

Baptist Apocalypticism in the Philippines: Narratives and Theologies (1900-2020s)

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ABSTRACT

The paper contends that eschatology, specifically apocalyptic theology, shapes a vital influence in forming the Baptist movement—and most Evangelicals—theology in the Philippines. In the 1500s, Spain offered the Roman Catholic Christian faith to the Filipinos as a means of colonization. Likewise, after more than three centuries, American missionaries came and proclaimed Protestant Christianity—in the form of Evangelicalism, including the Baptist faith. These missionaries arrived with a colonizing mindset; hence, historically and theologically speaking, Filipino Baptists originated within a Western American evangelical context. While the above statement is valid, Indigenous narratives, experiences, and theologies require representations locally and globally. Hence, this paper offers a Filipino perspective of a historical sketch of the early stages of the Baptist movement in the Philippines as a prophetic fulfillment. Moreover, the paper argues that the Baptist movement in the Philippines is rooted in eschatological, apocalyptic theology from the beginning to its recent developments. Initially, the paper introduces how Baptist missionaries—and Evangelicals—entered the Philippines with a colonial mindset. Next, it offers a brief historical religious background of the Philippines and a definition of a Filipino Baptist identity known as ‘Baptist Quadrilateral.’ In addition to this quadrilateral, the paper argues that eschatology is vital to Filipino Baptist identity. This final section presents how apocalyptic theology shaped the Baptist movement from its beginnings through this contemporary period.

Keywords: *Filipino Baptist, Baptist Apocalypticism, Baptist Missions, Global Evangelicalism*

Introduction

The birth of the Baptist movement in the Philippines began with an apocalyptic prophecy—the end of an era of religious oppression and a fresh season of restoration and freedom. In geographical context, the Philippines is in the far east of the Asian continent. Unlike other Asian countries such as India, Myanmar, and China, evangelical missionaries reached the Philippines in the last two years

of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Scott Sunquist posits that evangelicalism in Asia represents the earliest form of Protestant Christianity. Sunquist states, “It would be accurate to say that evangelicalism is normative Protestant Christianity in Asia, both because of its genesis and its recent developments.”¹ This claim is valid for the Philippines, especially when Baptists from America began sending missionaries to saturate the archipelago.

Conversely, Joe Wilson presented how American Evangelicalism exhibited a “manifest destiny” ideology during its presence in the Philippines.² For example, Thomas Barbour, former Foreign Secretary of the American Baptist Missionary Union, at Baptist World Congress in 1905, said, “Let the lands of the East be filled with schools representative of the superior culture and the superior educational method of Christian civilization.”³ Former Southern Baptist missionary to the Philippines and former President of Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary in Baguio City, Leslie Hill, notes, “Baptist missionaries...came with the ‘colonial mindset’ of that time.” Only when a culture is civilized can it become a true Christian community. For these missionaries, “to be civilized required becoming like themselves—American.”⁴

American Evangelicalism should see Philippine Baptists—and broader Filipino Evangelicals—from an indigenous perspective.⁵ This article argues that eschatology, specifically apocalyptic theology, shapes a vital influence in forming Philippine Baptist—and most Evangelicals—theology. Going beyond David Bebbington’s quadrilateral, eschatology has played and continues to play a crucial role—or at most the bedrock—in the context of

¹ Scott W. Sunquist, “Asia,” in *Global Evangelicalism: Theology, History and Culture in Regional Perspective*, eds. Donald Lewis and Richard Pierard (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 197. Cf. Lorenzo C. Bautista, Aldrin M. Peñamora, and Federico G. Villanueva, eds., “Evangelical Christianity may think that with the coming of the Protestant Americans the situation changed.... But like their predecessors, the American Protestant missionaries came with the American colonizers,” *Faith and Bayan: Evangelical Christian Engagement in the Philippines* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2022), 5.

² Joe Wilson, “‘God has, by our very gunships, summoned us to possess the land’: Evangelicalism and American Empire in the Philippines, 1898–1946,” at *International Evangelicalism: Studies in the History of Global Connections*, Baylor University, October 4–6, 2023.

³ Thomas S. Barbour, “Missionary Methods from the Point of View of the Foreign Missionary Work of the Northern Baptists,” in *The Baptist World Congress Record of Proceedings 1905*, 102.

⁴ Leslie Hill, *Faithful and Free: Baptist Beliefs Through the Years* (Manila: Church Strengthening Ministry, 2013), 329.

⁵ Read John Paul Arceno, “A Southern Baptist Story in the Philippines: The Life and Ministry of Henry P. Silbor, 1938–2010,” *TALA Kasaysayan: An Online Journal of History* 4:1 (June 2021), 46–77.

Filipino Baptists and Evangelicalism.⁶ However, the primary challenge is mapping Baptists in the Philippine context. Baptist historian Albert Wardin stated, “Philippine Baptists are like a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces are difficult to fit together.”⁷ Consequently, the paper first presents a glimpse of the historical context of the Philippines. Subsequently, a definition from Francis Samdao’s Baptist quadrilateral serves as a guide toward the primary goal of this paper. With the historical context and a helpful guide, the paper argues that Philippine Baptists began with eschatological-apocalyptic theology, and is still present in recent developments.

A Historical Sketch of Christianity in the Philippines

Prehistorically, the Philippines had an animistic in its religious tradition.⁸ These religious practices shifted when Spain arrived, with their banner of Catholicism beginning in 1521. Yet, it was in 1565 that Spain established rule over the land until 1898. For 333 years, the Spanish faith monopolized and implemented the state religion of Roman Catholicism; this resulted in the Philippines being the only Christian nation in Asia.⁹ America entered the scene at the peak of the Philippine Revolution against the Spaniards in 1898. After America defeated Spain and signed the *Treaty of Paris*, the Philippines came under American rule, acquired for the sum of \$20 million according to Article 3 of the Treaty.¹⁰

As noted above, American missionaries came to the Philippines with a goal to “Christianize” the nation. In addition to converting the populace to

⁶ Bebbington’s Quadrilateral: conversion, biblicism, crucicentricism, and activism. Read David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-20. Cf. Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology Volume 1* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 89-98.

⁷ Albert W. Wardin Jr., *Baptists Around the World* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Pub., 1995), 158

⁸ Sunquist, “Asia,” *Global Evangelicalism*, 214. Cf. C. R. Moss, *Nabaloi Law and Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1920), 273, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044041907890&view=1up&seq=75>; Leonardo N. Mercado, “Philippine Shamanism and Inculturation,” in *Doing Filipino Theology* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1997), 20-43.

⁹ Sunquist notes that Christianity in the Philippines is over 92 percent, *Global Evangelicalism*, 228. Philippine Statistic Authority reports that, as of 2020, 78.8% are Roman Catholic, and more than 10% are other Christian denominations and affiliations, “Religious Affiliation in the Philippines,” February 22, 2023, <https://psa.gov.ph/content/religious-affiliation-philippines-2020-census-population-and-housing>.

¹⁰ United States, “A Treaty of Peace Between the United States and Spain, Signed at the City of Paris, on December 10, 1898” (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1899), 6, [archive.org/details/aca4900.0001.001.umich.edu](https://www.archive.org/details/aca4900.0001.001.umich.edu)

Protestant Christianity, there was also the challenge of civilizing them according to American standards. In 1903, President William McKinley, on American Expansionism, explained first his struggle, then stated, “There was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow men for whom Christ also died.”¹¹ Prior to this explanation, Evangelicals in America had already gathered and begun sending missionaries since 1898. This group of evangelicals organized the Evangelical Union of the Philippines (EUP) in 1901 and established a Comity of Agreement, dividing the Philippines into missionary areas to avoid duplication and denominational conflicts.¹² The EUP was composed of the Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, United Brethren, Disciples of Christ, Congregationalists, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Plymouth Brethren, Seventh-day Adventists, Episcopalians, with American and British Bible societies, and Young Men’s Christian Association.¹³ Today, two major Evangelical councils represent the broader Evangelical Protestant community in the Philippines. The first council is the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), consisting of ten Mainline Protestant denominations organized in 1963. The second council, the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC) has encompasses a total of 88 denominations since 1965.¹⁴ Notably, there is no distinction between evangelicals and Protestants—evangelicalism is the normative expression of Protestant Christianity for Filipinos.

Nonetheless, Christianity in the Philippines is a “sandwich religion.” Layers of indigenous animism, Spanish Roman Catholicism, and American evangelical Protestantism. President of Micah Global and a Filipino Evangelical theologian, Melba Maggay, notes how Evangelicals in the Philippines still exhibit the influence of its theological roots in animism. The need for a mediator is a concept of “getting through”—having access to the

¹¹ General James Rusling, “Interview with President William McKinley,” *The Christian Advocate*, January 22, 1903, 17. Reprinted in Charles Sumner Olcott, *The Life of William McKinley, Volume 2* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), 109–111. Cf. Daniel Schirmer and Stephen Shalom, eds., *The Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship, and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1987), 22–23.

¹² Nestor Distor Bunda, *A Mission History of the Philippine Baptist Churches 1898—1998 from a Philippine Perspective* (Aachen, Germany: Verlag Mainz, 1998), 84–87.

¹³ Bunda, *A Mission History of the Philippine Baptist Churches*, 85. Cf. Peter G. Gowing, *Islands Under the Cross* (Manila: National Council of Churches in the Philippines, 1967), 126–7. Seventh-day Adventists and Episcopalians did not join the Comity of Agreement. Cf. Camilo Osias and Avelina Lorenzana, *Evangelical Christianity in the Philippines* (Dayton, OH: United Brethren Publishing House, 1931), 89–91, 202–3.

¹⁴ See National Council of Churches in the Philippines website: <https://nccphilippines.org/>; Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches website: <https://pcec.org.ph/>

supernatural.¹⁵ This context served as the backdrop for the development of the Baptist movement and its religious endeavors. With the religious historical context from a Filipino perspective in mind, the next section part presents a Filipino Baptist theological viewpoint.

A Filipino Baptist Quadrilateral

Francis Samdao's Baptist quadrilateral is an excellent starting point for understanding Filipino Baptists.¹⁶ David Bebbington's quadrilateral influenced Samdao's formulation.¹⁷ Though he comes from an outsider's perspective in defining Baptist theologies in the Philippines as an Episcopalian minister, Baptists—and broader Evangelicals—have influenced his scholastic and ministerial life. Samdao is a senior lecturer of theology at the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary (PBTS). At the same seminary where he completed his Bachelor of Theology and Master of Divinity. His ThD is from Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary (ABGTS)—a consortium of Asian theological seminaries—with its main campus at PBTS. Moreover, he serves as Assistant Editor of the World Evangelical Alliance's *Evangelical Review of Theology* journal.¹⁸

Samdao notes the complexities of Baptist churches in the Philippines. They differ in evangelistic style, church polity, discipleship engagement, worship service, and theological stance. Thus, to provide a succinct definition of what it means to be a Baptist, he proposes “four vital convictions”—Filipino Baptist Quadrilateral: (1) Christ as the head of the church, (2) regenerate membership, (3) loyalty to Scripture, and (4) individual soul liberty.¹⁹ After elaborating on each theological conviction, Samdao concludes, “Baptist beliefs include a discernible juxtaposition of affirmations and denials. For example, they affirm the principle of receiving grace by one's decision, not sacramentally. They insist on believer's baptism by immersion, as opposed to

¹⁵ Melba P. Maggay, *The Gospel in Filipino Context* (Manila: OMF Literature, 1987), 3-5. Cf. Mercado, “Philippine Shamanism and Inculturation,” 20-43.

¹⁶ Francis Samdao, “A Baptist Quadrilateral? A Filipino Outsider's Perspective on Baptist Identity,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 45, 1 (February 2021): 41-53.

¹⁷ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 2-20. Cf. David Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010).

¹⁸ Evangelical Review of Theology site: <https://theology.worlddea.org/evangelical-review-of-theology/>

¹⁹ Samdao, “A Baptist Quadrilateral,” 45-52.

infant baptism. Their only priest is Jesus Christ; their only supreme authority is the Bible.”²⁰

Moreover, these empirical proposals from Samdao’s *outsider’s* lens help contextualize an indigenous viewpoint. Although his Baptist quadrilateral—to which he agrees—is not limited to the Philippine context, it also shares the same Baptist distinctives globally.²¹ Samdao’s works are not only for local consumption but are also aimed at the broader evangelical Christianity. Elsewhere, he stated, “Contextual theologies are gifts from the local church to the church universal.... Asian theologians should fully take into account in their work of contextualization, balancing cultural sensitivity with catholic sensibility.”²²

However, the Filipino Baptist theological convictions cannot dismiss the cultural presence of religious animism—either consciously or subconsciously. Sunquist recognizes that “evangelicalism in Asia...often looked more like the book of Acts than Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* or the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*.” Missionaries claim to have “encountered spirits, demons, dreams, and visions,” even though they do not possess a theology similar to these beliefs or doctrines.²³ This claim is valid in the Philippines. For brevity, a specific work of Samdao addresses this statement. Samdao states, in Cordilleran spirituality—a northern tribe of Luzon in the Philippines, “There is no demarcation between the secular and spiritual. Their animist religion upholds the importance of being in tune with the ecosystem—a ‘sacramental’ perspective.”²⁴ While this is evident in the northern mountainous region of the Philippines, the Baptists arrived in the central Visayan region of Panay Island with a similar religious tradition, background, and spirituality.

The preceding sections of the Philippine historical context and Filipino Baptist quadrilateral provide the backdrop of understanding an evangelical group; they affirm the headship of Christ, and regenerated church membership, biblicism, and sole competency, with a contextualized

²⁰ Samdao, “A Baptist Quadrilateral,” 53.

²¹ Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries*, 255-274. Cf. R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2005); Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2013).

²² Francis Samdao, “On the Idea of Contextualization: Cultural Sensitivity and Catholic Sensibility,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 46, 1 (February 2022): 61. Cf. Samdao, “A Baptist Quadrilateral,” 53.

²³ Sunquist, “Asia,” *Global Evangelicalism*, 214.

²⁴ Francis Samdao, “What Has Cordilleran Spirituality to Do with Evangelicals?” *Asia Journal of Theology* 35, 2 (October 2021): 238-255.

indigenous religious spirituality. Although this may sound theologically syncretistic, but from a historical and cultural objective viewpoint, one cannot deny the realities and experiences behind these facts. In this kind of religious experience, the following section presents the argument of this research—apocalyptic eschatology has played, and continues to play, a vital role in the Philippine Baptists.

Philippine Baptist Apocalypticism

Resurrection stories, prophetic fulfillment, supernatural healings, and other miraculous events have been ordinary encounters for American Baptist missionaries in the Philippines. A former Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) missionary, William Wakefield, reported on how Ben Carez witnessed the resurrection of a deceased girl while conducting a funeral service. Carez saw the girl lying dead in a closed casket; he opened the casket to pray. Wakefield reported that Carez "prayed with the people, and when he had finished, this little girl began to stir, and she sat up and began to talk and to ask for something to eat."²⁵ This story was officially reported to the convention. Furthermore, such narratives are not unique to the experiences of many Baptist missionaries. Likewise, the central argument is that Baptists—from a Filipino narrative—began as a fulfillment of an apocalyptic prophecy and is still present in contemporary developments.

Prophetic Beginnings of Filipino Baptists

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Padre Juan was a prominent Filipino priest on the island of Panay. He had attracted followers—especially the *Pulahanes*—wherever he went while preaching Christ to different communities.²⁶ However, Padre Juan's preaching was markedly different from that of Roman Catholic parish priests, which became the primary reason for his persecution by the state church. Missions historian Anne Kwantes notes, "Padre Juan went from town to town, preaching and healing, and explaining wonderful truths from what he called God's Word."²⁷ Though many missionaries cannot fully articulate the narrative about Padre Juan, "they believed that...[he] had been instrumental in preparing the people of

²⁵ William R. Wakefield, "Report to FMB Board, Minutes," November 8, 1977, *Foreign Mission Board*, January 10, 1978, Richmond, Virginia. Cf. Arceno, "A Southern Baptist Story in the Philippines," 56-57.

²⁶ The term "Pulahanes" is a societal movement, mostly farmers, against colonizers.

²⁷ Anne C. Kwantes, *A Century of Bible Christians in the Philippines* (Manila: OMF Literature, 1998; repr., Denver, CO: iAcademicBooks, 1998), 22-23.

Panay.”²⁸ University of the Philippines history professor and Baptist historian Kristoffer Esquejo observes that Padre Juan taught his followers to study the Bible devotionally and to understand salvation in and through Jesus Christ alone.²⁹ His teachings resulted in Padre Juan being imprisoned several times in Iloilo, then finally in Manila in 1870. There was no other information about Padre Juan after this imprisonment. Baptist missionary Charles Briggs noted about Padre Juan:

They say of Padre Juan that he was a wonderful man, who possessed a power that to them was mysterious...a man of spotless character and pure life...that he had a miraculous power to heal the sick and he performed hundreds of wonderful cures by merely laying on his hands or anointing with clay.³⁰

Moreover, the legacy of Padre Juan endures due to his prophecy. His prophecy foretells of foreign people preaching the same good news he proclaimed and granting access to the Word of God, the Bible. It possesses an apocalyptic nature given the various revolutions against Spaniards that were happening in the Philippines, locally and nationally. Adding to these revolutions was the ongoing persecution of the *Pulahanes*. Even the *Tagalogs* persecuted and killed several of them during the peak of the conflicts.³¹ All these persecutions led to a heightened adherence to Padre Juan’s prophecy and hope for its impending fulfillment. This apocalyptic prophecy of liberation and restoration was realized in the eyes of the indigenous through the arrival of American Baptist missionaries. The Baptists immortalized Padre Juan’s vision.

In 1900, the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society representing the Northern Baptists (now American Baptists) sent their first missionaries to the Philippines, specifically to the Island of Panay, where the *Pulahanes* were located. The pioneering missionary works of Swedish Baptist missionary Eric Lund and Filipino Braulio Manikan, both of whom became American Baptist missionaries, were embraced immediately by the followers of Padre Juan—for two primary reasons: as a fulfillment of the vision and the

²⁸ Kwantes, *A Century of Bible Christians in the Philippines*, 23.

²⁹ Kristoffer R. Esquejo, “Si Padre Juan at ang Kilusang Pulahanes sa Panay,” in *Independencia 1843: Ang Rehimentong Tayabas sa Daloy ng Kasaysayan ng mga Kilusang Mapagpalaya*, eds. Raymundo Andres Palad and Estelita Valdeavella-Llanita (Tayabas, Philippines: Alternatibong Tahanan ng mga Akda at Gawang Nasaliksik, 2019), 272.

³⁰ Charles W. Briggs, “Padre Juan,” *Baptist Missionary Magazine* LXXXII no. 11 (November 1902), 687; Henry W. Munger, *Christ and the Filipino Soul: A History of the Filipino Baptist, 1900-1945* (Iloilo: ABC Printing Center, 1967), mp. 21-22. Cf. Esquejo, “Si Padre Juan,” 273.

³¹ Filipino natives from the region of Luzon.

protection both from the *Tagalogs* and Spaniards.³² In the same year, the first Baptist church was established in the Philippines—Jaro Evangelical Church. A year later, Lund reported that 7,934 people from the town of Janiuay, the *Pulahanes*, converted to Baptist.³³

The beginnings of the Baptist movement in the Philippines originated from an eschatological hope for liberation from both the slavery of sin and socio-political oppressions. This theme of eschatological apocalypticism continues to influence the development of Baptist movements in the Philippines, and persists to this day. The paper presents a few key figures from various Baptist groups: a Convention Baptist theologian—representing the group initiated by the American Baptists—Ernesto Ungcho; a Southern Baptist pastor with a Fundamental Baptist background—Jeremiah Lepasana; and a founder of the Bible Baptists, Armie Jesalva.³⁴ Additionally, a brief subsection addresses criticisms of apocalyptic-oriented eschatology.

Filipino Baptist Developments and Apocalypticism

Evangelical Christianity and broader Protestants celebrated its centennial year in 1998. Access to the Bible became significant in the conversion of many Filipinos to evangelical Christianity. In her work, *A Century of Bible Christians in the Philippines*, Kwantes celebrated 125 years since the first Filipino translation of a book in the Bible by offering 20 chapters of different narratives, essays, and reflections on Evangelical experience in the Philippines.³⁵ Significantly, Baptists paved the way for translating the Bible into *Hiligaynon*.³⁶ It has become a vital part of Filipino Baptist history that Eric Lund and Braulio Manikan translated the New Testament into *Hiligaynon*. This translation demonstrates that theology influences the

³² Esquejo, “Si Padre Juan,” 284.

³³ Eric Lund, “Latest from the Philippines,” Baptist Missionary Magazine LXXXI no. 9 (September 1901), 601. Cf. Esquejo, “Si Padre Juan,” 267; Bunda, *A Mission History of the Philippine Baptist Churches*, 164–166.

³⁴ The author is fully aware of different Baptist denominations in the Philippines, like the Baptist Conference of the Philippines or Converge, Reformed Baptists, Freewill Baptists, Conservative Baptists Association of the Philippines, Missionary and Primitive Baptists, and several Independent Baptist networks. It is significant to note that many of these Baptist groups sprang out from American Baptists or Convention Baptists, Fundamental Baptists or Association of Baptists for World Evangelism, Southern Baptists, and Bible Baptists, though not exhaustively.

³⁵ Kwantes, *A Century of Bible Christians in the Philippines*, 11–27.

³⁶ Frank Charles Laubach, *The People of the Philippines: Their Religious Progress and Preparation for Spiritual Leadership in the Far East* (NY: George H. Doran Co., 1925), 257–8. A native language of Panay Island.

translation process. Lund and Manikan translated *baptizo* to *pagtugmarw* (or to immerse).³⁷

With biblicism as the primary method of theology, the Baptists in the Philippines have subsequently been influenced by Western premillennial thought, apocalyptic theology, and versions of dispensationalism.³⁸ This influence is evident in the three Filipino Baptist personalities discussed in the following section. First, in the 1960s, Filipino Baptist theologian and pastor Ernesto Ungcho emerged as an influential figure and a significant contributor of premillennial thought to the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches. Filipino Baptist historian and theologian Nestor Bunda notes that Ungcho was the “epitome of a man who committed all to Christ...and is well known to several generations of Baptists.” Bunda continued, “To be more effective, Ungcho had a visual aid of his ‘God’s Plan of the Ages’ to explain terms like ‘premillennialism,’ ‘dispensations,’ ‘tribulation,’ and ‘rapture.’”³⁹ Elias Lapatha gave this visual aid to Ungcho.⁴⁰ Filipino Baptist historian Francis Neil G. Jalando-on notes that Ungcho was famous for giving out religious tracts. One of these tracts was written by Ungcho and is entitled *Subong Buhi, Burwas Patay*.⁴¹

Second, Filipino-American Jeremiah Lepasana was a Fundamental Baptist in the Philippines and taught at its denominational seminary, the Baptist Bible Seminary and Institute in Taytay, Rizal. After arriving in the United States of America, he joined the Southern Baptist Convention and currently pastors one of the largest Filipino-American Baptist churches in New Jersey.⁴² Lepasana authored a discipleship material entitled *E12 Intentional Discipleship*, which is widely used by BCI churches in the Philippines as well as by several independent Baptist and evangelical churches. In one of his

³⁷ Hill, *Faithful and Free*, 334; Bunda, *A Mission History of the Philippine Baptist Churches*, 104. However, newer versions have the transliterated word “baptism” for the general use of broader Christian churches. See *Ang Pulong Sang Dios*, Hiligaynon version published by Biblica in 1996; also *New Testament: Pinoy Version* (Manila: Philippine Bible Society, 2018).

³⁸ For the definition and history of premillennialism and dispensationalism, read Daniel G. Hummel, *The Rise And Fall Of Dispensationalism: How The Evangelical Battle Over The End Times Shaped A Nation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023).

³⁹ Bunda, *A Mission History of the Philippine Baptist Churches*, 352.

⁴⁰ Elias Lapatha was a paid evangelist by Convention Baptists. See Francis Neil Gico Jalando-on, *A History of Philippine Baptist Pastors 1898—2002* (Iloilo, Philippines: Religion, Ecumenics, Mission and Society, 2003), 116.

⁴¹ The title translates to “Today Alive, Tomorrow Dead.” Jalando-on, *A History of Philippine Baptist Pastors*, 116. Unfortunately, there are no available sermon manuscripts or tracts written by Ernesto Ungcho due to archival challenges, according to Jalando-on, Facebook message to author, August 14, 2024.

⁴² Bible Church International website: www.bcinj.org/

‘School of Leadership’ books, he included “The Rapture of the Church” as a vital component in the doctrinal lessons for discipleship. He explains from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 that this “precious doctrine” of rapture is the “sudden removal of true believers from the earth during the second coming of Jesus Christ.”⁴³ The rapture is because “God wants to spare the believers from the Great Tribulation.”⁴⁴ With much anticipation, Lepasana urges, “I hope and pray that we maintain the same attitude...Christ is surely coming, and it’s going to happen sooner than most of us are expecting. So prepare... prepare... prepare before it’s too late!”⁴⁵

Lastly, the Bible Baptist denominational group was included in the top seven (0.5% or more than half a million) in the Philippine Statistics Authority statistical report of religious affiliation in 2020.⁴⁶ Armie Jesalva has been a key figure of this denomination. Moreover, part of his doctrinal commitment is ‘soulwinning.’ Jesalva urges his church members to evangelize promptly and win souls because “time is challenging us.” He preached, “We are in the last days before the return of Jesus Christ, and we know there is very little time left to engage in soulwinning. Time is running out and the curtain will soon fall. Let us not squander our greatest opportunity in our lives.”⁴⁷ This call for soulwinning has been the emphasis of their Baptist network since January 2007. Jesalva shares that the greatest highlight of his ministerial service is the church’s IBN Nationwide Gospel Saturation. It claims that as of August 16, 2019, the total number of souls won is 9,273,748.⁴⁸ In his preaching on January 1, 1975, Bob Hughes (1932-1976) noted, “Walk into Dr. Armie Jesalva’s office.... The first thing you’ll

⁴³ Jeremiah Lepasana, “The Rapture of the Church,” in *E12 Discipleship: School of Leader’s Lessons* (NJ: Bible Church International, 2010), 240. This edition was published and printed by Lepasana’s church.

⁴⁴ Lepasana, “The Rapture of the Church,” 241.

⁴⁵ Jeremiah Lepasana, *E12 Discipleship: School of Leadership 3* (Manila, Philippines: Church Strengthening Ministry, 2012), 83. The content of this edition is the same as the Lepasana’s church’s version. The difference is that instead of two volumes, there are five volumes of this set: 1) Pre-Encounter, 2) Post-Encounter, 3) School of Leadership 1, 4) School of Leadership 2, and 5) School of Leadership 3 Lessons.

⁴⁶ Philippine Statistics Authority, “Religious Affiliation in the Philippines,” February 22, 2023, <https://psa.gov.ph/content/religious-affiliation-philippines-2020-census-population-and-housing>.

⁴⁷ Mike Wells, *The Life and Ministry of Dr. Armie Jesalva* (Mesquite, TX: Parkside Publications, 2019), 91-92.

⁴⁸ Wells, *Life and Ministry of Jesalva*, 65. Armie Jesalva’s several nieces and nephews are members—including the sisters of Armie who were former members—of the church where the researcher ministers, Union Community Bible Church in New Jersey. These relatives are eyewitnesses to how Armie emphasized soul-winning and the last days.

see on that doctor's desk is a Bible. And, brother, before you'll get a pill for your stomach, you'll get a dose of the gospel for your soul."⁴⁹

In summary, in the beginnings of the Baptist movement in 1900 and its developments from the middle of the twentieth century up to today—2020s, apocalyptic eschatology has been significant in their religious experiences. This includes themes of prophetic fulfillment, the end of the world, resisting the oppressors, participating in revolutions, rapture, premillennialism, dispensationalism, and other doctrinal convictions related to this field of theology. Philippine Baptists—at least from the represented groups in this paper—apocalypticism had been inspired by an indigenous priest's vision and later influenced by American premillennial thought or pop-dispensationalism—with a great emphasis on the rapture and second coming of Christ.⁵⁰

A Modern Criticism of Baptist Apocalypticism

The arrival of Western Protestant-Evangelical apocalyptic theology in the Philippines motivated the rapid growth of the Baptists in the twentieth century. However, this eschatological orientation does not always serve the Baptist churches and their communities well. Only two criticisms are presented in this subsection for brevity: 1) Platonic Escapism and 2) Christian Zionism. Since there's no sufficient space to develop here, these criticisms are using the lenses of Filipino Evangelical theologians Federico Villanueva and Aldrin Peñamora.⁵¹ The researcher's criticisms come from each view's potential radical tendencies.

Platonic escapism or *otherworldly* eschatology is the view that this world is not the *truly* real and final place for Christians. There is a spiritual, heavenly realm where Christians' future reality awaits. Federico Villanueva explains that otherworldly—meaning focusing on the rapture, end times, and second coming of Christ—is an easy escape from this world to another. It “emphasizes heaven as the final destination... [and] diverting attention away

⁴⁹ Bob Hughes, “I Sat Where They Say,” *Global Baptist Times* Vol 10, Issue 1, February 2019: 5.

⁵⁰ For pop-dispensationalism, read Hummel's *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism*, 231-335. Though many Filipino Baptist pastors and churches vary with eschatological views, it is apparent that apocalyptic theology and premillennial thought were present during the Baptist beginnings and development in the Philippines.

⁵¹ Federico Villanueva and Aldrin Peñamora are well-published authors and professors at the Asia Graduate School of Theology, a consortium of Evangelical seminaries and academic institutions in the Philippines. Peñamora is an ordained minister of the Conservative Baptist Association of the Philippines.

from God’s creation.”⁵² Hence, the socio-practical tendency of apocalyptic-oriented eschatology is indifference or apathy toward the other, community, nature, and especially the poor and the oppressed. However, Villanueva notes, “We long for the renewal and transformation of creation, not its annihilation or total destruction.”⁵³ Peñamora’s ethic of *malasakit* helps counter such tendencies. Beyond statistical-soul-winning data and escapism, one ought to practice *malasakit* with everyone. *Malasakit* is “looking intently at another person’s pain.”⁵⁴ It is to show empathy and concern for your neighbor, community, nature, and all *kapwa*.⁵⁵ Peñamora states, “God...is intensely and personally concerned with the good of others, especially the poor and oppressed.”⁵⁶ Instead of focusing on personal salvation and eagerly waiting for the rapture to escape from this corrupted world, one needs to practice *malasakit* and holistic stewardship.

Christian Zionism is another view connected to premillennialism and dispensationalism. While the former criticism is about indifference to the world, this view is an excessive focus on the triumph and flourishing of the Jews and modern-day Israel.⁵⁷ Peñamora, in his presentation, explains that putting the Christian Zionism agenda—their return to the land, rebuilding of the State, and total flourishing of modern-day Israel, which is perceived as prophetic fulfillment—on a pedestal excludes other significant narratives such as—but not limited to—the Nakba narrative in 1948 and the current Israel-Palestine and Gaza conflicts.⁵⁸ Again, this concern can lead to apathy

⁵² Frederico Villanueva, “Yours is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory,” in *Ama Namin: The Lord’s Prayer in Philippine Life and Spirituality*, eds. Timoteo D. Gener and Jason Richard Tan (Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2023), 158-89. Villanueva argues that holistic eschatology is more biblical among *this-worldly* or utopia-oriented, *otherworldly* escapism, and *holistic* views.

⁵³ Villanueva, “Your is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory,” 158.

⁵⁴ Aldrin Peñamora, “Their Blood Cries Out from the Ground: An Ethic of *Malasakit* and the War on Drugs,” in *Faith and Bayan*, 126.

⁵⁵ *Kapwa*, or shared self, is our obligation towards our fellow being; *to see the self in the other*. See Fritz Gerald M. Melodi, “Virgilio Enriquez and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Dialogue: Discerning a Theology of Solidarity in Philippine Kapwa-Culture,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 45, 3 (2021): 269-272. Cf. Virgilio Enriquez, “Kapwa: A Core Concept in Filipino Social Psychology,” *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, 42 (1978): 100-108.

⁵⁶ Peñamora, “Their Blood Cries Out from the Ground,” 126.

⁵⁷ Contra dispensationalism, read Oren R. Martin, “The Land Promise Biblically and Theologically Understood,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 255-74.

⁵⁸ Aldrin Peñamora, “Reconciling the Shoah and the Nakba: Theologies in the Making and Toward the Unmaking (through Peacemaking) of the Israel-Hamas War,” presented during the General Assembly and Theological Forum of Samahan ng Teolohikal na Edukasyon ng

toward other narratives. Thus, Peñamora calls for eschatological awareness and careful practice through peacemaking. The former entails understanding the historical contexts and theological implications of premillennialism and dispensationalism. The latter argues that one should be thoughtful in actions and words and avoid leaning toward radicalism.⁵⁹

Perhaps these two criticisms are noteworthy for this paper since Baptist apocalypticism is a historical fact and an actual reality. While Western eschatologies were influential in the beginnings and development of the Baptist movement in the Philippines, there is a vital need for theological awareness, reflection, and careful practices to avoid such theological criticisms.

Conclusion

Filipino Baptists belong to the Evangelical movement through the efforts of Baptist missionaries from America since 1898. Perhaps seeing this narrative from an indigenous perspective is also necessary. Hence, this paper aims to present that Baptists in the Philippines began in an apocalyptic eschatology

Pilipinas: The Bible and Israel, Central Philippine University, Jaro, Iloilo, July 31, 2024,
<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/183aUFh8m6/>

⁵⁹ For Peñamora's peacemaking proposal, read Aldrin Peñamora, "The Way of the Cross and the Good Life: Evangelical Virtue Ethics in Asia," in *Asian Christian Ethics: Evangelical Perspectives*, eds. Aldrin Peñamora and Bernard K. Wong (Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2022). In the context of Asian suffering and oppression, Peñamora notes—two sentences before the conclusion, that peacemaking "does not lead to forgetting the past; they direct people to remember the concreteness of oppression and injustice, to recognize deeply that they take place in time, to real people in actual situations," chap. 8, Perlego. Cf. Rula Khoury Mansour, "The Mission of the Church: Just Peacemaking and Reconciliation," in *Asian Christian Ethics*, chap. 14. Mansour furthers Peñamora's "peacemaking" into "just peacemaking theory." Mansour includes "the role of the Palestinian Church within the Ongoing Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" as a case study and points out that Christian Zionism is one of the critical factors of "the tremendous amount of injustice experienced by the Palestinian communities... [and] does not have enough international church support." Still, in conclusion, Mansour advances a "just peacemaking paradigm [which] serves well as a conceptual framework for justly using nonviolent tactics against oppression." However, not all theologians and church historians adhere to the peacemaking view. See Hadje C. Sadjje, "Buhay sa Ilalim ng Pananakop o Okupasyong Militar: Isang Engkuwentro sa Realidad ng Hidwaang Israel at Palestina," in *Banwa at Layag: Antolohiya ng mga Kurwentong Paglalakbay ng mga Pilipino sa Ibayong Dagat*, ed. Axle Christien J. Tugano (Manila: Limbagang Pangkasaysayan, 2023), 208-16. While Hadje agrees with the dangers of Christian Zionism due to dispensationalism, he proposes a different solution. Sadjje urges Christians to condemn actively and publicly the colonial Zionist Israel and their crimes against the Palestinian people and their land. Elsewhere, Sadjje notes, "Dispensationalism is one of the sources why many conservative Evangelicals led to chilling culture of silence about the suffering of Palestinian/ Arab Christians," Sadjje, "'Jesus said, I have the Other Sheep': The Palestinian (Arab) Christians in Occupied Palestine," *Christianity in the Middle East Journal* 1, No. 45 (2018): 104-120. Therefore, for both views, dispensationalism can lead to radical Christian Zionism, which is oppressive, dangerous, and apathetic.

of prophetic fulfillment and have maintained premillennial thought throughout their development. The initial section provides the historical context of the religious setting of the Philippines and a definition of what it means to be a Filipino Baptist, provided by Francis Samdao's Baptist quadrilateral. Next, the paper also examines how eschatology plays a significant role in Filipino Baptists and seems to be the bedrock of their history, deeds, and theology. Baptist apocalypticism is evident through Padre Juan's prophetic vision, several Baptist missionaries, and even contemporary Filipino Baptist pastors and theologians like Ernesto Ungcho, Jeremiah Lepasana, and Armie Jesalva. Finally, regarding apocalyptic-oriented eschatology, the researcher recommends the necessity of contemporary theological reflection, sociocultural awareness, and careful practice among today's Baptists in the Philippines. *

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