Title: Christianity encounters Filipino spirited-world beliefs: a case study

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Abstract:

In varying degrees, Filipino Christians are aught in a three-way confrontation of spirit-world views. The three views are the Western-inspired rationalistic understanding of the supernatural, the non-rationalistic Filipino traditional religious beliefs and practices, and the biblical understanding of the spirit-world. The tension created by this confrontation often results in a syncretistic response labeled “split-level Christianity” by Jesuit priest Jaime Bulatao.

This study was proposed in an attempt to remedy the “split-level” characteristic of the Filipino Christian experience. Specifically, it attempts to identify a contextualized theological-pastoral approach to the spirit-world component of Philippine popular religiosity. The study is based on a case which exemplifies the issues encountered by Filipino Christians in attempting to respond to the biblical teachings about the spirits. The general procedure of the study follows several steps: (1) description, (2) analysis, (3) biblical-theological interpretation, and (4) pastoral action.

Part I: Description

After the case presentation and an introduction of the research, the description portion of the study presents a review of literature on the spirit-world phenomenon in the Philippines. This
review describes two major views, one of which view considers the Filipino spirit-world beliefs as a Filipino invention necessary for social control; the other view advocates the idea that the belief is based on the reality and existence of the Spirits.

**Part II: Analysis**

The analysis probes the socio-cultural, psychological, and religious factors that have shaped the dynamics of the care. The Filipino values of *pikisisama, amor propio, sakop system,* and *bahala na* reinforce the spirit-world beliefs and made the healing ritual offered by spirit-world practitioners necessary. The most important factor was the influence of anitism—the primitive Filipino religious belief system. Anitism’s concept of an inaccessibly God, the existence of environmental spirits, and the idea that all natural events are attributable to the inscrutable ways of invisible forces of the spirit-world, are evident in the case.

**Part III: Biblical-Theological Interpretation**

The two chapters in this section deal with separate specific issues. One deals with the Filipino belief in the existence of evil spirits and their involvement in human life and illness. The other deals with the participation of Filipino Christians in the traditional healing ritual performed by spirit-world specialists. The findings may be summarized as follows.

1. The Bible affirms the reality, existence and activity of angels, fallen angels, and demons or evil spirits in this world.

2. Bible narratives such as the experience of Job and Jesus’ encounter with demon-possessed persons indicates that demons are capable of inflecting disease and physical harm to human beings.
(3) Major aspects of the spirit-world healing rituals have the characteristic of magic, a practice condemned by the Bible.

(4) Subscription to spirit-world healing rituals is inconsistent with an authentic Christian faith.

Part IV: Action

The study recommends that Christianity should not deny the Filipino spirit-world categorically. Instead, it should endeavor to inculturate the Filipino spirit-world beliefs and practices within the bounds of sound biblical principles. The study advocates that Christianity should provide Filipinos with Christian spirit-world teachings and an alternative healing ritual. The teachings should emphasize the existence of the spirit-world, the immanence-transcendence of god, the Christus Victor motif, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Filipinized healing ritual should use symbols, such as coconut oil and laying on of hands, to dramatize the sovereignty and power of God over the spirits and human lives.