:1, GNB).

This is why the Church Of Christ, through the Felix Y. Manalo Foundation, Inc., exhausts all efforts to help those in need by conducting International Aid to Humanity programs in various parts of the globe, especially in areas severely affected by famines and calamities.

True Christians make use of every opportunity to help the needy. This is in keeping with the instruction of the apostles, as can be read in Galatians 6:10: “So then, as often as we have the chance, we should do good to everyone, and especially to those who belong to our

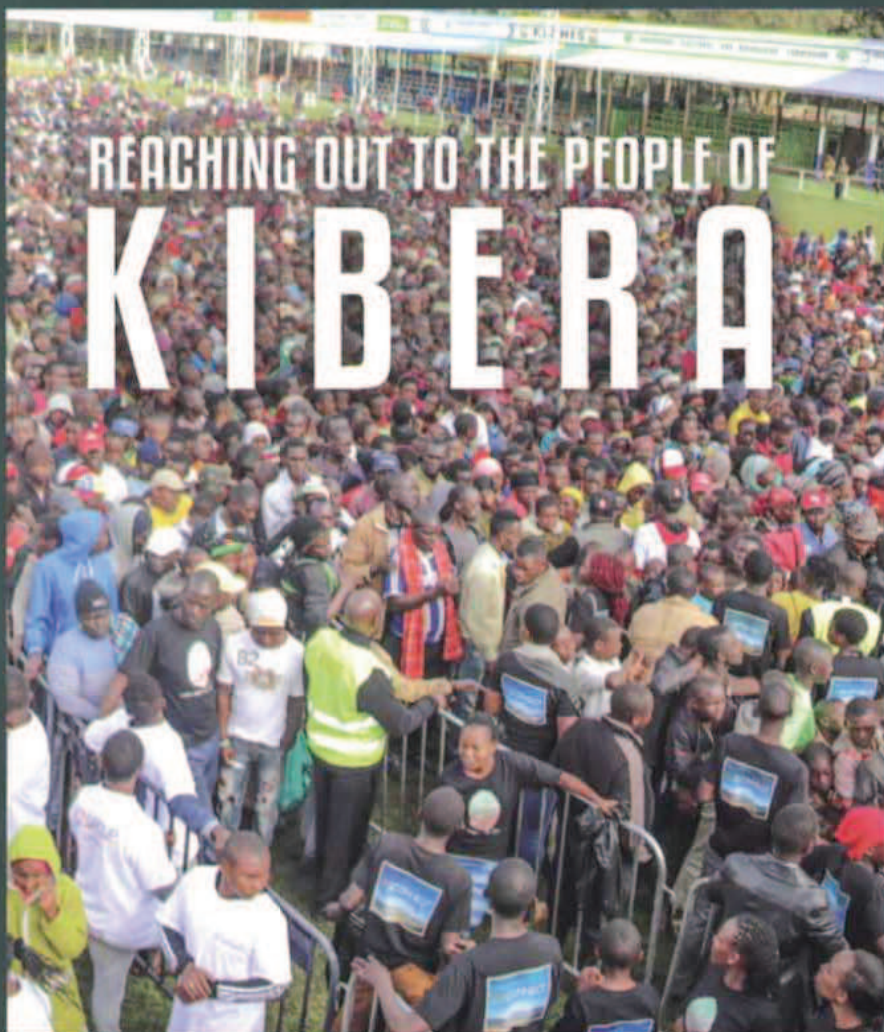
family in the faith” (*Today’s English Version*). In fulfilling this sacred duty, the members of the Church Of Christ are able to prove that not only are they united in participating in the intensified campaign of the Church Administration to help those in need but they are also zealous in fulfilling God’s will for all true Christians that they make use of every chance to do good to everyone.

Furthermore, they do understand that by helping the needy, they bring honor to the Lord. This is what the wise King Solomon attested to in Proverbs 14:31: “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors

God” (*New International Version*). This is why members of the Church Of Christ never feel that participating in the Church’s humanitarian missions is burdensome. Instead, they do so wholeheartedly. They willingly help others, for they do know that fulfilling such divine duty brings honor to the Lord God.

Providing jobs and opportunities for livelihood

Intensifying the campaign to help the needy by providing food parcels, clothing, and other necessities does not mean that the Church Of Christ promotes dependency or tolerates laziness. Regarding this, there is a biblical instruction that is strictly



WHENEVER ABJECT POVERTY is discussed in the context of community and social condition, the Kibera slum in Kenya will never be forgotten to be mentioned. This slum is considered as the biggest and poorest urban slum in Africa (www.advance-africa.com) and one of the largest in the world (www.kibera.org.uk). Although study results about the exact population of Kibera differ, survey experts are one as witnesses to testify to the reality—hundreds of thousands of extremely poor people are suffering in this slum area.

Kibera is also regarded as “one of the most studied slums in Africa” (www.researchgate.net) not only because it is found almost in the middle of the progressive city of Nairobi, which is the capital and the largest city of Kenya, but it is also situated near the headquarters of UN Habitat, the United Nations’ agency that studies human settlement and urban development, which is based at the heart of Nairobi City. It is estimated that the people in the slum of Kibera live only on less than \$1 a day (worldpopulationreview.com) and more than 50% of the people here are unemployed (www.kibera.org.uk). In view of such severe economic condition—not to mention the poor sanitation in the entire community and the lack of

followed by true Christians. This is what Apostle Paul says in II Thessalonians 3:10-12: "While we were with you, we used to tell you, 'Whoever refuses to work is not allowed to eat.' We say this because we hear that there are some people among you who live lazy lives and who do nothing except meddle in other people's business. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we command these people and warn them to lead orderly lives and work to earn their own living" (GNB).

As proof that the Church Of Christ strictly adheres to this biblical instruction, the Church Administration, through UNLAD International, Inc., launches

livelihood projects and training programs that provide the members and nonmembers as well with the necessary knowledge and skills for them to have a stable and reliable means of earning a living.

Far more important to share

The meaning of these difficult times in the last days is explained in the gospel according to Apostle Matthew: "Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'... 'So you also, when you see all these

things, know that it is near, at the *very doors!* ... For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these *are* the beginning of sorrows' (Matt. 24:3, 33, 7-8, *New King James Version*).

Part of Christ's response to the question of His disciples regarding the signs of His Second Advent or the day of Judgment is that "nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom," and that "there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places." It is an irrefutable truth that these things have already taken place and continue to occur at the present time.

access to basic services including electricity, sewage system, medical care, clean water, among others—there is no denying that the people in Kibera badly need assistance.

Being aware of the wretched condition of the Kiberans and as part of the antipoverty campaign of the Church Of Christ, the Executive Minister of the Church, Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, instructed the staff of the Felix Y. Manalo Foundation, Inc. and the district staff of the ecclesiastical district of Africa to organize an outreach activity through the Church's Aid to Humanity program. To ensure not only the success but also the orderliness of the activity, planning and preparations were carefully carried out. And several days before the event, invitations and coupons were distributed to the residents of Kibera.

Early morning of November 25, 2016, the Jahmuri Park Show Ground, which is the cradle of the Nairobi International Trade Fair, was filled with an estimated 25,000 Kiberans who were the beneficiaries of this humanitarian mission. Food packages and grocery items were doled out to all who were in attendance. Every Kiberan present was filled with the overwhelming feeling of joy and gratitude. In view of this momentous event, Mr. David Ole Shani, the Deputy of Kenya Police, gladly remarked, "This is the first time that we have such a kind of exercise conducted by a



That is why far more important than the material blessings that true Christians willingly share with others is God's message about the gift of salvation. This is what Apostle Jude all the more enjoins true Christians to do: "keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh" (Jude 1:21-23, *Ibid.*). It is a divine command that true Christians show mercy or compassion towards others and save them by snatching them out of the fire. The fire being referred to is

the lake of fire into where those who will be condemned on Judgment Day will be thrown and eternally tormented (Rev. 20:14). This is why as the day of Judgment draws nearer, the members of the Church Of Christ double their efforts to share the grace of salvation with as many people as they can by guiding them to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

The truth about salvation was taught by no less than the Savior Himself: "So Jesus spoke again: 'In very truth I tell you, I am the door of the sheepfold. ... I am the door; anyone who comes into the fold through me will be safe' ..." (John 10:7, 9, *Revised English Bible*).

The fold or flock that should be entered by those who want to be saved as introduced by the apostles is the Church Of Christ (Acts 20:28, *Lamsa Translation*). For this reason, the members of the Church Of Christ never tire of inviting people who are not yet in the fold. The same with participating in humanitarian missions—they also do not consider it as a loss even if they have to devote much time, resources, and effort in sharing the true faith. Instead, they find happiness in sharing their material blessings with those in need and, all the more, in guiding people toward salvation. 🌟



Church. It is a large congregation that has never been held since before." And driven further by his appreciation and gratefulness for what the Church Of Christ has done for the Kiberans, Mr. Ole Shani added, "The Church [Church Of Christ] all the way from the Philippines coming here shows that you people have a real concern for us. And I thank you very much."

The Church Of Christ not only provided provisions to the people in Kibera but also shared with them the biblical truth about the true Church which is far more important to receive, for it will certainly lead them to salvation on Judgment Day. Thus, ministers of the Church expounded on this. Through a video presentation, the Kiberans came to know about the Church Of Christ and its noble purpose in reaching out to them. And since such kind of immense outreach activity conducted by a Church was the first in Nairobi City wherein thousands of Kiberans benefited both materially and most especially spiritually, Mr. Joseph Onyango, the Deputy Registrar of Societies of the Republic of Kenya, exclaimed in delight, "I would like to thank the Iglesia Ni Cristo for their kind gesture I have seen today. We appreciate it very, very much and we thank the Church wholeheartedly. I would like to say I welcome the Iglesia Ni Cristo here in Kenya." 🌟

THE 5TH INC INTERNATIONAL CHRONICLERS' ASSEMBLY

CHRONICLING THE CHURCH'S VICTORIES

AS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST presses onward to further victories in all aspects of its works worldwide, the Church's chroniclers double their efforts to ensure the proper documentation of all its events. Hence, the system of recording the Church's activities and the upkeep of its recorded history is continually updated with the aid of modern technology.

New methods were imparted to the chroniclers from the different ecclesiastical districts of the Church and their counterparts from the departments and institutions in the Iglesia Ni Cristo Central Office as they gathered once again for the annual INC International Chroniclers' Assembly held at the Central Temple's Session Hall from January 21 to 25, 2017.

The words of God taught by the Church Administration remain to be the guidelines of Church officers in performing the tasks God entrusted to them, so on January 24, the chroniclers received God's message as they witnessed on video the highlight of Brother Eduardo V. Manalo's homily during one of his pastoral visitations.

Reflecting on the message they received, Brother Jake Jambaro, district chronicler of Metro Manila North, shared the following: "Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, himself, in his preaching, mentioned some statistics and other relevant information that show the extent of the Church's growth and success in recent years. Recording such information and other historical events in the Church is our duty as chroniclers. It is important because these records show proof that God is with this Church."

For Brother Ariel P. Pavico, district chronicler of South Korea, he said, "Part of thanking God is remembering His blessings and the victories He gives the Church, and documenting such events is vital to preserve the Church's history for it to be shared with the members of the Church not just today but most especially in the future."

Brother Eduardo Manalo also sent Brother Rodelio E. Cabrera, the Church's Records Custodian, to deliver a Bible-based lecture and to preside over the oath-taking of the 46 newly appointed chroniclers.

This year's seminars and workshops focused on precision in making entries in recording the Church's history. The need for thorough research based on credible sources and references was emphasized. These points were covered by the lectures delivered by Brother Feljun B. Fuentes (Standards in Writing and Editing for the Chronicling of Church Events) and Brother Erwin Daniel S. Briones (Strategies in Research and Materials as Sources for Writing History). Brother Jeffrey C. Cabacungan gave important guidelines on using the visual medium in documenting Church events, 'Standards, Technique, and Resources for Photo-documentation, Storage, Management, and Critique.'

Ministers of the INC Research and Information Office discussed the system and technology used. Brother Eraño G. Quintio, through the use of the Church's history computer application, discussed the importance of recording immediately the Church's victories. Brother Dean F. Parado gave a brief recap



on the progress of the assembly from the time it was formed in 2012. The lecture prepared by Brothers Gelson P. Presilda and Dominador A. Aguada Jr. dealt on ways of reconciling information gathered and historical dates. Brother Raymond M. Reyes discussed some areas of concern regarding the submitted history books and conducted the chroniclers' workshops.

On January 21, the chroniclers went on a tour of some of the Philippines' historic sites in Bulacan such as the Museo Ng Kasaysayang Pampulitika ng Pilipinas (Museum of Philippine Political History) in Plaza Rizal, San Agustin and the Museo ng Republika ng 1899 (Museum of the 1899 Republic) in San Gabriel, Malolos.

Goodwill Games were held at the Iglesia Ni Cristo School for Ministers Gymnasium on January 22. The chroniclers joined sporting games and group dynamics to foster unity and brotherhood among them.

The annual INC Chroniclers' Assembly is facilitated by the Research and Information Office. Under the guidance of the Church Administration, this office propels projects and directs tasks aimed at producing complete, credible, and well-researched sources of historical information that can be used in various aspects of the works of the Church. The office also coordinates with other departments at the INC Central Office to ensure that the Church's recorded history is preserved, made accessible, and properly handled according to the highest standards and, more importantly, according to the Church Administration's guidelines and instructions, so that everyone will know that this Church is the handiwork of God. 🙏

Written by Misael D. Dungca III with assistance from Ronnie L. Rilles and Niko S. Moncada

DAY
1



MUSEUM
TOUR

DAY
2



GOODWILL
GAMES

DAY
3-5



LECTURES,
SEMINARS, AND
WORKSHOPS



Growth and expansion

Establishment of the Miyashiro Group
Worship Service (GWS) in the district of
Japan; first worship service in
Paniki Extension, Nueva Vizcaya.

Contributing Writers and Photographers: Mayumi Sugihara,
Tyra Nell Lu, Chrystelle Lamson, and Jojo Mertula





Edifying the flock

Choir members of **Cebu South** invite brethren and guests to celebrate Choir Day; and brethren in **Regina, Central Canada** gather for an evening of fun, games, music and entertainment together with their families.

Contributing writers and photographers: Marc Louie Aniñon, and Lailani Garcia

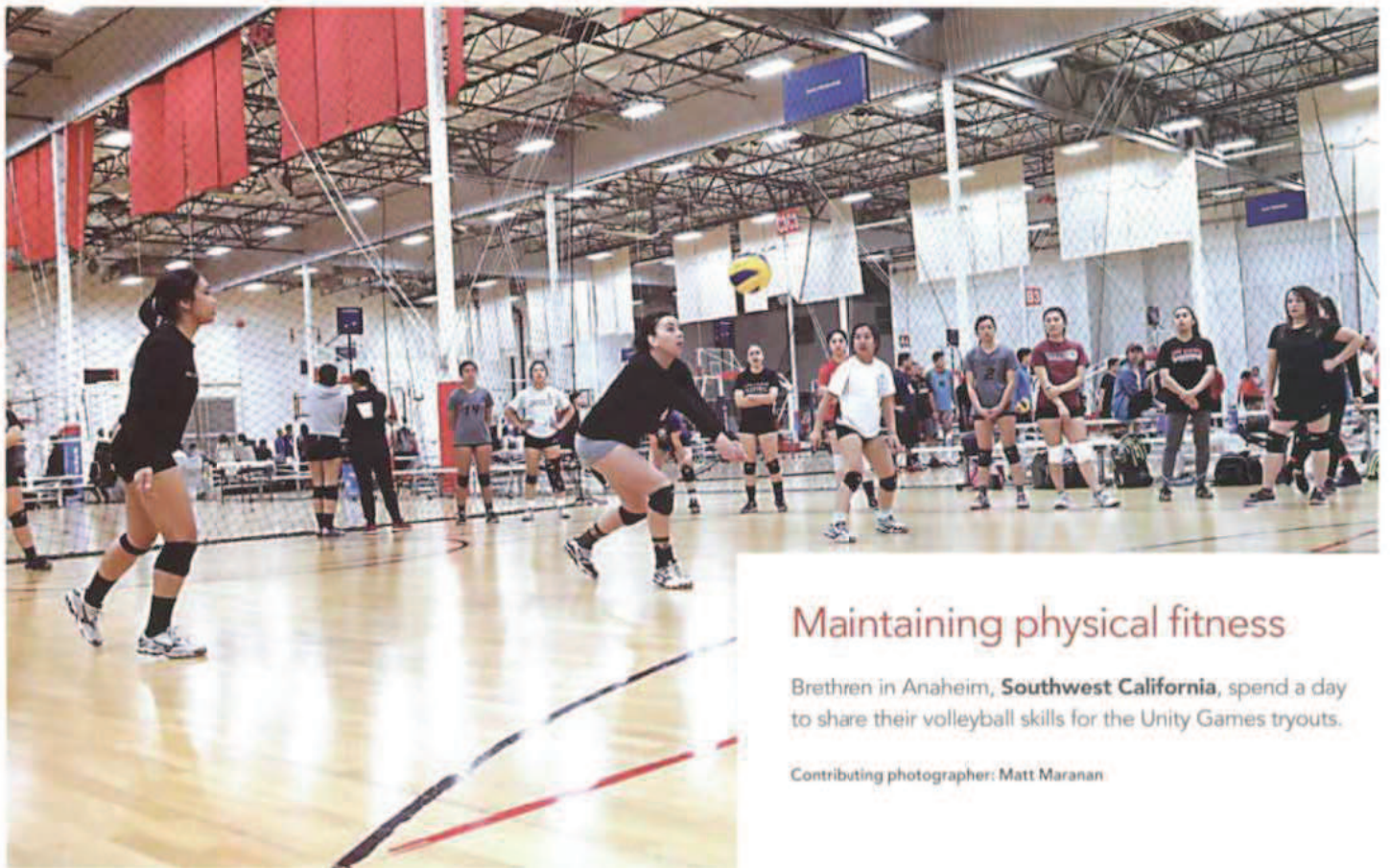




Sharing the faith

Brethren in **New Zealand** go house-to-house to distribute pamphlets about the Church Of Christ; one of the 12 venues in the district of **Batangas** where Barangay Evangelical Missions are held; brethren invite friends and co-workers from different nationalities in an Evangelical Mission in **UAE South**; and, in the district of **Central**, the Sanctuary of the Central Temple is filled with guests invited by members of the Binhi organization and PNK officers.

Contributing writers and photographers: Roxanne Rosquita, Saizza Escueta, Frozandee Sabado, and Kyla Ysabelle Calvero



Maintaining physical fitness

Brethren in Anaheim, **Southwest California**, spend a day to share their volleyball skills for the Unity Games tryouts.

Contributing photographer: Matt Maranan

Performing his biggest role

By MARIE F. RUIZ

SEASONED ACTOR AND SCREENWRITER Brother Michael Lewis Hudson started to dream big when he was young because, he said, "My parents encouraged me not only to expand myself as a person but to dream big." He pursued a career in acting out of his love for movies. "Being a lover of movies, it [acting] gave me an opportunity to really live their [the characters he portrays] lives that is something that's not similar to mine," he enthused.

This University of Washington graduate honed his talent by undergoing training in acting, scene study, and script analysis from known acting studios and, for three years, with Gregory Berger Sobeck, a Yale alumni and said to be one of the best acting teachers in Los Angeles, California. Good at his craft, Brother Michael has portrayed lead and supporting roles in a number of award-winning American films, starred in a television series and a soap opera, did national commercials, and performed in a string of stage plays in the USA.

His being into basketball, golf, football, baseball, track-and-field, and weight lifting gives him advantage to fit certain roles. His work takes him to different places and his family had moved around when his father was still in the Navy. But everywhere he goes, he remains an active member of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ). He said that he "gets in touch with brethren right away because there are always activities going on. I would join activities any day of the week."

Fully recognizing that his talent is a gift from God, when he was in LA, he joined the production team and cast of the ecclesiastical district's short film entry "I Am Different" that garnered a number of top awards in INCinema's very first Excellence in Visual Media (EVM) Awards held on October 27, 2013 at the University of the Philippines Theater in Quezon City, Philippines. Moving to the local congregation of Everett, he joined last year's entry of the ecclesiastical district of Pacific Northwest "Iron-willed" that also garnered top awards in the now called EVM Awards International held on October 31, 2016 at the INC Tabernacle in Quezon City.

Finding fulfillment in working with brethren in activities in the Church, Brother Michael expressed, "When all of you are a team and you're working for a common goal which is not only to inspire the brethren but more so to give honor and

glory to God, nothing beats that." And because his services to God are his top priority, he is always ready to give up what others may consider as gain. Recollecting an instance, he said, "One time, I was part of an INC Giving activity as one of those in charge of coordinating and organizing the event when I got a call from my agent. Basically, she was saying that 'producers specifically chose you and they want to meet you in person. Can you drive down to Santa Monica in about an hour?' But always placing God number one, as my first priority, I had to turn down that audition for a national commercial." He just shrugged his shoulders and told himself, "There's going to be future auditions. And there was!" He soon co-starred in the soap opera *General Hospital* and, later on, starred in two box office-hit movies.

His being a servant of the Almighty God is his biggest role, a responsibility he will never abandon. He said, "No matter what happens, no matter what dreams I go for, I would always place God number one in my life. God is truly the One Who has blessed me with everything and He never wastes time for me, so why should I abandon my time for Him? In all that I do, whether acting or any other job, God is always number one." 🙏



A deaconess with award-winning artistic talent

By ARNEL M. ARMENIA



IN THE CIRCLE of literary figures in the Philippines, being a Palanca awardee is regarded as a great honor. This multi-category competition is held annually, the entries of which are judged by a panel of luminaries in the realm of Philippine literature such that receiving an award from it is considered by many as a validation of a writer's talent. Sister Adelma Libunao-Salvador, a finance officer and a deaconess from the local congregation of Sacdalan, ecclesiastical district of Bulacan North, is a recipient of such an honor.

Sister Ade, as she is fondly called, is happily married to Brother Gorgonio S. Salvador Jr. and is the mother of Gilliano (a student majoring in Film), Sergio (currently in Grade 10), and Georgia, who is in Grade 2. They are all active members of the Church Of Christ.

Her winning entry *Silat* (Filipino term for the spacing between bamboo poles or slats used as flooring material), a Filipino essay that delves into the sensitive arena of family issues, convinced the judges not only of her flair for writing but also of her stout heart. She will never forget the day a courier-mail arrived at their doorstep and handed her a letter from the competition's award committee.

"I was so nervous that I was jelly-kneed and I found myself whispering a prayer to God," she recalled.

It turned out to be a confirmatory letter stating that she won First Place in the category *Sanaysay sa Filipino*.

"I was so overwhelmed by the honor that God allowed me to receive. Even after the awarding ceremony for the winners in the 65th Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature, my gratitude to God has never waned," she added.

Sister Ade's love for writing began only in the form of writing a diary that blossomed lately into her being a fellow in a poetry-writing program. On winning a Palanca Award, she said, "I am thankful to God for this achievement. I also am thankful to Him because He gave me the opportunity to develop my flair in writing. Joining LIRA (Linangan sa Imahen, Retorika, at Anyo) just became an outlet for my emotions, but it also sharpened my critical thinking and writing skills especially in Filipino. It also opened doors for me to befriend people who are really into writing."

Less than a year after she won in the Palanca, Sister Ade reaped another honor. She earned a spot in Talaang Ginto 2016 of the KWF (Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino)—the government agency tasked with studying, guarding, developing, and disseminating the Philippine national language.

Talaang Ginto is one of the longest-running competitions for poetry written in Filipino. Each year, only three deserving poets are chosen as recipients of the said recognition.

For the said competition, Sister Ade submitted *Hiling* (in English, "Plea"), a 100-stanza poem of impressive prosody, or rhythm and rhyme. Sharing her thoughts on her accolades, Sister Ade said, "I don't think that there is something special about me. If someone really has interest in writing and he or she does not shy away from spending time in thinking about it, writing and editing his or her piece, being able to win is possible. For me, being a member of the Church Of Christ is what gives me confidence. I tell myself that win or lose, I am okay because God knows what's best for me and I trust in His decisions. That is why more than these awards, I am proud of my membership in the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*." ☪

I am truly blessed by God

FREDERICK LEE JONES
Southeast California

THE LESSON WAS SO PROFOUND and it was truly an eye-opener for me that I went the next day and the next and the next. I didn't stop attending. Then came the lesson where the minister stated towards the end that I should enlist as a Bible student. I asked to be enlisted right then after having heard 18 lessons though!

I was baptized on March 27, 2010 in the local congregation of Las Vegas. Las Vegas is my home. It is where I was born, and where I found the true Church.

I was born on July 21, 1972 to a single mother. My father was a married man—so life for me and my mother was truly a struggle. I grew up believing in the Trinity and that Jesus is God. Even then, I really couldn't grasp the concept and I eventually found my own

worldly path. After high school, I enlisted for the Navy but my mother made me come home. With no job and no way of getting any good references, I had a brush with the law—a life I am glad to have escaped from. I woke up one morning in 2008, truly upset. I was so mad that I left everything, and moved to the other side of town and began working for a telephone company. Little did I know that even at that time God was planning a great change for me.

A year after that fateful morning, I completed a ten-month pharmacy technician program at Heritage College. Soon after, I was employed in a pharmacy. I also worked part-time as a karaoke DJ. But when I made it through my probation at the pharmacy and realized that it wasn't where I wanted to be, I chose working as a karaoke DJ full-time. If I had not made the choice, I would not be in the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ) today and I may never have another chance to join.

One day, I was about to host a karaoke competition when, an hour before the competition, a group of young people came in—there were around 40 of them. Because I had an hour to kill, I joined them. It was the best time I ever had at that place. After that, I didn't see them again until the following week. This time, there were ten more. I quickly wanted to know who these wonderful people were, and I wanted to hang out with them. There was this incredible desire to get to know these people.

Then, I was invited to play basketball with them. It was really nice because they all did things together. This huge group of people all being united. The next invitation was a dinner with them. The place was full of people and we all had lots of fun just chatting and getting to know

everyone, singing karaoke. I had a blast. Three weeks went by when one of them, Brother Augustin Figer, texted me, inviting me to meet with them. When he told me to meet them at a chapel I quickly declined, but I did something that was uncharacteristic of me: I sent another text asking for the address of the chapel. He sent it to me and, a few minutes after, there I was attending a Bible study, Bible in hand and eager to listen.

The lesson that night hit me deep in the gut because it was exactly the answer to my question decades ago: the Bible proves that Christ is a man—and not God! I remember asking a Baptist preacher one time: "If Christ is the Son of God, then why do you call Him God?" He just told me that I would have to take it by faith, and that it was a mystery. After that, I never went to church again until that night at the chapel of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*.

Six years have passed since I was baptized into the Church. Now, I also invite people to the Church. I urge them to sign up for the lessons. I also have taken oath as KADIWA president in the local and an officer of the Light of Salvation, a District KADIWA officer, INC Radio correspondent, a performer in the Closing Centennial Celebration, and had performed on the Christian Music Video "United with the Church Administration." Just recently, I was invited to San Francisco, California to host the first ever Regional EVM Awards in North America. Live! It was one of the most amazing experiences ever in my life. I am now the captain of the Southeast California District Unity Games KADIWA Basketball Team.

I am so humbled and I feel truly blessed by our Almighty God. I truly praise God, and will always do so. I truly love my life as a member of the Church Of Christ. And I am forever one with Brother Eduardo V. Manalo! 🙏



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Our Eyes Are Set

As the days pass by like hurried feet treading on murky grounds
And silhouettes of the future seem to surface in midair
Our vision is as certain, as sure as every morning glow
For we live not for the world, and we are but sojourners
Our eyes are set on what lies ahead of all these struggles.

We keep holding on to what is in store for us
The promise of eternal life, timeless glorious living
This keeps us steadfastly anchored to our calling
And keeps us unmindful of all these pains and sufferings
For the day comes and intrudes like a burglar at night.

From the east, to other corners of the world
His call of salvation rings loudly and clearly
Against heartless men's aimless goals and worthless dreams
To those who will heed, the promise is given
Be they weak, be they lame, be they poor or less fortunate.

Now, here we are, in this pinnacle, brethren
We will never mind the stumbling blocks laid in our track
We did and will triumphantly hurdle the devil's lair
And our entry to the next level is most certainly assured
For our citizenship is in heaven—our true home.

Jesus Isaac Mangco • Leyte, Philippines

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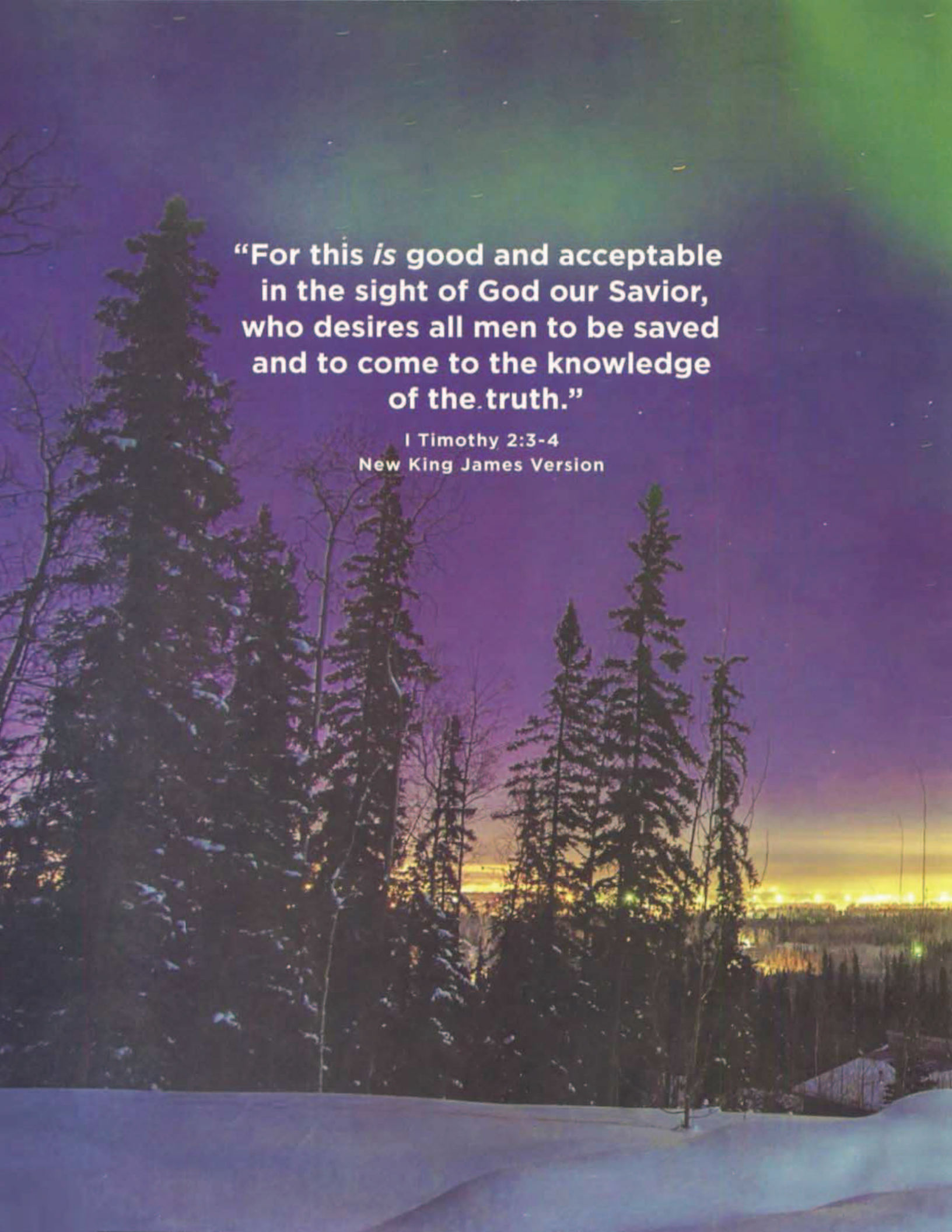
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A winter night landscape featuring snow-covered evergreen trees in the foreground and a distant city skyline with lights reflecting on water in the background. The sky is dark with visible stars.

**“For this *is* good and acceptable
in the sight of God our Savior,
who desires all men to be saved
and to come to the knowledge
of the truth.”**

**I Timothy 2:3-4
New King James Version**