

TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE:  
A BIBLICAL CRITIQUE OF THE THEOLOGY OF FILIPINO FOLK CATHOLICISM

By

Aaron Joshua V. Caparros

A Capstone Project Presented to the Faculty of the

CEBU GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Theology - Major in Pastoral Ministry

Mandaue City, Cebu, Philippines

May 2022

## TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE:

### A BIBLICAL CRITIQUE OF THE THEOLOGY OF FILIPINO FOLK CATHOLICISM

#### **I. Introduction**

Why do millions of Filipino Catholics flock to Cebu and celebrate the feast of *Santo Niño*? Why do hundreds of devotees endure long lines in the *Basílica* to touch the image of the Holy Child? Why do millions gather in the feast of *Hesus Nazareno* and dive through a sea of humanity to wipe the image with their handkerchiefs or towels? Why do they venerate Mary and the saints to such a high degree that their images receive godlike adoration and reverence? Why does Catholicism in the Philippines look different and quite bizarre to some who observe from the outside?

The uniqueness of Filipino Catholicism is due to the syncretism of ancient Filipino animism and medieval Hispanic Catholicism, commonly known as “Filipino Folk Catholicism.” My endeavor in this capstone project is to explore the theology of Filipino Folk Catholicism and evaluate its theology through the lens of Scripture. I’m using the term “theology” not in its broad sense, but in its narrow definition of theology proper or the study of God. Thus, my paper is a survey and a critique of the view of God, including other deified beings, in Filipino Folk

Catholicism. Furthermore, this study will have a special emphasis on divine transcendence and immanence, which are related Christian doctrines concerning God's relationship with creation. Reformed theologian John Frame explains that "while God is exalted in his royal dignity and exercises both control and authority in his creation (transcendence), he is, by virtue of this control and authority, very present to his creation, especially his people, in a personal and intimate way (immanence)" (Frame 2022). I am aware that there are other doctrines relevant to the topic, but I will focus on transcendence and immanence since they are prominent themes in the interplay of Filipino animism and Spanish Catholicism.

## **II. The Animism of Pre-Hispanic Philippines**

The spirit-world of pre-Hispanic Philippines is vast and complex. Gods and goddesses were revered in the different *barangay* kingdoms scattered all throughout the archipelago. They had a variety of names, ranks, domains, attributes, behavior, and functions, reflecting the multiplicity of ethnicities, cultures, and languages in the Philippines. Aside from polytheism (the worship of more than one god), indigenous Filipinos also engaged in animism, which is derived from *anima*, the Latin word for spirit or soul (E.J. Sharpe, "Animism," in *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*). Animists believed that spirits resided not only in humans but also in rocks, trees, animals, rivers, mountains, and absolutely all things. Everything was alive in an animistic world (Hislop 1971, 148). Native Filipinos were convinced that they were massively outnumbered by the legion of deities and spirits both good and bad in the visible and invisible realms (Scott 1994, 78). In addition to polytheistic animism, indigenous Filipinos were also exposed to other major

world religions. Traders and migrants from India and China spontaneously brought elements of Hinduism and Buddhism around the ninth to tenth century (Macaranas 2021, 3). Malay traders and settlers brought Islam and they formed Muslim communities in the southern islands in the thirteenth century (Reyes 1985, 203).

The polytheistic animism of the Filipinos was organized into a well-structured system. A supreme deity sits on top of the Philippine pantheon, but he was hypertranscendent and inaccessible to mortals. In order to bridge the gap, the supreme god utilized the services of the *anitos*, which included both subordinate deities and ancestral spirits (Guillermo and Win 2005, 132). Because of the remoteness of the supreme deity and the nearness of the *anitos*, the worship of the people was not god-centered but *anito*-centered (Blumentritt 1895, 19). Thus, Isabelo De Los Reyes proposed that the original religion of the Filipinos was *anitismo* or the cult of the *anito* (De Los Reyes 1909, 11).

I asked contemporary practitioners of the ancient tradition if they find the Filipino-Hispanic *anitismo* (or its anglicized form, anitism) appropriate to describe their beliefs and practices. A priest from the Higaunon tribe, known as a *babaylan* in Bisaya or a *katalonan* in Tagalog, replied that there is no exact term for the general belief or the *kinaraan* (old ways) because the Philippines is made up of different islands, cultures and traditions. One may be comfortable with a term while another might not. He stated his openness to any term as long as it is reasonable and meaningful. He sees nothing wrong with *anitismo* or anitism, but the term he uses is *diwataan*, which comes from the word *diwata*—the equivalent of *anito* in the Visayas and

Mindanao. Since a consensus has not yet been made, I will use the terms *anitismo*, anitism or *diwataan* interchangeably.

The framework of *anitismo* or *diwataan* is built upon two axioms: the transcendence of *Bathala* and the immanence of the *anitos*. Each axiom is essential to understand the essence of ancient Filipino animism and its transposability to Roman Catholicism.

## **A. Transcendent *Bathala***

### **1. The Semi-monotheistic Belief**

*Bathala* was the supreme deity of the Tagalogs. His name was “apparently derived from the Sanskrit *bhattara* (noble lord)” (Scott 1994, 234). Attached to *Bathala*’s name was the description “*maykapal*,” which is a short hand for “*maykapal sa lahat*” or “maker of everything.” *Bathala Maykapal* dwelt in “the highest realm of the eternal space called *kawalhatian* or sky” (Jocano 1968, 170). Because *Bathala* was unreachable, the people offered sacrifices to the *anitos* who ministered to them. Conquistador Miguel De Loarca wrote:

When the natives were asked why the sacrifices were offered to the *anito*, and not to the *Batala* [*Bathala*], they answered that the *Batala* was a great lord, and no one could speak to him. He lived in the sky; but the *anito*, who was of such a nature that he came down here to talk with men, was to the *Batala* as a minister, and interceded for them. (De Loarca 1582, 253)

Different regions had their own version of a supreme god: *Malayari* to the Zambals, *Apo* to the Benguetanos, *Kabunian* to the Ifugaos, *Lumawig* to the Bontoks (Jocano 1968, 169-179), *Magindusa* to the Tagbanwas of central Palawan, *Mahal na Makakaako* to the Mangyans of Mindoro, *Gugurang* to the Bikolanos, *Laon or Malaon* to the Bisayans in the west, *Abba* to the Limasawans, *Mele* to the Bilaans, *Pamulak Manobo* or *Mandarangan* for the Bagobos of Mindanao, and *Magbabaya* to the Bukidnons, Mamanwas, Subanons and the Manobos (Sitoy 1985, 12-13). Some regions had co-equal supreme deities instead of one. For the Sulods, *Tungkung Langit* was their most powerful male god while *Alunsina* was the female counterpart (Jocano 1968, 178). For other Bisayans, *Kaptan* created the first man and woman out of a reed. He ruled the skyworld with *Maguayen*, a co-eternal goddess (De Loarca 1582, 214).

## **2. Objections to the Semi-monotheistic Framework**

Some have raised doubts on whether the indigenous Filipinos truly believed in a supreme god. They proposed that the theology of Filipinos was a polytheistic kaleidoscope rather than an organized system closely resembling monotheism. The difficulty in studying pre-Hispanic Philippines is that almost all primary sources come from the perspective of Spanish chroniclers. Although literacy was widespread, indigenous beliefs and practices were usually preserved and passed down through oral traditions, poems and songs. If religious scriptures and writings existed, they were all systematically destroyed by the Spaniards (Churchill 1977, 33-35).

The confusion between a polytheistic and a semi-monotheistic framework is probably because of the predisposition of Spanish Catholics to “find concepts in other religions which were normative in their own” (Scott 1994, 233). Another possibility is the influence of Islamic monotheism. Moreover, contemporary practitioners of ethnic religions like those in the mountain provinces have exalted one of their deities to the highest rank possibly to parallel Christian or Islamic theology (Hislop 1971, 152). The *Boxer Codex* has a brief account on *Bathala*, but even though it is an early document (c. 1590), the description seemed to be heavily colored by Christian or Islamic thought:

They said that this god of theirs was in the air before there was heaven or earth or anything else, that he was *ab eterno* (from eternity) and not made or created by anybody from anything, and that he alone made and created all that we have mentioned simply by his own volition because he wanted to make something so beautiful as the heaven and earth, and that he made and created one man and one woman out of the earth, from whom have come and descended all the men and their generations that are in the world. (Souza and Turley 2016, 336)

While Christian or Islamic beliefs may have influenced the documentation of ancient views, there are evidences, however, that the supreme god framework is common among animistic cultures. In fact, “[m]ore than two-thirds of tribal religions believe in a creator God, sometimes seen as male, sometimes female, and sometimes as combining both genders” (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 1999, 51). *Yu-huang-shang-ti* is the lord of heaven in China. *Hananim* is the chief god of Korea. *Engai* is the high god of the Masai in sub-Saharan Africa. Much like *Bathala*, the supreme god of other nations was usually not worshipped directly. He was far removed from humanity and has left the concerns of this world to lesser

gods, spirits and humans (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 1999, 51-53, 60). By looking at the remarkable similarities found in other animistic religions around the world, there is a high probability that the Spaniards accurately recorded the semi-monotheistic system of the Filipinos.

## **B. Immanent *Anitos* or *Diwatas***

The word *anito* was predominantly used in Luzon. It is of Malay origin and it meant “ancestral spirit.” The term’s semantics gradually expanded and it was also used to refer to spirits (Hislop 1971, 144) and deities in general (Scott 1994, 234). *Diwata* is the parallel of *anito* in the Visayas and Mindanao. It comes from *devata*, a Sanskrit word for divinity or divine beings (Churchill 1977, 37). Some of the *anitos* or *diwatas* are “the great beings who inspire the phenomena of nature, while others are guardian spirits, messenger spirits, or mischievous tricksters” (Beyer 2014, 24).

## **3. Nature Gods**

The supreme god had numerous secondary deities or nature gods assisting him in maintaining the order and balance of creation. Some of the gods under *Bathala* were *Dumangan*, the god of good harvest; *Amanikabli*, the god of the sea; and *Mayari*, the goddess of the moon, whose sisters were *Hana*, goddess of the morning, and *Tala*, goddess of the stars. Submitting to *Malayari*’s rule were *Akasi*, the god of health and sickness; *Mangalabar*, the god of good grace; and *Aniton Tawo*, the god of wind and rain. Serving Kaptan were *Makliumsatwan*, the god of the



plains and valleys; *Maklium-sa-bagidan*, the god of fire; and *Sarangan-sa-bagtiw*, the god of storms (Jocano 1968, 169-179). The other gods were *Idiyanale*, the god of agriculture; *Balangaw*, the god of the rainbow; *Diyon Masalanta*, the god of love; *Sidapa*, the god of death; and *Siginarugan*, the god of hell (Agoncillo 1990, 46). Similar to the Greek and the Roman gods, the Filipino deities were not purely spiritual beings as they would oftentimes take a human or animal form. They also have anthropomorphic passions and weaknesses. When provoked or angered, they were appeased only through sacrificial offerings (Fernandez 1979, 3).

#### **4. Ancestral Spirits**

Although a supreme god ruled over the universe and a myriad of nature gods filled the skyworld, earthworld, and underworld, the ancestral spirits were the main objects of worship. The souls of the dead were specifically called by the Bisayans as *umalagad*, which comes from *alagad*, a follower or assistant (Scott 1994, 80). They were “generally parents or grandparents, but occasionally a popular hero known for his bravery, ferocity, and active love life” (Scott 1994, 80). Because of the animists’ need for daily success and survival, the venerated spirits received “not only formal worship by priests and priestesses, but domestic offerings and routinary acts of reverence on the part of laymen” (Scott 1994, 81).

## 5. Idols and Worship

Every single household and community had idols called *likha* or *larawan* by Tagalogs and *tao-tao*, *bata-bata* or also *larawan* by Bisayans. Some idols were made of wood and “large enough to be adorned by gold chains or have actual food placed in their mouth” (Scott 1994, 236). Smaller idols were made of stone, clay, shell, or gold. Others were not necessarily sculptured into an image but may either be a tooth of a crocodile, a tusk of a boar, or an unusual stone (Scott 1994, 236). These idols were “given divine attributes and were believed to function as real divinities” (Jocano 1975, 229).

Religious ceremonies and sacrifices were led by a *babaylan* or *katalona*. The places of worship were not in temples for the ancients had none. Instead, they worshipped “in caves, in forests, inside the houses of the chiefs and in many other places” (Jocano 1975, 228). While *anito* referred to an idol, spirit, or deity for the Tagalogs, *anito* was the actual act of worship for the Bisayans. *Paganitohan* (*pinagaanitohan* in Tagalog) was the object of worship (i.e., the idol, *diwata*, or *umalagad*). *Paganito* (*naga-anito* in Tagalog) was the act of sacrifice (Scott 1994, 80, 236).

Filipino animists believe that relics and rituals could appease or manipulate the gods and spirits. They offered food, gifts, prayers and sacrifices for the following reasons: “(1) to prevent and cure diseases; (2) to insure safety in voyages; (3) to achieve a good harvest; (4) to attain success in raids and wars; (5) to have a happy and prosperous married life; (6) to insure the

safety of the mother and the child during childbirth; and (7) to acquire protective powers against witchcraft and other sources of evil” (Jocano 1975, 226). Attention and adoration were given to both the good and bad supernatural beings. The benevolent ones were summoned in order to obtain a good fortune, and the terrifying ones were petitioned so as to avoid a curse of sickness, harm, poverty, or even death (Potet 2017, 164).

The framework of the transcendent *Bathala* and immanent *anitos* encapsulates the spiritual dynamics in ancient Filipino animism. It also fostered the convenient fusion of Filipino animism with Spanish Catholicism.

### **III. The Syncretism of Animism and Catholicism**

When the Spaniards “discovered” the Philippines in the sixteenth century, they introduced and indoctrinated the people with Roman Catholicism. Their efforts of conversion were systematic and comprehensive. They sent missionaries and church orders who taught Catholicism through catechisms, sermons, and recitation of prayers and doctrines. They administered the sacraments of baptism, eucharist, confirmation, confession, matrimony, anointing of the sick, and ordination. They established an archdiocese; built churches, seminaries, schools, and hospitals; and organized feasts, fasts, and processions (Schumacher 1979, 39-92). After more than three centuries of conquest, colonization and conversion, the Spanish Catholics successfully drove out *anitismo* or *diwataan* to the remotest mountains and regions of the Philippines, or so they thought. Despite all their triumphs, *anitismo* survived and

evolved within the church as Filipino Folk Catholicism, a convergence of east and west, ancient and medieval, native and colonial.

Filipino Folk Catholicism continues to thrive to this day. Fr. Vitaliano Gorospe observed that “especially in the rural areas, we find merely the external trappings of Catholic belief and practice superimposed on the original pattern of pre-Christian superstitions and rituals” (Gorospe 1966, 37). Fr. Jaime Bulatao calls the syncretism “split-level Christianity” since Filipino Catholics have “two theological systems side by side, the Christian and the pagan, existing within one man” (Bulatao 1966, 7). Even the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines cannot deny the existence of such syncretistic Catholicism as stated in the *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* (NCDP):

With the introduction of “Hispanic Christianity” by the early Spanish missionaries into an already existing indigenous belief system, the beginning of what is called today “folk” or “popular Catholicism” was initiated ... this popular religiosity still remains strong [among Filipino Catholics]. (NCDP 1984, 36)

The transposable concepts within both systems made it possible for *diwataan* and Catholicism to co-exist with each other. The indigenous understanding of *Bathala* and the *anitos* were replaced with relative ease by the Spanish Catholic teachings of the transcendence of *Dios* and the immanence of the *santos*. Aside from the parallel frameworks, similarities can be observed between the popular devotions of medieval Spanish Folk Catholicism and contemporary Filipino Folk Catholicism. Moreover, Filipino Folk Catholicism flourishes within

the current dissonance between the official teachings of the clergy and the popular piety of the laity.

### **A. Transcendent *Dios***

During the early periods of colonization and conversion, some Spanish missionaries have adopted the term *Bathala* in their preaching and baptism:

The natives of this island (Luzon) usually call him *Batala* [*Bathala*], and even consider him God of all creation. Accordingly, after the religious came to this land and commenced to preach the faith of Jesus Christ, and to baptize, the natives have not known how to give any other name in their language to God our Lord, except that of *Batala*. (Anon 1572, 271)

The Filipino *Bathala* was eventually replaced by the Spanish *Dios*. However, even the *babaylans* who have long resisted Catholicism and fled to the remotest parts of the Philippines, “have been generally willing to recognize the name [i.e., *Bathala*] as not objectionable in substitution for *Dios*” (Bowring 1859, 158). It is not hard to understand how *Bathala* was seen as interchangeable with *Dios*. Both were recognized as the supreme deity and the maker of everything. Both resided in the highest heavens. Both seemed to be unapproachable. As Anthropologist Charles MacDonald elaborated:

The Tagal had a concept of a supreme God creator of the world (*Bathala*) who could be petitioned only through intermediaries, lesser gods and spirits (*anito*) or ancestors who were worshipped in the form of idols. This system indeed is similar in structure to the Supreme God surrounded by the saints,

angels, and archangels, and organized into a pantheon of lesser divinities, some being separately worshipped as in the cult of patron saints. (MacDonald 2004, 84)

Even if the semi-monotheistic framework is rejected, Filipino Folk Catholicism still stands because of the different emphases of animism and Catholicism. The backbone of animism is not the high theological issues like God's existence, nature, attributes, and works, but the practical aspects of everyday living (Henry 1986, 10). Thus, in the process of syncretism, the high theology of Roman catholicism became the superimposed structure while the practical theology of pre-Hispanic *anitismo* continued to be the underlying or indigenous structure (Sala-Boza 2008, 284-285). Missionary Rodney Henry observed that animism and Catholicism "can coexist quite nicely together as long as each is fulfilling its separate functions. Roman Catholicism is the religion of ultimate concerns, while animism is the religion of everyday concerns" (Henry 1986, 14). God is recognized as supreme in the minds of Filipino Folk Catholics, but "in practice, especially in one's daily affairs, God appears to be of little importance. He is too remote to be involved" (Almocera 2005, 84). He "remained distant, high as the sky, as seen in the absence of representation for God the Father in Catholic churches" (Maggay 1999, 15).

## **B. Immanent *Santos***

Since animistic paganism was more concerned with survival than salvation, the ancestral *anitos* or *umalagads* became the center of ancient Filipino worship. They were the constant companions of the animists and they fulfilled the immediate needs and desires of the people for

good health, safety and prosperity. When the animist became Catholic, *Bathala* was exchanged with *Dios* and *anitos* were traded with *santos*. This “exchange” was acknowledged as a fact by the bishops of the Philippines in the *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* (NCDP) and the *Acts and Decrees of the 2nd Plenary Council of the Philippines* (PCP II):

Traces of veneration of dead ancestors—apparently a pre-Christian Filipino practice—can still be found today. Catholic devotion to the souls in purgatory, and the celebration of All Saints and All Souls Days, has tended to reinforce these beliefs at times. Perhaps the most characteristic aspect of Filipino popular religiosity... is devotion to saints. This fits in well with the Filipino’s natural attraction for the concrete as well as for mediators. (NCDP 1984, 40)

We look at our expressions of popular piety and the strong residues of pre-Spanish religion in them—superstitious they often are: sacraments becoming *anting-antings*, saints taking over the place of *anitos*, the Supreme Deity approachable only through lesser intermediaries. Aberrations there are in plenty and they must be recognized as such, they must be corrected. (PCP II 12)

Practitioners of Folk Catholicism believe that direct prayers and offerings to *Dios* are not as effective as when they are channeled through the saints. Therefore, the invocation and veneration of the saints provided greater odds of securing blessings, favorable fortunes and answered prayers. As Anthropologist F. Landa Jocano wrote:

The ability to establish a relationship with God acquires added and favorable dimensions if prayers are first addressed to intermediaries than directly to the Almighty. This implies a belief that God is too removed from worldly affairs to take any specific interest in men but saints are “almost human,” they are close to the world. To God “only saints” can speak better. A person may pray to the Almighty directly but his chances of getting what he wants are slim. (Jocano 2019, 77)

Folk Catholicism unintentionally developed its own kind of polytheism with a “well-developed angelology, demonology, and cult of the saints” (MacDonald 2004, 79). The saints, especially in many rural settings, are not primarily regarded as “models of holiness” but as “spirits who are asked to grant favors, to refrain from inflicting harm or remove the harm they had inflicted. Interest in the powers of the spirits spills over to what the saints are capable of doing” (De Mesa 2011, 60). Like the *diwatas*, the *santos* “can be manipulated for personal and group ends. Coercion of saints into giving the devotees what they want are expressed in long novenas, said in church or at home, for a specified number of days, and in elaborate festivals” (Jocano 2019, 77). Excruciating acts of asceticism are also seen as effective ways of getting the attention and services of the saints (Go 1979, 190).

The images of the saints, including images of Jesus (i.e., *Santo Niño* or *Hesus Nazareno*), are believed to be endowed with special powers. By wiping or touching the idols of the *santos*, devotees believe that they will obtain “a *bisa* or efficacy to cure sicknesses and ward off evil spirits” (Del Castillo 2015, 42). Stories of miracles have been ascribed to the idols reminiscent of the *likhas* of the *anitos* or the *tao-taos* of the *diwatas* (Rodell 2002, 31). The relics of the saints are likewise perceived as powerful objects like the *agimat* or *anting-anting*, which is an amulet or talisman that warded off evil forces, offered protection from misfortunes, and effectuated success and victory (Guillermo and Win 2005, 36-37). Fr. Jose Francisco Syquia, an exorcist of the Archdiocese of Manila, asserted the miraculous efficacies of the relics. He said, “We need to keep these blessed objects such as the ancient relics, the relics of the Saints, because the more you have blessed objects the more you are protected” (Syquia 2006, 116).



### **C. The Similarities Between the Folk Catholic Devotions of Medieval Spain and Contemporary Philippines**

Folk Catholicism was prevalent during the middle ages. Some examples of folk beliefs and practices were “the growth in popular forms of devotion to Our Lady and the Saints: pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and to the tombs of the Apostles and martyrs, veneration of relics, litanies, and suffrage for the dead; the considerable development of the rites of blessing [e.g., holy water blessing] which, together with Christian elements, also reflected a certain response to a naturalistic sensibility as well to popular pre-Christian beliefs and practices” (Congregation for Divine Worship 2001).

Spanish Protestants attempted to reform Spain by championing the Five Solas of the Reformation and denouncing many Roman Catholic teachings, institutions and practices. Some of the popular beliefs and practices they condemned were the veneration and adoration of “relics, crucifixes and statues of the Virgin and of those called saints... The existence of purgatory... with its concomitant indulgences and prayers for the dead” (Kinder 1994, 77). Sadly, the Spanish Catholic Church brutally opposed the Protestants. The documents of the Spanish inquisition reveal Spain’s “savage treatment of the merest hint of Protestantism... This was backed up by a concerted effort to convince people by all possible means, fair and foul, that a Spaniard is naturally a Roman Catholic” (Kinder 1992, 68). Thousands of Protestants were accused and suffered long periods of imprisonment. They would “finally to appear in *autos da fe* and then suffer various punishments: being burnt alive, strangled and burnt, sent to the galleys, flogged

through the streets, having goods confiscated, wearing *san benitos*, and abjuring vehemently or mildly. The absent and dead were not exempt, being tried in their absence and burnt in effigy” (Kinder 1992, 67). The Spaniards’ extreme intolerance hindered the biblical reformation of their beliefs and practices. One major reason behind Spain’s militancy was because of its history. Spain was conquered by the Muslims for nearly eight hundred years. It took a tremendous amount of crusading zeal to completely drive out the Muslim overlords in the Iberian peninsula in the fifteenth century (Schumacher 1979, 1). So when the Spanish missionaries came to the Philippines, they exported the most militant form of Catholicism and “shared with their converts their own brand of Spanish peasant folk Catholicism” (MacDonald 2004, 79). Therefore, in many ways, the unreformed beliefs and practices of Spanish Folk Catholicism “were not so different from those of the people they were indoctrinating in the new faith” (MacDonald 2004, 79).

While the majority of Spanish Catholics eventually grew out of the excesses, millions of Filipino Catholics from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century remained faithful to the beliefs and practices of medieval Spanish Catholicism—a brand of Catholicism that’s conducive to animistic amalgamation. Some traditions and customs that are considered today as excessive were actually common expressions of medieval Folk Catholicism. As Benedictine Monk Anscar Chupungco explains:

Although several countries in Europe and Latin America can claim to be the centers of popular religiosity, the Philippines as a former colony of Spain shares and preserves faithfully, in modified form, much of its colonizers’

religious traditions. ... the Filipino religious culture as we know it today began with the coming of the first Spanish missionaries. (Chupungco 1992, 103)

One account by a Spanish chronicler clearly illustrates the impact of Spanish Folk Catholicism on Filipino popular piety:

They scourge themselves and ask that others scourge them. And some have themselves hang on a cross, others put great weights on their necks, other drag weights from a halter as if they were breasts, since they consider themselves such for having offended God. Others... keep their arms extended in the form of a cross for such a long time as to cause wonder. The sighings and groaning with which they do all these things are many and deep, lamenting that they have offended the Divine Majesty. And to conclude this in a word, whoever should enter into the towns of these faithful in the time of Lent and in particular during all of Holy Week, would think rather that he is entering into a monastery of religious of great penance rather than into towns or houses of ordinary lay people. (Schumacher 1979, 85)

Some of the gory rituals mentioned above are still practiced by devotees up to this day, but Catholic leaders have changed their views. These rituals are now considered as distortions of Catholic teachings of love and sacrifice. However, Archbishop Paciano Aniceto conceded that the church could not stop the rituals involving the flagellations and crucifixions of the penitents because they've become embedded in the popular piety of the Filipino people (Cabrera 2013).

#### **D. The Gap Between Official Teachings and Popular Piety**

I acknowledge that the gap between official teachings and popular devotions is not only a problem in Filipino Catholicism but also in other religions in the Philippines. The focus of this

paper, however, is Roman Catholicism, the biggest religion in the Philippines, accounting for 80 percent of the total population (Philippine Statistics Authority 2017). I interviewed Fr. Steban Savary, a French priest who is currently serving in Cebu (Savary 2019). He observed that Catholicism in France is more on the intellectual side while Catholicism in the Philippines is more on the affectional. He admires the devotion of the Filipinos but admits that sometimes their expressions can get excessive. Although Filipino Catholics are well-intentioned, he recognized that much work still needs to be done for Filipinos to be well-educated with the catechism and for Filipino priests to receive ample teaching and instruction.

The official teachings of the Catholic Church condemn the theology of *anitismo* or *diwataan*, specifically in regards to polytheism, idolatry, superstition, divination, and magic (CCC 2112-2117; cf. CFC 887-888). Filipino bishops see the dangers of anitism and lament the immature faith of most Filipinos. The *Acts and Decrees of the 2nd Plenary Council of the Philippines* states:

For most of our people today the faith is centered on the practice of rites of popular piety. Not on the Word of God, doctrines, sacramental worship (beyond baptism and matrimony). Not on community. Not on building up our world unto the image of the Kingdom. And we say it is because the “unchurched,” the vast majority of our people, greatly lack knowledge of and formation in the faith. (PCP II 13)

The *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (CFC) admits the problems of Filipino Folk Catholicism, but it does not advocate for a complete eradication (cf. CFC 116-118, 1765). In fact, it celebrates the greatest asset of Filipino Folk Catholicism, which is the consistent cultivation of

a “strong sense of personal belonging, of self-identity and security” (CFC 1362). Historian Resil Mojares reflects the sentiments of CFC when he wrote:

Church authorities have expressed concern about the dangers in popular devotions, that they divert the attention from what is important, the liturgy; that they can degenerate into superstition and idolatry; that they encourage subjectivism and sensationalism; that they can be abused for non-religious and other purposes. Yet, the fact also remains that popular devotions have been a major vehicle for the spread of Catholicism in the country, and the medium through which religion has been effectively incarnated in the lives of communities. (Mojares 2017, 101)

On one hand, the leaders of the Filipino Catholic Church warn of the dangers of Folk Catholicism in their official teachings, but on the other hand, they tolerate its errors in their local ministries. “Rarely do these two ‘traditions’ [i.e., indigenous and Catholic systems] come into open conflict,” says Dr. Fe Susan Go, “and rarely do Catholic Filipino priests point out or directly oppose the contradictions existing in the religious practices of their practitioners” (Go 1979, 188). The Catholic church regularly exercises “a degree of leniency with regard to the propagation of a ‘uniquely Filipino’ Catholicism” (Bautista 2010, 146), knowing that Vatican II encourages adaptation (cf. *Ad Gentes* 22) and the Second Plenary Council promotes a faith that’s “inculturated instead of westernized” (Fabella 1999, 125). When Pope Paul IV visited Manila, he declared that “the man of Asia can be a Catholic and remain fully Asian. ... if the Church must above all be Catholic, a pluralism is legitimate and even desirable in the manner of professing one common faith in the one same Jesus Christ” (Pope Paul VI 1970). Because Filipino Folk Catholicism enhances the mystical experiences of the Filipinos, displays the inculturated faith of the community, and advances the growth and preservation of the Catholic religion, the clergy

will remain reluctant to confront with any zeal or earnestness the syncretistic beliefs and practices of the devotees. They will continue to acquiesce under the pressures of deep-seated traditions and pragmatic agendas. In light of all the factors involved in Filipino Folk Catholicism, the gap between the official and the popular will remain high and wide.

#### **IV. A Biblical Critique of the Theology of Filipino Folk Catholicism**

After surveying the background and theology of Filipino Folk Catholicism, a biblical critique is necessary to avoid the erroneous views of God and unauthorized forms of worship. I uphold the conviction of *Sola Scriptura* based upon the authority, sufficiency, clarity, and necessity of Scripture. The Bible is the absolute standard by which all beliefs, customs and traditions must be examined. It is the special revelation of the one true God and it declares how His creatures must relate to Him (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Heb. 1:1-2; Ps. 19:7-9; Prov. 30:5; John 17:17). For the critique to be genuinely biblical, I must start with the original intent of Scripture before I relate it to Filipino Folk Catholicism. The biblical critique must be built upon a thoroughly biblical foundation.

##### **A. A Brief Background on Acts and the Athenian Worldview**

I've chosen Acts 17:16-31 as my main text because it provides numerous biblical principles to confront and correct the theology of Filipino Folk Catholicism, most especially in the areas of transcendence and immanence. "The Acts of the Apostles" or "The Acts of the Holy

Spirit” was written by Luke around 62-65 A.D. It is the sequel to the Gospel of Luke, the “second volume in a history of Christian beginnings” (Carson and Moo 2005, 285). Acts recorded the founding events of the church through the Spirit-empowered lives and ministries of the apostles. Acts 1:8 lays out the major outline of the book as the apostles were the witnesses of Christ in Jerusalem (1:1-6:7), in Judea and Samaria (6:8-9:31), and to the uttermost part of the earth (9:32-28:31). The pericope is within the third major division of the book and it describes how Paul confronted the prevalent polytheism, paganism, and idolatry in Athens.

During Paul’s time, the city “was no longer a world superpower nor the hub of intellectual activity as it once was, but it did have a legacy from the glories of the past in its civic pride and its reputation for matters of philosophy and piety” (C. Gemf, “Athens, Paul At,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 1993 ed.). Athens was the “native city of Socrates and Plato, and the adopted home of Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno” (Bruce 1988, 329). Greek philosophies continue to be influential in Catholic theology. St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, two of the theological giants of Catholicism, integrated Greek philosophies into their theology. Augustine adopted Neoplatonism while Aquinas embraced Aristotelianism (Allison 2014, 52).

The ancient religion of the Greeks was excessively polytheistic. The Greek cosmos was filled with gods, ranging from Olympian gods, chthonic gods (associated with the earth, crops, and the underworld), and heroes (mythical figures or historical figures deified upon death). Their chief deity was the sky-god, Zeus, which is *Dios* in the genitive form. The other gods were Hades, the god of the underworld; Hermes, the messenger god; and Poseidon, the god of the sea.

The city of Athens was named in honor of Athena, the goddess of reason, wisdom and war. Generally speaking, the Greeks were “extremely open to new deities and cults, and often identified their own deities with some of the major foreign deities which they encountered” (D.E. Aune, “Religions, Greco-Roman,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 1993 ed.). If all the Greek divinities in all places and periods were counted, the total number would reach tens if not hundreds of thousands (Larson 2016, 23). In addition to polytheism, animistic elements can also be observed in the beliefs and practices of the Greeks (Koch 1973, 23).

## **B. The Indignation and Inclination towards Polytheism, Paganism and Idolatry**

### **1. Paul’s Indignation towards Polytheism, Paganism and Idolatry**

When Paul arrived in Athens, his spirit was “provoked,” which comes from the Greek word *παροξύνω* (*paroxuno*) and it meant that Paul’s spirit experienced an inward stimulation of anger (cf. Bauer 2000, 780). The reason behind Paul’s indignation was the pervasive idolatry in Athens. The city was “full of idols” dedicated to pagan gods and goddesses (Acts 17:16 LSB). Pausanias said that it was even “easier to meet a god or goddess on the main street of Athens than to meet a man. This was statistically true because the population was about 10,000 but there were 30,000 statues of gods” (Hughes 1996, 230). New Testament Scholar Craig Keener elaborates on what Paul would have seen in Athens:



As soon as one entered Athens one would encounter idols and temples of Demeter, Poseidon, and soon Dionysus, Athena, Zeus, and Apollo (Pausanias 1.2.4–5). Further along one encountered Hestia, Ares, Aphrodite, Hephaistos, the Disocuri, Serapis, and again Zeus, Apollo, and Dionysus (1.8.3–4; 1.14.6–7; 1.18.2–6; 1.19.1–2; 1.20.2–3); en route to the Acropolis, Asclepius, Themis, Gaia, and Demeter (1.21.4; 1.22.1-3). (Keener 2020, 428-429)

In Paul’s Judeo-Christian worldview, he knew without a doubt that polytheism and idolatry were direct attacks on the first two commandments of the Decalogue. Yahweh is the one true God. Therefore, no other “god” is worthy of worship (cf. Exod. 20:2). Making an idol of any likeness, even an idol representing Yahweh, was strictly prohibited (cf. Exod. 20:3; 32:1-35; Deut. 4:15-20; 17:2-7). An idol obscured Yahweh’s glory and conveyed false ideas about Him (Packer 1973, 45-47). The worship of idols reveals man’s suppression of truth, the futility of his thoughts, and the foolishness of his darkened heart for he has exchanged “the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the likeness of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures” (Rom. 1:23 LSB; cf. 1:18-25). That is why Paul made clear to the Athenians that it is wrong to suppose “that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the craft and thought of man” (Acts 17:29 LSB).

Idolatry is also demonic. Pagan worship and sacrifices are offered to demons, not “gods” (cf. 1 Cor. 10:20). Paul admonished the Corinthian believers to flee from idolatry (cf. 1 Cor. 10:20) and disassociate from anyone who professes to be a Christian but continues to practice idolatry (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-11). Those who have not yet “turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9 LSB) will not inherit the kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:18-21).

## 2. Filipino Folk Catholicism's Inclination towards Polytheism, Paganism and Idolatry

The Catholic Church insists that the veneration of the saints does not break God's commands against polytheism and idolatry (cf. CCC 2129-2132; CFC 892). They make a distinction between worship and veneration through the words *latria* and *dulia*. Aquinas explained that *latria* is the highest form of worship. It is reserved for God alone and never to be given to creatures. *Dulia*, on the other hand, is the veneration given to the saints and angels. Mary receives the highest degree of veneration called *hyperdulia* because she is honored as the Mother of God and the Mother of All the Saints in Catholicism (Aquinas 1911, 1633-1634; cf. CCC 971). The problem in Filipino Folk Catholicism is that the dividing line between *latria* and *dulia* is rarely observed by the devotees. Furthermore, a deeper problem arises when the distinctions of *latria* and *dulia* undergo Scriptural scrutiny. The root problem is not in popular piety but in the actual teachings of the Catholic church.

Exodus 20:5a says, "You shall not bow down to them [i.e., idols] or worship them" (NIV). The Hebrew word for "bow down" is שָׁחָה (*shachah*) and for "worship" is עָבַד (*avad*). The words שָׁחָה and עָבַד form a "figure of speech called hendiadys, where two expressions are used to convey a single idea, viz., 'to offer religious worship'" (Kaiser 1990, 423). Baptist apologist James White notes how the Septuagint's translation of *avad* dispels the supposed distinctions between *dulia* and *latria*:

When translators of the Greek Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) rendered *avad* into Greek, they did so by using a couple of different terms. Most important to our purposes here is the fact the both *dulia* and *latria*, in their verbal and substantival forms, are used to translate the one term *avad*. Clearly the Septuagint translators recognized the fact that *avad* meant *both* to worship and to serve, to give *latria* and to give *dulia*. When we come to the New Testament, we find that both terms are used with similar frequency in both their noun and verb forms. We also discover that there is absolutely no distinction made between them relevant to religious worship. (White 1996, 210-211)

While there are examples in the Bible of people showing honor and respect to others, God alone is worthy of both *latria* and *dulia* in all religious contexts. That's why Peter rebuked Cornelius when he bowed down to him (cf. Acts 10:25-26) and the angel likewise reprimanded John when he fell down before him (cf. Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). Worship belongs solely to God. Since the religious contexts in the Bible do not distinguish between *latria* and *dulia*, the subsequent acts of the veneration of the saints and angels, like touching, wiping, lighting candles, bowing down, and praying to their images, aren't excused as *dulia*, but are condemned by God's Word as polytheism and idolatry (cf. Exod. 20:3-6). Furthermore, God's holiness not only condemned the worship of false gods, but also the indulgence of any kind of unauthorized worship (cf. Lev. 10:1-2; 1 Sam. 13:8-14). Therefore, no one has the right to decide on his own how he'd like to worship God or venerate human beings regardless of how sincere his intentions may be. All forms of worship and veneration must conform to the standard that God has explicitly proclaimed in Scripture.

Hypertranscendence is the most noticeable distortion of Filipino Folk Catholicism as I will elaborate in the next point. However, it must be said at this juncture that Filipino Folk

Catholicism also diminishes God's transcendence by engaging in polytheism, paganism and idolatry. Baptist theologian Millard Erickson highlighted six implications of the doctrine of transcendence—two of which are relevant for Filipino Folk Catholicism: “There will always be a difference between God and humans” and “Reverence is appropriate in our relationship with God” (Erickson 2013, 289). Elevating saints into a godlike status obscures the infinite difference between God and humanity, and more importantly, it is irreverent towards God.

### **C. The Proclamation and Distortions of God's Transcendence and Immanence**

#### **1. Paul's Proclamation of God's Transcendence and Immanence**

Compelled by his convictions, Paul reasoned every day with the Jews in the synagogue, the God-fearing Gentiles, and everyone present in the marketplace (Acts 17:17). Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers conversed with him but they couldn't quite understand his new and strange message (Acts 17:18). Epicureans, followers of Epicurus (341-270 BC), had a theology similar to deism. They believed that the gods enjoyed unhindered happiness but were withdrawn and uninterested in the affairs of the world. On the other hand, Stoics, founded by Zeno (340-265 BC), acknowledged a “supreme god but in a pantheistic way, confusing him with the ‘world soul’” (Stott 1991, 280). The philosophers brought Paul to the Areopagus (Acts 17:19), the most important council in Athens since it had a wide range of authority in legal, political, educational, moral, and religious matters (Williams 1990, 303). They were intrigued by

Paul's strange teaching and wanted to learn its meaning (Acts 17:20). Learning something new was the favorite pastime in Athens (Acts 17:21).

Paul started his preaching by acknowledging the religiosity of the Athenians (Acts 17:22). He observed their fascination with numerous gods and goddesses, and the idols and temples dedicated to them. The Athenians even had an altar with the inscription, “Ἄγνωστον θεῶν” (“To the unknown god”). The practice of erecting altars for unknown gods was for safety precautions. Diogenes Laertius explained that “if the gods were not properly venerated they would strike the city. Hence, lest they inadvertently invoke the wrath of some god in their ignorance of him or her, the city set up these altars to unknown gods (Diogenes 1.110–13)” (C. Gemf, “Athens, Paul At,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 1993 ed.). Paul used the inscription as a launching pad to proclaim the God whom the Athenians were ignorant of (Acts 17:23).

Who is God? Paul presented seven important truths about God. First, God is the Almighty Creator of the Universe. He created “the world and all things in it” (Acts 17:24a LSB; cf. Gen. 1:1; Exod. 20:11; Isa. 42:5) Second, He is the Sovereign Lord of Heaven and Earth (Acts 17:24b; cf. Matt. 11:25; Deut. 10:14; Ps. 115:16). As Lord, God “does not dwell in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24c LSB; cf. 7:48; 1 Kings 8:27). Third, God is the Independent One. He is not “served by human hands, as though He needed anything” (Acts 17:25a LSB; cf. Ps. 50:8-12; 1 Chron. 29:14-16). Fourth, God is the True Source and Sustainer of Life. He is the One who provides and preserves “life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:25b LSB; cf. Job 33:4; Eccles. 12:7; James 1:17). Fifth, God is the Ultimate Ruler of the Nations. He created the first man who

became the ancestor of all peoples, tribes and nations (Acts 17:26a; cf. Gen. 2:7; 3:20). He also determined the “appointed times” of everyone and the “boundaries of their habitation” (Acts 17:26b LSB; cf. Deut. 32:8; Ps. 74:17). Sixth, God is the Ever-present Father of Humanity. Human beings are God’s offspring in the sense that every single man or woman is created in the image of God (cf. Acts 17:28b; Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1-3). God desires that people seek Him (cf. Acts 17:27a; cf. Ps. 14:2; Prov. 8:17; Isa. 55:6; Jer. 29:13). He is not far from anyone (cf. Acts 17:27b; Deut. 4:7; Ps. 145:18). In fact, people live, move, and exist in Him (Acts 17:28a; cf. Job 12:10). Seventh, God is the Final Judge of the World. Paul concluded his message with a final denunciation of idolatry and a call for repentance. Being image-bearers of God doesn’t give humanity the right to “return the favor” and create a god in their own image and imagination (cf. Acts 17:29).

Paul declared that God is both transcendent and immanent. God is infinitely set apart from creation as the Almighty Creator of the Universe, the Sovereign Lord of Heaven and Earth, the Independent One, and the Final Judge of the World. He, however, is not withdrawn nor indifferent to His creation. Dr. Frame explains that “God’s immanence is not some kind of opposite to God’s transcendence, some paradoxical negation of transcendence. Rather it is a necessary implication of his transcendence” (Frame 2022). Therefore, because God is supreme in control and authority, He is also infinitely involved in creation as the True Source and Sustainer of Life, the Ultimate Ruler of the Nations, and the Ever-present Father of Humanity. Scripture consistently affirms God’s transcendence (cf. Isa. 6:1-5; 55:8-9; Ps. 113:4) and immanence (cf. Jer. 23:23-24; Deut. 4:7; Ps. 145:18). There are even verses in the Bible where both

transcendence and immanence are located side by side (cf. Deut. 4:39; Isa. 57:15; Acts 17:24-28). Having an imbalanced view of God's transcendence and immanence will lead to a distorted theology. Hypertranscendence leads to deism while hyperimmanence leads to pantheism. Deism overstressed the importance of transcendence at the expense of immanence. It created an absentee god, withdrawn from and aloof to the world. Pantheism, on the other hand, swung the pendulum in the opposite direction. It stressed immanence to the extreme, erasing the distinction between God and the world by thinking that the whole universe is divine. It failed to recognize the Supreme Being who is "distinct from, and infinitely exalted above, His creation" (Berkhof 1941, 24). Paul's balanced presentation of God's transcendence and immanence corrected the deistic sentiments of the Epicureans and the pantheistic tendencies of the Stoics.

God had overlooked the times of ignorance in the past, but He is now "commanding men that everyone everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30 LSB; cf. 14:16; Rom. 3:25). Paul was not implying that the Athenians were innocent, but that God's judgment was delayed (cf. Rom. 1:18-20; 2:4). The day of God's final judgment of the world has been set. God is now giving a worldwide call to repentance "because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He determined, having furnished proof to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31 LSB). God's judgment will surely come to pass. The standard is righteousness and the means is a Man. Who is this Man? It is none other than the Risen Christ. By using the term "Man," Paul was probably not alluding to Jesus' humanity, but emphasizing

Jesus' title as the "Son of Man" whom the Father has given authority to execute judgment on everyone (cf. John 5:27).

Jesus is the epitome of transcendence and immanence. He is the perfect representation of God (cf. Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3; John 14:9) because He Himself is God (cf. John 1:1-3; 10:30; Col. 1:19). Though He had equality with the Father and the Spirit, Jesus willingly humbled Himself in His incarnation (cf. John 1:14; Phil. 2:5-7). He entered the world as "Immanuel, which means God with us" (Matt. 1:23 ESV). As the God-man, Jesus is both transcendent and immanent. He lived a perfect life (cf. Heb. 4:15) in order to die on the cross as the perfect sacrifice (cf. Heb. 7:27; 9:27; John 19:30) and propitiation for our sins (cf. 1 John 4:9-10; Isa. 53:4-6). He died and rose again victorious over sin, Satan and death (cf. 1 Cor. 15:4-8; 54-56; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gen. 3:16; Heb. 2:14). The appropriate response to the good news of Christ's death and resurrection is repentance and faith, which are two sides of one coin. To repent means to willingly turn from sin and to believe means to wholeheartedly trust in Christ alone for one's salvation (cf. Mark 1:15; Luke 13:32; John 1:12; Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8-9).

Jesus ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father (cf. Heb. 1:1-3; Eph. 1:20-22). In His second advent, He will no longer come as a Suffering Servant, but as King and Judge (cf. Phil. 1:9-11; Matt. 24:30; Rev. 19:11-16). He, however, has not left His people as orphans (cf. John 14:16-18). Those who repent and believe in the gospel receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal. 3:2; Eph. 1:13). Through the Holy Spirit, God is not only with His people, but also in them (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19-20). The indwelling presence and ministry of the third



person of the trinity continue to powerfully declare God's transcendence and immanence in this present age.

## **2. Filipino Folk Catholicism's Distortions of God's Transcendence and Immanence**

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) affirms God's transcendence and immanence and explains the doctrines in a manner consistent with Scripture. God transcends creation, while at the same time, actively upholding and sustaining creation through His immanent presence (CCC 300-301; cf. CFC 315). In regards to these doctrines, Catholics and Evangelicals share a common ground. Despite the official teachings, however, there is an imbalanced and unbiblical view of transcendence and immanence in Filipino Folk Catholicism. Practitioners of Filipino Folk Catholicism do not deny God's transcendence. They acknowledge Him as their Supreme Deity and the Creator of all things, but He is viewed in similar ways to Bathalaism or deism. An overemphasis on transcendence leads to the notion that the Divine is unapproachable. God is far away, withdrawn from the affairs of the world, and apathetic to the lives of His creatures. Two tragic results of hypertranscendence are observed: (1) the need for multiple mediators (2) and the transactional or ritualistic relationship with God.

### **a. The Need for Multiple Mediators**

According to Catholic theologian Fr. Antoine Vergote, multiple mediators are valuable and necessary for Catholics:

God remains the mysterious unpredictable reality. Even Jesus Christ appears a bit too divine for men to experience a warm and personal relation with him. Mary (or another saint) is closer to the people, and yet she has a divine power and reality. Saints emerge from the human and they remain trusted persons with whom one can more personally relate. ... In order to approach [Jesus] as a “friend” or a “brother,” one would have to put him on the same footing as a folk saint, and this too familiar relation would dissipate belief in His divine greatness. (Vergote 1982, 17-18)

Fr. Vergote tried to safeguard God’s greatness but at the expense of God’s nearness. Describing God as “the mysterious unpredictable reality” and Jesus as “a bit too divine” diminish the very immanence of God (cf. Acts 17:25-28; Jer. 23:23-24; Deut. 4:7; Ps. 145:18) and the true humanity of Christ (cf. John 1:14; Rom. 1:3; 8:3; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:7-8; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 John 4:2-3). Fr. Vergote even describes the Pope as a visible mediator:

In catholicism, the Pope is the visible mediator with whom one can come in contact by seeing him, by hearing him, by receiving his blessing, even by touching him, or in picking up a flower strewn for him and upon which he has stepped. Why not? Intellectuals who sometimes look down their noses at this, go themselves to visit the museum/birthplace of a favorite author or an admired scholar. (Vergote 1982, 18)

Fr. Vergote articulates what most devotees feel and believe. God is too distant. To reach Him, they need the intercession of Mary, saints, and the Pope. Catholic leaders may denounce the excessive devotions to the saints (cf. CCC 2132; CFC 892), but have they honestly examined if their official teachings contribute to the problem? Could it be that the inappropriate devotions of the followers are rooted in the unbiblical teachings of the leaders? The Catholic dogma of the intercession of the saints (cf. CCC 956) does not originate in Scripture and has no biblical basis whatsoever. Nowhere in the Bible does it command believers to pray to the saints in heaven, nor does it teach that they can hear the prayers of the people. The big assumption in the Catholic

dogma is that the saints have godlike abilities to hear all the prayers of the billions of devotees around the world simultaneously, in different languages, and even those that are offered silently in people's hearts. It assumes that the saints know the intentions of peoples' hearts. On the contrary, the Bible declares that God alone knows the hearts and intentions of mankind (cf. 1 Kings 8:39; 1 Chron. 28:9; Acts 1:24; 1 Sam. 16:7; Jer. 17:10). Furthermore, 1 Timothy explicitly says that "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5 ESV; cf. Heb. 9:15; 12:24). Jesus perfectly qualifies as the one mediator between God and men because He is both truly God and truly man. The Bible also does not teach that the unique mediation of Christ is shared by Mary and the saints (cf. CFC 526). Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6 LSB). Mary and all the saints do not provide alternative routes to God. In fact, contacting the dead is explicitly forbidden by Scripture (cf. Deut. 18:10–11). The only way to the Father is through Jesus. The author of Hebrews powerfully declares that Jesus is the Great High Priest:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us take hold of our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things like we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:14-16 LSB; cf. 2:17-18)

Christ sympathizes with human weaknesses. He understands what it's like to go through trials and temptations. He is willing and able to help for He alone is victorious over sin and temptation. Jesus is "at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" (Rom. 8:34 ESV; cf. Heb. 7:25). The Holy Spirit is likewise interceding for believers (cf. Rom. 8:26-27) since He is "another Helper, to be with you forever" (John 14:16 ESV; cf. John 15:26; 16:7). The

author of Hebrews doesn't call for believers to go to the saints in order to draw near to God. Through Christ, believers are exhorted to draw near with confidence to the throne of God's grace to "receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16 ESV; cf. Heb. 10:19; Eph. 3:12). It is clear that the Bible does not present the Triune God in hypertranscendence. Each person in the trinity is equally and harmoniously transcendent and immanent. Therefore, the Catholic teachings on the heavenly intercession of Mary and the saints are not only unnecessary, but more importantly, they are unbiblical.

### **b. The Transactional or Ritualistic Relationship with God**

The relationship between God and the Filipino Catholic is largely defined as transactional or ritualistic rather than relational and personal. In July 2002, a controversy shook "the very foundations of Cebuano belief" (Vanzi 2002). The Catholic Archdiocese of Cebu announced that the image of the Lady of Guadalupe replaced San Vidal as the official patron of Cebu. Very few Cebuanos know that San Vidal was the former patron of Cebu. The popular belief even today honors *Santo Niño* as the patron saint of the Queen City of the South. Thus, *Santo Niño* is unconsciously demoted in the minds of the people from divinity to sainthood. People associate *Santo Niño* not so much as the second person of the trinity, but more like St. Baby Jesus. The confusion is because *Santo Niño* has been historically held as the protector of Cebu and the central figure of the Catholic faith in the Philippines. Because of the popular belief in the sainthood of *Niño*, he is treated like an *anito* or *diwata*—an intercessor for the people. Therefore, *Santo Niño* can be manipulated in order to receive blessing, healing, prosperity, success, and

protection from harm or evil spirits. Dr. Jocano mentioned that *Santo Niño* is popularly held as some sort of rain-god, one who could be bribed or coerced into sending rain:

When there was a desperate need for water, and the fields were dry, the people asked for rain and were instantly given it, so the accounts went. Some other times when the rain was not prompt in arriving, the natives brought the image in a procession to the sea and dipped it, often telling the image that if it did not give them rain immediately, they would leave it there.

Normally, the *Sto. Niño* responded by giving the people rain. Because of this belief, the *Sto. Niño* in Panay, Capiz is always bathed in the river every year, amidst feasting and celebrating. The legend on how the *Sto. Niño* brought rain to the drought-stricken town and how the people threatened the image with drowning if it did not bring rain is often recounted by the old folks. As it happened, one informant said, “rain came when water reached the *Sto. Niño's* neckline.” (Jocano 2019, 81)

The folk practice of *panata* is another example of a transactional relationship. A *panata* is a devotee’s pledge or a vow offered to the Black Nazarene if he will grant either a material or spiritual favor. In a ritualistic or transactional relationship, God is perceived more as an impersonal force that can be manipulated rather than a Personal King who deserves utmost submission, loyalty, and worship whether He gives or takes away (cf. Job 1:21). Fr. Gorospe observes:

... some Filipino Catholics use God or religion as a means to their own personal satisfaction or ends, such as to gain social acceptance or prestige, to enhance their business or their political ambitions. ... Many Filipino Catholics make novenas to obtain favors from God. They feel that they have done something for God and expect Him in turn to reciprocate by granting their request. They feel that God is indebted to them and therefore if God does not answer their prayer, they sulk or make *tampo*. (Gorospe 1966, 27, 37)

Many devotees also have the split-level mentality of doing whatever they want in their everyday concerns as long as their obligations to the ultimate concerns like prayers and church attendance are fulfilled. After all, God is distant and uninvolved in their day-to-day existence. Reformed theologian Loraine Boettner describes Roman Catholicism as “largely a religion of ceremonials and rituals, and as such it is a far departure from the purity and simplicity of the Gospel” (Boettner 1962, 273). An intimate and personal relationship with God is a foreign concept to those who believe that God is far away and detached from everyday life. The Catholic Bishops of the Philippines desire to correct this problem:

... the startling growth of “*Born Again*” and *Fundamentalist groups* indicates a widespread yearning among Filipinos for a closer, more personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. *PCP II* does not hesitate to admit that the “Church has failed in many ways to satisfy the spiritual hunger of many of the faithful. This we must correct” (*PCP II 223*). (CFC 469)

## **V. Conclusion and Final Reflections**

This theological survey shows the tight intermeshing of ancient indigenous animism and medieval Hispanic Catholicism in Filipino Folk Catholicism. The two seemingly incompatible systems are fused through their transposable frameworks, parallel practices, and the fulfillment of different concerns for the Filipino people. This biblical critique, however, exposes not only a gap between the official teachings and popular beliefs, but also a gap between the official teachings and the Word of God. In one sense, Filipino Folk Catholicism belittles God’s transcendence by exalting the saints to a godlike status, and thereby, falling into the abyss of polytheism, paganism and idolatry. In another sense, Filipino Folk Catholicism overemphasizes

God's transcendence and diminishes His immanence through the framework of a transcendent *Dios* and immanent *santos*. Hypertranscendence makes multiple mediators an absolute necessity and ritualism or transactionalism a typical description of the devotees' relationship with God.

A biblically balanced view of God's transcendence and immanence is crucial to accurately understand who God truly is, how He relates to creation, and how His creation must relate to Him. Paul's preaching in Athens manifests the perfect harmony of God's transcendence and immanence. It also provided the necessary correction to the theological distortions in Filipino Folk Catholicism. The Triune God is both transcendent and immanent.

The desire of the Filipino bishops to correct the problems of Filipino Folk Catholicism is indeed commendable. However, the same problems will persist if the Word of God is not honored as the ultimate authority not only for the popular piety of the laity but also for the official teachings of the clergy. The call of the sixteenth-century Reformers for *Sola Scriptura* continues to be relevant in today's day and age. Unleashing the power of God's Word will cleanse the syncretistic beliefs and practices of the Filipino Catholic Church, eliminate the need for multiple mediators, and transform ritualism or transactionalism into a genuine, personal and intimate relationship with Father through the Son and the Spirit. Ultimately, the glory of God's transcendence and immanence will be increasingly evident and immensely magnified when His Word is wholeheartedly honored and obeyed.

## APPENDIX

### Is Mary another Mediator? A Critique of CFC 526

Under the heading “Mediatix,” paragraph 526 of the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (CFC) presented the Catholic position of Mary’s mediating role. The *Catechism*, however, fails to provide proof-texts for their view. Instead, paragraph 526 starts on a defensive tone, stating that “Mary’s intercession does not in any way detract from, or add to, *the unique mediation of Christ.*” Christ’s unique mediation is indeed biblical and the *Catechism* cited 1 Timothy 2:5-6 as a reference: “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the witness for this proper time” (1 Tim. 2:5-6 LSB). Citing the verses did not strengthen the Catholic position, but rather worked against it. How can Mary be another mediator when Scripture explicitly declares that Jesus is the one mediator between God and men? Catholic apologist Dr. Mark Miravalle explains that Paul used the Greek word εἷς (*heis*) not necessarily to mean “sole” or “only” for it may also be rendered as “one, first or primary” (Miravalle 1993, 26–27). The problem with Miravalle’s explanation is that Paul used the same word in his declaration, “... there is one [Gk. εἷς (*heis*)] God” (1 Tim. 2:5a LSB). Catholics certainly do not teach that God is the first or primary deity among other gods, so why should they accept the belief that Christ is the first and primary mediator amongst many others? The Bible never describes Mary as a mediator nor does it endorse Mary’s intercession. It is God the Son and God the Holy Spirit who intercede for believers (cf. Rom. 8:34; cf. Heb.



7:25; John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; Rom. 8:26-27). Evangelical theologian Gregg Allison said, “What is biblically affirmed, and thus of the greatest and surest comfort for Christians living today, is that both the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ intercede for them (Rom. 8:26–27, 34). The sufficiency of Scripture reminds Christians that what God has provided for them, the tandem intercession of the second and third persons of the Trinity, is the sufficient resource upon which they are to rely” (Allison 2014, 201-202).

Can Catholics use John 2:1-12 to prove Mary’s intercession? Didn’t Mary’s request prompt “the first of the ‘Signs’ of Jesus” (CFC 516)? When the wine ran out during the wedding at Cana, it was indeed Mary who brought the matter to her son. Jesus responded, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4 ESV). Even a casual reading of Jesus’ reply shows that Jesus is not obligated to comply or honor any requests. Jesus did honor Mary’s request in this situation, but does this now prove the doctrine of Marian intercession? Dr. Ernest Manges, professor of theology and church history, says that Catholics argue “that Mary will intercede for us by imploring her son to action in the same way she did for the wedding hosts... However, the text as it stands gives no indication that Mary serves as mediator or intercessor between all believers and her son. To assert that this passage teaches Marian intercession changes the focus of the story from Jesus to Mary. The natural reading here directs our attention not to the mother, but to the son” (Manges 2011, 28). Jesus’ first sign “manifested his glory,” which led Jesus’ disciples to believe in Him (John 2:11 ESV). Therefore, John 2:1-12 is not about Mary’s power over her Son but Jesus’ power over creation.

While Jesus honored His mother's request during the wedding celebration at Cana, Mark 3:31-25 (cf. Matt.12:46-50; Luke 8:19-21) is an example of how Jesus denied Mary's requests at times. Jesus' mother and His brothers came to where He was conducting His ministry. They stood outside and called for Jesus. Instead of going to His family and yielding to their summons, Jesus replied, "For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35 LSB). Jesus' absolute loyalty is the will of His Father. He never did anything contradictory to the Father's will (cf. John 4:34; 6:38). Jesus abides by a simple principle: honoring any request that's in accordance with His Father's will, but denying requests that go against His Father's will.

CFC 526 gives two analogies to prove Mary's mediating role. The first analogy is "God's continuing act of Creating, the one goodness of God is communicated diversely to all creatures." The Catechism is implying that assenting to Mary's mediation shouldn't be a problem for those who believe that God continues to communicate to all creatures in more ways than one. The Bible does affirm that God communicated "in many portions and in many ways" in the past but "in these last days spoke to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2 LSB). Christ is the full and final revelation of God. The priests and prophets of the Old Testament were types and shadows that ultimately pointed to Jesus (cf. Heb. 8:5-6). Moreover, the central focus of all things throughout the New Testament is Jesus, not Mary. The second analogy is that "the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by sacred ministers and by all the baptized." Indeed, New Testament believers are called into a universal "priesthood" to God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5), but Jesus alone is the Great High Priest (cf. Heb. 4:14; 2:17, 18; 10:21). God does call believers to "cooperate, in manifold human ways, in Christ's redemptive mission" (cf. Matt. 28:18-20) but He doesn't share

Christ's unique mediation with all (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5). God is holy and all of humanity are sinners. Even Mary acknowledged her need for saving grace when she called God her Savior (cf. Luke 1:47). Jesus is the sole mediator between God and men because of His unique person and work. Jesus alone is truly God and truly man and He alone died and rose again to reconcile mankind to God (cf. Col. 1:15-20). I agree that Mary had a "special cooperation due to her God-given role within His saving work through Christ and the Spirit." Mary had the privilege of being the earthly mother of Jesus, but where in the Bible does it say that Mary's cooperation made her a Mediatrix who works alongside the One Mediator? As Dr. Allison says:

With deep perplexity and unmitigated concern, evangelical theology laments and rejects the Catholic Church's invocation of Mary "under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix." Despite Catholic theology's denial that Mary's maternal role detracts from or minimizes the unique mediatorial role of Christ, evangelical theology insists otherwise. Through the Son of God's immaculate conception, sinlessness, perfect obedience of faith, passion, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, sending of the Holy Spirit to give birth to the church, baptism of Christians with the Spirit to incorporate them into his body, and union with them, Jesus Christ has accomplished salvation completely. Nothing more is or can be added to that which he did to perfectly save fallen human beings, and God has not designed salvation, which he could have done through his Son alone, to include the work of his Son's mother. (Allison 2014, 204-205)

Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6 LSB). Since Jesus is the only mediator that men and women need, the Catholic teaching of Mary's mediation is unnecessary and unbiblical. After considering all the unbiblical assumptions, how then can the *Catechism* seriously and honestly say that Mary's intercession does not detract or add to the unique mediation of the one mediator, Jesus Christ?

## REFERENCE LIST

- Agoncillo, Teodoro A. 1990. *History of the Filipino people*. Quezon City, Manila: C & E Publishing Inc.
- Almocera, Reuel A., E. Acoba, Lorenzo Bautista, George N. Capaque, Jose M. de Mesa, Timoteo D. Gener, Ed Lapid, Isabelo F. Magalit, Melba Padilla Maggay, Ernest Manges, Noli P. Mendoza, John R. Pesebre, Leo E. Rempola, Jean Uayan. 2005. *Doing theology in the Philippines*. Mandaluyong City, Metro Manila: OMF Literature Inc.
- Allison, Gregg R. 2014. *Roman Catholic theology and practice: an evangelical assessment*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway.
- Anon. 1572. Relation of the Conquest of the Island of Luzon. In *The Philippine islands, 1493-1803*, ed. Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, vol. 3. United States of America: Project Gutenberg. Ebook.
- Aune, David. E. "Religions, Greco-Roman." in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. 1993 ed.
- Aquinas, Saint Thomas. 1911. *The summa theologica: complete edition*. Translated by The Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 3. Allen, Texas: Christian Classics.
- Bauer, W., William F. Arndt, F. Wilber Gingrich, and F.W. Danker. 2000. *A Greek - English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*. Third edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bautista, Julius J. 2010. *Figuring Catholicism*. Quezon City, Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Berkhof, Louis. 1941. *Systematic theology*. Murrayfield Road, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust.
- Beyer, H. Otley. 2014. *Origin myths among the mountain peoples of the Philippines*. United States of America: Project Gutenberg. Ebook.
- Blumentritt, Fernando. 1895. *Diccionario mitologico de Filipinas*. Second edition. Madrid, Spain.

- Boettner, Loraine. 1962. *Roman Catholicism*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.
- Bowring, John. 1859. *A visit to the Philippine islands*. London: Smith, Elder and Co.
- Bruce, Frederick Fyvie. 1988. *The book of Acts*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Bulatao, Jaime. 1966. *Split-level Christianity*. Quezon City, Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Cabrera, Michaela. 2013. Devotees nailed to cross in Philippine folk Catholicism ritual. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-crucifixion-idUSBRE92S04K20130329> (accessed 7 March 2022).
- Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. 1984. *National catechetical directory for the Philippines*. Pasay City, Philippines: Daughters of St. Paul.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1997. *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*. Manila, Philippines: ECCCE Word & Life Publications.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. *Acts and decrees of the 2nd plenary council of the Philippines*. Pasay City, Philippines: Paulines Publishing House.
- Carson, D. A. and Douglas J. Moo. 2005. *An introduction to the New Testament*. Second edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.
- Chupungco, Anscar J. 1992. *Liturgical inculturation: sacramentals, religiosity, and catechesis*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press.
- Churchill, Malcolm H. 1977. Indian penetration of pre-Spanish Philippines: a new look at the evidence. *Asian Studies* 15 (April-August-December): 21-45.
- Commission of Cardinals and Bishops. 1994. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Manila, Philippines: CBCP/ECCCE Word & Life Publications.
- Congregation for Divine Worship. 2001. Directory on popular piety and the liturgy: principles and guidelines. [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccdds\\_doc\\_20020513\\_vers-direttorio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20020513_vers-direttorio_en.html) (accessed 1 March 2022).
- De Loarca, Miguel. 1582. Relacion de las yslas Filipinas. In *The Philippine islands, 1493-1803*, ed. Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, vol. 5. United States of America: Project Gutenberg. Ebook.

- De Los Reyes, Isabelo. 1909. *La religion antigua de los Filipinos*. Manila, Philippines.
- Del Castillo, Fides. 2015. Gospel-culture relationship of traditional Filipino religion and Catholicism. *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 6.2 (December): 41-47.
- De Mesa, Jose. 2011. Christianity and culture in Asia. In *Studies in Religion and Theology: Issues and Perspectives*, ed. Rito Baring. Quezon City, Philippines: Central Book Supply, Inc.
- Erickson, Millard J. 2013. *Christian theology*. Third edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic.
- Fabella, Virginia. 1999. Inculturating the gospel: the Philippine experience. *Way-London-Society of Jesus Then the Way Publications* 39 (April): 118-128.
- Frame, John. 2022. Divine transcendence and immanence. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/divine-transcendence-immanence/> (accessed 7 March 2022).
- Fernandez, Pablo. 1979. *History of the Church in the Philippines, 1521-1898*. Manila: National Book Store.
- Gempf, Conrad. "Athens, Paul At." in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. 1993 ed.
- Go, Fe Susan. 1979. Mothers, maids and the creatures of the night: the persistence of Philippine folk religion. *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 7 (September):186-203.
- Gorospe, Vitaliano R. 1966. *Christian renewal of Filipino values*. Quezon City, Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Guillermo, Artemio R. and May Kyi Win. 2005. *Historical dictionary of the Philippines*. Second edition. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Henry, Rodney L. 1986. *Filipino spirit world*. Mandaluyong City, Metro Manila: OMF Literature Inc.
- Hiebert, Paul G., R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou. 1999. *Understanding folk religion*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books.
- Hislop, Stephen K. 1971. Anitism: a survey of religious beliefs native to the Philippines. *Asian Studies* 9 (August): 144-156.
- Hughes, R. Kent. 1996. *Acts. Preaching the Word*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books.

- Jocano, F. Landa. 1968. Notes on Philippine divinities. *Asian Studies* 6 (August): 169-197.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1975. *Philippine prehistory: an anthropological overview of the beginnings of Filipino society and culture*. Quezon City, Philippines: Philippine Center for Advanced Studies, University of the Philippines System.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2019. Filipino Catholicism: a case study in religious change (1967). *Asian Studies: Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia* 55 (January): 69-101.
- Kaiser, Walter C. 1990. *Genesis-Numbers*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 2. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.
- Keener, Craig S. 2020. *Acts*. New Cambridge Bible Commentary, ed. Ben Witherington III. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Kinder, A. Gordon. 1992. Protestantism in sixteenth-century Spain. *Mediterranean Studies* 3 (January): 61-70.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. Protestantism in sixteenth-century Spain: doctrines and practices as confessed to the Inquisitors. *Mediterranean Studies* 4 (April): 73-80.
- Koch, Kurt E. 1973. *Demonology past and present*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications.
- Larson, Jennifer. 2016. *Understanding Greek religion*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Macaranas, Juan Rafael G. 2021. Understanding folk religiosity in the Philippines. *Religions* 12, no. 10 (September): 800.
- MacDonald, Charles J. H. 2004. Folk Catholicism and pre-Spanish religions the Philippines. *Philippine Studies* 52, no. 1 (January): 79-93.
- Maggay, Melba Padilla. 1999. *Filipino religious consciousness: some implications to missions*. Quezon City, Philippines: Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture.
- Manges, Ernest B., Dennis L. Nordine, and Steven M. Wilkinson. 2011. *Jesus and: discussions of Jesus in the Philippine context*. Mandaue City, Philippines: Harvest Publications.
- Miravalle, Mark I. 1993. *Mary: coredemptrix, mediatrix, advocate*. Santa Barbara, California: Queenship Publishing Company.
- Mojares, Resil B. 2017. *The feast of the Santo Niño*. Cebu City, Philippines: University of San Carlos Press.

- Packer, James Innell. 1973 *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press.
- Philippine Statistics Authority. 2017 Philippine Population Surpassed the 100 Million Mark (Results from the 2015 Census of Population). <https://psa.gov.ph/press-releases/id/120080> (accessed 16 March 2022).
- Pope Paul VI. 1970. Address of the Holy Father Paul VI to all the bishops of Asia. [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1970/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19701128\\_vescovi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1970/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19701128_vescovi.html) (accessed 21 March 2022).
- Potet, Jean-Paul G. 2017. *Ancient beliefs and customs of the Tagalogs*. Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press Inc.
- Reyes, Ramon. 1985. Religious experience in the Philippines: from mythos to logos kairos. *Philippine Studies* 33, no.2 (June):203-212.
- Rodell, Paul A. 2002. *Culture and customs of the Philippines*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Sala-Boza, Astrid. 2008. Towards Filipino Christian culture: mysticism and folk Catholicism in the *Señor Santo Niño de Cebu* devotion. *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 36, no. 4 (December): 281–308.
- Savary, Steban. 2019. Interview by Aaron Joshua V. Caparros. Brothers of Saint John, Good Shepherd Road, Cebu City, Philippines. February 19, 2019.
- Schumacher, John N. 1979. *Readings in Philippine church history*. Quezon City, Manila: Loyola School of Theology.
- Scott, William Henry. 1994. *Barangay: sixteenth-century Philippine culture and society*. Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Sharpe, Eric J. “Animism.” in *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*.
- Sitoy, T. Valentino. 1985. *A history of Christianity in the Philippines*, vol. 1. Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers.
- Souza, George Bryan and Jeffrey Scott Turley. 2016. *The Boxer Codex: transcription and translation of an illustrated late sixteenth-century Spanish manuscript concerning the geography, history and ethnography of the Pacific, South-east and East Asia*. Netherlands: Brill.



- Stott, John R. 1991. *The message of Acts: to the ends of the earth*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Syquia, Jose Francisco. 2006. *Exorcism: encounters with the paranormal and the occult*. Quezon City, Philippines: Shepherd's Voice Publications.
- Vanzi, Sol Jose. 2002. Santo Niño no longer Cebu's Patron. *Philippine Star*, July 20.
- Vergote, Antoine. 1982. Folk Catholicism: its significance, value and ambiguities. *Philippine Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1 (First Quarter): 5-26.
- White, James R. 1996. *The Roman Catholic controversy*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers.
- Williams, David John. 1990. *Acts*. New International Biblical Commentary. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson.