Mission in Mindanao
An Essay Critiquing the History of Missionary Activity in Mindanao, Philippines.

Report: Missiology in the Local Context
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Mission in Mindanao

On May 19, 1572, Spanish commander Miguel Lopenz de Legaz initiated the colonization of the Philippines. He wrote in his journal, "The only reason the Spaniards had come to the islands was to bring the Filipino's the knowledge of the Catholic faith." This began the missionary effort to the Philippines.

The King of Spain, Philip II, sent de Legaspi with two other political goals: Initiate spice trade with the Philippines and find a communications route between Spain and New Spain (Mexico) going east. This started the destruction of the Philippines Indigenous culture and began the imposition of Spanish culture and religious understanding on the Malay people of the Philippine islands.

In 1898 after four hundred years of Spanish rule, the United States of America purchased the Philippines for twenty million dollars on December 10, 1898 with the expressed intent to release the Philippines as an independent republic. During the Spanish occupation, the Indigenous people of Mindanao resisted the colonizing forces of the Spanish and Spain never gained governing authority over the island. Without this authority the Spanish sold Mindanao to the USA as part of the 1898 treaty of Paris.

1 Fuller, 92
2 Fuller, 97
3 Aguinaldo, Ch.3
4 A Treaty of Peace Between the United States and Spain
In order to assert their authority on the people of Mindanao, the USA and the newly formed Republic of the Philippines initiated a migration movement to Mindanao from the Northern islands. The church was used as a force for political and financial gain to spread the kingdom of Spain rather than the Kingdom of God.

The strategy was implemented in order to overwhelm the island with Northern pro-government Christians and convert the remaining Mindanaoan Indigenous people to Christianity. The government provided land titles for the northern migrants in Mindanao, money for missionaries and even advertised about the pagan people of Mindanao in dire need of Christianity.

Missionaries cooperated with the political agenda firstly through manipulative scriptural interpretation and teaching. Romans 13 and 1st Peter 2:13-25 in particular were used to obligate new converts to sacrifice their land and right to self-determination in order to be "faithful to Christ." New converts were told that God instituted all authorities and therefore all people should honor God by fully submitting to the governing authorities.

In addition, passages translated wrongly by King James' translators, in order to keep his subjects passive under his tyranny,\(^5\) were reintroduced to pacify the new Christians of Mindanao under the tyranny of the new Republic of the Philippines and the influence of the United States. "Do not resist an evil one" (Matt 5:39), was taught to mean that citizens of Mindanao who love Jesus

\(^5\) Swartley, 114
should not resist the Catholic Church who was claiming their land.\textsuperscript{6}

These land claims were made through government processes of which the Indigenous Mindanaons were unaware and they had no avenue to learn about them. They then needed to relinquish their land under Republic on the Philippines law or suffer the consequences, often extra-judicial death.

These misinterpretations of scripture, as well as forced assimilation into the northern Christian culture while simultaneously rejecting their own culture, created an attitude of submission in the Philippines known as the colonial mentality. Rather than asserting themselves and their rights, Mindanaons denied themselves and submitted to the Catholic and evangelical churches under foreign missionary guidance.

This attitude is continuing today as foreign missionaries focus on increasing church attendance and the Platoen dichotomy of heavenly salvation and earthly life as they continue to proliferate the subordination of Filipino church leaders under North American missions organizations. Funding for these new churches comes from overseas, which creates dependency on the foreign missions organization. The indigenous churches are not free to transform as

\textsuperscript{6} Scholars now reinterpret Matt 5:39 as "do not retaliate with evil someone who does evil to you."\textsuperscript{6} Jesus' instructions were not to surrender our will and our desires for justice, but rather, do not respond to evil with evil, or violence with violence. The examples used by Jesus in his original context, walking a second mile while carrying a roman soldiers equipment, stripping naked in court to embarrass the person who is suing, and forcing an oppressor to punch rather than slap, were methods prescribed to redeem the God-given dignity of the oppressed person while resisting evil nonviolently.
they grow as a community, in fear of losing funding from sending organizations. Filipino pastors are often afraid to explore beyond the theological boundaries set by their funding denomination because if the mission’s organizations do not understand the local situation and agree with the contextualized gospel the local church may lose their support.

These kinds of church planting organizations are binding the people rather than empowering them to create a locally sustainable church and showing the gospel as the source of liberation that it is. Funding without giving local pastors freedom and support to explore how Jesus addresses their cultural bondage is undercutting leadership development and the freedom of Christ in church leaders and members throughout the Philippines.7

In my research I have not seen an emphasis on living a wholly, transformed life in Christ in many churches or ministries in Mindanao. I have read about it and have heard people speak about it, but I have not seen it in the groups who claim to be bible-believing Christians.

According to the Oxford American Dictionary the word "Lord" means someone with power, authority and influence.8 Claiming that Jesus is Lord is a commitment to making Him the authority over an individual life and giving Him all power and influence in all areas of one’s life. This is not the mainstream

7 Paul Hiebert emphasizes the need for national church leaders to apply contextual theology. Local leader’s inherent understanding of community needs and along with proper biblical hermeneutic training enable them to apply and teach the biblical message of freedom in Christ and the kingdom of God to their community for empowerment and liberation.

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teaching of missionaries in the Philippines although many claim Jesus as Lord.

Jesus said, "You are truly my disciple if you do what I say" (Luke 6:46-49).

The book of James calls biblical believers to read the bible and then implement its teaching in their lives (James 1:22). Finally, Jesus’ great commission, the central focus of the majority of all Christian missions organizations and movements, says in Matthew 28, go and make disciples of all people groups, baptizing them in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you (my translation from the original greek).

The transformative power of the gospel is realized in a life of obedience and discipleship. This kind of discipleship has been pushed to the periphery of the church in the Philippines and replaced with an emphasis on spiritual harmony with God and personal sinlessness. These are very important aspects of the gospel, but a crucial part is missing.

The church and missionaries in Mindanao need to analyze their output. Pastors must observe the members of churches and discern if their lives are growing in Christ-likeness and becoming founded on Jesus’ action and His word.\(^9\) The highest value of a disciple is pursuit the of the master’s values. In the case of the church, it is the pursuit of the values of the Kingdom of God as

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\(^9\) In the story of the wise and foolish builders Luke 6:47-49 Jesus makes a statement which is the call to revolutionary reformation of the individual mind, soul and body. Pastors and missionaries need to evaluate their congregations growth and transformation based on this statement and formulate future church plans based on the urgency of obedience in Jesus expression.
revealed by the life of Jesus Christ. His life demonstrates the highest values in God's created reality. When a person commits to following Jesus that person commits to reordering his/her values to reflect the values of the ultimate reality, the embrace of the Creator and his infinitely loving direction. Aligning ourselves with the Creator gives total freedom. We know the ultimate authority in the universe and He loves us without stipulations. Through Christ’s example, the Creator demonstrated how to live a life of complete freedom from the destructive influence of sin and to reflect the original glory of His creativity in us.

Mindanao cries for church members and missionaries who are active in reaching out to other people groups and building relationships to share the realization of the freedom and love that is in the embrace of God and the obedience of His commands. In John 14:15 Jesus said to his disciples, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." This my prayer for the next generation of Mindanaon church members and leaders, they teach and strive to obey what Jesus commands above all else.
Works Cited


