

“Ili a Baluarte”: Revisiting the Cradle of Aglipayanism

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My first month as parochial vicar of the Roman Catholic Parish of the Immaculate Conception in Batac led me to a first visit to its *barrios*. As I conversed with the barrio folks and even parishioners from the *poblacion*, there was a common line in almost everyone's mouth: “*Aglipayano kami idi, Apo*” (We were Aglipayans before, Father). I said to myself, “O, here I am, a “*Padi a Romano*”² (Roman Catholic Priest), standing on the very soil of Aglipay's *ili a baluarte* (Bailiwick).

The town (now City) of Batac, Ilocos Norte was very important and dear to Padre Gregorio Aglipay y Labayan, the *Primer Obispo Maximo* (First Supreme Bishop) of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (IFI) and the man who gave his name to that church, *Aglipayano*. The town was the place of his birth, childhood and guerilla activities. It was the stronghold of the church he led.

While browsing old files, I coincidentally found in an old journal a photo of the town's landscape sometime in the first quarter of the 20th Century. The photo showed a ruinous baroque³

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² In the earlier years, Catholics were called by Aglipayans as “Romano,” stressing the idea that it is a religion of Rome and not of the Filipinos.

³ Sometime in the 1930's, the Church façade was reconstructed and its architecture was changed into modern Romanesque design.

church, a *convento* obtruding the traces of its palatial character and a belfry that once loomed the poblacion's skyline. This is how Batac's landscape at the time when Catholicism was in its lowest point in this part of the islands. In a way, the photo pictured the once dominant and influential Catholic Church struggling for existence in its former important missionary center.

In a leisure time at the church patio, while holding that old photo, it came to my awareness that the passing of time has already changed that old landscape of the town center. The ancient church looks vibrant again with its new Romanesque façade, a religious school stands over the ruins of the old convento and the site of the old belfry on the church's right side is now a busy street. Across the river, from the church patio are two churches; they both bear the name *Aglipayano* but belonging to two different faith traditions.

What the photo showed and what I was actually seeing at that hour somehow presented to me Batac a century ago and Batac a century after. For this, my curiosity was tickled to look into the present-day Batac with regard to Catholicism and the religious outbreak staged in this very soil a hundred years past. This year 2008 marks the first centenary of the revival of Roman Catholicism in Ilocos Norte. This study intends to retrace the movement of the revival process in Batac, the "epicenter" of the "tremors" of the outbreak in the province.

1. Batac and its Foundation

The city of Batac is situated 472 kilometers north of Manila and 18 kilometers south of the Capital City of Laoag. It has a terrain of plain lands, mountains and hills, rivers and creeks. It is Ilocos Norte's second city after Laoag.

"Home of Great Leaders"

Batac is tagged as the "Home of Great Leaders" because it has produced men who made breakthroughs in the history of the Philippines: Artemio Ricarte⁴ (*El Vibora*) of the Revolutionary

⁴ He was born on October 20, 1866 to Faustino Ricarte and Bonifacia Garcia. A teacher at the start, he became one of the most feared rebels of his time during the Revolution and his alias "Vibora" or Viper attests to that. He worked faith-

Government, Gregorio Aglipay, the great statesman and religious reformist and Servando Castro⁵ a Catholic Priest turned schismatic who had a hand in the drafting of the 1935 Philippine Constitution. Batac has also the prestige of having produced two Philippine Presidents, the relatives Ferdinand Edralin Marcos⁶ and Fidel Marcos-Valdez Ramos.⁷ Two current Senators trace their roots in Batac: Rodolfo Biazon⁸ and Aquilino Pimentel.⁹ In the field of literature, the Ilocanista Mariano Jacinto Caoili who translated into the dialect a book on the Holy Family in 1859,¹⁰ which became a

fully by the side of Bonifacio, and after the latter's death, sided with Aguinaldo for the liberation the country both against the Spaniards and the Americans. General Ricarte is noted as first Filipino Commanding General of the Philippine Army (1897). He died on July 31, 1945 somewhere in the hinterlands of Kalinga-Mountain Province while eluding the American forces unbowed and unheralded to the end.

⁵ He was born on October 23, 1863 to Don Celedonio Castro, an interpreter of the Court of First Instance and the Chinese Mestiza, Doña Lucia Guatlo. He might have been a childhood friend of Aglipay and a contemporary in school. He studied at the University of Sto. Tomas where Apolinario Mabini was his rival for school honors. He was sent by his sister, Leovegilda to the Vigan Seminary where he subsequently served as professor. He was ordained for the Diocese of Nueva Segovia in 1890 and served in the Parishes of Batac (ca. 1893), Paoay and Sarrat. Padre Castro had a sister who was a nun but later left the religious life. The Padre was one of the sixteen schismatic priests in 1902 that joined the new church. He became a bishop of the IFI, Ecclesiastical Governor of Laguna, a writer in the newspaper "*La Vanguardia*," a signatory of the *Doctrina y Reglas Constitucionales*, Dean of Aglipayan Bishops, Supreme Bishop Emeritus and delegate to the 1934 Constitutional Convention. He staunchly fought for the preservation of Catholic doctrine in the IFI when there was an attempt to deviate from it by Aglipay. He remained celibate until he died on December 6, 1946 in Batac.

⁶ He was Philippine's President from 1965 to 1986. A son of Mariano Marcos, a school teacher turned politician and Josefa Edralin of Sarrat.

⁷ His mother, the educator Angela Valdez y Marcos who was married to lawyer Narciso Ramos of Asingan, Pangasinan, was a full-blooded daughter of Batac. Angela was a second degree cousin of Ferdinand Marcos. Fidel Ramos was President of the Philippine Republic from 1992 to 1998.

⁸ He was born in Batac on April 14, 1935 to Rufino Biazon and Juliana Gaspar.

⁹ His parents were Aquilino E. Pimentel, a lawyer from Cagayan de Oro City and the public school teacher Petra Quilinging of Brgy. Cobol (now Pimentel), Batac, Ilocos Norte.

¹⁰ This native did *Biag da Apotayo a Jesus, Maria quen Jose. Maypaay unay a macaparayray iti puso quen naquen ti siasinoman a agbasat iti daytoy a naisurat a pacadayaoan ti Apotayo nga Dios; naadao iti sao ti Tagalog, quet inyulog iti sao ti iloco ti maysa nga Ilocano natural iti ili a Batac; quet indalus*

well-read Ilocano religious literature, gave also a significant contribution during the Spanish time. As they say, individuals are reflections of the community where they come from. These men speak of the kind and quality the Batac community has. It has cuddled men of breakthroughs. This was the matrix of the man, Gregorio Aglipay.

Ministerio de Batac

Batac is one of the earliest centers of evangelization in the Ilocos. After the pacification of the north by the youthful conquistador Juan de Salcedo, *Ministerios* (Ministries) or missionary centers were established. After the foundation of the Ministry of Vigan in 1575, the Ministries of Laoag, Batac, Balatao (Bauang), Tagudin and Kaog (Sta. Lucia) were established by the Augustinian Definitory on January 5, 1586.¹¹ This shows that as early as the first phase of evangelization, Batac was already an important missionary outpost.

Source mentions that Batac was known before as the valley of Kakabayan. It got a new name from the Ilocano "Batac" which means help or aid, for the natives claim that they were charitable and helpful.¹² It was an *encomienda* owned by His Majesty the Spanish King and Don Gaspar Perez.¹³ In 1591, the *pueblo* had a population of 8,400 souls.¹⁴ The parish was dedicated under the advocacy of *La Purisima Concepcion de Nuestra Señora*.

met ti maysa nga Padre iti Orden ni Amatayo a San Agustin. Manila: Imprenta iti Colegio a Sto. Tomas, a biag ni D.J. Cortada. 1859.

¹¹ Juan A. Foronda, "The Establishment of the First Missionary Centers in Ilocos, 1572-1612." *The Ilocos Review* III: 25. Hereafter, Foronda.

¹² "Parish of the Immaculate Conception (Batac, Ilocos Norte)," *Nueva Segovia Bicentennial Souvenir* (Manila: UST Press, 1958) No pagination.

¹³ Christianized settlements were designated as either royal or private *encomiendas*. This was a way in which a community was incorporated with Spain and the people were made to pay the tributes for colony-building. An *encomienda* was awarded to a private citizen (called *encomendero*) who rendered good services to the King. The *encomendero* is responsible in the evangelization and protection of people. He received the sixth of the collected tributes and the rest are remitted to the Spanish Crown and to the Church.

¹⁴ *Relación de las Encomiendas Existentes en Filipinas el día 31 de Mayo de 1591* (Ahora publicada por primera vez, Año de 1898. Existente el original en el Archivo de Indias de Sevilla), in W.E. Retana, *Archivo del Bibliófilo Filipino*,

Fray Esteban Marin, Missionary and Martyr

It is interesting to note that the first Prior of Batac, Fray Esteban Marin, was a notable man in his Order. He was a Mexican of Spanish origin who was described as likely, the most dedicated, consistent and well-organized among the Augustinians who labored in the early Christianization of the Ilocos. He arrived in the Philippines in June 1584 and worked in Zambales and Pangasinan where he founded the towns of Masinloc and Bolinao. He was transferred to the Ilocos and appointed first Prior of Batac on April 25, 1587, moved to Tagudin in 1589, to Laoag in 1590 and back to Batac in 1596. He arduously worked in the establishment of peace, order and justice among the natives. He was energetic in the work of evangelization and this might have led him become the most loved and respected Augustinian by the natives and his confreres. After sometime due to his outstanding commitment, Fray Marin was given the task as Provincial Councilor and after few years he worked in the mission of Pampanga.

The mountains of Pampanga were inhabited by the Ilongots and Italonos. At times they descended to the plain land and ransacked the modest properties of the *indios*. Decided to stop once and for all the pillaging, the Governor General commanded a military expedition. Anxious of a possible bloodshed, Fray Marin convinced the Governor General to avoid force but the latter deemed the advice as sheer folly. Fray Marin went with the company of a native servant to the mountains to subdue the tribesmen. The *fraile* tried to act as arbiter to a native chieftain and convinced the latter to discuss the matter with other chieftains. On their way to the meeting place, a group of Ilongots appeared and captured Fray Marin by tying a rope on his neck; pulling him to move towards their desired direction. They brought him to the assembly place and there, tied him on a tree and killed him with arrows, took his head as trophy and burned his body. The zealous "Apostle" of the Zambals and Ilocanos died as martyr in November 1601. He died far from his place of origin and also far from his beloved Ilocanos.¹⁵ During the early phase of evange-

Recopilación de Documentos Históricos, Científicos, Literarios y Políticos y Estudios Bibliográficos, Volumen IV, Madrid 1898, 19.

¹⁵ Marcelino Nieto, "The work of the Augustinians in Ilocos," *The Ilocos Review* III: 210-212. Hereafter, IR.

lization, the faith in Ilocos was drenched with a martyr's blood. How sublime was Fray Marin's sacrifice? His martyrdom watered the seed of faith of the Ilocanos... in particular, the Bataqueños.

Spiritual Daughters

As a center for missions, the *frailes* stationed in Batac reached out other settlements. The first daughter of Batac is the *Visita de Dingras*.¹⁶ When Batac was founded as a ministry, Dingras was not yet known and unevangelized. Towards the end of the 16th Century, the people rebelled due to the unkind *encomenderos* and the excessive tributes. This is the first recorded revolt in the Ilocos.¹⁷ For this reason, the inhabitants fled from the settlements to the peripheries – to Dingras. It came to the awareness of authorities that if this remained unchecked this might hamper the work of evangelization. In April of 1589, Don Pedro Chaves was sent to pacify the rebels and as a consequence a fort was decreed to be constructed in Dingras.¹⁸ This was also the year when the area was attached as a *visita* of Batac. Shortly, it was made a ministry by the Augustinian Chapter on July 8, 1589. Due to the cruelty of the neighboring mountain tribes, it was reverted again into a *visita* of Batac on October 31, 1603.¹⁹

Batac's second daughter was the *Visita de Paoay*. Paoay is located west of its mother-parish with a distance of half a league.²⁰ The town became a *visita* in 1593. The settlement got its name from "Macapaoaycami" (We could go it alone). Natives were always living fearful of the invading muslims. The natives tried to hide away their fear so that when invited to ally with other tribes they refused to band with them and said the phrase

¹⁶ *Dinglas* in other manuscripts.

¹⁷ Digna Balangue Apilado, "A History of Ilocos Norte Province," *The Journal of History*, Vol. 52:3.

¹⁸ Isabelo de los Reyes, *Historia de Ilocos, Tomo II* (Manila: Establecimiento tipografico *La Opinion*, 1890), 60. Hereafter, de los Reyes.

¹⁹ *Archivo Agustiniiano en Valladolid (AAV), Libro de Gobierno, Tomo I, Folio 141.*

²⁰ AAV, *Mapa General de las Almas que Administran los Padres Agustinos Calzados en estas Islas Filipinas. Tomado en el Año de 1833* (Manila: Impreso en Sampaloc, 1834), 33.

"We could go it alone."²¹ The Chapter of May 4, 1686 made Paoay an independent house from Batac and the first Prior was named, Fray Lucas Sánchez, OSA. This might also be the year when it became a parish dedicated to San Agustin.²²

2. Colonial Batac

Aglipay lived his childhood in his town of origin. For this, let us take a historical survey of Batac during the Spanish Era.

Reduccion

Batac was a scenario of a typical Spanish Colonial settlement. Colonial Batac was arranged with grid-like streets, had a magnificent and large church, an elegant and solid convento, bell tower, a walled cemetery with chapel, *casa municipal*, *escuelas* and *puentes de mamposteria* (brick bridges). Traversing the *poblacion's* center is a stream called *Pagdanuman* (also Quiaoit River) coming from the mountain of Maoakoakar.

The church was dominantly located in the *poblacion's* center; overlooking the stream and its small bridge. The long road coming from Paoay ends at the church patio. It had a baroque façade coherent with its side walls. According to source, the stone and brick church was constructed by the pastor Fray Pedro Cariaga²³ in 1690 to 1692.²⁴ Fray Jose Nieto submitted a Report to Governor General Pasqual Enrile on the status of the province in 1831. In that report, he gave a description of each town and he observed that Batac had a "*large church, capacious and decent... a creek with little water crosses in front of the church, dividing the town in two parts.*"²⁵ This church was restored by Fray Cipriano

²¹ Foronda, 66.

²² Pedro Galende, OSA, *Angels in Stone* (Manila: GA Formoso Publishing, 1987), 358.

²³ Other documents spell it as "Carreaga."

²⁴ Pedro Galende, OSA, *Philippine Church Facades* (Quezon City: Vibal Publishing House and San Agustin Museum, 2007), 36-37.

²⁵ Fray Jose Nieto, OSA, *Description of the Towns of Ilocos Norte in 1831*, Archivo de Museo Naval, Madrid, Spain, 717.

Marcilla who was pastor from 1887-1895.²⁶ The 1888 *Memoria*²⁷ of Don Camilo Millan, Civil Governor of Ilocos Norte attested to this restoration.²⁸

A *Casa Parroquial* or *convento* was built in the 18th Century and restored by Fray Justo Hermosa who was pastor from 1824 to 1833.²⁹ Fray Nieto observed that there was “a *parochial house, recently built and with best layout*.”³⁰ In 1839, this *convento* was burned due to a firecracker and was rebuilt by Fray Juan Sugasti.³¹ Another fire ignited by the same cause earlier gutted down the second *convento* on January 1862 and this was its state until 1872. In that said year, a construction was commenced. The new palatial *convento* was built by Fray Saturnino Pinto³² who served as *cura* from 1870 to 1877. It was connected left of the church. The very spacious *convento* had a ground floor surrounded with arches *con techumbre de hierro* (with a roof of galvanized iron).³³ It was dilapidated during the terrible cyclone of May 9, 1913.³⁴ In January of 1945, the guerillas burned the *convento* and only the brick walls and arches were left of Fray Pinto’s palatial *convento*.³⁵

A belfry was built by Fray Jose Ines. Source said that the *fraile* paid the construction at his own expense. The tower might

²⁶ IR III:196.

²⁷ Report of a Civil Governor to the Governor General of the Islands.

²⁸ National Archives of the Philippines (NAP), *Memoria – Ylocos Norte (1846 – 1889)*, Tomo I, Folio 71v (b). Hereafter, *Memoria*.

²⁹ NAP, *El Oriente Año 1876 No. 37, 4*. Hereafter, *El Oriente*.

³⁰ Fray Jose Nieto, OSA, *Description of the Towns of Ilocos Norte in 1831*, Op. cit. Fray Nieto’s Report was in 1831, meaning, the restoration was finished before that year.

³¹ Also spelled in other papers as “Zugasti”.

³² *El Oriente*, 4. See engraving on page 7 of the same source.

³³ NAP, *Memoria, Tomo I, Folio 71v*. We can see in the picture published in the 1876 *El Oriente* that the roof at its completion was of tiles.

³⁴ A photo of its condition after the cyclone is in *Cultura Social Año 1, num. VI* (June 1913): 267.

³⁵ Regalado Trota Jose, *Ilocos Norte: A Travel Guide* (Laoag: Gameng Foundation and Museo Ilocos Norte, 2004), 175. The Immaculate Conception Academy stands over its ruins.

have been built between the years 1855 to 1869.³⁶ Two existing bells attest to the years of construction: 1855 and 1858.³⁷ The belfry stood about 10 meters north of the church façade. It had three levels.³⁸ The builder, Fray Ines died on December 2, 1869 and was buried in Batac.³⁹ He was the pastor of Batac when the infant Gregorio Aglipay was born in 1860.

In early times, the cemetery was within the church and its environs. Later, it was transferred about 150 meters south of the *poblacion*. The cemetery was surrounded with *muros de mamposteria* (brick walls) of a meter high. The opening was in the north and from it a pathway ending to a chapel. It was protected by two mountains to its west and south.⁴⁰

The imposing stone *Casa Municipal*⁴¹ stood at the north-western corner of the church; near the belfry. It was facing the southern direction. This public building was restored by Fray Cipriano Marcilla.⁴² Schools and bridges were also built by several Augustinians.⁴³ Fray Nieto commented that Batac had "*bridges of strong materials for an easy passage of the people and a better attendance to the divine offices.*"⁴⁴ Don Camilo Millan also observed in 1888 that Batac had five permanent bridges: Anangui, Garasgas, Tabug and two within the *poblacion* over the stream of *Pagdanuman*.⁴⁵

³⁶ IR III:222.

³⁷ This phrase is cast in one of the bells: "*Se Fundió en Puntales Cadiz por D. T. Haynes Año de 1855.*" The other bell has this "*M.R.P.F. Jose Ynes se fundió esta campana en el año de 1858 Ex-Proc.^R Gral. Secret.^O Y Prior.*"

³⁸ It was reduced into half by the strong earthquake of March 19, 1931, leaving its foundation. The remnants were totally demolished in a very recent date and its former site is now a busy street.

³⁹ *Archivo Diocesano de Laoag (ADL), Libro de Entierros de Batac (LEB), Tomo VIII, Folio 413v.*

⁴⁰ NAP, *Memoria*, Tomo I, Folio 83.

⁴¹ Now the site of the Imelda Cultural Center.

⁴² IR III:196.

⁴³ IR III:196.

⁴⁴ Fray Jose Nieto, OSA, *Description of the Towns of Ilocos Norte in 1831*, Op. cit.

⁴⁵ NAP, *Memoria*, Tomo I, Folio 70v (b). *Pagdanuman* is the old name of Quiaoit River. It is an Ilocano word which means water source. This river was a source of potable water, fresh fishes and shells and water for construction.

Industries

Regarding the harvest of rice, Fray Nieto in his 1831 Report described the abundance of Batac's produce. He attested that:

The harvests of rice in this town are large and abundant. This is due to the many creeks and other water receptacles made in the mountains' slopes which surround it and the farmers used for the irrigation of the lands, thus, securing the harvest at all times. The abundance of water is the cause of such a great fertility. They use a good amount of rice for the payment of tribute, and quite an excessive amount is sold to other towns, plus a considerable amount of baskets is brought to Manila.⁴⁶

As mentioned earlier, one of the contributing factors to this copious harvest is the abundance of irrigation. There were streams coming from the mountains, also the lakes south of Calumbuyan (now Brgy. Aglipay), in Sarnap, Bi-loca (sic) and Palunpong (sic).⁴⁷

Cotton was also an important industry. The town produced the largest, best and more secured than that of any town of Ilocos Norte. This industry was an important source of livelihood to the early inhabitants. Batac women did not have the diligence to weave cloths. Instead, they preferred to sell raw cotton to many buyers who come from other towns during harvest time. There was also a warehouse for looms where they manufactured bed spreads. In 1775, Fray Agustin Pedro Blaquier introduced the use of Spanish loom in Batac and soon it spread to other towns.⁴⁸ Fray Manuel Aparicio, who succeeded Fray Blaquier in 1791, worked hard with the *La Real Compañía de Filipinas* for the improvement of the textile industry.⁴⁹

Tobacco planting was common in Batac. The Spanish decree on tobacco monopoly affected the colonial community and each

⁴⁶ Fray Jose Nieto, OSA, *Description of the Towns of Ilocos Norte in 1831*, Op. cit.

⁴⁷ Ibidem. "Billoca" and "Palongpong."

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ NAP, *Erección de los Pueblos, Ilocos Norte y Sur, Tomo I (1807-1898)*, Folios 75-76.

laborer was obliged to plant at least a quota of 5,000 seedlings. This policy would later affect the young Gregorio Aglipay.⁵⁰

Molded by Exemplary Hands

Batac was served by outstanding Augustinians. Starting from the magnanimous first Prior, the martyr Fray Esteban Marin, Batac had a long list of exceptional clerics. Among the early pastors whose names were etched in the roster of greatness was Fray Geronimo Cavero. He first served as Prior of Bantay and there he adopted the famous Father of Ilocano Literature, Pedro Bucaneg.⁵¹ Fray Cavero was the mentor of the latter. According to source, Fray Cavero profited so much in the Ilocano prowess of Bucaneg who became his companion in his future missions which included Batac.⁵² Fray Cavero was Pastor of Batac thrice, 1597 to 1599, 1605 to 1608 and 1620 to 1623. The next notable friar who served during the early 17th century was Fray Francisco Mercado. He was elected prior on April 23, 1611. After three years he was moved to the Priory of Laoag where he served for nine years, then back to Batac on May 12, 1623. At this point he was named Ecclesiastical Judge for the Ilocos as requested by Bishop Juan de Renteria of Nueva Segovia. He also bought a farm from his own expense for the infirmary-house in Bantay. He left Batac in 1626 and returned as Prior of Laoag. In 1641, he was reappointed again as Prior of Batac, added to that assignment was the job of an examiner of language. He died in Batac in 1642.⁵³

It is important to note that two Spanish Friars who served as Batac's Pastor were elevated to the Episcopal Order: Fray Agustin Pedro Blaquier and Fray Vicente Barreiro. Fray Blaquier was responsible in introducing the use of Spanish loom for the weaving of cotton in the town. Born in 1749, Fray Blaquier was a very notable Augustinian being liked by his confreres and the

⁵⁰ Pedro de Achutegui, SJ and Miguel Bernad, SJ, *Religious Revolution in the Philippines*, Vol. I (Manila: Ateneo de Manila, 1961), 7. Hereafter, RRP.

⁵¹ Foronda: 79.

⁵² IR IV: 108.

⁵³ Elviro Perez Jorde, OSA, *Catálogo Bio-Bibliográfico de los Religiosos de la Provincia del Santísimo Nombre de Jesús de las Islas Filipinas desde su Fundación hasta nuestros días* (Manila: 1901), 194.

people. He was the candidate of his predecessor, Bishop Ruiz of Nueva Segovia who wanted to have him as his Auxiliary. In 1797, he was elected by the King as Bishop of Nueva Segovia, by the pope in 1801 and was consecrated bishop on February 2, 1803. While on a Pastoral Visit, he died on December 20, 1803 and was buried in Ilagan, Isabela.⁵⁴ The second to become bishop is Fray Vicente Barreiro.⁵⁵ He came to Batac as Pastor in 1816 and served here till 1818.⁵⁶ He was ordained bishop for Nueva Segovia in 1849. He died in 1856 and was buried in the Vigan Cathedral.⁵⁷

Some of Batac's Pastors were also notable writers. One among those was Fray Pedro del Vivar who, while pastor in Batac, made the account of the 1762 Diego Silang Revolt.⁵⁸ Together with Bishop Ustariz of Nueva Segovia, Fray Vivar was himself among the friars who were held captive by Silang in the convent of Bantay. Fray Fernando Rey was also in the list.⁵⁹ In 1845, Fray Gregorio Martinez published the corrected edition of the *Pasion de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo* (ca. 1629/1659) by Fray Antonio Mejia. Fray Jose Ines translated into Ilocano the *Pasiones* and published in 1847 the *Panagtotooc, quen ipapatay ni Apotayo a Jesucristo*.⁶⁰ He likewise corrected the Ilocano translation of Don Mariano Caoili on the Holy Family.⁶¹ These are just some among his published works. Lastly, there was Fray Cipriano Marcilla, an Augustinian scholar who did a study on the ancient native alphabet. In 1895, his last

⁵⁴ IR XXV: 45.

⁵⁵ IR XXV, 63.

⁵⁶ AAV, *Archivo Provincial de los Agustonianos Filipinos*, 99/3.

⁵⁷ IR XXV:63.65.

⁵⁸ Pedro del Vivar, OSA, *Relación de los Alzamientos de la Ciudad de Vigan, Cabecera de la Provincia de Ilocos en los años de 1762 y 1763* (Manila: Litografía Chofre y Compañía, 1893). He was Pastor of Batac, 1762-1765. A copy of the work is in the keeping of the Rare books Collection of the National Library of the Philippines.

⁵⁹ Regalado Trota Jose, *Ilocos Norte: A Travel Guide*, 177. Fray Fernando Rey was in Batac as pastor, 1774-1775.

⁶⁰ "The suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ."

⁶¹ Policarpo Hernandez, OSA, "An Overview on the Philological Literary and Social Works of the Augustinians in the Ilocos Region," *The ICST Journal* Vol. 7:39. Fray Jose Ines was Batac's pastor, 1855-1869.

year in Batac, he published *Estudio de los Antiguos Alfabetos Filipinos*.⁶²

Population

As to population, the *Mapas Generales* found by the author in the Augustinian Archives in Valladolid, Spain can be good sources. As mentioned earlier, at the start of the Ministry of Batac there were 8,400 souls. Let's jump to the 19th Century when Gregorio Aglipay was born and grew in Batac. The *Estado General* shows that there were 17,565 inhabitants in 1818⁶³ with 588 baptisms, 269 marriages and 286 deaths.⁶⁴ In 1833, Batac had a population of 15, 592 with 530 baptisms, 146 marriages and 311 deaths.⁶⁵ The *Mapa General* of the year 1835 shows that the town had a people of 14,315 with 336 baptisms, 146 marriages and 493 deaths.⁶⁶ One year after, the town had 14,447 souls with 556 baptisms, 146 marriages and 493 deaths.⁶⁷ In 1837, the *Mapa* shows that Batac's inhabitants were 15,814 with 547 baptisms, 108 weddings and 104 deaths.⁶⁸ Let us take a leap to 1845; the total number of souls, 15,539, baptisms, 461, marriages, 220 and

⁶² Cipriano Marcilla, OSA, *Estudio de los Antiguos Alfabetos Filipinos* (Malabon: Tipo-Litografia del Asilo de Huerfanos, 1895). A copy of the work is in the keeping of the Rare Books Collection of the National Library of the Philippines. Fray Cipriano Marcilla served in Batac, 1887-1895. He left a private library of 168 titles and a total of about 400 volumes including his personal works in the convent of Batac. Fray Marcilla's book collection was embargoed by the revolutionists at the turn of the 20th Century and is now in the keeping of the National Archives of the Philippines. List is under the file: "Inventario de los bienes Embargados – Provincia de Ilocos Norte."

⁶³ The year of the Royal Cedula that created the Provinces of Ilocos Norte and Sur.

⁶⁴ AAV, *Estado General de de los Religiosos de que se compone la provincial del Dulcísimo Nombre de Jesús de Padres Agustinos Calzados de estas Islas Filipinas, y del número de almas que dicha provincia administra, sacado de los mapas de almas del año de 1818: hecho en 31 de mayo de 1819*, 4.

⁶⁵ AAV, *Mapa General de las Almas que Administran los Padres Agustinos Calzados en estas Islas Filipinas*, (1833), 33.

⁶⁶ Ibid., (1835), No Pagination (NP).

⁶⁷ Ibid., (1836), NP. It's surprising that 1835 had a common number of weddings and deaths with 1836.

⁶⁸ Ibid., (1837), NP

deaths, 687.⁶⁹ In 1867, the town had 16,001 souls, 785 baptisms, 198 marriages, and 457 funerals.⁷⁰ In the year 1890, the town's population was 17, 323 souls, 473 baptisms, 74 marriages and 672 burials.⁷¹ The last data we can present for the Spanish regime is 1893 which had 20, 440 inhabitants with 735 baptisms, 198 weddings and 597 deaths.⁷²

Resistance

Sporadic revolts were typical in the colonial Philippines, so too with Batac. Let us take a glimpse of the natives' tendency for resistance.

As we mentioned earlier, the first ever documented revolt in the Ilocos was the Batac-Dingras revolt of 1589 due to the injustices of the *encomenderos*. In 1773, Batac women raised an uprising against Fray Fernando Rey on his decree that no women should bathe naked in the river. Bathing naked in the open river was an accepted practice by the natives but judged as indecent by the *fraile*.⁷³ Batac likewise had a participation in the famous Basi Revolt of 1807.⁷⁴

In 1838, the church and convento were burned due to a sky rocket. It was in time with the visitation of Archbishop Jose Segui, Archbishop of Manila and Ecclesiastical Governor of Nueva Segovia.⁷⁵ After a comedy show on the life of Noah, in the theatre, the fire broke out burning the convento, the church and some houses. The following day, a soldier started an investigation on the site. Angered by this move, a mob grabbed him but he was able to escape and ran to his headquarters. The soldiers in the barracks were surrounded by the enraged people. The soldiers ran to the

⁶⁹ Ibid., (1845), NP.

⁷⁰ IR XVIII:246.

⁷¹ RRP I, 532-533.

⁷² IR XVIII:150.

⁷³ Regalado Trota Jose, *Ilocos Norte: A Travel Guide*, 172.

⁷⁴ Manuel Arnaiz, OSA, "Relación de sus gestiones en la pacificación de los indios Ilocanos alzados en 1807," *Archivo Historico Hispano Agustiniano* XI (1919): 312-319.

⁷⁵ NAP, *El Oriente* 1876 num 37, 4.

house of the *Gobernadorcillo* Joaquin Sabas and there they fired their guns. The corporal separated from them because he ran to the churchyard. The people caught him and wanted to kill him. He was, eventually, saved by Don Benito Luis, the *Teniente Mayor*.⁷⁶

In 1844, women raised a protest against the pastor, Fray Juan Lijoo who mandated the people to throw alms in front of the convento for the "Santa Bola" (Holy Ball).⁷⁷ Another uprising was staged in 1877 against Fray Saturnino Pinto, the builder of the *convento*, because of the report that he did not pay for the timber used in the construction.⁷⁸ In 1893, there was another demonstration to protest the collection of taxes. Fray Marcilla intervened and the people were pardoned by the *Capitan General*.⁷⁹

Another manifestation of their subtle resistance was their defiance to implement the 1849 Decree of Governor General Narciso Claveria that Filipinos must change their surnames with Spanish *apellidos*. For this, many Bataqueños preserved their native surnames like Pitpit (compress), Daquep (sire), Agdigos (to bathe), Dutdut (feather), Gaoat (reach), Agloco (going wayward), Pecpec (packed), Pucan (cut trees), Labayan⁸⁰ (put food on plate) and among others.

3. Gregorio Aglipay Cruz y Labayan: The *Indio* from Batac

We have thus pictured the colonial community where Gregorio Aglipay y Labayan was born. Let us take a glimpse of the family where he came from.

Familia Aglipay

This baptismal register gives us a background of the infant Gregorio:

⁷⁶ Ernesto Cadiz et al, *Batac: Cradle of Eminent Men and Women* (Batac: Mariano Marcos State University, 2000), 32.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 33.

⁷⁸ Regalado Trota Jose, *Ilocos Norte: A Travel Guide*, 175.

⁷⁹ Regalado Trota Jose, *A Chronology of Ilocos Norte History* (Laoag: Ilocos Norte, 1999), 21.

⁸⁰ The maternal surname of Gregorio Aglipay.

On the ninth of May, year Eighteen Hundred and Sixty: the priest Don Domingo Agbayani, cleric of this diocese and assistant priest of this Town of Batac, with my approval, solemnly baptized Gregorio Aglipay Cruz, a boy of five days, legitimate son of Pedro Aglipay Cruz and Victoriana Labayan Hilario of the Barangay of Don Bartolome Pobre of the Town of Paoay. His godfather, Don Apolonio Quiaoit, resident of this said town, who was advised to fulfill his spiritual parent-hood and the obligations attached to it. And I affixed my signature.

Fr. Jose Ynes⁸¹

This is a proof that Gregorio Aglipay was an *indio*. Gregorio's birth date was May 5, 1860. The baptismal register says that he was five days old when he received the sacrament. In the olden times, the day of birth was counted as first day.⁸² The young Gregorio came from a humble and ordinary family of tillers in Sitio Calumboyen. This would attest that Gregorio learned to work in the farm. It was claimed that the roots of his father, Pedro Aglipay Cruz, were not from Batac; his ancestry was in Caoayan, Ilocos Sur. His mother, Victoriana Labayan Hilario, was a full-blooded daughter of Batac.⁸³ The book, *Religious Revolution in the Philippines*, presents that Aglipay had two brothers: Benito,

⁸¹ ADL, *Libro de Bautismos de Batac, Tomo XII, Folio 356*. "En nueve de Mayo de mil ochocientos sesenta años: El Padre Presbítero D. Domingo Agbayani, Clérigo de este Obispado y Coadjutor de este Pueblo de Batac, con mi licencia, bautizo solemnemente a Gregorio Aglipay Cruz niño de cinco días, hijo legítimo de Pedro Aglipay Cruz y Victoriana Labayan Hilario del Barangay de D. Bartolomé Pobre del Pueblo de Paoay. Fue su Padrino D. Apolonio Quiaoit, vecino de este pueblo, a quien se advirtió el parentesco espiritual, y demás obligaciones. Y lo firmé. Fr. Jose Ynes."

⁸² Ramon Danilo Laeda, "Writing History from the Parish Archive," *The ICST Journal* Vol.8: 62. Aglipay's birth date was controversial to historians because some claimed that his birth was May 7. Others say it was May 9, because it was the feast day of St. Gregory Nazianzen and obviously the infant was named after the saint. The Padre himself celebrated his birthday on May 8, as marked by the Kullabeng assembly. The most reliable source is the "*niño de cinco días*" (five days old) in the book of *bautismos*. He was baptized on the feast of St. Gregory and at that time he was five days old. If we reckon the fifth day before May 9, we can rightly say that it was May 5 (we must consider that the day of birth is the first).

⁸³ RRP, 5.

who was born in 1857 – three years older than Gregorio – and Canuto, claimed to be one or two years older than the Padre. Canuto seemed to have followed his brother Gregorio when he was assistant priest in Victoria, Tarlac. The former was one time town head of that town. Benito died at the young age of twelve (April 14, 1869)⁸⁴ and Canuto died around 1919.⁸⁵

Gregorio was the youngest child. He did not have a full experience of maternal intimacy due to the death of his mother when he was one-year and seven months old.⁸⁶ His biographers Achutegui and Bernad mention that he was taken care by his *abuelos*.

Simeon Mandac, another Aglipay's biographer, a protégée and later his factotum mentioned that:

From childhood he (Aglipay) helped out in the farm. He liked to ride spirited horses, to swim in the strong current of the swollen river, to climb the branches of the tallest trees, and to take part in the fights that boys had among themselves, from which he emerged not always unscathed.⁸⁷

This description prefigured Aglipay's life in the future. Mandac further narrated that Aglipay at age six was stolen by his father from his grandparents and brought to Aparri in Cagayan. His grandparents wanted him in school and the abduction by his father was not in their favor.⁸⁸

Another childhood story was the incident with the *Gobernadorcillo del Pueblo* (town executive). It was obligatory that each laborer must plant a minimum of 5,000 seedlings of tobacco. This was in line with the mandate on tobacco monopoly. Gregorio's elders were willing to follow the law but as their land was low, they had to wait for the end of the rainy season to dry up the land sufficiently. But when they started doing the planting, they were arrested for having delayed the planting of tobacco. They were able

⁸⁴ See his death register in *ADL, LEB, Tomo VIII, Folio 356 v.*

⁸⁵ RRP, 6.

⁸⁶ See his mother's death entry in *ADL, LEB, Tomo VII, Folio 319 v.*

⁸⁷ Simeon Mandac, in RRP, 6.

⁸⁸ RRP, 6-7.

to solve the problem and were not beaten as they had been threatened with. Because of this incident of minor tyranny, the youthful Aglipay left Batac in 1876 to seek good fortunes elsewhere.⁸⁹

The Young Lad

The sixteen year-old lad proceeded to Manila and studied first in the private school of the lawyer, Don Julian Carpio,⁹⁰ then at the *Colegio de San Juan de Letran*. For his personal needs, he was given financial assistance by his granduncle who was serving as house helper at the Beaterio de Sta. Catalina. Gregorio also worked as *capista* (working student) at Letran. Isabelo de los Reyes had this comment, "*Without any doubt, one of the great merits of Monsignor Aglipay consists in this, that from extreme poverty he arrived, by his personal worth, at the pinnacle of glory...*"⁹¹ Though loaded with works, Aglipay made excellent developments in his schooling that led him become a tutor to other students.

He then moved to the University of Santo Tomas and obtained there his *Bachiller en Artes*. He first thought of studying Law but changed his mind and decided to enter the seminary formation. As one who belonged to the north, then under the Diocese of Nueva Segovia, he had to go home and be enrolled at the *Recoleta* – managed *Seminario de la Inmaculada Concepcion* in Vigan in 1883. Don Aglipay's biographers said that he was "*persecuted*" in Vigan. Tomas Fonacier wrote, "*He went to Vigan and entered the Seminary there. In spite of all the obstacles which were placed on his way by the enemies of the Filipino clergy, he was able to finish the course in Theology.*"⁹²

The late Fr. Isaias Edralin, SJ was able to collect testimonies of priests who were Gregorio's contemporaries in the Vigan Seminary. They were Msgr. Andres Villanueva, former secretary of the Diocese of Nueva Segovia, Msgr. Bonifacio Brillantes, former Rector of the Vigan Cathedral, and Fr. Miguel Florentin, one of the nine

⁸⁹ *La Republica Filipina*, Dec. 15, 1898, 1-2.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 1-2.

⁹¹ Isabelo de los Reyes, in RRP, 9.

⁹² Tomas Fonacier, in RRP, 15.

clerics tortured in 1896 by the Friars due to alleged involvement to freemasonry. They commonly testified that:

"He [Aglipay] was a good athlete... he was clever but not a very good student. He was several times punished for reading prohibited books, but his attitude towards punishment was defiant: 'Let them punish me as they wish. I shall become famous man someday. Isn't there any liberty left?'"

The aforementioned priests further said that Don Gregorio escaped at night to serenade girls in Vigan Nonetheless, amidst these defects; he had a kind and gentle heart. Fr. Miguel Florentin related that he helped Don Gregorio go down from the seminary windows at night and that on one occasion he was caught and was sent home.⁹³

Msgr. Andres Villanueva affirmed Florentin's claim and added that when Don Aglipay was sent home to Batac as a consequence of his fault, he did not wish to go back to the Vigan Seminary any longer. Likewise, the *Recoletos* might not accept him again in the formation. For this, his pastor in Batac, Fray Cipriano Marcilla, endorsed him to go to Manila and there he was ordained a priest.⁹⁴

4. **R.P. Don Gregorio Aglipay: Priest of the Roman Catholic Church**

The Diocese of Nueva Segovia at this time was vacant. It was under the care of the Bishop of Nueva Caceres as Ecclesiastical Governor. Don Aglipay was to be ordained not by his proper Ordinary, which means, he must have a dimissory allowing him for ordination.

Presbyteral Ordination

In behalf of the Ecclesiastical Governor, the Vicar General Fray Jose Gogeoascoechea issued that important document for Don Aglipay. His ordaining prelate was the retired Apostolic Vicar of Tonking in Indo China, the Dominican Bishop Bernabe Garcia

⁹³ RRP, 16.

⁹⁴ RRP, 16-17.

Cezon. Below was Gogeascoechea's Dimissorial letter for Señor Aglipay:

WE, THE LICENCIADO DON JOSE DE GOGASCOECHEA Y JAUREGUI, Priest, Provisor and Vicar General of this Diocese of Nueva Segovia, Vacant See, Lawyer of the Tribunals of the King etc. etc.

By these presents and in virtue of the especial authorization granted by The Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Lord Sir Fray Arsenio Campo, Bishop of Nueva Caceres and Apostolic Governor of this Diocese grants Don Gregorio Aglipay, Deacon, native of Batac, Province of Ilocos Norte, our consent *ratione originis* for whom by the Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Lord Sir Fray Bernabe Garcia Cezon, Bishop of Biblios, can confer the Sacred Order of Presbyterate, in the ember day of Saint Thomas or outside that day as instructed in the record, which brings this grace worthy into effect.

Given in the Episcopal Palace of Vigan, signed by Us, sealed with that of the Provisor and Vicar General and restrained by the undersigned Secretary of the House and Government of this Diocese, 13th of December 1889.

Lic. JOSE DE GOGASCOECHEA

By the mandate of His Most Illustrious Lordship,

(Sgd.) EDUARDO PROBANZA

Secretary⁹⁵

Together with his fellow Ilocano Don Valentin Rubio, the ordination rites took place at the Dominican Church in Manila, on December 21, 1889 – Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle.⁹⁶ The notice of ordination was published in *Boletin Manilano* on December 22, 1889.⁹⁷ He received his faculties to preach, hear confession and administer the sacraments on April 9, 1889.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Archives of the Archdiocese of Manila (AAM), Leg. 21-A, in Folio.

⁹⁶ RRP, 17.

⁹⁷ *Boletin Manilano* Año XIV, Num. 51.

⁹⁸ AAM, *Libro de Gobierno Eclesiástico – Títulos y Licencias, 1876-1891*, Folio 367v.

Coadjutor

Padre Gregorio Aglipay celebrated his first mass on January 1, 1890. Three months later, he received his first assignment: Assistant Priest of Indang, Cavite, in the Archdiocese of Manila. Historians cannot pinpoint when and how did the Padre transfer to the Manila Archdiocese. By the fact that his dimissorial letter was issued by the Vicar General of Nueva Segovia, his diocese of incardination at his presbyteral ordination was Nueva Segovia. He could not have gotten the assignment as Assistant Priest of Indang if he was not a priest incardinated to the Manila Archdiocese except if he was on loan. Most probably, the three-month delay of his first assignment might have been due to the negotiation for transfer.⁹⁹

Padre Aglipay was appointed Assistant Priest of Indang on April 10, 1890.¹⁰⁰ He administered his first baptism there on May 21, 1898.¹⁰¹ The first wedding he officiated was on April 30, 1890.¹⁰² Padre Aglipay stayed in Indang until he received his new appointment as Assistant Priest in San Antonio, Nueva Ecija, on October 31, 1891.¹⁰³ After one year, he was reassigned to Bocaue, Bulacan, on October 4, 1892.¹⁰⁴ Three years and four months have passed; the Archbishop assigned him as Assistant Priest in San Pablo, Laguna, on February 29, 1896.¹⁰⁵ This was the start of the Philippine Revolution against Spain. On December 15, 1896, Padre Aglipay was moved to Victoria, Tarlac.¹⁰⁶ His stay in Victoria would later stir him to become involved in the revolutionary activities.

It is noteworthy that in a period of six years, he was assigned to five different assignments; all far from each other. To those who are aware of the procedures of the Catholic Church, this is not a good sign.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁹ RRP, 20.

¹⁰⁰ AAM, *Libro de Gobierno* (LG) 1890, Leg. 163.

¹⁰¹ Parish of St. Gregory the Great (PSGG), *Libro de Bautismos, Tomo XVIII, Folio 114*.

¹⁰² PSGG, *Libro de Matrimonios, 1867-1900, Folio 30v*.

¹⁰³ AAM, LG, 1892, Leg. 163 A.C. Folio 4.

¹⁰⁴ AAM, LG 1892 Leg. 195 Folio 196v.

¹⁰⁵ AAM, LG 1896, Leg. 198, Folio 209v.

¹⁰⁶ AAM, LG, Leg. 198, Folio 268v.

¹⁰⁷ RRP, 22.

The revolution of the Filipinos against Spain was ignited in 1896. Historians linked its ember with the execution of the three padres: Mariano Gomez, Jose Burgos and Jacinto Zamora in 1872. We must remember that the cry of these priests was the Filipinization of parishes and dioceses. Sometime in 1872, there was a mutiny in Cavite and the three priests were accused as the perpetrators. On February, 17, 1872, the priests were executed in the guillotine. This event ignited an anti-Spanish sentiment to the Filipinos.¹⁰⁸ This was the ember which produced the fire of the 1896 Revolution. Padre Aglipay became a prominent figure in the cry for the rights of the native clergy and started to have ties with Aguinaldo and his revolutionary government. The simple tiller from Batac was entering the national scene.

Aglipay in the Revolution

Meanwhile, on June 12, 1898, Aguinaldo proclaimed Philippine Independence in Cavite. This marked the eviction of Spanish authority over the islands and by virtue of the Treaty of Paris, the Americans took over. A constitutional assembly was convoked in Malolos, Bulacan, in September 1898. Padre Aglipay attended the assembly representing Ilocos Norte.

From this civil government, Padre Aglipay was named *Capellan Castrense* (Military Chaplain) and later *Vicario General Castrense* (Military Vicar General). Note well, the Padre received an appointment from a civil authority; a move which made him incur at that very moment a censure of automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication.¹⁰⁹

When General Manuel Tinio, who held northern Philippines, reached Vigan, Bishop Jose Hevia y Campomanes together with the Friars ran for their lives. They went to Cagayan with the hope to get a ship there going to Hong Kong. The bishop and the friars were caught by the revolutionists who occupied Cagayan and there they were detained. For sixteen months, Bishop Hevia was held

¹⁰⁸ Ramon Danilo Laeda and Noel Ian Rabago, *Aglipay after Aglipayanism* (Laoag: Diocese of Laoag, 2003), 16.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 8. This would mean that his appointment as Ecclesiastical Governor by Bishop Hevia was null and void because when he received the appointment he was under the censure of excommunication *latae sententiae*.

in Alcala.¹¹⁰ This made Bishop Hevia handicapped to manage the affairs of his vast diocese which stretched from the Islands of Batanes to the Province of Tarlac.

To solve this difficulty, Bishop Hevia appointed Vicars Forane for the Provinces of Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Pangasinan and Cagayan. For Ilocos Norte, Padre Don Pedro Brillantes of Santa, Ilocos Sur and *Cura Interino* of Pasuquin, was named for the post. Padre Brillantes like Aglipay had ties with the revolutionary government. In the baptismal files of Pasuquin, he used the title "*Cura Interino de este Pueblo de Pasuquin, Teniente Capellan Castrense y Vicario Foraneo de Ilocos Norte.*"¹¹¹ At this point, Padre Aglipay entered the picture. He, though a priest of Manila, wanted to intervene in the affairs of his former diocese of incardination; that is for him to become Ecclesiastical Governor of the diocese. He solicited the endorsements of the Vicars Forane which included Brillantes. The Vicars Forane granted his wish and proceeded to Cagayan to express to the detained bishop his desire for Nueva Segovia.¹¹²

Padre Aglipay presented the endorsement letters to Bishop Hevia. The detained bishop was impressed with Padre Aglipay's "concern" for Nueva Segovia. He then wrote two letters, the appointment of Padre Aglipay as Ecclesiastical Governor of Nueva Segovia and an exhortation to the Nueva Segovia clergy to render him due respect and obedience as Ecclesiastical Governor. Sometime in 1899, Bishop Hevia would revoke this appointment.¹¹³

Gobernador Eclesiastico de Nueva Segovia

Padre Aglipay then proceeded to Vigan for his installation as Ecclesiastical Governor. There was a solemn High Mass and *Te*

¹¹⁰ Ramon Danilo Laeda, "Fr. Jose Hevia Campomanes of Nueva Segovia," *The ICST Journal* Vol. II: 64. Hereafter, Hevia.

¹¹¹ Translated as "Interim Pastor of the Town of Pasuquin, Lieutenant Military Chaplain and Vicar Forane of Ilocos Norte." See Ericson M. Josue, "The 19th Century Pasuquin and its Pastors," *Philippiniana Sacra*, Vol. XLII, No. 126 (Sept-Dec., 2007), 619.

¹¹² John Schumacher, SJ, *The Revolutionary Clergy* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1981), 95.

¹¹³ Ramon Danilo Laeda and Noel Ian Rabago, *Aglipay after Aglipayanism* (Laoag: Diocese of Laoag, 2003), 65-66.

Deum in the Cathedral of St. Paul. From the windows of the Episcopal Palace, Padre Aglipay watched the parade of the Philippine Revolutionary troops. The town tendered him a program in the evening. At midnight, he visited the friars and nuns who were under house arrest in the seminary. What was unusual here was his attire: the Padre wore a general's garb with sword, riding boots and baton of command.¹¹⁴ As the provisional head of the diocese, Padre Aglipay issued circulars on administration, at times with a political tone and even anti-American.¹¹⁵ By taking the reins of the Ecclesiastical Governor, Padre Aglipay would later put into danger his ties with the Roman Catholic Church. Accusations of usurpation would later arise.

Usurpation Case

The events in Nueva Segovia were not spared from the eyes of the Metropolitan Archbishop of Manila, Fray Bernardino Nozaleda. We must understand that Nueva Segovia belonged to the Metropolitan Province of Manila. In this critical moment, the Archbishop as Metropolitan could dip his hands into the affairs of his suffragan. One thing more, involved in this issue was a priest of his archdiocese. He summoned Padre Aglipay and wanted him to clarify the accusation of usurpation. Padre Aglipay never presented himself to his superior. An ecclesiastical court probed the claims and after sometime, on May 4, 1899, that same court issued a Decree of Excommunication on Padre Gregorio Aglipay; guilty of the case on usurpation of jurisdiction.¹¹⁶ We must take note that when Padre Aglipay received his appointment as Ecclesiastical Governor he was under the censure of excommunication *latae sententiae* which followed that whatever designation he received from the Church after he incurred the censure was invalid *ab initio* (from its very beginning). Hence, his taking possession of Nueva Segovia fell under the violation of usurpation. When the Padre asked for appointment from Bishop Hevia, he did not

¹¹⁴ RRP, 75.

¹¹⁵ We must remember that the Philippines was seceded by Spain to the Americans in 1898 through the Treaty of Paris. Padre Aglipay by sentiment was anti-American.

¹¹⁶ RRP III, 199.201.

present to the prelate the real score, his post as Military Vicar General, and that he was under a *latae sententiae* censure. After knowing the situation, Bishop Hevia revoked the appointment he issued in 1898 for Padre Aglipay as Ecclesiastical Governor. Bishop Hevia said thus:

As soon as the sentence of the ecclesiastical tribunal of Manila reached me, by which Aglipay was declared to have incurred major excommunication reserved *speciali modo* to the Roman Pontiff, and when I learned that this sentence was disregarded by Aglipay and by almost the entire Filipino Clergy, I made known to the Clergy that I had revoked the appointment of Aglipay as Ecclesiastical Governor.¹¹⁷

On October 23, 1899, a group of native clergy met in Paniqui, Tarlac. Padre Aglipay acted as chairman. They stressed that the Philippine Dioceses were "impeded" because for them, the eviction of Spanish Dominion in the Philippines also ceased the authority of Spanish Bishops who were left in the islands. They planned to make a representation in Rome and ask for the appointment of native bishops. It is noteworthy that the intention in Paniqui was not a separation from Rome.¹¹⁸

After the assembly, the excommunicated Padre Aglipay withdrew to his beloved hometown of Batac and there started a guerilla band; this time, against the Americans!

5. El Guerillero

Having been an ally of Aguinaldo, Padre Aglipay was influenced to follow the means of the revolutionary government to free the Philippines from foreign hands, force!

General Manuel Tinio was the head of the native insurgents in the Ilocos. Tinio and his followers were Tagalogs, an obvious reason why they were unpopular to the Ilocanos and a ground for Padre Aglipay to attract many followers.

¹¹⁷ Bishop Hevia, in RRP, 98.

¹¹⁸ RRP, 109-114.

El General

The area of operation of Aglipay's guerilla troop was the mountainous districts of Batac, Badoc, Dingras, Banna and Piddig. Also in Paoay, Sarrat, San Nicolas and the areas of the 20th Century Towns of Currimao, Pinili and Nueva Era.

The Padre's first hideout was in a well hidden hollow between hills. It was so well-concealed that could not be seen from any nearby mountain top. Entering the *cotta*, one passed through the small ravine with four meters and a half deep which served as fortification.¹¹⁹

The terrain of these areas in Ilocos Norte provides a good setting for hiding places. Achutegui and Bernad described:

...the rugged terrain in which a narrow coastal plain is hemmed in by hills broken by rivers and deep ravines, the hills enclosing fertile little valleys. Some of the hills have caves, like Maoakoakar; and even without the caves, some of the hills are forbidding, like Baracbac in Pinili and Unegdaga in the Batac area... They could always retire to the mountains in the east, like the mount of Simminublan, whose rounded top... reminds Ilocanos of the [*sinublan*,] large iron cauldron for molasses.¹²⁰

The Aglipay guerilla group had a number of encounters with American forces. Those in the report were the encounters in Barbarangay, in the outskirts of Batac, Dalayap in Paoay, Gabor in the present Pinili (Badoc before) and San Lorenzo in San Nicolas.

The Battle of Mabaleng is worthy of attention. When members of the American forces went near Aglipay's *cotta* in Mabaleng, they were fired upon by the Filipinos who came out in big numbers from their hiding places. The Americans retreated to the *poblacion* where they set the houses on fire.¹²¹

The renegade priest transferred his hiding place on a hill in Payao, near the river. Again, other battles were staged in Baracbac and Sumader. Some days later, his *cotta* in Payao was

¹¹⁹ RRP, 117-118.

¹²⁰ RRP, 118.

¹²¹ RRP, 119.

attacked by Americans and about ninety Aglipay's men died. The Padre retreated to a plateau on top of Mount Maokoakar. American forces were able to seize the insurgents in Maoakoakar; again there was heavy battle – ruffles against *bolos*. The survivors, including the Padre, hid in Mount Simminublan (now part of Nueva Era). In 1900, there were fightings in Bongo, Banna and Quiom in Batac. As a result of the hard life, Padre Aglipay became seriously ill but recovered after sometime.

In 1901, there were two encounters, one in Tipcal and the other in Pussuac. The Tipcal encounter was near an old mango tree about a hundred yards east of the stone bridge.

Despite the difficult life in the warfare, Padre Aglipay remained unbowed and unscathed. These events at the end of the 19th Century, proved Batac's Aglipay as energetic and an effective guerilla leader.¹²² He gained the full support of his town mates. To them, he was the government being a man of experience: a cleric, an Ecclesiastical Governor and a guerilla leader for Filipinization.

Surrender

With Aguinaldo's capture in Isabel, many other insurgents went down from hiding and asked amnesty from American authorities. This would precipitate Aglipay to finally surrender on May 25, 1901, in Laoag. It was marked with a festivity, a parade and a program.¹²³

Padre Aglipay lived temporarily in the convent of Laoag with its *Cura Interino*, Padre Jose Evangelista and the Assistant Padre Roman Ver.¹²⁴ Evangelista would later become one of his staunch allies in the schism and Ver would be the only Ilocano Priest who would remain strongly Catholic and work for the preservation of the faith in Laoag.

After sometime, the padre lived in Manila with his secretary Simeon Mandac and the young lad Santiago Fonacier who would later become his immediate successor as Supreme Bishop of the schismatic church.

¹²² RRP, 120.

¹²³ RRP, 138.

¹²⁴ RRP, 141.

6. Cisma Aglipayano – 1902

Asamblea de Paniqui

In Paniqui, Tarlac, the native clergy had expressed their desire for the Filipinization of the local Church. They cut their allegiance to foreign bishops but remained in adhesion to Rome. There was an attempt for a dialogue with the Spanish Metropolitan of Manila, Archbishop Nozaleda. The latter refused the demand for Filipinization. The representatives then tried to dialogue with the Apostolic Delegate Placid Chapelle but he also refused the proposal.

Having failed with the Manila Archbishop and the Delegate, the native clergy sent a team to lobby with the Holy See. But, like the earlier dialogues, it failed. Furthermore, the document brought by the Filipino representatives was threatening for Rome: *"If Rome did not grant their demands, they would go into a state of rebellion. It was a vain threat, and it was the wrong thing to say."*¹²⁵

Asamblea en Nueva Segovia

The year 1902 came; temperature was getting high. In January that year, an assembly was called among Nueva Segovia clergy. This was their resolution:

We the undersigned priests will fight for the exclusive right of the Filipino clergy to occupy the position of archbishops and bishops in the Philippines. If this right is violated by the Apostolic Delegate, we will secede from the Roman Church and form an independent Filipino Church, teaching the same dogmas as the Roman.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ RRP, 159.

¹²⁶ The document in RRP IV, 121. The signatories were Padres Pedro Noriega, Juan Castro, Jose Evangelista, Servando Castro, Clemente Edralin, Esteban Paz, Evaristo Clemente, Ignacio Noriega, Ramon Farolan. Lucas Albano, Platon de Villanueva, Roman Ver, Mariano Madarang, Quirino Evangelista, Sinforoso Bonoan, Salvador Galano and Mariano Espiritu.

Asamblea de Kullabeng

On May 8, 1902, Padre Aglipay's 42nd birthday, the Ilocano clergy met again in a Barrio of Badoc called Kullabeng (now part of Pinili). Santiago Fonacier has this description:

Aglipay celebrated his 42nd birthday in Kullabeng Badok (sic), Ilokos (sic) Norte, now the site of the Municipality of Pinili. Several priests and laymen attended the affair and then and there they resolved to declare their independence from the Church of Rome and establish a Filipino Independent Church. Father Aglipay, however, requested the Assembly to postpone the formal launching of the Church to give him time to contact all Filipino priests and laymen leaders, so that the movement would count with the unanimous support of the Filipino people and clergy. In that same meeting, some of the priests and laymen, led by Padre Brillantes, Farolan and Bonoan, advocated for reforms of doctrines and religious practices. Padre Pio Romero led the conservatives who were of the opinion that the Church should follow the same doctrines, dogmas and tenets of the Roman Catholic Church, except obedience to the Pope for the time being.¹²⁷

The doctrinal reform which they were referring to meant changed from Trinitarian to Unitarian: from the Catholic doctrine of One God with Three Persons to One God, One Person, One Essence and One Spirit. The Kullabeng Assembly was a turning moment, a declaration of independence from Rome and its doctrines. These tenets would be later adopted as official doctrine of the schismatic church.

Then, there came a circular of Padre Brillantes, former Ilocos Norte Vicar Forane, to the Ilocano clergy. In the circular, Brillantes rejected the authority of Fray Fidel Larrinaga, the new Ecclesiastical Governor of the diocese for reasons that he was a friar and his appointment came from a bishop who was also a friar – Bishop Hevia.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Santiago Fonacier, in RRP, 163.

¹²⁸ RRP, 163-164.

La Iglesia Filipina Independiente

The final rupture came when Don Isabelo de los Reyes of Vigan proclaimed on August 3, 1902 the *Iglesia Filpina Independiente*. De los Reyes was one of Ilocos' greatest minds. He was a historian, folklorist, statesman, publisher, founder of Philippine labor union and this time, founder of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*. He appointed Padre Aglipay as head of the new church without the latter having knowledge of it. Padre Pedro Brillantes, former Vicar Forane was named Bishop of Ilocos Norte, Padre Jose Evangelista was Bishop of Manila, Padre Servando Castro was Ecclesiastical Governor of Laguna, Padre Jorge Barlin was Bishop of Sorsogon and Padre Candido Gironella, Ecclesiastical Governor of Ilocos Sur, among others.

Padre Jorge Barlin, who was named Bishop of Sorsogon, immediately refused his appointment. Barlin's adhesion to the Roman Catholic Church is inspiring. In his letter to Simeon Mandac, he said:

Since I do not belong to your church, I am sending back your documents, for how can a non-member be a leader of the same? ... The congregation then ... may revoke my appointment and give it to another of your communion, for possibly there will not be lacking madmen who would readily accept it....¹²⁹

The Vatican would later recognize his allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church. Barlin would be appointed Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Nueva Caceres, making him the first Filipino in history.

Padre Aglipay too was not aware of his nomination. While waiting for the decision of the padre to lead the new church, de los Reyes prompted the consecration of the schismatic Bishop Pedro Brillantes in Bacarra, Ilocos Norte. Brillantes in his profession swore that he "*shall guard and preserve unsullied the faith, tradition, the contents of sacred scriptures, the sacraments, external cult, the veneration of saints and especially of the Ever Blessed Virgin Mary.*"¹³⁰

¹²⁹ RRP, 187.

¹³⁰ RRP, 447.

Delos Reyes handed to Padre Aglipay his appointment. It was only then that he became aware of it. De los Reyes reported that the Padre shed tears, bemoaning the loss of religious unity in the Philippines. Historians Achutegui and Bernad believed that the Padre was unprepared to break with Rome. He then went for a retreat in a Jesuit Retreat House. After some days, he finally decided to take the post offered by de los Reyes – to lead the Filipino schismatic church founded by the latter.¹³¹

Primer Obispo Maximo

Padre Gregorio Aglipay y Labayan, son of Batac, an excommunicated Roman Catholic priest and former Guerilla leader, was now the *Primer Obispo Maximo* of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*. His episcopal consecration took place on January 18, 1903 in Concepcion, Malabon, Rizal. Bishop Jose Evangelista, former Roman Catholic Pastor of Laoag and now schismatic Bishop, consecrated Padre Gregorio Aglipay and was assisted by other schismatic clerics.

Soon the schism reached the Diocese of Nueva Segovia, Ilocos Norte in particular. The whole body of priests joined the schism except for one, Padre Roman Ver. At the time there were thirteen parishes. The following is the name of the priests who started the schism in the Ilocos Norte towns: Padres Sinforoso Bonoan (—), Esteban Paz (Pasuquin), Pedro Brillantes (Pasuquin-Bacarra), Platon de Villanueva (Vintar), Jose Evangelista (Laoag), Salvador Galano (San Nicolas), Pedro Noriega (Dingras-Banna), Juan Castro (—), Jose Castro (Piddig), Evaristo Clemente (—), Servando Castro (Sarrat), Clemente Edralin (Solsona), Mariano Espiritu (Badoc), Quirino Evangelista (Paoay), Ignacio Noriega (Bacarra) and Lucas Albano (Batac). Padre Roman Ver who was Assistant pastor in Laoag refused to join the group and he became the only priest who remained steadfast to Catholicism. Because of this act of Padre Ver, the Laoag church was never held by schismatic hands.

¹³¹ RRP, 188.192.

7. "Out of the Depths, I cry to You..."

Schism in Batac

At the outbreak of the schism Padre Lucas Albano was the interim Pastor of Batac. He brought with him the vast majority of the population to the schismatic movement as they remained to stay in the convento and church. In January 1902, he was one of the signatories of the ultimatum of the native clergy to the Apostolic Delegate that they would break from Rome if the request for the appointment of a Filipino Bishop failed.¹³² But it seems he was a man of changeable mind. On April 2, 1903, he was again one of the nineteen signatories of the declaration against the schism and expressed adhesion to the Holy See.¹³³ Afterwards, he was found as the initiator of the schism in Batac. Anyhow, this on-and-off attitude was found in some schismatic priests including Padre Aglipay himself.

On April 7, 1903 the Holy See appointed Bishop Hevia's replacement: Bishop Dennis Dougherty of Philadelphia, United States. As expected, negative reactions were heard from the native clergy. On July 1, 1903, a group of clergy assembled in Bantay under the leadership of its pastor, Padre Eulogio Alcid. Alcid was Pastor of Batac before being assigned in Bantay. They resolved that they suspend temporarily their allegiance to any foreign bishop but not to cut ties with Rome. The new bishop arrived in Vigan on October 22, 1903. The young bishop got the hardest responsibility of putting Nueva Segovia back to order. In Ilocos Norte, it took him several years before he could start his defense against this schismatic bailiwick.¹³⁴

Barlin vs. Ramirez

We must remember that the schismatic priests, including Padre Lucas Albano of Batac, remained to hold the colonial churches and convents. It took the Bicolano Padre Jorge Barlin to cast the first strike on the offensive to regain churches and convents. Barlin

¹³² RRP IV, 122.

¹³³ RRP IV, 202.

¹³⁴ IR XXV, 126-127.

who was Administrator of the Diocese of Nueva Caceres sued to court Padre Vicente Ramirez, the schismatic pastor of Lagonoy, Ambos Camarines. On November 24, 1906, the Philippine Supreme Court promulgated the decision that the real owner of these churches was the Roman Catholic Church. Below is an excerpt of the decision:

It, therefore, follows that in 1898, and prior to the treaty of Paris, the Roman Catholic Church had by law the exclusive right to the possession of this church and it had the legal right to administer the same for the purposes for which the building was consecrated. It was then in the full and peaceful possession of the church with the rights aforesaid. That these rights were fully protected by the treaty of Paris is very clear. That treaty, in article 8, provides, among other things, as follows:

And it is hereby declared that the relinquishment or cession, as the case may be, to which the preceding paragraph refers, cannot in any respect impair the property or rights which by law belong to the peaceful possession of property of all kinds, or provinces, municipalities, public or private establishments, ecclesiastical or civic bodies, or any other associations having legal capacity to acquire and possess property in the aforesaid territories renounced or ceded, or of private individuals, or whatsoever nationality such individuals may be.¹³⁵

The decision on this case would later become the basis of the verdicts in all cases to regain churches back to Catholic hands.

Move for Re-conquest

With this, Bishop Dougherty could now move to regain Ilocos Norte. In 1908, he appointed priests who remained steadfast to Catholicism to put on the yolk to revive Catholicism. These native priests were Padre Andres Alcayaga, who worked in Bangui and Nagpartian (now Burgos); Padre Trinidad Ranjo who persuaded his relatives to return to Catholicism in Pasuquin; Bacarra-native

¹³⁵ G.R. No. L-2832 November 24, 1906 in <http://www.thecorpusjuris.com/jurisprudence/jurisprudence1900to1910/133-jurisprudence1906/1152-gr-no-l-2832.html>.

Padre Atanasio Albano, who worked in his home-parish; Padre Mariano Loreto Pacis of Vintar, who also worked with his town mates; Padre Roman Ver, who was assigned Pastor of Laoag since the time of Ecclesiastical Governor Larrinaga, continued to fight for the preservation of Catholicism in Laoag. Padre Anastacio Ocampo served in Paoay; Padre Martin Bustamante, Padre Miguel Florentin, and the Badocqueño Padre Luis Cortez also exerted efforts to revive the faith in Badoc; Padre Glicerio Manzano got the heaviest job in Batac. He experienced to be shouted upon and his residence was often stoned by people. Padre Higino Payoyo preserved the Faith in San Nicolas; the thirty-one year old Padre Mariano Edralin stayed with his town mates in Sarrat. He sacrificed his life for the sake of reviving the faith. After coming from the court which gave the verdict of returning Sarrat church to the Catholic Church, they found him dead in front of the entrance of the convento in Sarrat. Padre Mariano Corpus also served in Dingras and Banna.

Furthermore, Bishop Dougherty sent Padres Alfredo Verzosa and Melanio Lazo to help in the works of revival in all Ilocos Norte towns. Padre Verzosa made an impressive job in Bantay when he was able to catapult schismatics back to Catholicism there.

The "Epicenter"

Let us observe the "tremors" in Batac, the "epicenter." As we have presented earlier, during the Spanish colonial regime, Batac had hundreds of baptisms in a year. After the outbreak, the situation was totally inverted. Achutegui and Bernad studied the status of the parish at the first quarter of the 20th Century. Their basis was the canonical books of the parish. The *Libro de Bautismos*, volume 24, covered the period from June 19, 1897 to December 25, 1901. It shows that Padre Lucas Albano had started signing the entries on October 18, 1899. This means that in this date, he started serving as Interim Pastor of the Catholic Batac. They reported that the book had 400 folios but folios 103 to 219 are missing. For the period of December 26, 1902 to May 12, 1909 there is no record of baptisms. The first six years were the period when Padre Lucas Albano held the church and convento as a schismatic priest.

In 1908, Bishop Dougherty started the move to regain Ilocos Norte, he sent Padre Glicerio Manzano of Tagudin to Batac to

revive Catholicism. Working in Batac was a very heavy mission. The *Libro de Bautismos* Volume 25¹³⁶ shows us the picture of the situation in terms of administration of baptisms. In their study, Achutegui and Bernad observed that no baptism was entered since the book was issued on October 5, 1908 till May 12, 1909. In that latter date, the pastor Padre Glicerio Manzano baptized the ten-day old Pedro Jesus Manzano, legitimate son of Numeriano Manzano and Isabel Manglapus. It seemed that the one baptized was a relative of the *Cura*. This was the only baptism for the year 1909. For 1910, there were only three baptisms. Bishop James Carroll of Nueva Segovia, the successor of Bishop Dougherty came for a pastoral visit on December 3, 1910. For the year 1911, two baptisms were registered and one of those is Virginia who was 41 days old, legitimate daughter of Numeriano Manzano and Isabel Manglapus.; most probably another niece of the pastor. No baptisms entered for 1912. In 1914, there were only three baptisms and one among them was "*sub conditione*" – conditional baptism. This means, the baptizand might have been baptized earlier as Aglipayan.¹³⁷ The actual *Libro de Bautismos* show that there were thirty-one baptisms for 1915. The new pastor, Padre Getulio Paredes had his first baptism on April 10, 1915.¹³⁸ This marked the start of the slow recovery of the parish. Achutegui and Bernad noted that it took thirty-nine years (1908-1947) to complete the 327 folios of a volume which during the Spanish regime could be filled up only in a period of two years.

The third pastor after the outbreak was Padre Getulio Paredes, a member of the big Paredes clan of Bangued, Abra, which produced the statesman Quintin Paredes. The priest courageously faced the odds of holding the minority. During this critical period, the church and convento were often stoned by people; hence, disturbing the priest's privacy. There is a story that after a night of unrest caused by the stoning of the convento's roof by hostile schismatics, he went to the local police and dared them to stop the frequent stoning. If they could not control the disturbance, he'll

¹³⁶ The first six folios of Volume 25 are no longer extant; it starts now with folio 7, year 1914.

¹³⁷ RRP, 533.

¹³⁸ Immaculate Conception Parish –Batac (ICPB), LB XXV, Folio 8.

report them to his relative, Don Quintin Paredes who was at that time in the hierarchy of the Supreme Court; since then, no more nightly disturbances.

It was said that some priests resigned as Pastors of Batac. This was because they didn't have the income for daily sustenance: no sacraments, no stipends. At this point, the once economically sufficient parish became a subsidized ecclesiastical unit.

Some interim Pastors held the reins, Padre Reynaldo Rola from 1921 to 1923, Padre Gerardo Bayaca from 1923 to 1926. Padre Bayaca would later take a prominent place in the history of the schism; he would join the schismatic church and become one of its bishops and later, its *Obispo Maximo*. The Paoay pastor, Padre Anastacio Ocampo was *Cura Encargado* (priest-in-charge) from 1926 to 1933. It would take sometime before Batac could have its full-time pastor again in the person of Padre Bernardo Batoon of Abra. It was in his time when the church was burned. They built a small provisional chapel at the patio but again, burned. Padre Batoon managed a school for children in his convento. He served in Batac from 1933 to 1940.

Those who remained Catholics were the elite families of Batac: the Verzosas and Mendozas. This was a reason for the Catholic Parish to be tagged as "*Simbaan dagiti Babaknang*" (Church of the Elite) by the schismatics. To them, it was not the Church for the poor; but it was the church of the Spaniards, edifice of the oppressors. Majority of the Aglipayans were the commoners.

During Holy Weeks, only less than the half of a hundred participated in the procession. This was a tiny number compared to the thousands in the Aglipayan procession. The 1939 census gives us this picture: Total population, 22,207; Aglipayans, 21,141; Catholics, 903; others, 163.¹³⁹

An elderly parishioner related a story that as a member of the choir she had to practice Latin and Spanish songs in her house. One day, she was singing songs of that kind. Suddenly, her neighbor, who was a schismatic, shouted at her: "*Isardengmo dayta dakayo a Romano, inka ketdi agkanta sadiay Roma wenno Espanya!*"

¹³⁹ RRP, 534.

Awan lugaryo dito!" (Stop that, you Romans, better for you to go off to Rome and Spain. You don't have a place here!).¹⁴⁰

The once strong, influential and dominant Roman Catholic Church had to struggle for existence in its former important missionary center. Catholicism went to the depths. Aglipay's impact to his townsfolk was very strong. For them, he was their hero. To them, his church was the religion for the Filipino.

8. Catholic Revival

Churches back to Catholic Hands

The 1906 Supreme Court Decision on the Barlin vs. Ramirez case was a strong blow that caused a deliberate decline of the IFI. In 1908, when churches and convents were returned to the Roman Catholic Church, the new church had to build chapels for their liturgies. If the decision had been the reverse, it would have been the Roman Catholic Church to be thrown to oblivion. The loss of the churches from the hands of the Aglipayans led some members to return to the Roman Catholic Church. This was the case in Batac. The increase was slow but at least it grew every year since 1909.

The Trinitarians: Obispo Servando Castro et al.

Sometime in 1929, there was a kind of division among the Aglipayan Clergy. We must remember that the new church embraced Unitarianism. Some of the former Catholic priests wanted to preserve the Roman Catholic doctrine in the IFI. *Obispo Maximo Aglipay* wanted to abolish the celebration of the mass. A group of original clergy of the IFI led by the Bataqueño Bishop Servando Castro protested. They stressed that at the time of the church's establishment they resolved to "*organize a Philippine Church with the same dogmas as the Roman Church.*"¹⁴¹ Pedro Brillantes, the very first bishop of the new church, swore at his ordination as bishop that he'll "*guard and preserve unsullied the faith, external*

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Ms. Melchora Alimboyugen-Salvador, Private Residence, 10 June 2008.

¹⁴¹ RRP, 447.

cult, the veneration of saints and especially the ever Blessed Virgin Mary."¹⁴² But at the end, the reform of Aglipay triumphed and the Castro group accepted defeat. Here, we can see the start of doctrinal disagreements which would occur again later after Aglipay's death.

Muerte del Fundador

Isabelo de los Reyes, Sr., the founder of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI), was the wind beneath the wings of the Supreme Bishop. He wrote many works and allowed them to be signed as ideas of Msgr. Aglipay. He had been standing beside the monsignor till he retracted and returned to Catholic communion on September 14, 1936.¹⁴³ This retraction of de los Reyes was another strong blow. The very person who invited Monsignor Aglipay to join the schismatic movement had left the church which he himself founded. De los Reyes died on October 10, 1938 after having given all Catholic solace for the dying.¹⁴⁴

Death of Bishop Aglipay

On September 1, 1940 came the sad news in Batac: Gregorio Aglipay, her great son, had died in Manila. After a life which spanned eighty years, three months and twenty-seven days, the unbowed man had to surrender himself to death. It was reported that a month before his death, the strong man paid a visit to the Ilocos, Batac in particular. According to sources, he visited his relatives and bade them goodbye. He met the Aglipayan clergy and told them to watch over the welfare of their church.¹⁴⁵ After some days, he had mild cerebral attack. The physician attested that he had been fighting against his infirmity but after sometime of agony, the boy who once climbed the topmost trees, swum against the torrents, the priest of political will, the unscathed guerilla leader had succumbed himself to death. On his deathbed, many Roman Catholic Clerics and religious attempted to convince his return but

¹⁴² RRP, 447.

¹⁴³ RRP, 502.

¹⁴⁴ RRP, 509.

¹⁴⁵ RRP, 511.

circumstances did not allow them. The death of the Supreme Bishop Gregorio Aglipay became the strongest spike to his church. After a decade, there would be power struggle and doctrinal disagreements.

Reburial in Batak

In 1959, Nineteen years after his death, Gregorio Aglipay was reburied in his beloved Batak. The reburial is described below:

Over thirty thousand faithful attended the three memorable days of the reburial in the Batak Cathedral of the mortal remains of Bishop Gregorio Aglipay y Labayan, founder of the Church which started September 1...

Twenty bishops, two hundred priests and thousands of Filipino Catholics witnessed the impressive and solemn ceremonies. Today thanks to Bishops Flaviano Lorenzo and the public officials of Batak, Bishop Aglipay rests in his beloved Batak, and at long last has been lifted above the plane of conflict and hatred. Henceforth, Mons. Aglipay will shine among the stars of this land of ours far above the gathering clouds over heads. Bishop Aglipay's rests in his tomb at Batak is not his end, but the beginning of a lasting glory for all eternity. He was buried accompanied by the grief of the whole Philippines...

On September 11, the Supreme Bishop celebrated a Requiem Mass in the Parish Church of Batak, Ilokos Norte, before the mortal remains of the Bishop Founder Mons. Gregorio Aglipay y Labayan. After the Mass the Supreme Bishop delivered a brief Message to the Faithful of Batak, congratulating them for the lovely and marvelous new temple of that glorious town. The bishop also recounted some of the fascinating anecdotes of the late Founder's life in Rome, and recounted the last hours of Mons. Aglipay, when he gave his bishops the great commission to carry on with the Filipino Catholic Church... Bishop Manuel L. Lagasca, the Secretary General, Mr. Juan Franco and Mr. Mariano Nalupta [Sr.] delivered eloquent speeches...¹⁴⁶

At this time of reburial, there was an intramural struggle going on in Aglipay's church.

¹⁴⁶ "The Christian Register" in RRP, 514-515.

Rising from the Rubbles

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church across the river was slowly rising from the rubbles. In these years of recovery, the following pastors held the rein of the Catholic parish: Padre Alfonso Dacanay of Aringay, La Union, from 1940 to 1944; Padre Teodorico Rivera, from 1944 to 1946; Padre Dionisio Valdez, from 1946 to 1947; Padre Elpidio Jaramillo of Santo Domingo, Ilocos Sur, from 1947 to 1948; Padre Juan Bello from Santa, Ilocos Sur, from 1948 to 1951; Padre Jose Pineda, from 1951 to 1958; and Padre Jose Aspiras of Agoo, La Union, from 1958 to 1960.

Schism within the Schism

The intramural struggle in the IFI reached its height in the 1950's, a decade after Bishop Aglipay died. Two prominent factions were emerging: the one by Bishop Isabelo de los Reyes, Jr., son of the founder, and by Bishop Santiago Fonacier, protégée of the first Supreme Bishop. After the death of Bishop Aglipay, two candidates were being considered as head of the church: the Trinitarian Bishop Servando Castro, and the Unitarian Bishop Santiago Fonacier. The former was a Roman Catholic Priest and the latter, a cleric trained under Aglipay. Both of them were involved in politics, Castro being a delegate to the 1934 Constitutional Convention and Fonacier being a Senator. Castro was a Bataqueño and Fonacier was a Laoagueño. Castro was fighting for IFI's return to the tenets of Roman Catholicism; Fonacier was stressing preservation of Aglipayan Liberalism. The supporters of Fonacier persuaded Castro to give up his candidacy. Bishop Castro agreed to give up on condition that they restore Trinitarianism in the IFI. With this, Fonacier became Supreme Bishop, the immediate successor of the late Bishop Aglipay. Bishop Servando Castro retired and died in his hometown, Batac, on December 6, 1946. Though in schism, he died endearing Catholic tenets and clerical celibacy.

As Bishop Fonacier reigned, doctrinal differences continued. The prominent figure now in the Trinitarian section was Bishop Isabelo de los Reyes, Jr. After sometime, Bishop Fonacier was deposed on charges of unaccounted funds. The Supreme Council ratified the deposition and elected the former Roman Catholic Pastor of Batac turned schismatic, Bishop Gerardo Bayaca, as new *Obispo Maximo*, replacing Fonacier. Bishop Fonacier rejected the validity

of the election. Soon the church was divided in two hostile factions: the Fonacier faction known or the Unitarians and the De los Reyes faction known as the Trinitarians. Each faction threw accusations against each other. In September 1946, both factions elected their own "Supreme Council." The Unitarian faction elected Bishop Juan Jamias as Supreme Bishop and the Trinitarian faction elected Bishop Isabelo de Los Reyes, Jr. as *Obispo Maximo*, replacing Bayaca. De los Reyes urgently registered himself to the Securities and Exchange Commission as "*sole corporate body*" to administer temporal goods of the IFI.

Aglipayans against Aglipayans

The gap was more widened when Bishops De los Reyes, Bayaca and Aguilar sought Episcopal Consecration from Protestant Episcopalian Bishops. This move made the de los Reyes faction officially Trinitarian. Then, the question on who was real owner of the Aglipayan churches arose: Who was the real *Obispo Maximo*? The issue was brought to court. The lower court favored Fonacier. De los Reyes appealed to the Appellate Court and it favored him. Fonacier (now the petitioner) rebutted to the Supreme Court which had Eliseo Mabanag as his lawyer, Claro Recto for De los Reyes and the young Ferdinand Marcos as *amicus curiae*. Below is an excerpt of the Supreme Court's verdict:

On this point, the evidence shows that petitioner Fonacier, calling himself as Supreme Bishop of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, issued a call to all those bishops and rebels belonging to his faction for a meeting to be held by the *Asamblea Magna* on September 1, 1946 for the election of his successor, and it was in that meeting where Bishop Jamias was elected to take his place as Supreme Bishop; but such election was found by the Court of Appeals to be illegal because, "It has been conducted not by a quorum of qualified and legitimate members of the IFI but by rebels thereof who were not authorized to organize the so-called *Asamblea Magna*", and so it concluded that Mons. Juan Jamias was not legally elected as Supreme Bishop of said church. This finding also involves a question of fact which we cannot now look into... The complaint in this case was filed on February 9, 1946 raising as the main issue whether petitioner should still be regarded as legitimate Supreme Bishop of the *Iglesia*

Filipina Independiente or whether he has been properly replaced by Bishop Gerardo Bayaca. This has been recognized by petitioner himself who, in the brief he submitted to the Court of Appeals, maintained that the only issue was, "Who is the true and legitimate *Obispo Maximo* of the IFI?" The alleged abjuration of respondent De los Reyes and Bishops Bayaca and Aguilar and the alleged restatement of articles of religion and doctrinal differences between the new and original constitutions of the church were never alleged directly or indirectly in the pleadings of the parties. These questions were raised for the first time on January 10, 1948 when petitioner filed a supplementary answer alleging that on August, 1947, the respondent "formally joined the Protestant Episcopal Church of America." The alleged doctrinal changes and abjuration took place therefore after this case was filed in court, and after the division of the church into two groups had occurred and consequently, they could not have been the cause of the division. Under these circumstances, it would seem clear that the allegation regarding the alleged changes in doctrinal matters or in matters of faith incorporated in the constitutions of the church are entirely irrelevant in the present case. And, on this matter, this observation of the Court of Appeals comes in very fittingly: "The amendments of the constitution, restatement of articles of religion, and abandonment of faith or abjuration alleged by appellant, having to do with faith, practice, doctrine, form of worship, ecclesiastical law, custom and rule of a church having reference to the power of excluding from the church those allegedly unworthy of membership, are unquestionably ecclesiastical matters which are outside the province of the civil courts." (45 Am. Jur., 748-752, 755.) To this we agree.

Wherefore, the decision appealed from is affirmed, without pronouncement as to costs.¹⁴⁷

The Supreme Court affirmed the decision of the Appellate Court giving the favor to Bishop De los Reyes as the legal head of

¹⁴⁷ "G.R.No. L-5917, January 28, 1955" in http://www.lawphil.net/judjuris/juri1955/jan1955/gr_15917_1955.html

the IFI. Fonacier rejected this fact and founded his own church: Independent Church of Filipino Christians (ICFC).

Riot in Batac

Batac since the start of Aglipayanism has always been an Aglipayan bailiwick. Majority of the Aglipayan parishioners were on the side of the Fonacier faction. When the Supreme Court gave the favor of leadership to Bishop de los Reyes, numerous Aglipayans of Batac followed the ICFC but remained to stay in the church and convent of the IFI – which they built with their own efforts.

In 1959, with the help of a sheriff from Manila, the IFI Padre Clemente Reyes dispossessed the ICFC Padre Vicente Pasetes and took over the church and convent. In the morning of May 5, 1959, Padre Clemente Reyes attempted to say mass but suddenly the angry congregation dragged him out of the altar and stripped him of his vestments. It was said that this issue was triggered by the remarks of Reyes that when he tried to drive the Aglipayans to the IFI had called them, "Aglipayan Animals." Not only contented with his ejection and stripping of his vestments, the Aglipayans brought the issue to court which had this analysis:

Even before that May, 1959, here was already a cleavage among the followers of the Aglipayan Church in Batac; and this cleavage that split the followers into two hostile factions generated hatred and animosity when the sheriff of Manila delivered the convent and the other church properties to the faction "*Iglesia Filipina Independiente*" of which the accused was a priest. The complainant and others who believe themselves the owner of the church and its properties because they alleged to have built them with their own money and efforts were all naturally aroused to violence when their own priest, Fr. Vicente Pasetes, of their own faction "Independent Church of Filipino Christians" was ejected from the convent and in his place was installed the accused who was a stranger to them; and in the morning of May 5, 1959, their resentment and anger broke loose from their moorings and the complainants with others laid hands on the defendant.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ "People of the Philippines vs. Clemente Reyes, CFI Laoag, Criminal case 3282" in RRP II, 263.

The Aglipayanism in Batac was divided into two churches: IFI and ICFC. The IFI constructed their new church and became the final resting place of the remains of the Bataqueño Bishop Gregorio Aglipay after the reburial on September 11, 1959. Across the street, there was the wooden ICFC church.¹⁴⁹ It was said that both installed loud speakers in their churches which they use when they have public debates. The ICFC had a bigger number of followers.

Rebautismos

Confusions emerged in the minds of many Aglipayans in Batac. This led some to return and others be baptized to Roman Catholicism.

The Roman Catholic Baptismal Book of Batac covering the first three years after the division shows that from May 1959 to the December 1961 there were 440 baptisms of which 111 were rebaptisms.¹⁵⁰ All the pages of volume 27 which has 20 entries per page have approximately an average of 15 rebaptisms each.

Historians Achutegui and Bernad had this comment when they came to Batac in 1960:

The group known as the Philippine Independent Church has constructed a fairly large concrete church where the remains of Aglipay are said to be buried, having been transferred from their former resting place in his old cathedral in Tondo. On a visit to Batac on Easter day in 1960, we saw a handful of people attending services in that church. Across the road; in a more modest wooden chapel belonging to another Aglipayan body Easter services were also being held with a considerably larger crowd in attendance. At the top of the road, on a rise of ground, is the old Catholic church where Aglipay himself had been baptized. At that hour on Easter

¹⁴⁹ The IFI church was changed with a bigger one in 1977; marking the 60th Birthday of President Ferdinand Marcos. The ICFC church has acquired a property east of the IFI convent, the church was later transferred there and their former site is now the exhibit hall of the photos of the late President Marcos.

¹⁵⁰ ICPB, LB, Tomo XXVI, Folios 121-200; ICPB, LB, Tomo XXVII, Folios 1-13.

morning the plaza in front of the [Catholic] church was full of people. A large crowd was going in to hear the next mass.

That is the situation in Aglipay's birthplace and the spiritual center of the Aglipayan religion. It is a picture, in miniature, of the [Religious] situation in the country as a whole.¹⁵¹

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Laoag

In 1961, Blessed Pope John XXIII erected the Roman Catholic Diocese of Laoag comprising the whole Civil Province of Ilocos Norte. Laoag was made the seat of the diocese; thus, the parish church of St. William, saved from Aglipayanism by Padre Roman Ver, was elevated into a Cathedral. The former chancellor and Canon Lawyer of the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia, the Most Rev. Antonio Lloren Mabutas of Agoo, La Union, was named first Roman Catholic bishop.

Now, Ilocos Norte had its own bishop. Supervision was now closer. This move of the Holy See refuted the Aglipayan claim that Rome will never listen to the demands of the Filipinos. The establishment of a Roman Catholic Diocese in the province which at that time was dominantly Aglipayan was a very laudable move. This time, a Roman Catholic Bishop is in residence in the soil that was once dominated by schismatic leaders.

Bishop Mabutas believed that there is need to educate the faithful of their faith and for this, one of his major thrusts was the foundation of Catholic Schools in his diocese. In 1963, the Immaculate Conception Academy (ICA) was founded.

Vatican II

An ecumenical council was convoked by the Blessed Pope John XXIII in 1961. This council was done in the Vatican; hence, naming it Second Vatican Council (Vatican II). This council led to the renewal of the Roman Catholic Church as she responds to the demands of the modern world. The council promulgated sixteen documents, one of which was *Unitatis Redintegratio*. It dealt with Ecumenism and with the unity among Christians, one of the main concerns of the Council. The document reads:

¹⁵¹ RRP II, 267.

The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but they differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ himself were divided. Certainly, such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature.

The Lord of Ages nevertheless wisely and patiently follows out the plan of his grace on our behalf, sinners that we are. In recent times he has begun to bestow more generously upon divided Christians remorse over their divisions and longing for unity.¹⁵²

Exceptional Priests

One the most unforgettable priests who worked in the edification of the Catholic Faith in Batac was the Rev. Fr. Francisco Raval Cruces of Laoag. He started his ministry in Batac on December 18, 1960. It has been said that his roots was from the town. Baptismal registers show that in his term of three years he did numerous conversions from Aglipayanism. Since his arrival in 1960 to the end of his term, there were 899 baptisms of which 251 were converts. He had Fr. Onofre Aurelio as his Assistant, then after sometime, Fr. Dionisio Rios. Fr. Cruces ended his term in Batac on May 1, 1963. Rome would later acknowledge his efforts for the Faith. In 1968, while pastor in Sarrat, Fr. Cruces was named Titular Bishop of Tambeae and first Auxiliary Bishop of the Lingayen-Dagupan Archdiocese. In 1970, he was made first Residential Bishop of Ilagan in Isabela. He became the Metropolitan Archbishop of Zamboanga in 1973 till he retired in 1994. Archbishop Francisco Cruces died in 1997.¹⁵³

¹⁵² *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism), 1, in Austin Flannery, OP, ed., *Vatican II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Vol.1 (New York: Costello Publishing Co., 1985).

¹⁵³ Ericson M. Josue, *Alfredo Verzosa, Obispo* (Lipa: Missionary Catechists of the Sacred Heart, 2007), 205.

Another most-loved priest was the Rev. Fr. Victorino Cristobal Ligot of Laoag. He became Batac's pastor on May 1, 1963. During his term there were 1,177 baptisms of which 599 were converts. He is remembered as the founder of the Immaculate Conception Academy. After sometime, the school was handed over to the Holy Sprit Sisters. This school became an effective tool in the conversion of many Aglipayans. Fr. Ligot built a big chapel in Baay which was sourced from the fund sent by Fr. Cruces from the United States. Fr. Ligot had an Assistant Priest in the person of the Rév. Fr. Adriano Lagoc of Pasuquin. In 1969, while rector of the Cathedral in Laoag, Fr. Ligot was named Titular Bishop of Budua and Auxiliary Bishop of Nueva Segovia. Bishop Victorino Ligot was named in 1970 as the first Bishop of San Fernando de La Union. He stayed there till he died of cancer in 1980.¹⁵⁴

After these two exceptional clerics, the parish was managed by the following priests: Fr. Amador Foz (1967-1971) with his young assistants Fr. Adriano Gervacio and Fr. James Bonoan, Fr. Rodolfo Nicolas (1971-1973) who built the present rectory, Msgr. Pablo Pacis (1973-1977), Fr. Mauro Resurreccion (1977-1981), Msgr. Juan Ballesteros (1981-1987), Msgr. Ruben Abaya (1987-1993) and Fr. James Bonoan (1993-1994).

9. Batac Circa 2008. A Century after the Revival

PCP II and DLPA I

As a response to the *aggiornamento* of the Vatican II, the Philippine Conference of Bishops convoked, in 1991, the *Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (PCP II). It was a decisive moment that gave the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines a pastoral direction. It was a time to evaluate, assess and set a move for the future. The Council was an opportunity to rediscover the identity of the Filipino Catholic; hence, the emphasis on enculturation and appreciation of the indigenous. It also set the concern of solidarity with the poor. PCP II gave stress to Ecumenism and encouraged dialogue of the Catholic Church with other churches. Importantly, PCP II stressed the significance of the mission of the Church as the "Church of the Poor."

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 205.

In May 1994, under the leadership of then Bishop of Laoag, Most Rev. Edmundo Abaya, DD, the *First Diocese of Laoag Pastoral Assembly* (DLPA I) was convened. It intended to put into the local Church the renewal specified in both Vatican II and PCP II. The DLPA I placed as a thrust the establishment of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) or *Nacrstianoan a Sangakarrubaan* (NASA) in all barrios. Hence, with this concern of DLPA I, barrio missions were intensified.

Parish Alive

The Rev. Fr. Victor Hernando took the interest of barrio works. He started his term in Batac in 1994, year when the DPLA I was convened. He laboriously visited all barrios of Batac and was successful in converting Aglipayans to Catholicism. This move was actually laying the foundations of the Basic Ecclesial Community. He initiated the parishioners to live with the BEC Spirit – that is love and unity. Fr. Hernando set the pastoral direction of the parish through the formulation of the Vision-Mission Statement. He conducted orientation seminars for the awareness of the parishioners on BEC. They had as pilot areas Barangay Baligat and Sitio Sider in Dariwdiw. The masses were finding their way to their involvement in the Church. From being tagged as “Church of the Elite,” the Roman Catholic Church in Batac had become a “Church of the Poor.”

The following shows us the data: in a period of seven years, there were 3452 baptisms of which 249 were rebaptisms. The total population of Batac in the year 2000 was 47, 610. There were 15, 807 Catholics and 25, 579 Aglipayans.¹⁵⁵ As of the year 2000, Catholicism was not yet the majority. Aglipayans held larger mass but we must take note that in Batac, Aglipayanism is divided into three sects. Hence, the number of Aglipayans is to be divided among the IFI, ICFC and the newly founded *Reformistas*.

Fr Hernando also intensified the faith by introducing the parishioners to the Parish Renewal Experience which became an effective tool to attract numerous non-Catholics to join Catholic

¹⁵⁵ National Statistics Office, *Census 2000* (Manila: National Statistics Office, 2000), 83.

communion. Fr Hernando expanded the convento and built the parish pastoral center.

This noble job was continued through the able and gentle pastorship of Msgr Policarpo Albano. He proved to be a zealous worker in the pastoral. With his friendly gestures, he was able to win people under his flock. He was well-loved by the people of Batac, even by non-Catholics. Msgr Albano was assisted in his ministry by Fr Danilo Devaras and later, by Fr Engelbert Elarmo.

It was during Msgr. Albano's term that the Roman Catholic Parish hosted the Diocesan Celebration of Christ the King in 2002. It was striking that the event was convoked in 2002, the year that completed the count of the century after the Aglipayan outbreak (1902). It was a huge gathering of Catholics in the very soil which a century earlier was indifferent to Roman Catholicism. This became a graced-moment to mobilize the people. This was a stimulus in awakening the involvement of people and appreciation of their being a community. This was an opportune moment to activate the different commissions prescribed by the DLPA I: Worship, Education, Service, Temporalities, Vocations, Youth and Family Life.

The baptismal Book shows that there were 719 baptisms and 59 converts in 2002. The Sacrament was given to 439 individuals in 2003 and 47 were rebaptisms. The year 2004 records 504 and 17 converts. In 2005, there were 457 baptisms and no rebaptisms. In 2006, 482 were baptized with no converts. And in the year 2007, 377 were baptized and 55 were converted. In all, there were 3,035 baptized and 178 were converted from 2002 to 2007. The figures speak of a familiar trend in the colonial era. This is an indication that the parish has fully regained its vitality after an almost century of recovery.

While Pastor of Batac, Msgr Albano was elected by the Diocesan Consultors' Board as Diocesan Administrator of the Diocese of Laoag during the vacancy of 2005-2006.¹⁵⁶ Before Msgr

¹⁵⁶ The former Bishop of Laoag, Most Rev. Ernesto Salgado was installed Archbishop of Nueva Segovia on 31 May 2005. Msgr. Jacinto Jose was Diocesan Administrator from June to December 2005. He was elected Bishop of Urdaneta in September of the same year and installed as such on 30 December 2005. Msgr Albano was elected immediately after Bishop Jose's transfer.

Albano left Batac for his new assignment as Rector of the Cathedral in Laoag, he, together with the parishioners, revised the Vision-Mission Statement of the parish making it jived with its present situation.

Reformist Aglipayans

On the other hand, the Independent Church of Filipino Christians was undergoing a crisis. One among the towns which had a big number of ICFC followers was the town of Pasuquin, situated 18 kilometers north of the Capital City of Laoag. In the late 1990's, the pastor of the ICFC Parish in Pasuquin was Fr Romeo Magsingit. He was highly regarded by his followers for his eloquence and charisma, a very rare feature of an ICFC minister. Fr Magsingit became aware of the decline of the ICFC and he advocated some reforms in the church. He initiated approaches to resolve malfunctioning systems in terms of church management. The priest suggested his innovations of their church rituals and practices in order to eradicate those insignificant and unreasonable segments that were not aligned to their tenets. He likewise attempted to review Aglipayan doctrines in order to arrive at a system of reason in defense of the faith. But this endeavors of Fr. Magsingit triggered the ire of some church leaders.

Sometime during those months before August 1998, he was confronted with problems and intimidations that was not his – it was Fr. Marcelo P. Boquing's. Intensely disturbing, Fr. Boquing at that time had a mixture of personal, parochial, and seminary problems. Against him, bishops and laity were involved in the crisis. Fr. Boquing repeatedly begged for Fr. Magsingit's help and rescue. The fact is that Fr. Boquing knew very well that his big brother, Fr. Magsingit, was well versed about the present and actual state of the church administration. At that time, Fr. Magsingit was almost two years as ICFC Parish Priest of Pasuquin. Realizing the need of his pitiful brother, Fr. Magsingit worked on to resolved (sic) things up to whatever he could to rescue his pitiful brother. He called the attention of three priests to reinforce a plan to formulate a supposedly lasting solution to Fr. Boquing's problem and possibly on the same kind of future problem of other priests. Fr. Magsingit drafted a manifesto, explained and deliberated on it until the four (Fr. Erwin Abella,

Fr. Cristobal la Peña, Fr. Ben Bayanggos, Fr. Magsingit) of them, in the presence of Fr. Boquing, arrived into a common point of understanding, braced themselves with each other's assurance of unity and steadfastness for whatever the consequence of their act till the end. The Manifesto was composed of exposes entitled "Agony and Lamentations" which was planned to be sent to the members of the Supreme Council and Board of Trustees only. Few days later, Fr. Boquing went to tell Fr. Magsingit that he had not managed to send those copies of the Manifesto anymore because Fr. Bayanggos had already defected and had already surrendered a copy to Bishop Dumlao [the Obispo Maximo]. (In two weeks time since the defection of Fr. Bayanggos, Frs. La Peña and Abella, followed suit. Not long after... Fr. Boquing made retractions and left Fr. Magsingit in total isolation, in desolation and dismay).¹⁵⁷

An assembly was convoked in Tayug, Pangasinan. When accorded the floor, Fr. Magsingit defended his claims and nobody rebutted. Instead they read the letter of Bishop Dumlao. In that letter, the *Obispo Maximo* requested that those involved in the manifesto be meted out with removal. He further made a threat to resign should they not be ousted.

On August 23, 1998, Fr. Magsingit received an order of indefinite suspension. This would later strike the sentiments of his supporters. There was lobbying but could not meet in a common point with authorities. The solution: found another church following the reform principles of Fr. Magsingit. This led to the foundation of the Philippine Aglipayan Reformist Church, also known as *Reformistas*. Soon the group stretched to other towns and it had reached Batac. The group was established in Batac on May 6, 2001 – ninety-nine years after the establishment of Aglipayanism.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Magdaluisa P. Lagazo, *A Brief History of the Philippine Aglipayan Reformist Church Inc*, Pasuquin: Philippine Aglipayan Reformist Church Inc, 2001. (Unpublished work).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., NP. A group of *Reformistas* separated from Fr Magsingit and founded another Aglipayan Sect in the town of Pasuquin. In that town, there are now four Aglipayan churches. This breakaway group has not extended yet their church to any other town in the province.

The trend of events was not new in Aglipayan history. At this point in time, Batac has three Aglipayan churches but following two opposing faith traditions. There is one thing that makes them common: reverence to Batac's Gregorio Aglipay.

Batac Today

By virtue of Republic Act 9407, Aglipay's beloved Batac was elevated into the status of a City. The Roman Catholic parish of the Immaculate Conception has become the second premier parish of the Diocese of Laoag; next after Laoag. On April 7, 2008, the Rev. Msgr. Manuel "Bong" Lamprea, Jr. was appointed new Parish Priest. For his parochial vicar, the Rev. Fr. Ericson Josue was likewise named. Msgr. Bong ventured in fostering brotherhood among the parishioners. His gentleness, meekness and empathy has made the parishioners feel his fraternal concern, he is a "big brother" to all.

Msgr. Bong continued the noble initiatives of his predecessors. Barrio missions are maintained and the phenomenon of incorporation to Catholic communion goes on.

10. Conclusion

The saga of Aglipay and his church is not complete without Batac. Batac's history will be likewise partial without Aglipay and Aglipayanism. Aglipay and Batac are entwined: Aglipay, being her exceptional son; Batac, being Aglipay's mother soil.

Aglipay: Hero or Villain?

Gregorio Aglipay was a product of his time. In the judgment of many, he was a villain; his means was wrong! He divided the one Church. But weighing the merit of evidences using as lens the context of his time, as a human person who belonged to a period of repression, the human solution of resistance was a valid choice. Gregorio Aglipay was just a man with sentiments, with idiosyncrasies, with limitations – a human being. On the other hand, Aglipay was a hero. Through his stirrings, he was able to create a ripple; calling his people to shed blood for independence. His valor and courage asserted the Filipino. He fought for the fact that the Filipino is a human being endowed with freedom, has the right to peace and is inclined to love. Aglipay taught his people the appre-

ciation of being a Filipino Christian. The identity of the Filipino is manifested in his culture. God reveals Himself through culture; it is likewise through culture that man responds in faith. Hence, an inculturated Church; a Church run by Filipinos for Filipinos.

Gregorio Aglipay was the Filipino Martin Luther; a priest, a reformer, a charismatic leader. To awaken the slumbering Roman Catholic Church of her mission, Martin Luther had to sound the thundering alarm of dissension. To lead *indios* discover their identity as Filipino Christians; Gregorio Aglipay had to engage into a struggle. A thesis meets an antithesis to arrive at synthesis.

Purification Moment

The same trend is familiar in biblical history. After David and Solomon had put the Kingdom of Israel to the heights, they started to think that things were under their control. The governance was of course theocracy but their human allurements are starting to get higher using their office as guise. David did some injustices, such as the death of Uriah for the sake of possessing his beautiful wife Bathsheba; likewise, Solomon adored the foreign gods of his wives. This reality brought the Kingdom of Israel to a division. As the usual trend goes, it was initiated by a renegade in the person of Jeroboam. No one remained loyal to the house of David except the tribe of Judah. Thus, Israel was divided into Southern Kingdom and Northern Kingdom (cf. I Kings 12:20-26). Church history is also filled with schisms like the great Schism of 1054 dividing the Church into Orthodox and Catholic; also, the great Western schism led by Luther that paved way to the establishment of Protestantism. Shaking someone from slumber is a typical trend in salvation history.

The Philippine Church had received also its dose. The once intact Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines was shaken by the schism of De los Reyes and Aglipay. These events seem so negative in a perspective but on the other view it is a purifying moment – they led the Church to change, they were catalysts to betterment.

Ecclesia Semper Reformanda

The cravings of Aglipay have been recognized by the Roman Catholic Church. Today, majority of the Catholic Dioceses in the Philippines are in the hands of Filipino Prelates. In 1905, the first

Filipino Roman Catholic Bishop was appointed, in the person of Bishop Jorge Barlin of Caceres. In 1916, the first ever Ilocano Roman Catholic Bishop was named, Bishop Alfredo Verzosa of Vigan, a veteran in the mission for the schismatics in the Ilocos. At present, the Philippines has 138 active and retired Diocesan and Auxiliary bishops in 86 ecclesiastical jurisdictions. In addition, the Vatican has acknowledged the prowess of the Filipino in terms of diplomatic relations; hence appointing Filipino Nuncios in the persons of Archbishop Osvaldo Padilla, Apostolic Nuncio to Korea and Mongolia; Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana, Apostolic Nuncio to Pakistan; Archbishop Francisco Padilla, Apostolic Nuncio to Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands; and Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Apostolic Nuncio to Haiti. The Ilocano Bishop Wenceslao Padilla, CICM is Apostolic Prefect of Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia. Six Filipinos have been named Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church: Cardinal Rufino Santos, Cardinal Julio Rosales, Cardinal Jaime Sin, Cardinal Ricardo Vidal, Cardinal Jose Sanchez and Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales. The late Pope John Paul II had selected a Filipino to head the Congregation for the Clergy of the Roman Curia in the person of a former Nueva Segovia Archbishop, Cardinal Jose Sanchez. The Philippines has contributed apostles not only in the service of the Philippine Church but likewise in the whole Catholic World. It reflects that the mission of Filipino Catholicism is universal.

The Plenary Council of the Philippines II says:

We need to become the "Church of the Poor"... that embraces and practices the evangelical spirit of poverty... whose members and leaders have a special love for the poor ... where, at the very least the poor are not discriminated against because of their poverty, and they will not be deprived of their "right to receive in abundance the help of the spiritual goods of the Church... that the pastors and other Church leaders will give preferential attention and time to those who are poor... that the poor... themselves become evangelizers... that is willing to follow Jesus Christ through poverty and oppression in order to carry out the work of salvation.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Manila: Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 1992), 48-51.

The First Diocese of Laoag Pastoral Assembly follows this by saying:

We, the People of God in the Diocese of Laoag, do deeply realize our brokenness due to our sinfulness, as is clearly shown in such observable phenomena as the following: (1) the economic poverty of the people due to social injustice, (2) the religious indifference among the Filipinos in general and among Ilocanos in particular due to local schism and religious ignorance, (3) the distortion of cultural values, and (4) the political instability caused by acute individualism... Intensely desirous of following the way of Jesus, we aspire to be a Church of the poor, where the poor among us are not only objects but also agents of evangelization, where unity prevails among us, and where social justice and solidarity are promoted.¹⁶⁰

This move in the local Church has changed the image of the Roman Catholic Church as the "Church of the Elite" into a "Church of the Poor." Having made aware of her mission in the Philippines as a result of the revolts and dissensions, the Roman Catholic Church had moved the pendulum to the other side. Mission to the barrios and empowering the parishioners was a means to attain this vision. The concrete tool is the establishment of Basic Ecclesial Communities where every member, poor and rich alike, participates in the life and mission of the Church. This shows that the Church always reforms and adapts to suit herself to the needs of the time.

PCP II shows the Filipino Catholic Christian. Being Christian is part of the Filipino Identity. Maturing in faith becomes only possible from personally interiorizing the message of Jesus in the Filipino ways of thinking, loving and valuing. The challenge then for the Filipino Catholic is to know the Filipino Culture and with Christian Faith, purify, guard, develop and perfect this culture. Likewise, Catholic faith must intertwine with Filipino ways. Filipino Catholicism is very Marian. It shows the Filipino endearment to mothers and women. Hence, Mary is prominent in the

¹⁶⁰ *Acts and Decrees of the First Diocese of Laoag Pastoral Assembly* (Laoag: Diocese of Laoag, 1994), 101.

heart of the Filipino Christian – *El Pueblo Amante de Maria* (The people dearly in loved with Mary).

Ut Omnes Unum Sint!

May they all be one! Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. (Jn 17:21).

Unity of believers is what Jesus asked His Father to grant so that the world may believe in His message. He had earlier said: *“Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand”* (Mt 12:25). Hence, the early Christians gave witness to their conviction in *“one heart and soul”* (Acts 4:32) that led non-believers say: *“Look how they love one another!”* These love and unity were the signs that gave testimony to the faith of the early believers and attracted pagans to embrace Christianity.

But Jesus himself predicted to Peter: *“Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers”* (Lk 22:31-32). Division is what the evil one does to *“sift”* those who believe. The Vatican Council II’s Decree on Ecumenism says: *“Division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the most holy cause, the preaching of the gospel to every creature.”*¹⁶¹ This *“sifting”* is manifested in the schisms and apostasies found in Church history. This was predicted by Christ but had affirmed to Peter: *“strengthen your brothers”* – restore what was lost.

Ecumenism is the move to restore the lost unity caused by numerous factors: doctrinal disagreements, cultural differences, human limitations and idiosyncrasies, individual differences etc. There is indeed an urgent call to restore unity among the believers so that *“the world may believe”* (Jn. 17:21) in Christ.

In the case of Catholicism and Aglipayanism, the passing of time has widened the gap of their division. Each has already established a *“comfort zone”* of its own which somehow has become

¹⁶¹ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1.

a factor to the slow attainment of the restoration of unity. Such is the situation between the local Catholic Church and the Aglipayan Church.

The causes of Aglipayanism, namely, (1) Filipinization of the Church Hierarchy, (2) Christian Church for the Filipinos and (3) a Church that welcomes local culture, we among the concerns of the PCP II. Only, it came almost a century after the schism. But here comes the pressing question: "Why not be amicable to one another?" Time has already passed the hurts and wounds. What we have now are only the scars. Why not find ways of restoring the lost unity?

A portal has been opened for the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* to have amicable relations with the Roman Catholic Church. Their concordat with the Episcopalian Church which is also in ties with the Roman Catholic Church has made it possible. This resulted to the acceptance by the Roman Catholic Church of the efficacy of their baptism and acknowledged them as *Christifideles*. There are still a lot of differences and wounds to mend but at least something has been started.

What is left behind is the opening of a dialogue with the other two Aglipayan sects: Independent Church of Filipino Christians and the recent Aglipayan Reformist Church. Both churches embrace the Doctrine of One God, One Person, One Spirit and One Essence. This makes a doctrinal dialogue difficult between them and the Roman Catholic Church. But anyhow, simple gatherings and fellowships could suffice at the moment. Light gestures could also be a good start for the attainment of unity.

Likewise, Catholic Pastors must work in opening the minds of Catholics to be disposed in the ideal of reunification. Catholics must also open their arms to aim for Christian Unity. We must get down from our "pedestals" for no unity can be achieved if we remain seated on our "throne." The call for unity with the Aglipayan Brethren would remake the history that was once devastated by manipulation, mistrust and oppression.

Not even the Jaws of Hell will Overcome It! (Mt. 16:18)

The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation. Her presence in the world is a reminder of the truth that the baptized are

on a journey towards the Eternal Kingdom. Thus, the Church, as its old name in the Acts of the Apostles suggests (cf Acts 9:2.), is the WAY of believers towards the Father (*Ad Patrem*). Though full of human limitations, the Church as divinely instituted is being pulled up by the grace of God in order for her to continue the saving mission of her Spouse and Founder, Jesus Christ.

The schism led by the Ilocanos Isabelo de los Reyes and Gregorio Aglipay is one among the many manifestations of the fact that the Church is human yet her continuous presence is a proof of the divine spark in her. The whole story did not happen by chance. It was a human movement but God's hands always direct and put things to their proper order. That chapter in local Church history was allowed to occur in order to assure better life for the Church and gain stronger commitment to her mission for the Filipinos – the only Christian Nation in the Far East.

This humble work shows this trend of triumph and defeat; human and divine; “up moments” and “down moments” in Church history. Despite these realities, the Church remains to stand in her mission of bringing Christ's faithful to the Father's Kingdom. □