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Changing Patterns of Aglipayan Adherence in the Philippines, 1918-1970

DANIEL F. DOEPPERS

This article investigates the nature and pattern of the most substantial change in Philippine religious adherence since the religiously tumultuous period which followed the Revolution. Specifically it employs some of the methodologies of social geography to examine at several scales and time intervals between 1918 and 1970 the changing pattern of adherence to the church (later churches) created by the nationalist or "Aglipayan" religious movement of the early twentieth century.¹

Religious identity is a key to the definition of social groups in many cultural settings. In the Philippines religious adherence is an excellent clue to both deep regional cleavages and moderate local social variation. The tripartite division of Philippine societies into Christian, Muslim, and localized simple ethnic or "animist" compartments resulted from modest Islamic proselytization followed by the establishment of an extensive network of Catholic missions in the lowlands of Luzon, the Visayas, and the northern fringe of Mindanao during and after the sixteenth century. The Catholic mission-*cum*-parish organization operated as an integral component of Hispanic rule. Together with other aspects of that colonial system, it served to restrict Islamization to the southern portion of

1. The new church was initially known as the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (IFI) or, in English, the Philippine Independent Church (PIC). After World War II, the English version became the official designation. Both terms are used here in their official chronological contexts. The name Philippine Independent Church was legally retained by the larger body of adherents following the separation of the Fonacier and other small factions, and therefore it no longer refers to all members of religious bodies descended from the nationalist religious movement of 1902 but only to the largest single group. It is used in the latter sense in this article. The first Supreme Bishop of the IFI was Gregorio Aglipay. Aglipay remained head of the church for almost four decades and, in addition, was widely known for his roles in the Revolution and the Philippine-American War as well as his candidacy for national political office in 1935. As a result, *Independientes*, including members of various offshoots, are frequently called "Aglipayans." In this article "Aglipayan" is used as it is used in the Philippine census to refer to the declared adherents of all churches descended from the IFI.

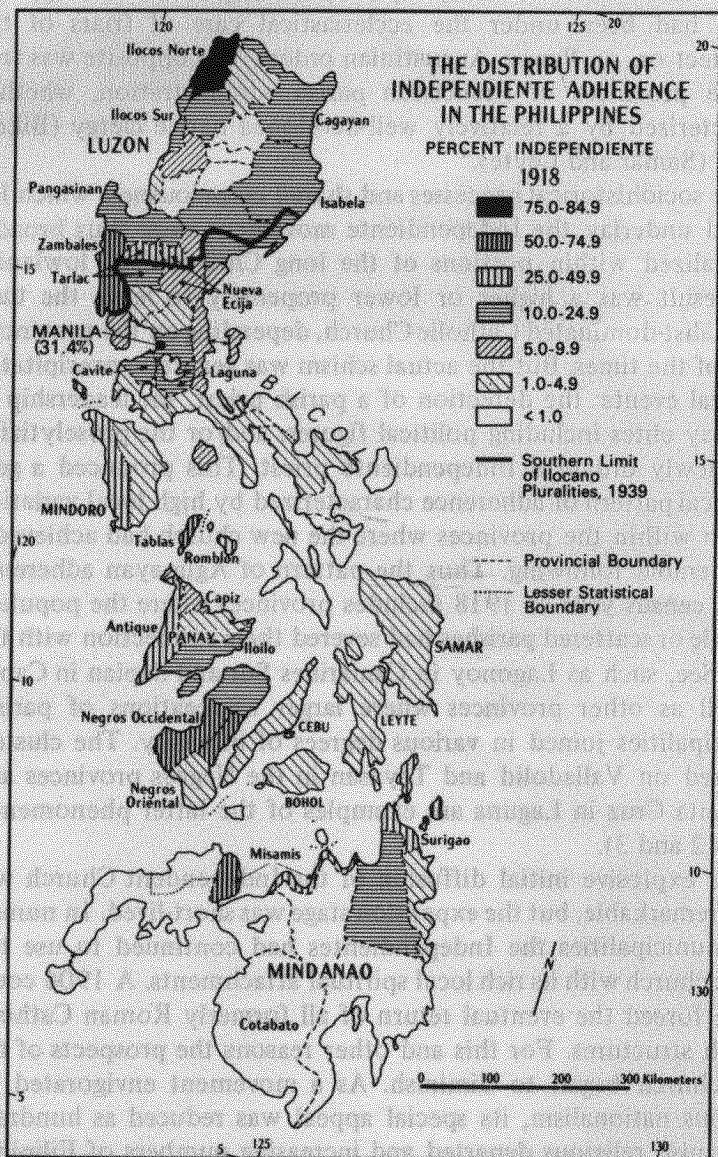
the archipelago and to play a crucial role in the emergence of an increasingly integrated Christianized lowland society.²

Because Catholic Church policy and personnel in the Philippines were thoroughly intertwined with the political goals of the Spanish colonial edifice, an institutional setting evolved which proved inimical to the emergence and full utilization of a first-class indigenous clergy. In the late nineteenth century the reaction to the restricted opportunities for native and mestizo clergy, to Spanish friars serving as parish priests (*curas*) or even monopolizing the parishes of whole provinces, and to the ownership of large tracts of cultivated land by friar orders helped produce a climate of anti-colonialism in some regions which ultimately led to revolution (1896–98). Though the immediate political aims of the Revolution were frustrated by the imposition of American suzerainty, the urge to Filipinize the Catholic Church in the islands continued to gather force. The moves of the Catholic hierarchy to seek some accommodation with this “spirit of the times” came too late to prevent schism.³ An understanding of the diffusion of this religious movement is necessary if subsequent changes in adherence are to be made meaningful.

The rapid expansion of the nationalist religious movement during the 1902–1906 period produced a strong, though often minority, pattern of adherence to the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* among several disparate regional populations. First, the movement was led by and diffused most rapidly among Ilocanos in northern Ilocos and several pioneer Ilocano settlement areas on Luzon (map 1). (As opposed to some other dioceses, indigenous Catholic priests in the largely Ilocano diocese of Nueva Segovia were only occasionally allowed the full career development of parish administration.) Second, the new church attracted a substantial following in some Manila districts and southern Tagalog areas of high revolutionary fervor and can thus be partially interpreted as an expression of variable regional anticolonialist feeling. Third, the *Independiente*

2. This topic has been explored in D. F. Doeppers, “The Evolution of the Geography of Religious Adherence in the Philippines before 1898,” *The Journal of Historical Geography*, 2 (April, 1976): 95–110.

3. For an analysis and detailed reconstruction of these events see Mary Dorita Clifford, B. V. M., “*Iglesia Filipina Independiente: The Revolutionary Church*” in *Studies in Philippine Church History*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1969), pp. 223–55, and Pedro S. de Achutegui, S.J., and Miguel A. Bernad, S.J., *Religious Revolution in the Philippines: the Life and Church of Gregorio Aglipay*, vol. 1 (Manila: Ateneo de Manila, 1960).



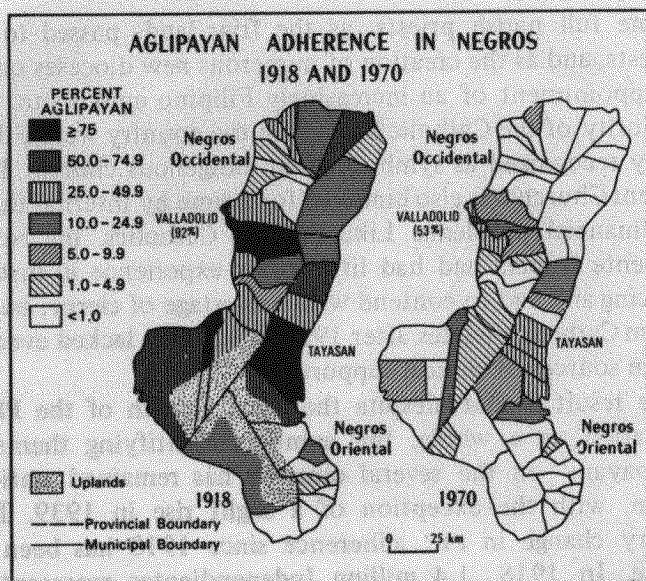
Map 1. (Calculated from *Census of the Philippines, 1918* [Manila: Census Office of the Philippine Islands, 1920], vol. 2, pp. 50, 394-433.)

movement tended to find fertile ground in several Visayan provinces which were characterized by a poorly developed native clergy *and* which had been under the ecclesiastical care of friars of the Recollect or, on Panay, Augustinian orders. The opposite was true of the provinces of Franciscan parish administration, whether characterized by a relatively well-developed native clergy (Bikol) or not (Samar and Leyte).⁴

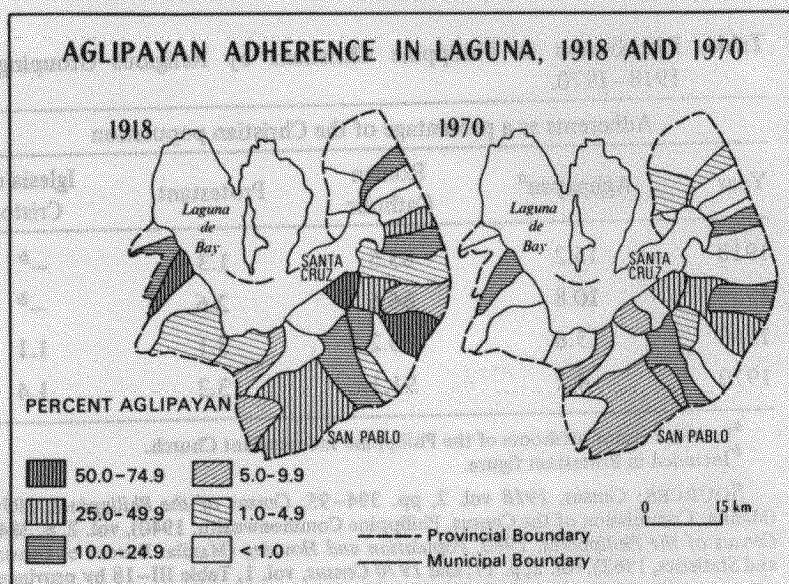
The sociohistorical processes and shared consciousness which led to and underlay the Independiente movement were thus broadly regionalized within portions of the long Christianized lowlands. The result was a higher or lower propensity to leave the then colonialist-dominated Catholic Church, depending on the provincial spirit of the times. But the actual schism was generally precipitated by local events: the defection of a parish priest, the leadership of local lay elites including political figures, and/or the proselytizing of a newly ordained Independiente priest. This produced a geographical pattern of adherence characterized by high local variation – even within the provinces where the new church had achieved a considerable following. Thus the pattern of Aglipayan adherence in the census year of 1918 includes provinces where the populace of single or scattered parishes had severed their connection with the Holy See, such as Lagonoy in Camarines Sur and Sapián in Capiz, as well as other provinces where larger aggregations of parish-municipalities joined in various degrees of intensity. The clusters centered on Valladolid and Tayasan in the Negros provinces and on Santa Cruz in Laguna are examples of the latter phenomenon (maps 2 and 3).

The explosive initial diffusion of the Independent Church was quite remarkable, but the expansion stage was short-lived. In numerous municipalities the Independientes had continued to use the parish church with its rich local spiritual attachments. A 1906 court ruling forced the eventual return of all formerly Roman Catholic church structures. For this and other reasons the prospects of the new church began to diminish. As a movement invigorated by religious nationalism, its special appeal was reduced as hundreds of Spanish religious departed and increasing numbers of Filipinos

4. These and other factors underlying the complex distribution of early Independiente adherence are explored in D. F. Doeppers, "The Philippine Revolution and the Geography of Schism," *The Geographical Review* 66 (April, 1976): 158–77. To avoid masking significant gradients, such as that between the Ilocano and Tagalog lowlands of Nueva Ecija, several provinces have been statistically subdivided in Maps 1 and 4.



Map 2. (Calculated from *Census, 1918*, and *1970 Census of Population and Housing* [Manila: National Census and Statistics Office, 1974], vol. 1, Table III-18 by province.)



Map 3. (Calculated from *Census, 1918*, and *1970 Census*.)

became full parish priests, as the friar lands passed to Filipino interests, and as the creation of numerous new dioceses occasioned the appointment of an increasingly Filipino episcopate. By 1920 a majority of the Catholic bishops in the country were Filipinos — widely recognized as symbols of an indigenous church. The Independent Church was also hindered for a time by internal theological and financial problems. Like Filipino Catholics, the early Independent leaders had had little prior experience in institutional financing and had to contend with a shortage of clergy, but, unlike Roman Catholic prelates after 1920 or so, they lacked even modest foreign sources of clerical support.

The result is that, despite the rapid growth of the Philippine population as a whole, the numbers identifying themselves as "Aglipayans" in the several censuses has remained static at 1.4 million, with the exception of a slight rise in 1939. Thus the primary change in PIC adherence since 1918 has been *relative* decline. In 1918, 1.4 million Independientes represented 15.2 percent of the Christian population. By 1970 the same number constituted only 4.2 percent of the Christian population (see table).⁵ This declining proportion has been the largest relative

Table. Distribution of Philippine Christians by Religious Groupings: 1918–1970.

Adherents as a percentage of the Christian population				
Year	Aglipayan ^a	Roman Catholic	Protestant	Iglesia ni Cristo
1918	15.2	83.5	1.3	— ^b
1939	10.8	86.6	2.6	— ^b
1960	5.6	90.2	3.1	1.1
1970	4.2	91.1	3.3	1.4

^aIncludes minor offshoots of the Philippine Independent Church.

^bIncluded in Protestant figure.

SOURCES: *Census, 1918* vol. 2, pp. 394–95; *Census of the Philippines, 1939* (Manila: Commission of the Census, Philippine Commonwealth, 1940), vol. 2, p. 384; *Census of the Philippines, 1960, Population and Housing* (Manila: Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1962), vol. 2, p. 17; and *1970 Census*, vol. 1, Table III–18 by province.

5. The Aglipayan population may have been modestly underreported in all censuses

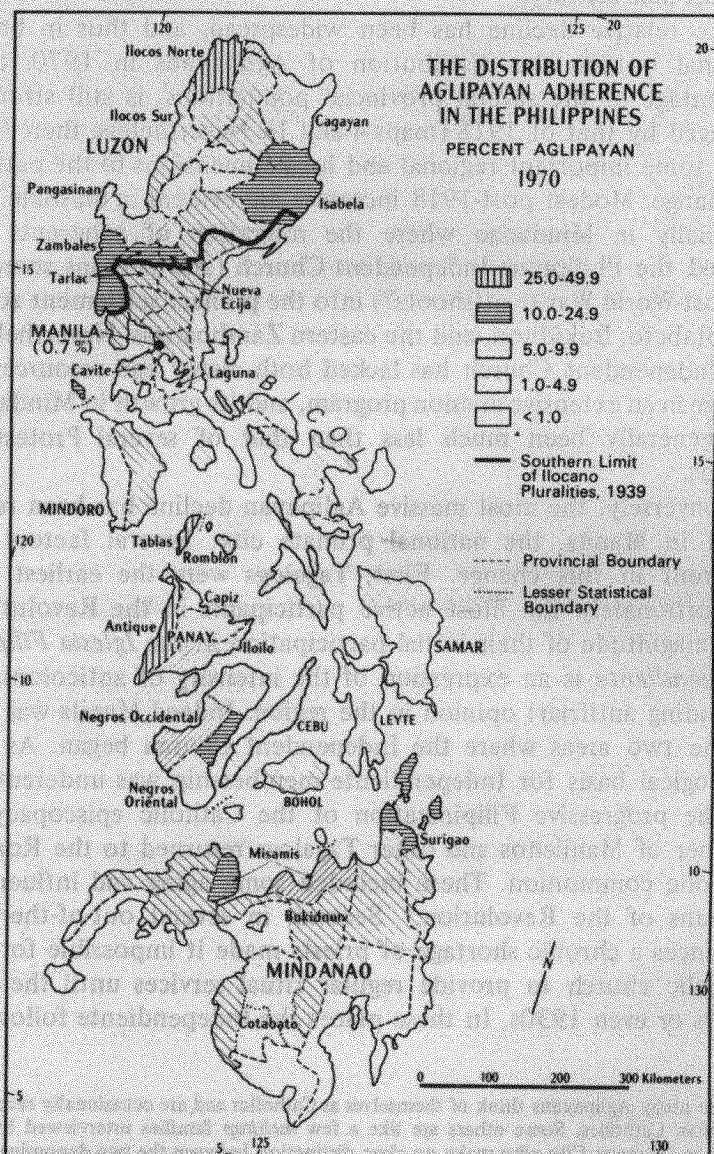
change in religious identity in the long settled lowlands during the last half century.

The relative decline has been widespread, and thus in broad regional outline the distribution of Aglipayans in 1970, as a percentage of the several provincial populations, is still strongly presaged by that of 1918 (maps 4 and 1). Nevertheless, there have been some important regional and local dimensions to the pattern of change. Modest post-1918 increases are evident in Masbate and especially in Mindanao where the migration of adherents has carried the Philippine Independent Church (and perhaps some of its post-World War II offshoots?) into the pioneer settlement zones of Cotabato, Bukidnon, and the eastern Zamboangas. Nevertheless, the Independent Church has lacked both clergy and resources to engage in an extensive mission program, and its growth in Mindanao has generally been much less than that of several Protestant groups.

Conversely, the most massive Aglipayan decline has been registered in Manila, the national primate city. Several factors are apparent in this change. First, Tagalogs were the earliest and proportionately the most active participants in the Revolution. The magnitude of their initial participation in the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* is an expression of the intensity of anticolonialist (including antifriar) opinion in the region. Indeed Manila was one of the two areas where the Independent Church began. As the ideological basis for Independiente membership was undercut, as by the progressive Filipinization of the Catholic episcopacy, a number of Manileños and other Tagalogs returned to the Roman Catholic communion. These included some aging and influential veterans of the Revolution.⁶ Second, in several out-of-the-way provinces a chronic shortage of priests made it impossible for the Catholic church to provide regular ritual services until the late 1920s or even 1930s. In these places the Independiente following

because many Aglipayans think of themselves as Catholics and are occasionally recorded as Roman Catholics. Some others are like a few *mahirap* families interviewed by the author in Dagupan City who make no clear distinction between the two denominations and attend Mass at either. The data on religious adherence in the 1970 census may be less accurate than that in some previous censuses because it is based on a 5 percent sample rather than a full enumeration. All other percentages used in the text and figures refer to Aglipayans as a percentage of the *entire* unit population.

6. J. B. Rodgers, *Forty Years in the Philippines* (New York: The Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1940), p. 45.



Map 4. (Calculated from 1970 Census, vol. 1, Table III-18 by province. The census data are based on a 5-percent sample. See table on p. 270.)

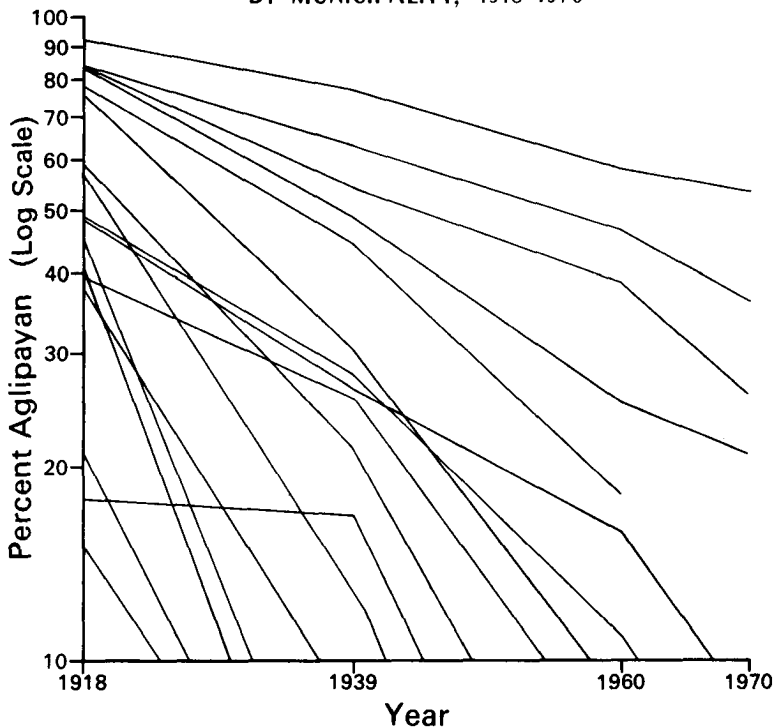
was, in part, maintained for lack of an active alternative. Manila, however, has long been a center of relatively intense Catholic religious and educational activity, and thus the Independent Church was not able to maintain its following there by default, as it were. Finally, Aglipayans in Manila have been demographically overwhelmed by massive streams of migrants from the heavily Roman Catholic provinces. This has tended to leave Aglipayan migrants from Ilocos and western Visayan regions small minorities in a new setting where there may well be strong practical reasons for switching to the predominant faith. Thus, with the exception of a few districts, such as Pandacan and Santa Ana, the Independent Church suffered a great loss of following in the national metropolitan core between 1918 and 1939, and continuing further diminution thereafter. Fewer than 3.5 percent of all Aglipayans now reside in Metro Manila as opposed to 12 percent of Roman Catholic adherents and a startling 15 percent of all members of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.⁷

Manila and the pioneer Mindanao provinces represent the extreme cases. Elsewhere the patterns of decline have been more subtle. To investigate this phenomenon, change within units equivalent to the 1918 municipalities was graphed for a dozen sample provinces. From this perspective a general rule may be discerned: the lower the initial (1918) percentage adhering to the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, the more rapid the rate of subsequent decline. Data from Negros Occidental provide a graphic illustration in the logarithmic scale (page 274). The rate of decline often becomes especially marked after local Aglipayan adherence falls below 25 percent. The principal exceptions to these generalizations occur in a few scattered localities of late diffusion. These were found in northern Tarlac and Isabela, where continued Ilocano migration brought a greater following, as well as in southeastern Masbate and a few other locales. The relative position of Aglipayan adherence in these municipalities peaked between 1939 and 1960. In southern Mindanao, maximum relative strength came with the waves of migrants that followed the conclusion of World War II.

The result of the general differential rates of decline has been

7. Calculated from Table III-18 by municipality in the Manila and Rizal books of the *1970 Census of Population and Housing* (Manila: National Census and Statistics Office, 1974), vol. 1. The growth and diffusion of *Iglesia ni Cristo* adherence is by no means a simple reciprocal of Aglipayan "losses."

CHANGING AGLIPAYAN ADHERENCE
IN NEGROS OCCIDENTAL,
BY MUNICIPALITY, 1918-1970



Note: The logarithmic scale is used to highlight the *percentage* rates of change which, if constant over the whole period, appear as straight lines. Calculated for municipalities as they were bounded in 1918 from the *Census, 1918, Census, 1939, Census, 1960, and 1970 Census* (See table on p. 270).

that the same municipalities which formed the core of various Aglipayan clusters in 1918 are still the centers of most intense adherence, but the cluster about each of them has diminished as the contiguous municipalities decline more rapidly. Maps 2 and 3 illustrate this phenomenon for Negros and Laguna, respectively.

The assumption that a substantial initial Independiente following in isolated or scattered municipalities might exhibit a propensity to decline more rapidly than the general trend led to a separate examination of nine cases occurring in the sample provinces.⁸

8. All members of this group exceeded 10 percent Independiente in 1918 and were contiguous to or surrounded by municipalities where the Independent Church had not

Three declined precipitously, but six conform to the pattern illustrated in the scale. Thus the results are mixed and not sufficiently different for isolation to be identified as a factor independent of the general pattern of Aglipayan recession.

The decline of Aglipayan adherence in the coastal lowlands of Ilocos Norte presents a special case. Indeed that province has always been a special case. Achutegui and Bernad have detailed the events of 1902 which saw all of the Filipino curas and a total of 20 out of 24 or 25 indigenous Roman Catholic priests in Ilocos Norte join the movement for a national church — a movement which came to be headed by their provincemate Gregorio Aglipay.⁹ Of all the church structures only the cathedral in the provincial capital of Laoag remained in Catholic hands. Only a minority joined the new church in Laoag and neighboring Bacarra, and thus the initial pattern of Independiente adherence in Ilocos Norte resembles a doughnut (map 5). In most other lowland municipalities 84-99 percent of the 1918 inhabitants declared their allegiance to the new church. Since that time, the rise of Roman Catholic adherence/decline of Aglipayan loyalty has spread outward in a straightforward diffusion pattern. By 1960 Burgos municipality had emerged as a secondary diffusion center and Batac (Aglipay's birthplace) as a center of cultural conservatism and resistance. During the 1960s the number of Aglipayans declined absolutely as well as proportionately in 10 municipalities. Viewed at another level, the experience of Ilocos Norte since 1918 is a delayed microcosm of the rediffusion of Roman Catholic adherence from Manila and the several diocesan centers throughout the long settled lowlands. The cluster of Aglipayan adherence around Batac now resembles many other clusters at an early stage of recession.

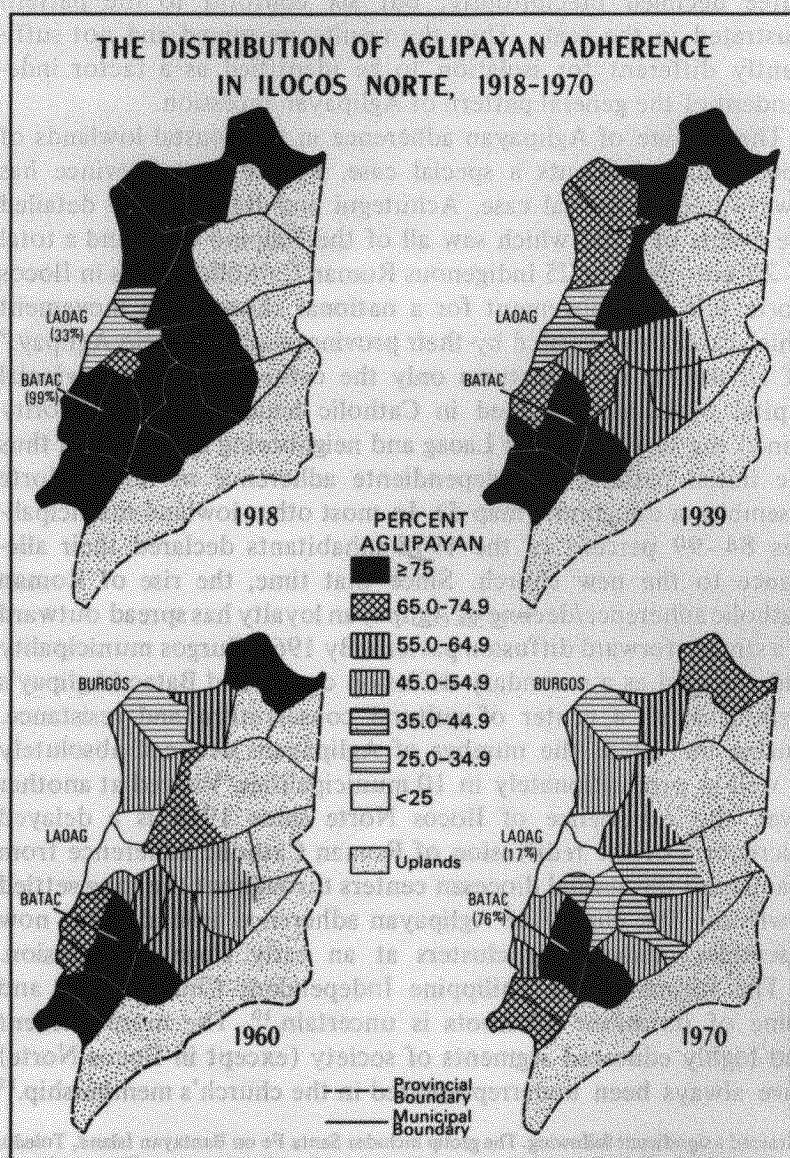
The future of the Philippine Independent Church (PIC) and some of its minor offshoots is uncertain.¹⁰ The more affluent and highly educated segments of society (except in Ilocos Norte) have always been underrepresented in the church's membership.¹¹

attracted a significant following. The group includes Santa Fe on Bantayan Island, Toledo, and Alcantara, all in Cebu; Lagonoy in Camarines Sur; Caidiocan on Sibuyan Island, Romblon; Sapián and Pontevedra in Capiz, and Libacao and New Washington in Aklan.

9. Achutegui and Bernad, *Religious Revolution*, 1:194-95, 211, 217, 228.

10. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, chap. 14.

11. A sample survey by the author in the urban portion of Dagupan City, Pangasinan in 1969 found that while 8.2 percent of the large lower class population identified themselves as "Aglipayan," the same was true of only 1.8 percent of the combined middle and upper strata.



Map 5. (Calculated from *Census, 1918*, *Census, 1939*, *Census, 1960*, and *1970 Census*. See table on p. 270.)

In recent decades there has developed an occasional tendency for upwardly mobile families to switch to a more prestigious communion — in this case to the Catholic Church. Furthermore, the passing of an influential older generation has in the past left younger family members free to reconsider the question of religious adherence, though, despite various hearsay accounts, there is little statistical evidence of wholesale changes in particular localities.

On the other hand, after considerable theological wandering, the Philippine Independent Church has been firmly led back to an orthodox Trinitarian position since World War II. Whether most of the priesthood or any but a small minority of the faithful ever left that perspective is debatable. In 1961, a Concordat of Full Communion was formalized between the PIC and the Episcopal Church of the United States. As a result, candidates for the priesthood are now rigorously trained at a joint seminary. Whether these new strengths will enable the Philippine Independent Church to retain a larger percentage of its members' natural increase and to do so universally within the far flung areas where it and various minor Aglipayan offshoots are presently represented is problematical. The early and continued loss of following in the trend-setting national metropolitan center, however, is not an omen of renewed growth. Neither is the accelerating rate of relative decline in the clusters of greatest Aglipayan following. If the past generation is a guide to the immediate future, the Philippine Independent Church will continue an inexorable but not precipitous decline. Some argue that modern secularism is producing the same effect on religious participation in (but not identity with) numerous other churches.