

CHRISTIANITY ENCOUNTERS FILIPINO SPIRIT-WORLD BELIEFS

A Case Study

A DISSERTATION

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Reuel U. Almocera

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH  
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Title: CHRISTIANITY ENCOUNTERS FILIPINO SPIRIT-WORLD BELIEFS: A CASE  
STUDY

Name of researcher: Reuel U. Almocera

Name and title of faculty adviser: Nancy Vyhmeister, Ed. D.

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In varying degrees, Filipino Christians are caught 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 labelled "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 case. The Filipino values of pakikisama, 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 concepts of an inaccessible 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 rituals 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 inflicting disease and physical harm to human beings.

(3) Major aspects of the spirit-world healing rituals have the characteristics 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.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### PART I: DESCRIPTION

Chapter	
1.	CASE PRESENTATION . . . . . 2
	Case Background . . . . . 2
	The Case: Fructuoso . . . . . 3
2.	INTRODUCTION . . . . . 6
	Pastoral-Theological Issues . . . . . 9
	Definition of Terms . . . . . 9
	Method and Sources . . . . . 10
	Delimitation of the Study . . . . . 13
	Significance of the Study . . . . . 14
	Descriptive Outline . . . . . 14
3.	REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE . . . . . 16
	Works of Filipino Authors . . . . . 16
	Social Scientists . . . . . 17
	Religious Leaders and Teachers . . . . . 19
	Works of Non-Filipino Authors . . . . . 22
	Social Scientists . . . . . 22
	Religious Leaders and Teachers . . . . . 23
	Summary . . . . . 26

### PART II: ANALYSIS

Chapter	
4.	SOCIO-CULTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DYNAMICS . . . . . 29
	Social Acceptance, <u>Pakikisama</u> and <u>Amor Propio</u> . . . . . 32
	<u>Sakop</u> System as Basis for Norms and Principles . . . . . 36
	The Influence of <u>Bahala Na</u> Psychology . . . . . 40
5.	RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS . . . . . 44
	Philippine Pre-hispanic Anitism . . . . . 44
	The Concept of an Inaccessible God . . . . . 45
	The Fear of Other Gods . . . . . 47
	The Fear and Worship of Spirits . . . . . 48

Philippine Folk Christianity . . . . .	54
Folk Catholicism . . . . .	54
Folk Protestantism . . . . .	66
The Religious Understanding of the Foreign	
Missionary . . . . .	69
The Influence of Rationalism . . . . .	70
The Influence of Seventh-day Adventist	
Teachings . . . . .	71

### PART III: BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

#### Chapter

6. THE BELIEF THAT SPIRITS ARE INVOLVED IN HUMAN LIFE	
AND ILLNESS . . . . .	74
Common Beliefs About Spirits in Ancient	
Cultures . . . . .	75
Spirits in the Egyptian and Babylonian Culture . .	75
Spirits in the Hebrew Culture . . . . .	76
Spirits in the Persian Culture . . . . .	78
Spirits in the Greek Culture . . . . .	79
Beliefs About Spirits in the Bible and Christian	
Faith-Tradition . . . . .	80
The Angelic Spirits . . . . .	81
Holy Angels . . . . .	86
Evil Angels . . . . .	88
Demons and Evil Spirits . . . . .	91
Reality of Demons . . . . .	92
Origin of Demons . . . . .	98
Nature of Demons . . . . .	101
Activity of Demons . . . . .	104
Spirit-World Belief in the Life, Ministry and	
Teachings of Jesus . . . . .	113
The Case of the Two Demoniacs of Gadara . . . . .	113
The Case of the Man at the Synagogue in	
Capernaum . . . . .	115
The Case of the Lunatic Child of an	
Unidentified Man . . . . .	116
Other Cases of Demonic Activity in the	
Gospels . . . . .	117
7. HEALING RITUAL AND SPIRIT-WORLD BELIEF . . . . .	120
Occultism . . . . .	121
Magic . . . . .	122
Black and White Magic . . . . .	125
Magic Phenomena in the Light of the Bible . . . . .	127
Christian Healing Rituals Related to the	
Spirit-World . . . . .	132
Exorcism . . . . .	132
Importunate Prayer for Healing . . . . .	136

## PART IV: ACTION

Chapter		
8. ACTION PLAN . . . . .		140
Synthesis of Analysis and Interpretation . . . . .		140
Pastoral Action . . . . .		143
Basic Teachings . . . . .		145
The Existence of the Spirit-World . . . . .		145
The Immanence of God . . . . .		149
The Christus Victor Motif . . . . .		151
The Ministry of the Holy Spirit . . . . .		152
Pastoral Care Alternative . . . . .		153
General Guidelines . . . . .		154
A Filipinized Christian Healing Ritual . . . . .		156
Other problems related to Filipino		
Spirit-World Beliefs . . . . .		159
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .		161
CURRICULUM VITAE . . . . .		178