

The Philippines: A Layman's Perspective (1)

Nicholas Kleyn

Introduction:

The Foreign Mission committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches sent a delegation of Rev. Rodney Miersma and Rev. Daniel Kleyn to the Philippines for two weeks in October 1999. I had the privilege of “tagging” along for one week of this trip to see the land and the people that the PRC has contact with in Daet and Manila. It was a culture shock for me to go to a foreign country like this and gave me the opportunity to meet people from a foreign county who have the same beliefs as we do.

Tuesday October 5 – Wednesday October 6

I left Grand Rapids Tuesday morning and met Rev. Kleyn and Rev. Miersma in Minneapolis. We then flew to Japan (12 hours) and then flew down to Manila (4 hours) and lost a day crossing the International Date Line. We arrived in Manila Wednesday night at 10:30 PM. Went through customs, which went well, except right away you knew you were in a different country when you see a sign, “Drug traffickers will be subject to the death penalty.” We caught a taxi and went to the Shalom Center (hotel) and slept.

Thursday October 7

We awoke and had a rice breakfast and other interesting food at the hotel. We soon found out that Filipinos have rice with breakfast, lunch and supper. We did not have anyone to meet till late afternoon so we ventured out into the streets of Manila. We saw sights and smells that were very interesting and make me thankful for the things we have in America that we take for granted. We saw the make-shift huts and shelters that people live in. Everywhere we went there was dirt and trash. Streets were not well kept, and had lots of potholes and traffic lights that did not work. We walked down to the ocean and saw how it was full of trash washed up onto the shore. People were living on top of this trash in their boats. There were people who were sleeping on the sides of the footpaths.

We exchanged some money as well. For \$100 US you get 4,000 Peso. The minimum wage per day is 200 Peso or \$5 US. But we could buy a pretty good meal for around 40 Peso or \$1 US.

We then visited a mall. It was pretty nice to get out of the hot, humid, tropical weather. We never did know what the temperature was except that it was hot. The mall was a lot like our malls and here we could see there is a rich element in the Filipino society.

We then went back to hotel and rested. Jet lag was catching up with all of us.

The Filipinos can all speak English. The American military had a presence there till the early 1990's, thus everything is written in English and nearly everyone we met could speak good English. The hardest part was that their accent was pretty heavy at times, which made it difficult to understand them.

At 4:30 PM we met Rodolfo Sy. We were meant to go with him to a Bible study, to a Berean Group as they call themselves. This did not work out for the group, so instead we met with Rodolfo in our hotel room for three hours. He was a very Reformed man and had an excellent grasp of the truths of the Reformed faith. The ministers discussed many different things

with Rodolfo and were impressed with the knowledge that he had. It was encouraging to hear a man from his background have such a knowledge of the truths of Scripture.

Friday October 8

We got up at 4:30 AM and were off to the airport to fly to a city call Naga. The ride in the taxi to the airport took 20 minutes, but during rush hour it could take 3 hours. We flew out of their new Philippine Airlines terminal that had just opened and was quite impressive compared to all the other buildings we had seen so far. We flew to Naga and were met at the airport by Pastor Nelson Carvillo and Pastor Modesto Tanierla. Six of us squeezed into a taxi built for small people and went to a bus terminal. We then caught a bus to Daet. What a ride that was! The driver was unreal: cutting blind corners, passing cars and just pulling over to miss oncoming traffic etc. We stepped out of the bus in Daet (with much relief) and right into a restaurant for lunch. After lunch of sweet and sour pork and rice we squeezed our big bodies into a tricycle, (a small 250cc motor bike with a sidecar on it) and went to a hotel to check in and rest for a few minutes.

At 1:00 PM, Modesto came and took us to his church called Sovereign Grace Baptist. This was quite a unique building with no glass in the windows, pews were small and hard, the lighting was very dim, and everything very plain and simple. It struck me how content they are with simple things and nothing has to be fancy or extravagant. Pastor M. Tanierla (71) lived behind the church with his wife and mother. I think there were also two other families that lived in little huts in front and behind the church. These huts were very simple and plain compared to what we have in the USA, but they were quite adequate.

A meeting with ministers and elders from about six or seven congregations in the area had been organized by Pastor Percival Tanierla for the afternoon at this church. Pastor P. Tanierla has been instrumental in teaching the men with whom we met the Reformed truths. The idea of the discussion was to talk about different doctrines that they struggled with, about their churches and how they were affiliated with each other, and about the PRC and our beliefs and purposes in visiting these churches. The men started arriving around 1:30 PM. We met these men as they arrived and were able to talk to them and get to know them a little. We were then introduced to the group of men that had gathered, around 12-15 men. The session was opened in prayer and we sang a few hymns with a guitar as accompaniment. A circle was formed and discussion started and lasted for around five hours. It was a very lively discussion. Some of the questions were as follows: What does the PRC want to do in the Philippines? When are we coming? What type of gospel are you going to preach when you come? They got into discussions on dispensationalism, covenant, doctrines of sovereign grace etc., and Rev. Miersma and Rev. Kleyn were in the hot seat. One question after another, and well-thought-out questions with Scripture to support their questions, were asked. They both did an excellent job of answering the questions. It was interesting to see these Filipino ministers asking questions and discussing things. They get really excited when they are making a point and it is interesting how they express themselves. Rev. Kleyn said that he felt like he was in front of synod again for his examination into the ministry. These men were very receptive to the answers given by the two ministers and were very open to learn more truths of the Reformed faith. It sure was a blessing to see these Filipino men get excited about new biblical truths they were learning.

After the discussion ended, Rev. Miersma and Rev. Kleyn went back to the hotel to prepare for Saturday's lectures, and I think as well to recover and relax after a very busy day. I had the opportunity to go with three men to visit in their homes. Dante Almoguera, Elmer Barrameda and Pastor Danny Tejares. These men are the leaders in a church called Reformed in

Christ Fellowship which is located in Daet and about three miles from the church we had been meeting in during the day. We first went to Pastor D. Tejares' house. He has five children and lives with his parents. He also is the Pastor of this church and they hold the church services in his house. A rather sad story too. He and his wife were on a bus to Manila in June and had an accident with a truck. His wife was killed instantly and he was severely injured. He had just gotten out of the hospital a week before we came and his leg was still in plaster because of seven fractures he had in it. He has five young children. But you could see how the church and his family had pulled together during this tough time and he talked of God's will and sovereignty in the things that had happened to him. It was a blessing to see how sincere and accepting he was of God's will for him.

I then went with Dante to his house just around the corner. He is 32 years old and is married with two children. He lives with his parents in law in the same house. These houses are very different than we have in the States. Nothing is fancy and the people are content to have homes that are simple and plain as that is usually all they can afford. It is also very common in the Philippines that families all live together either in the same house or in little huts on the same complex. The family unit is still rather strong compared to how it has fallen apart here in the States.

Elmer was a young man from a church in the hills about three hours from Daet. He had been staying with Pastor D. Tejares the last few weeks to help him because of his accident. He met Pastor D. Tejares at school and has been taught the truths of the Reformed faith by him.

I then visited for a few hours with these men back at Pastor D. Tejares' house. We spoke about their thoughts on the day's discussion and they were very receptive to the teachings of Rev. Miersma and Rev. Kleyn and said they now would go and study the Word of God more in light of the day's discussion. We also talked about life in general, how they all struggle to find work, about the economy, the political situation, schooling and family life. It was interesting that in the Philippines divorce and abortion are outlawed by the government and is very low. They said it was changing. Slowly these things were getting accepted more and more and the government was changing the laws.

After a very interesting night I caught a tricycle back to the hotel around 9:00 PM. Rev. Kleyn and I then went out to find some food to eat. I think we found some cakes at a shop that was about to close.

Originally Published in:

Vol 59 No 1 January 2000