

- The Iglesia Ni Kristo is a monument to the dynamic leadership of Felix Manalo in the field of religion.

A FILIPINO RELIGIOUS BUILDER

An outstanding personality, whose influence has made a deep impress on a vast sector of the nation, died a few months ago. He was none other than Felix Manalo, the supreme administrator of the religious organization known as *Iglesia ni Kristo* with a following estimated at about 3,500,000 Filipinos. The late religious leader could well be cited as an example of what a man with ability, dedication, sincerity, and energy could accomplish in the way of human service outside of the most traveled path of politics and government work which attracts the great majority of men, young and old in our country. Broadly speaking, the history of the Philippines may no longer remain complete without the figure of Felix Manalo and his achievement in an area which has not aroused great interest and enthusiasm among Filipinos of talent and ambition.

In times not usually considered extraordinary or critical, Felix Manalo has shown beyond doubt that there are things other than politics or business which have a strong appeal to a considerable portion of the people of our country. He has shown that there could be a type of leadership which could be used to answer a popular and human need.

Whether one agrees or not with his ideas and procedures, one has to admit that he has attained greatness which, in many ways, no other Filipino has so far equalled. The concrete results of his work attest to the hunger and the eagerness of millions of Filipinos for the teachings and the message he has given them. Up to the time of his death, he had succeeded in establishing 1,250 churches all over the Philippines. Considering that he founded the *Iglesia ni Kristo* only on July 27, 1914, no

other organization including the Roman Catholic church, the Aglipayan church, American Protestant churches, has been able to equal that record attained by him in the space of less than 50 years.

The first site of his church was at Punta, Sta. Ana, Manila; and he started with a following of only about 100 persons. Even if one were to include political organizations and political parties, no group, society or establishment in this country has been able to recruit some 3,500,000 followers at any time during the last 70 years.

The *Iglesia ni Kristo* represents a voting population of about 900,000 men and women. They are said to follow the leadership of Felix Manalo and to be convinced by the inspiration of his civic spirit to cast their votes practically as one man in our general elections. It is surprising, therefore, that in the last ten or fifteen years politicians running for important public offices such as that of President of the Philippines, the Vice President, or the Senator have often, or almost invariably, approached the Supreme Head of the *Iglesia*

ni Kristo for assistance by persuading him to appreciate and support their programs and policies. For undoubtedly, Felix Manalo's leadership was not confined to sectarian purposes but was also extended to such ends as he considered beneficial to the individual and the nation.

Descended from humble parents, Manalo was born on May 10, 1886 at Barrio Calzada, Taguig, Province of Rizal. His parents were, of course, Roman Catholics. He was married to Honrada de Guzman with whom he had six children the eldest of whom is Pilar, followed by Avelina, Dominador, Salvador, Eraño, and Bienvenido. After the American occupation of the Philippines, Felix Manalo was converted to the Methodist church.

Having decided to enter religious work, Felix Manalo became a minister of the Methodist church. Then he became a minister of the Presbyterian church, and later on he joined the Seventh Day Adventist again as a minister in this organization. As a serious student of the Bible, he felt that there must be a more faithful observance

of its precepts. His experience as a religious worker must have convinced him that there could be a program and a procedure more satisfying to him and to many Filipinos than any of the then existing religious sects. Hence, with his broad background of church work, he decided to establish the *Iglesia ni Kristo* which he considered suitable to the kind of life, condition, and daily activity of his countrymen. That his decision received agreement and acquiescence on the part of many of his own people may no longer be denied and questioned by anyone who is not bound by narrow prejudices against non-conformists. It should be added that the success of Felix Manalo in the field of religious activities would have been impossible if the spirit and institutions of democracy had not been implanted in this country.

Felix Manalo disclaimed any pretension to be the spiritual head of his church. He had always declared in stronger terms that the supreme head of his church is Jesus Christ himself. His relation with his church and his po-

sition in it are merely that of an Administrator or Overseer. If he had left the other religious organizations, according to him, it was because he believed that they do not follow strictly the teachings of the Bible. To him the Gospels are the true basis of the Christian faith.

Felix Manalo died about a month before reaching the age of 77 years. His sickness was cancer. He is succeeded by Eraño Manalo, his fifth child, who by the way was elected as his successor way back in 1953 by the Council of Ministers of the church. According to the Council, the decision in the choice of Eraño Manalo was based on the following personal qualities of Eraño Manalo: a fine character, a strong personality, energetic leadership characteristics, deep devotion to the church, and thorough knowledge of the religion.

The fact that Eraño is the son of the founder was completely disregarded by the Council of Ministers in arriving at its decision of choosing him as the next administrator of the *Iglesia ni Kristo*. —*Philippine Weekly Review*.