

Philippine Shamanism and Inculturation

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The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) stressed the importance of interfaith dialogue.¹ Although it mentioned the world religions present in the Philippines, it forgot the primal religion of our indigenous peoples. Instead PCP II put believers of primal religion as objects of evangelization—not agents of evangelization.

This oversight of PCP II can perhaps be traced to earlier Church documents. The Vatican II “Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” (*Nostra Aetate*) considered the Church’s relationship only with the great religions; nowhere did it mention the primal religions. We therefore understand the same omission in other Church statements, like those of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC).

Yet primal religion is found in the whole of Asia (including the Indian subcontinent, Tibet, China, Indochina), Indonesia, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Australia, the Pacific countries, North and South America, Africa. These peoples constitute a big chunk of the world’s population.

Only recently has Rome become aware of the importance of dialogue with primal religions. On 21 November 1993 Francis Cardinal Arinze, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, wrote a letter to the Episcopal Conferences in Asia, the Americas, and Oceania. The document was entitled “Pastoral Attention to

¹ *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Manila: Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, 1992), nos.110-115.

Traditional Religions.”² In this document Cardinal Arinze outlined the nature of traditional religions, and gave as well as the reason for pastoral attention and dialogue with these religions. This seemed to be the first Vatican document on dialogue between Christianity and Traditional Religions. In this dialogue the document recognized “mutual understanding, respect, discovery of the seeds of the Word in this religion, and the joint quest for God’s will.”³

What is Philippine shamanism? What can we learn from Filipino shamans regarding inculturation? These are some of the problems which we desire to tackle in this article. First, we shall review the principles of inculturation. Second, we shall give a brief survey of Philippine shamanism. Third, we shall see how inculturation occurs in the various aspects of Philippine shamanism.

Inculturation in general

In order to understand inculturation, first we should go to the meaning of culture. We take culture here not in its popular sense as refinement or education. Rather we take culture in its anthropological sense as the big umbrella which includes the world view of a people, their social interaction, and their material expressions. So culture includes religion, politics, language, economy, kinship, etiquette, the way of dressing and style of living. Culture may be defined as “a dynamic system of socially acquired and socially shared ideas according to which an interacting group of human beings is to adapt itself to its physical, social, and ideational environment.”⁴

What is inculturation? In its theological context, Pope John Paul II defines inculturation as “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.”⁵ Inculturation “is a process of evangelization by which the Christian life and message

² *L'Osservatore Romano* (English edition), no. 4, 26 January 1994.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴ Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures. New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 74. Italics in original.

⁵ *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 63.

are assimilated by a culture in such a way that not only are this life and message expressed through the elements proper to this culture, but they come to constitute a principle of inspiration as well, and eventually a norm and power of unification that transforms, re-creates, and revitalizes that culture."⁶

Because culture is dynamic, inculturation is also a process and evolves in the history of a people.

Inculturation is the marriage between Christianity and a particular culture. As such it is between *equal* partners. Inculturation is not acculturation (or socialization), adaptation, contextualization (which stresses only the present context), dynamic equivalence, enculturation, transculturation, or translation.

No culture —the Jewish culture included— "may be absolutized as the adequate, unique vehicle of revelation" because "in every culture there is room for, and there must be a demand for conversion, transformation, and growth."⁷

Inculturation bases itself on the model of the incarnation.⁸ Although the culture and Christianity should go together as equal partners, we know this did not happen in Philippine history. We know that the Christianity imposed on the Filipinos was of a particular Western kind. It used the Platonic categories which separated the profane from the sacred (although Church and State were one in the Spanish conquest).

Social workers get happy by helping the poor. So happiness is the by-product of charity. The same is true of inculturation; it is a by-product of faith.⁹

Genuine inculturation does not successfully happen by imposition from outside, as what happened when a Western Christianity

⁶ Marcello de C. Azevedo and Herve Carrier, "Inculturation," *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. by Rene Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (NY: The Crossword Publ. Co., 1994), p. 501.

⁷ Ibid., p. 503.

⁸ *Ad Gentes*, no. 10; *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 53; *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 52.

⁹ For more details, see Leonardo N. Mercado (ed.), *Working With Indigenous Peoples, A Source Book* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1994), pp. 83-90.

was imposed on primal peoples. Neither does it succeed even with scholars like what Matteo Ricci did for China or De Nobili among the Hindus.¹⁰ Rather the main agent of inculturation is not the missionary but the Holy Spirit and the hearers of the Good News. The need for the missionary comes from the first proclamation. The missionary is the catalyst who encourages that interaction of the Holy Spirit with the people to arise. The missionary and the object of the gospel both perceive the Good News through their filters. Only when the object of mission work gets converted, absorbs the Good News in his/her own categories does the inculturation process begin. The example is the Samaritan woman (*Jn* 4). From a hearer of the Good News, she becomes a missionary and brings her own people to Christ.

Pieris makes the body a metaphor of inculturation. The total Christ is the head and his body which is the church. A European and western ecclesiastical imposition of Christianity is like "a clumsy body that hides its head which is Jesus."¹¹ The second attempt of the intellectuals is like the head minus the body. But when the people (including the non-Christians) are involved, that is the true body.

General and Philippine Shamanism

Scholars say there are two kinds of Asian shamanistic complexes. The first one is composed by cattle-breeders, while those of the second one are agriculturists.¹² The members of the former kind of shamans are exclusively males, while those of the latter are generally women. The latter "conjure up spirits in human forms; their powers are largely explained by the sexual relationship they entertain with a spirit; and they do not dance during the seance."¹³ The Philippine shamans belong to the latter type since their culture is not that of cattle breeders. In history we see both female and male shamans. Some are transvestites to show the *conjunctio oppositorum*, meaning that there is no male nor female in relationship with the divine.

¹⁰ Aloysius Pieris, "Does Christ Have a Place in Asia? A Panoramic View," *Concilium* (1993): 33-47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹² I. P. Couliano, *Out of This World, Journeys from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Boston: Shambala, 1991), pp. 39-40.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Some anthropologists may object to the term "Philippine shamanism" because the term "shamanism" connotes more the Mongolian or Eskimo types. The early Spanish chroniclers called them *catalonans* and *babaylans* respectively for the ancient Tagalog and Visayan priestesses/shamans. These archaic terms, however, are no longer used in the current Philippine languages. Their equivalents would be the terms used for local traditional healers.

Many studies have been done on traditional and newer forms of Philippine shamanism.¹⁴ Since the material is too broad, I shall focus on what I myself experienced (see cases in the *Appendix*) plus other references. But because Philippine shamanism is a part of a larger phenomenon, let us first review the principles of shamanism in general.

Shamanism has many meanings. It can be taken in a narrow or in a wide sense. In its narrow sense, the *shamans* are "people of ecstasy." According to Eliade, who is the foremost expert on this topic, shamanism is basically "technique of ecstasy."¹⁵ "Ecstasy" in its etymology (*ex* = out; *histanai* = stand) means "to stand out of oneself." Webster's dictionary defines ecstasy as "a state of being beyond reason and self-control" or as a state of trance.¹⁶ It does not mean bliss. If a person in ecstasy is outside of himself/herself, the shaman during his trance is "believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld."¹⁷ So the shamans can voluntarily enter into an *Altered State of Consciousness* (ASC), can journey to other realms, and thereby acquire "knowledge or power" and thereby help the "people of their community."¹⁸ The shaman has a close relationship with nature.

¹⁴ See Francisco R. Demetrio, *Myths and Symbols Philippines* (Manila: National Book Store, Inc., 1990), pp. 295-331; Evelyn Tan Cullamar, *Babaylanism in Negros: 1896-1907* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1986); Quintin C. Terrenal, *Santo Niño of Cebu's Envoy Extraordinary Matet of Naga City* (Manila: Logos Publications, 1992); Jaime T. Licauco, *The Magicians of God, The Amazing Stories of Philippine Faith Healers* (Manila: National Book Store, Inc., 1982); Rebecca C. Tiston, *The Tambalans of Northern Leyte* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1983).

¹⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. by Willard R. Task, Bollingen Series LXXVI (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 4.

¹⁶ Webster's *Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v., p.395.

¹⁷ Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 6.

¹⁸ Roger N. Walsh, *The Spirit of Shamanism* (Los Angeles: Jeremy R. Tarcher, Inc., 1990), p. 11.

While every shaman is a healer, not all healers of primitive societies are shamans.¹⁹ According to this narrow definition, while every shaman during his trance can communicate with the spirits (good and evil and those of the dead), not all those in trance are shamans.²⁰

Because the shaman, through his ecstasy, can shift from visible to the invisible world, he is a kind of "middle man between ordinary and non-ordinary reality" or a "power-broker" who manipulates "spiritual power to help people, to put them into a healthy equilibrium."²¹ The shaman then is the technician of the sacred.

The broad definition of a shaman is the specialist who enters "into a controlled ASC on behalf of his community."²² This broad definition would therefore embrace all Filipinos who go into trance (*langkap*, *sinasapian*, in Tagalog or *naluganan* in Ilocano) and who help others during this trance. This includes mediums in prayer communities and other traditional healers.

Like other shamans in the world, the Filipino shamans not only heal; some traditional ones make diagnosis through omens. Shamans may prescribe cures through the sacrifice of pigs or chickens. They claim to see the spirits and the souls that have fled. If the patient's soul goes away, the shaman invites it to come back or even tries to capture it. This means that Filipinos believe in the existence of the spirit and the soul. The spirit [*hininga*] or life principle stays with the person until death, while the soul [*kaluluwa*] can go away, as in dreams.

If the soul stays away for a long time, sickness may follow.²³ In some cultures, the shaman conducts the death person's soul to the underworld. The technical term is *psychopomp*.²⁴ Shamans in not a few Philippine tribal groups act as their guides and leaders. The knowledge

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

²¹ Michael Harner, "The Way of the Shaman," in *A Firewise Treasury of Light*, ed. by Mary Olsen Kelly (NY: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1990), p. 215.

²² Walsh, *The Spirit of Shamanism*, p. 9.

²³ For more details, see Leonardo N. Mercado, *The Filipino Mind* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1994), pp. 3-18.

²⁴ Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 182, 216, 208.

to guide may come through divination (such as through looking at the entrails of animals) or while they are in trance. In other cultures "most shamans are said to be able to harmonize with the forces of nature, evoking rain, or sunshine, when called for, by a ceremony."²⁵

Shamans, therefore, are the mainstay of primal religion. They belong to the class of heroes, who, like the saints and sages of the past, search "for enlightenment, liberation, salvation, or awakening."²⁶

Shamans in general serve a number of functions. While their role varies from society to society, "they served a number of functions: artist, healer, magician, priest, psychotherapist, seer, storyteller."²⁷ As a diviner, the shaman can tell, for instance, where game can be found or recover lost animals.

But the chief characteristic of a shaman is his ecstasy. His added roles of diviner (medium), healer, teller of myths, sorcerer, ruler of the tribe, etc. are secondary. When a culture remains simple, like that of the food gatherers or hunters, the shaman combines the above-mentioned roles in himself. Thus in the Philippine millennial movements, the leaders of the religious movements against Spain were also shamans.²⁸ But when the society becomes more complex these roles get specialized: the healer, the priest, the sorcerer and the diviner are separated.²⁹

Winkelman found a strong relationship between the number of special practitioners and a society's complexity. If there was one practitioner present, it was almost always a shaman or healer. If there were two present, one was always a shaman or healer and the other was either a priest or a malevolent practitioner. If three were present, one was always the shaman or healer, and the other

²⁵ Alberto Villoldo and Stanley Krippner, *Healing States* (NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1987), p. 160.

²⁶ Walsh, *The Spirit of Shamanism*, p. 24.

²⁷ Villoldo and Krippner, *Healing States*, p. 161

²⁸ Leonardo N. Mercado, *Inculturation and Filipino Theology* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1992), pp. 93-94; *The Filipino Mind* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1994), pp. 23-25.

²⁹ Villoldo and Krippner, *Healing States*, pp. 164-166.

two were generally the priest and the sorcerer. If the society was high complex, the diviner was added and all four roles were filled by separate people.³⁰

With social change, the culture also changes. Even our present-day healers are specialized: masseurs (*hilot*), midwives (*partiras*), herbalists (*arbularyo*), sorcerers (*kulam*). They may combine ritual and prayer in their respective specializations. The appearance of specialization is similar or parallel to the modern disappearance of general practitioners (G.P.) and the proliferation of medical specialists.

In the case of cultural change, we see those three levels, namely, the material, social, and world view. Philippine culture, in contact with Iberian culture/Christianity, experienced some important changes. For instance, primal spirits got Christian names; the Spanish missionaries replaced the *anitos* with the saints.

But in spite of the social change of shamanism, we can still see the continuity from the pre-colonial shamans to the present ones.³¹ The Filipino Shamans described by the early Spanish chroniclers (and called *catalonans*, *babaylans* or *baylanas*) have their tradition continued partly in today's tribal Filipinos. One example are the *pandaniwans* of the Hanunoo Mangyans of Mindoro.³² Likewise in spite of the social change we can observe the continuation of the ancient tradition, as well as the continuity of shamanic healing in the modern Filipino psychic surgeons. Psychic surgery has assumed the trappings of modern medical culture. It is a case of inculturation into the culture of modern hospitals.

Elsewhere we have pointed out the similarity between the old and the new shamanic healers.³³ While the latter have given Christian names and interpretations to the shamanic phenomena, both are

³⁰ Ibid., p. 166.

³¹ F. Landa Jocano, "Ang Mga Babaylan at Katalonan sa Kinagisnang Sikolohiya," *Ulat ng Unang Pambansang Kumperensya sa Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Lunsod Quezon: Pambansang Samahan sa Sikolohiyang Pilipino, 1976), pp. 147-159.

³² Antoon Postma, "The Pandaniwan and HIs Daniw Power: The Healer Shaman in Mangyan Society," in *Filipino Religious Experience and Non-Biblical Revelation*, ed. by Leonardo N. Mercado (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1992), pp. 91-110.

³³ Mercado, *Inculturation and Filipino Theology*, pp. 101-103.

generally the same in their call, the nature of their trances, spirit guides, esoteric language, classification of disease, and their healing procedures.

After having seen inculturation and Philippine shamanism, let us now proceed to *how Filipino shamans inculturated Christianity*.

First let us review the foregoing principles. We said that inculturation is a by-product of faith, that the chief agents of inculturation are the people themselves. Inculturation allows the believer to express his/her faith according to the light of his/her own culture. In this sense Christianity should respect Philippine culture with its primal religion where shamans played a role. In the scholastic philosophy, perception depends upon the eye of the beholder; the filter is one's world view. Thus a shaman of an African primal religion would interpret his trance according to his world view. That means he would name the spirits according to his African spirit world. Similarly, a shaman from Thailand would certainly interpret it in Thai Buddhist categories while a shaman from Peru would do it according to his own tradition (a result of the encounter of Indian culture and Christianity), syncretistic to some eyes, *curanderista* or folk healing.³⁴ A Chinese Taoist would also have his own interpretation: I know of a Taoist shaman who acts as medium in his Taoist temple in Sta. Cruz. On one occasion I observed him acting as the medium while his followers, in trance, consulted him. Once the trance was over, he told me the name of the spirit who visited him; it had a Chinese name of Taoist tradition.³⁵

Inculturation and the Call of the Filipino Shaman

The call to shamanism has the following common elements:³⁶

(1) *Conventional slumber*: Before his call the shaman is like the rest of his conventional society.

³⁴ For details, see Douglas Sharon, *Wizard of the Four Winds, A Shaman's Story* (NY: The Free Press, 1978).

³⁵ See Jaime C. Bulatao, *Phenomena and their Interpretation, Landmark Essays 1957-1989* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1992), pp. 63-71.

³⁶ Walsh, *The Spirit of Shamanism*, pp. 27-43; Couliano, *Out of This World*, pp. 40-44.

(2) *The call to adventure and awakening*: The call asks the candidate to go beyond the conventions of his society.

The vocation may either be through the call by the spirits or through family inheritance. The shaman is like the hero. The call may also come during a vision quest or a dream. This vision quest comes through a period spent in solitude and even fasting. For example, a woman healer whom I met in Mount Banahaw reported that she had breast cancer and that her case was considered as hopeless. She spent nights in Mount Banahaw. One day she had a vision, during which she was told to take a stone hidden somewhere; once she got it, she began her call as a healer.

In general if a shaman refuses to heed his/her call or breaks the vows of shamanism, s/he will allegedly become ill, insane, or die. In the words of Campbell, "the thing about the shaman crisis is that if the individual does not follow the song he will die, he will really die."³⁷ If it is not physical death, the person's will won't be fulfilled in life. Refusal of the call leads to unauthentic living. If, however, s/he follows the call, then the way may not be easy because trial or probation is also needed.

After being visited by the spirits, the candidate undergoes a period of psychic depression and illness. The crisis has life-shattering proportions because it confronts his beliefs.

...For the modern Filipino healers [and shamans], the spirits calling have Christian names. Thus, Eleuterio Terte, the first notable Filipino psychic surgeon, got his call in 1925 when two angelic children appeared to him while he was seriously ill. He was promised a cure if only he accepted the mission to heal others. Jun Labo, another famous healer based in Baguio, claims he received his calling when Jesus Christ appeared to him. Maria Daylo, a healer from Leyte, was promised a cure from her ailment by the apparition in a dream of St. Michael the Archangel, and she in turn promised to heal other people.³⁸

Two Filipino healers in Canada, Alanah Vahlerio and Eddie Virrey, claim that Jesus Christ appeared to them (see *Appendix*).

³⁷ Phil Cousineau (ed.), *The Hero's Journey, Joseph Campbell on his Life and Work* (NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), p. 62.

³⁸ Mercado, *Inculturation and Filipino Theology*, p. 101.

(3) *Discipline and training.* During this phase a teacher is usually needed, although for some the teachers are their spirit guides. Where there are teachers the disciple is like an apprentice. The period can be from a few months to several years. The purpose of the apprenticeship is to make the candidate an effective instrument of the spirit. The learning is both theoretical and practical. The content extends from myths and cosmology to rituals and techniques of the shamanic culture.

(4) *Return and contribution.* The return of the shamans to society is like the mystics of Christianity who have realized their spiritual marriage with God. The marriage bears fruit as the mystic reenters society. Those who overcome this period learn to control the spirits. In order words, because they have learned to heal themselves, they can also heal others. The healing is done through exorcism and it is usually the shaman the one seeking the lost soul of the patient. In short, the shaman is the wounded healer who, because s/he was sick and cured himself/herself, s/he succeeds now in healing others.

The shaman's work is to serve the community, mainly through healing. In their modern counterparts, the new healers do not ask for recompense. In the case of Eddie Virrey, for instance, he does not accept cash donations, but only in kind, such as candles or whatever is used for the community prayers. (Accepting money would eventually lead up to losing the gift of healing!)

Altruism or community service, according to several schools of psychology, is a mark of health. Self-actualized persons, to use the term of Maslow, are involved with helping people. "Healthy people tend to devote themselves more to aiding others, and this may be a further argument against seeing the shaman as psychologically distressed."³⁹

Inculturation and the Spirit Guide

The spirit guide has several names in shamanic literature: *tutelary spirit*, *nagual* (in Mexico and Guatemala), *assistant totem* (Australia), *familiar* (Europe), *guardian spirit*, *friend*, *companion*.

"A shaman is a man who has the immediate concrete experience with gods and spirits; he sees them face to face, he talks with them,

³⁹ Walsh, *The Spirit of Shamanism*, p. 88.

prays to them, implores them —but he does not 'control' more than a limited number of them."⁴⁰

The shaman has encountered or acquired the guiding spirit in his quest during his initiation period. The shaman meets the guardian spirit in remote places such as caves, forests, top of the mountain, or the guardian spirit searches out the shaman. According to Eliade,

Without a guardian spirit it is virtually impossible to be shaman, for the shaman must have this strong, basic power source in order to cope with and master the nonordinary or spiritual powers whose existence and actions are normally hidden from humans. The guardian spirit is often a *power-animal*, a spiritual being that not only protects and serves the shaman, but [also] becomes another identity or *alter ego* for him.⁴¹

Through the training of the initiation period, the shaman has been trained to see and control the spirits. The spirits assist the shaman in the journeys, in providing strengths, abilities, and in possessing the shamans.

Filipino shamans, especially the modern healers, have Christian names for their guides. Flor Cometa has Jesus Christ as her guide.⁴² For others, the guide can vary according to what saint visits them during the trance. The guide can vary from God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, to the Blessed Virgin, St. Michael the Archangel, or any of the saints.

Can the spirit guide be given a psychological explanation? Modern psychologists, like Jung, have rediscovered the techniques of merging oneself with a power figure.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 213.

⁴² Jaime T. Licauco, "Flor Cometa: Healer of Makati," in *True Encounters with the Unknown*. (Manila: National Book Store, Inc., 1986), pp. 59-76.

⁴³ "Several schools of psychology, including Jungian and Gestalt, use guided imagery or fantasy to access inner wisdom. A common technique is a dialogue with the sage or inner teacher, in which the therapist asks the patient to imagine himself in a safe, pleasant environment and then meeting a person of great wisdom. ...Some people who have literally changed the course of history have been directed by such inner teachers. The philosopher Socrates, the political leader Gandhi, and the

Inculturation and the Shamanic Trance

The Filipino shamanic trance is situated in the context of his primal world view. The prevailing Western world view is that the whole of creation exists for the benefit of man. Its emphasis on individualism (such as the stress on personal freedom) has made Westerners separate from one another. "How different the shamanic world view is! For the shaman all is sacred and alive, everything is interconnected and interdependent, all creatures are part of one great web of life that holds all things in harmony."⁴⁴

The Filipino's world view still retains much of his original primal or animistic world vision, which is not *dualistic* —the natural and the supernatural— but as peopled by both the seen and the unseen beings.⁴⁵ When the Filipino shaman falls into a trance, "the shamanic ecstasy could be considered a reactualization of the mystical *illud tempus* when men could communicate *in concreto* with the sky."⁴⁶

According to Walsh, shamans are able to enter altered states of consciousness at will, a skill that is one of their defining characteristics. Some altered states may be both psychologically and psychosomatically healing.⁴⁷

The trance of the shaman, as said above, lies in the shamanic journey or soul flight. This is similar to (1) out-of-body experience or astral travel, (2) to near-death experience, as reported in the book of Dr. Raymond Moody, *Life After Life*; (3) as dream travel, which we experience when flying in our dreams; (4) as lucid dream, where the dreamer knows that he is dreaming.⁴⁸ The lucid dreamer knows how to direct his dream like the shaman directs his journey.

psychologist Carl Jung all reported that they learned from and were directed by inner guides who arose unbidden from the depths of the psyche." (Walsh, *The Spirit of Shamanism*), p. 132.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 255.

⁴⁵ Bulatao, "Filipino Transpersonal World View," in *Phenomena and Their Interpretation*, pp. 49-53.

⁴⁶ Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 505.

⁴⁷ Walsh, *The Spirit of Shamanism*, p. 208.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 141-152.

The medium's state of consciousness may vary from full awareness and complete memory of the process to complete unawareness and amnesia. The medium's voice, expression, accent, posture, and behavior may all change, suggesting that the original person and personality have been replaced by one quite different. The effect can be most dramatic.⁴⁹

Flor Cometa, one of the major faith healers of Metro Manila, personally told me that she can control her trance and is aware of herself while in that state of ASC. But Eddie Virrey in trance is a totally different person; if he is supposedly entranced with the *Santo Niño*, he behaves and talks like a child; and after the trance he does not know what happened and what he said. The same is true of the shamanistic healers of Gampanan: They do not know what happened when they were in trance; but they report which "apostle" took possession of them. According to one elder of the Gampanan group, the souls of the *talaytayans* go outside of them while another takes over. However, some of the *talaytayans* or mediums are not completely unconscious. It is a state between normal consciousness and total unconsciousness. The healer speaks in a low guttural voice with the patient and can advise the patient.

Unlike the shamans of America, who use instruments such as a drum or hallucinogenic or intoxicating agents, the Filipino shamans do not use drugs. Some Filipino shamans use the beating of a porcelain saucer to induce trance. This beating of the porcelain is similar to the beating of a drum in other shamanic cultures.

The steady rhythm of the drum basically forces the consciousness to change, actually causing the brain waves to decrease to what our scientists call the alpha level or deeper, which allows normal thought patterns to be interrupted and even to cease. When the rational mind is interrupted from its ordinary mental processes, visions can happen, the inner eye can open to the invisible world, and a new perspective can be gained. ...The drummer holds the rhythm, keeping a steady beat that carries the shaman on the journey and brings the soul back to the body on completion of the task.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 123-24.

⁵⁰ Vicki Noble, *Shakti Woman, Feeling Our Fire, Healing Our World, the New Female Shamanism* (NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), p. 139.

Even Westerners can attain ASC through drum beating. "When a drum is played at a tempo of some 200 to 220 beats per minute, most Western novices report that they can journey successfully even on their first attempt."⁵¹

In the case of the head priestess or 'suprema' of the *Ciudad Mística de Dios* in Mount Banahaw, some of her companions stand behind her while she is preaching. When she goes into a trance and collapses, her companions catch her from hitting the floor. At this state of trance, she is said to speak with the voice of Maria Bernarda Balitaan, the foundress of the said church.⁵²

The trance state can be common. Some call it day-dreaming, fantasy. "Every long-distance driver has experienced trance, as have moviegoers and music listeners. Children easily enter trance states and seem to enjoy them immensely, until their elders tell them enough times that they are wasting time, being lazy or bad."⁵³

The experience of trance, according to Vicki Noble, is "immeasurably healthful, proving a kind of well-being that can't be quantified by Western science."

If trance is a means for helping other people (altruism), then, it is good.

With culture change, the original situation of shamanic culture is also affected. With Westernization some shamans have found it difficult to enter the trance state.

Nowadays they are more likely to use devices to compensate for the loss of their predecessor's powers; they look for visions in a bowl of water, or scatter bones on the ground so that they can seek answers from the pattern in which they fall. Yet these, too, were initially trance-induced forms of divination, and often still appear to be. The shaman hopes to throw off consciousness sufficiently to allow intuition or second sight to break through. And the belief

⁵¹ Walsh, *The Spirit of Shamanism*, p. 174.

⁵² Guillermo M. Pesigan, *Dulang-buhay ng Bundok Banahaw, Karanasan ng Ciudad Mística*. (Lunsod Quezon: Bahay Saliksikan ng Pilipinolohiyang Simulain, 1992).

⁵³ Noble, *Shakti Woman*, p. 139.

remains that spirits are responsible for the visions, and for the pattern into which the bones fall.⁵⁴

The medium is supposed to be taken over by the spirit. As in the case of Eddie Virrey, his behavior is different as *Nazareno*, *Santo Niño*, the Blessed Virgin, St. Michael the Archangel, or San Lorenzo Ruiz. But mostly it is either *Jesus Nazareno* or the *Santo Niño*. Eddie also falls into a trance when he makes the stations of the cross at Marmora. He heals others while in that state. On one occasion, a patient who could not drive for eight years and always used a cane was near Eddie; Eddie touched his leg and was instantly cured.

The explanation of trance extends from fraud to true possession. One scientific explanation of mediumship or channeling is dissociation. "In this process aspects of the psyche are split off from conscious awareness and *ego* control," as illustrated in multiple personalities. "The implication is that anyone—ancient shamans, modern channels, and all the rest of us— may be capable of receiving information from aspects of our own psyches that lie outside conscious awareness."⁵⁵

Inculturation of Shamanic Healing

How do shamans heal? Walsh explains that they have many ways of healing:

Shamans may use a variety of physical treatments such as cleaning wounds, massaging limbs, and administering herbal medications. Moreover, shamans themselves regard their healing powers as primarily spiritual. Yet much of their effectiveness may be due to the psychological factors. Like all healers they use suggestion and expectation and a variety of rituals that may elicit powerful placebo effects. Some of their practices involve what could be considered skillful psychotherapeutic techniques.⁵⁶

Because the shaman was formerly sick—even psychologically cracked up—and cured himself, s/he can also now cure others.

⁵⁴ Brian Inglis, *Trance, A Natural History of Altered States of Mind* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co. Limited, 1989), p. 30.

⁵⁵ Walsh, *The Spirit of Shamanism*, p. 128.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

Not a few Filipino patients report of their ailments which cannot be treated or cured by Western medicine. The reason is because, according to the shamanistic classification, ailments belong to two types: (1) *madukturan*, that is, can be cured by doctor; and (2) *hindi madukturan*, that cannot be cured by doctors. The latter, like sickness due to witchcraft, cannot be diagnosed or treated by Western medicine.

For example, a Filipino Canadian friend of mine narrated what happened to him when he and his wife went to a party.⁵⁷ He felt pain until it was no longer tolerable; so he asked his wife that they go home. He could not drive because of the pain; she did drive. No medicine could apparently cure him. Then he called his lady friend, Ms. Alanah Vahlerio, who is a Filipino healer in Toronto. She asked him to compare the sizes of his little fingers, that is, to check if they were of the same length. He saw that they were not. Then she concluded that he had *kulam* (witchcraft). It was quickly cured through *tawas*, a ritual to determine the origin of a sickness by burning alum crystals with small things owned by the patient. She pointed out the person involved: another Filipina; he said that the woman was envious of his position. He met her several times and noticed her hostility to him. But he did not take revenge.

Torrey had identified four fundamental principles which can also apply to shamanic healing:

1. A shared world view that makes the diagnosis and naming process possible.
2. Positive personal qualities of the healer that facilitate the client's recovery.
3. Client expectations of recovery that assist the healing process.
4. Specific techniques, materials, and healing procedures that are appropriate to the illness and conducive to recovery.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Personal communication from Mr. Reginaldo Edralin, Jr., Brampton, Greater Toronto, 7 October 1994.

⁵⁸ Villoldo and Krippner, *Healing States*, p. 192. "...Penicillin does not depend upon a common language of a shared world view. However, some societies believe in illnesses that are unknown to Western medicine — "lizard illness," *mal aire* (bad humors), *susto* (an affliction produced by breaking a taboo). If, for instance, a client in Peru insists he is suffering from *susto* and the local physician insists there is no such a malady, the sufferer may better find a shaman able to perform the necessary rituals to remove the affliction." (Ibid.)

In the trance state, even patients with ASC can remove tumors and cancer through auto-suggestion.

Speaking of auto-suggestion, scientists have long suspected is the placebo as healing:

The environment, the physician's status, and the rituals involved in giving and taking medicine can be almost as important as the drug itself. Today's psychiatrists who prescribe drugs to reduce depression or anxiety are well aware that they had better exude confidence if the drug is to have maximum effect, for the expectations of both patient and therapist tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies.⁵⁹

In other words, the way doctors use their gadgets (stethoscope, X-ray, and other modern instruments) is analogous to the shamans' rituals. They exude optimism.

Since health is holistic, the Filipino healers stress clean and healthy living.

Inculturation and Shamanic Spirituality

The following are some of the elements of shamanic spirituality:

(a) The first is *oneness with creation*, which is one of the positive values of primal religion. This is evident from the shaman's transpersonal world view. It is also eco-friendly. The failure of ecology in the West is due to the separation of man from creation, the latter being thought as a machine and subject to man's will.

Traditional spirituality has forgotten about the role of the environment. But in the new paradigm of theology, "the cosmos, God, and the humans are all interrelated" because "...one cannot speak about God except in the context of the cosmos and humans. You cannot speak about humans except in the context of God and the cosmos. You cannot even speak about the cosmos except in the context of God as horizon and humans as the observers. All three belong together."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Walsh, *The Spirit of Shamanism*, pp. 104-05.

⁶⁰ Fritjof Capra and David Steindl-Rast with Thomas Matus, *Belonging to the Universe. Exploring on the Frontiers of Science and Spirituality* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), p. 101.

The oneness of the shaman with creation (as typified with St. Francis of Assisi) should make us rethink of our individualistic spirituality. We do not only have to love our neighbor as ourselves, but also—quoting Gandhi's words—“every living being as thy neighbor.”⁶¹

(b) Second, shamanic spirituality *belongs to the apophatic tradition of mysticism*.⁶²

The holy as having two aspects, the “terrifying” (*tremendum*) and the “fascinating” (*fascinans*). Both are sides of the same coin, as what happened, for instance, to Moses when he saw the burning bush: he was both attracted and terrified by the phenomenon. The holy as *terrifying* stresses separation between the divine and the worshiper: the latter has to abase himself in humility. The holy as *terrifying* leads to the worshiper as a prophet; it leads to the cataphatic tradition, namely, where the worshiper affirms what s/he sees in the divine. God is transcendent and is a personal God.

On the other hand, the holy as *fascinating* does not emphasize separation; rather it encourages union. This leads to the worshiper as a mystic. The mystic wants to be in union with the divine. The divine is immanent; God is ‘Emmanuel’ (God-with-us). Mysticism also leads to non-affirmation. St. John of the Cross said that God is “nothing” (*nada*). So did the anonymous English author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. That is why for the Filipino shamans, the possession or trance is part of that immanence of the divine.

But does the prophetic tradition also have union with God? “Yes” and “no.” According to the standard books on spirituality, there are three stages: first the *illumination*, then *purgation* or state of dryness, and finally, the *unifying* stage of union with the heavenly bridegroom.

The Blessed Trinity can be seen as the indwelling God-within-us (*Emmanuel*), God as horizon (outside us), and God between these two poles as our life as relationship, which is the Holy Spirit. Yet culture plays a role in making us aware which aspect to emphasize. Philippine culture emphasizes the immanent God, the Emmanuel: Christ assures us of the trinitarian indwelling if we do his will (Jn. 14:23).

⁶¹ Quoted in Walsh, *The Spirit of Shamanism*, p. 262.

⁶² For details, see Mercado, *Inculturation and Filipino Theology*, pp. 88-116.

Furthermore, Philippine thought is *concrete*. When the Bible says that "God is spirit," it does not mean the immaterial spirit of Greek philosophy; but "spirit" in biblical thought, as explained by Fox, means "that God is the 'most alive' of us all: the Life-giver *par excellence*. It also means that God is superbly passionate, filled with emotion and calls... "pathos" for human history."⁶³

These interpretations of the experience are twofold: *apophatic* (they cannot be put into words and therefore silence is preferred), and *cataphatic* (where you say something of that experience; it results in statements and ends up in doctrinal formulas).

Being a Christian shaman has its consequences. In the Gamapanan tradition, the *talaytayan* or medium must have a clear conscience and be free from worldly concerns. His/her whole concern is to be a smooth bridge for God to work in the patients. His/her long-term preparation is a committed life of self-control and self-surrender, discipline, humility, prayer, bible-reading. Three days before the healing session, the *talaytayan* must prepare himself/herself for the healing service (*gampanan*). This includes prayer, vigils in prayerful meditation, the avoidance of evil speech (*malaswang pananalita*), sacrifice, self-control (*pagtitimpi*), patience (*tiyaga*), and —most important— love of God (*pag-ibig sa Diyos*) and service to neighbor (*paglilingkod sa kapwa*).

Hence the medium emphasizes self-preparation ("the soil" in the gospel parable of the sower) in order for the divine to grow. In other words, the accumulation of "power" is through self-discipline. We find a similar case in Javanese *kebatinan* tradition.⁶⁴

(c) Third is *the spirit of service to others*. The *talaytayan* is not primarily concerned about himself/herself but about charity. Emotional transformation and the cultivation of love have been the emphasis of *bhakti yoga* and Christianity, while Tibetan Buddhism has emphasized compassion. Wisdom has been the focus of *jnana yoga* and some schools of Buddhism. The precursors of these ethical, emotional, attentional, and wisdom trainings can be found in shamanism. The

⁶³ Matthew Fox, *Whee! We, Wee, All the Way Home, A Guide to Sensual Prophetic Spirituality* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bera and Co., 1981), p. 189.

⁶⁴ Mercado, *The Filipino Mind*, pp. 19-23.

best of shamanism has long been based on an ethic of compassion and service.⁶⁵

(d) Fourth is *the missionary spirit*. We shall explain this more in detail.

Inculturation and the Missionary Spirit

The traditional model of the missionary is one who receives a mission mandate and preaches the word of God. The missionary is usually a priest, but can also be either a sister, or a layperson. The idea of proclamation is like that of an aggressive salesperson who markets his goods. S/he believes that the Good News is his/her monopoly which the rest of the world and other faiths must have. S/he considers other religions as inferior to Christianity. A caricature of this type is the *born-again* fundamentalist who preaches hell-fire for those who refuse to be converted into his/her church. This kind of domineering attitude often produces negative reactions from non-Christians.

However, the Christian shamans have a different kind of mission strategy. First, instead of aggressive proclamation, they use the gentle way of attraction. Second, instead of clerical, they are lay people. A third element for some groups is their Marian nature.

(1) The shaman, who stands in the context of a prayer group or community, attracts other people. The first stage is curiosity on the part of the patient who was informed through word of mouth. Then the person's faith is enriched and strengthened through personal conversion. After the member takes part in the prayer group, s/he invites her friends to attend, too. This process is multiplied geometrically. The word-of-mouth principle seems to work more effectively than grandiose advertizing.

(2) These communities are usually lay-initiated and the work is voluntary. If there are priests, their role is mainly supportive and in the background. The lay members gladly give their time and talents to the missionary work. They find happiness in the fellowship and in the service which they render for the Lord.

⁶⁵ Walsh, *The Spirit of Shamanism*, pp. 247-48.

In particular, women have a role to play. The traditional shamans were women. This tradition continues in the Mount Banahaw religions where we find priestesses. The *manangs* or old ladies who lead the prayers in our Catholic churches also continue that feminine tradition of our culture. This study is not the place to raise the issue of women priests. It is enough to say that Philippine culture has no objections to the ordination of women.

(3) These prayer groups have images of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The prayers are traditional, such as the rosary. The recent world-wide Marian phenomenon points out to Mary as the unknown God's great missionary.

When the prayer group becomes too big, they split off or have daughter-prayer groups. Another possibility is that the mother-group opens outreach centers. This is done by the *Gampanan*. Eddie Virrey's community has daughter-groups which he visits regularly. He uses the word "*sakripisyo*" to mean an outreach activity.

Reflecting on the missionary model of the Filipino shaman, we find it quite biblical. The shaman's community attracts like the 'light on a hill' and, although small ("little flock" as Jesus called his community/people), it is a leaven or yeast in society (Mt. 13:3); and in spite of its smallness, it can change the taste of others like the salt (Mt. 5:13).

Furthermore, this model is non-threatening or best adapted for interfaith dialogue. The members of this model are humble because the Good News is "unpossessable", to use the expression of Machado.⁶⁶ God alone is the owner of the Good News and missionaries are only servants of the Good News.

We find the same attractive models in the famous St. Egidio's community in Rome, and in that of the ecumenical monks of Taizé in France. These two communities have branches all over the world.

Critique and Conclusion

How do we know whether the shamanic phenomena are genuine or not? For example, are those in trance really possessed by the

⁶⁶ Felix A. Machado, "The 'Unpossessable' Good News," in *Sedos Bulletin* 26, no. 5 (1994) pp. 143-147. Reprinted from *Vidyajyoti*, vol. 57, no. 10.

spirit(s)? Or can trance be explained naturally? In other words, are trances theologically valid or not? They can be explained from both sides; but which of them is the correct?

This is a case of "ontological indeterminacy," which means that "the fundamental nature or ontological status of the source of information cannot be decided definitely because the available information or observation can be interpreted in many ways and we have no absolute method by which to determine which interpretation(s) may be the best."⁶⁷

If the interpretation is a draw between 'materialists' and 'theologians', some try to play safe by saying "we don't know" (the agnostic position). Among the materialistic, theistic and agnostic stances, the middle ground position of agnosticism seems insufficient to us. Since spiritual matters are at stake here, we opt for the theological position; and have into account the principle which Christ gave: "You will know them by their fruits" (Mt. 7:16). Hence, we shall assume some Christian premises in looking at the phenomena of shamanism. In short, if the shaman has the fruits of charity, if s/he loves God and his/her fellowmen, and has the spirit of sacrifice (e.g., not hungry for money), then it is genuine. (Other things can be taken more in detail such as the shaman's prayer life, etc.)

On this regard, Bulatao points out four (biblical) conditions:⁶⁸

First, the shaman's prediction/s are to be verifiable (Dt. 18:21-22). Some shamans, for example, have falsely predicted the end of the world and urged their followers to prepare themselves for its coming.

Second, s/he must lead a good and fruitful life (Mt. 7:15-16). Some healers lead questionable moral lives and rich life style.

Third, they must obey the ecclesiastical authority (1 Cor. 14:37-38). Some healers obey their parish priests and bishops; others do not, such as the *Banal na Pag-aaral* of Sister Salve. She has been seen levitated and reading minds. Her members are convinced that Christ as *Inkong* speaks through her. But some American bishops have

⁶⁷ Walsh, *The Spirit of Shamanism*, p. 135.

⁶⁸ Bulatao, *Phenomena and their Interpretation*, p. 61.

banned the presence of her missionaries in their respective dioceses because Sister Salve's group refuse to obey Church's authority.

Fourth, the Christian shamans must profess Jesus as the Son of God (1 Jn. 4:1-3). On this regard, Ms. Dolores (Dory) Tan, a Filipino visionary of Marmora, Canada, reported an experience of encounter with the devil.⁶⁹

While she was doing the stations of the cross, a big crowd followed her. Some even asked for her blessing. She refused because she said that she was not a priest. A woman with a man's voice shouted, "She is not a priest; she cannot bless!" Ms. Tan saw that woman's face turned most ugly and her voice was guttural. Ms. Tan asked her if she could lead the rosary. The woman acceded but she could not pronounce "Jesus" every time she said the Hail Mary. So Ms. Tan's companions had to add Jesus in the Hail Mary. Later the woman's voice turned normal.

Can a shaman be possessed also by evil spirits? "Yes," says Eddie Virrey. His companions will know that he is possessed by evil spirits through the following signs: he does not speak, is restless, and shivers. Eddie says that there is no need of permission for them to enter: "*Basta, pumasok sila sa akin. Pero alam namin kung malamig na malamig, hindi good spirit,*" (They just entered me. But we know that if it is very cold, it is not a good spirit), says Eddie.⁷⁰ To counteract the bad possession, his companions sprinkled him with holy water and anointed him. Their non-stop prayer during his trance is an insurance that no evil spirit will use him as instrument.

What have Church authorities done in view of the many alleged revelations, miracles and healings of shamans? In the presence of obvious errors, bishops usually react immediately. But if there is a ring of authenticity, they wait for a long time. (For example, it took decades before the Church authorities pronounced the miracles of Lourdes as authentic). Between the immediate and the long wait there is a continuum of stances. Parish priests and bishops usually have adopted the policy of standing off or wait-and-see attitude.

⁶⁹ As reported by Dolores Tan on September 20, 1994, Mississauga, Ontario.

⁷⁰ Interview with Eddie Virrey, 9 August 1994, at his house in Scarborough, Ontario.

The belief in demons, angels, good and evil spirits has been a part of traditional Catholic creed. So has the communion of saints, which includes the souls of the departed.

If the magisterium teaches that salvation also occurs in other religions, and if it earnestly encourages inter-faith dialogue, then the dialogue with primal religions and their shamans has its rightful place.

We said earlier that shamans belong to a mystical tradition. Their view of the holy is quite different from that of the prophets who hold that the holy is transcendent. Since the prophetic tradition held the reigns of power in Western Christianity, the prophets, who did not understand the mystic, tended to persecute the latter and burned some of them on the stake as witches. The prophets represented "high culture" (read Hellenistic background) while the mystics were of the "common" culture. "Since the intellectual categories of the representatives of high culture—mainly Catholic theologians—were inadequate, the result was a bad anthropology."⁷¹

The inculturation of shamanism as sketched above follows a pattern. The Philippine-born Christian shamans abroad behave like their counterparts in the Philippines.

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APPENDIX OF CASE STUDIES

1. The *Gampanan* Case

A group of Filipino healers in Metro Manila has truly an inculturated form of faith-healing. This "espiritista" group refuses publicity because they received a private revelation from the Holy Spirit that all who go to them should be there by the will of God. That is why they forbid the taking of photographs during their sessions. Although they have no publicity even patients from abroad seek their help. These patients often have incurable ailments for which their respective doctors have given up hope. Yet incurable ailments like cancer get cured at the place. With due respect for their request

⁷¹ I. P. Couliano, *Out of This World*, p. 47. For more details, see Robert I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

for anonymity, I shall refer to them as *Gampanan*.⁷² The word "*gampanan*" connotes social process whereby the divine, the healer, and the patient perform their respective roles.

The staff of the center are former patients who got cured. Out of gratitude they have volunteered their services. They all wear white clothes similar to those of doctors and nurses in clinics. Some even wear surgical masks. The tables have alcohol, neat piles of hospital cotton, and similar trappings of an ordinary clinic. The healers frequently wash their oily hands with alcohol after each case and wipe them with cotton. All this gives the semblance of a local faith healing group working in the way modern clinic do. This is a case of inculturation into modern medical culture.

The healers are called *talaytayan* (bridge, medium). They believe that God communicates the *Banal na Batlaya* (Holy Spirit) to the *talaytayan* who is physically instrumental in curing the patient.

In the morning of November 16, 1994, when we visited the center, the prayer service was going on. Patients who came late were asked to register their names for treatment. The prayer service consisted of psalms, songs, and prayers all in Tagalog.

After the prayer service came three testimonies of some patients who were present. We heard a tearful and grateful testimony of a mother for the cure of her young daughter who had a perforated heart, bone cancer, sclerosis, and a bent spine. Her doctors in the Philippine Heart Center had given up the sickness as incurable. But after four months of treatment at the *Gamapanan*, she recovered. She walked unaided in the aisle—a feat she could not do before.

While the testimonies were going on, the staff ate their lunch. After lunch, seven staff members (two men and five women) in their clothing stood close to the altar in quiet recollection. The altar had the trappings of some Catholic icons (a crucifix, pictures of the Blessed Virgin and of the *Santo Niño*, a holy water container with sprinkler, bibles, etc.). In a matter of a few minutes, the main *talaytayan* weakened on her knees. The rest held her. Soon the whole line began to shake uncontrollably. Their trance had begun and they were under the shadow of the spirit.

One male *talaytayan*, a man in his early twenties, wearing a surgical mask, sat in his trance while he had a ballpen and hurriedly wrote on sheets of paper. Someone assisted him in turning the pages. A secretary took down his dictation. The other two *talaytayans* also had their mechanical writing

⁷² Besides my personal observation, I am grateful to the studies of Ms. Susana R. Reyes which were submitted to the University of the Philippines. Because of the request of the spiritual group to remain incognito, I do not cite names and places.

and dictation session. After the dictation was over, readers took turns in reading the biblical passages the *talaytayan* had dictated. One of the alleged dictations was from the Book of Revelation. The dictated text from another medium was similar to a quotation from the gospel of St. Mark (chapter 13) about the coming end of the world.

At the same time the other *talaytayans* blessed the bottles of water on the table. They were all under trance and they let their shaking hands over the bottles filled with water. A standard of the *Gampanan* was spread above the heads of the bottle like a small flat roof.

Since it was the third Saturday of the month, they had the *putong*, which is a kind of baptism and confirmation and membership entrance ritual to the group (*samahan*). The male spiritual head lectured to the 11 applicants (young and old) about the covenant between humanity and God. He read a part from the Acts of the Apostles. He stressed conversion. Then he asked the candidates to line up in two rows before the altar to ask for forgiveness. Afterwards, the principal woman *talaytayan*, who was all the time under trance, individually placed her hands on the heads and shoulders of the candidates. A companion guided her hands and steps. She repeated the act with the Bible on each person. Then she anointed them and gave each of them a paper containing the name of their respective patron saints/guardians. Finally, imitating the Catholic rite, she crossed her hands on the water, and sprinkled the candidates with holy water. With this ceremony they became members of *Gampanan*.

Next followed the healing proper. There were three "operating tables"—like those in a hospital—with a pillow on each. Above every table was the standard of the *Gampanan*. The procedure was usually the anointing of the patient's head, trunk, and legs with blessed coconut oil, together with some massage similar to that of chiropractors. Other attendants helped in the anointing of the lower extremities. Some used a blanket to shield the patient from the public in the case of women. (In the early days of the *Gampanan*, there were no massages but only the application of oil). The *talaytayan* simulated injections with words like "*Ito ay dugo galing sa Panginoon. Ito ay sustansya galing sa Diyos Ama.*" ("This is blood coming from the Lord. This is a substance coming from God the Father"). The kind of spiritual suturing of the wounds took place. The *talaytayan* had a short string which s/he used for the spiritual suturing. The penultimate act was when the *talaytayan* "scooped" something from the belly of the patient. The "dirt" was put in conical paper cups which attendants then took out and burnt in the small incinerator outside. The healing process concluded by placing drops of water on the eyes. (At times the cure includes the "*bintosa*": a small piece of paper is lighted and placed inside a glass. The glass then is placed on the body of the patient. The process results in the creation of a vacuum that makes the glass sticking to the patient's body].

When the healing service ends, the healer says goodbye: "*Ako'y magpapaalam, magbabalik ako sa aking kinaroroonan sa pangalan ni Hesukristong Panginoon. Nag-iiwan ako sa inyo ng kapayapaan, kaluwalhatian, liwanag na walang katapusan mula kay Hesus na Panginoon.*" Then the name of the "spirit" who possessed the *talaytayan* is revealed. Usually it is one of the apostles.

The procedure lasted till the evening until all the patients were treated. It was followed then by a thanksgiving session and, on that occasion, by a conference on what to do during their outreach mission to Olongapo City.

The center runs through help donated by grateful benefactors. They do not accept money for the cure.

The *Gampanan* has different branches in Luzon. Usually patients who get well convince friends to group together. They then invite the *Gampanan* team to travel to the outreach group.

2. The Case of Alanah Vahlerio

Alanah's grandfather was a traditional healer, which meant using Pig Latin, prescribing roots and herbal medicines and even *kulam*. He bequeathed his powers to his son who continued the same practice. But Alanah did not believe in such practices.

Since she was a child, Alanah was always prayerful. Her house was near San Roque church in Blumentritt St. Her family had a picture of Christ called *The Eye*, which caught her attention. Most of the time she would just sit in front of that picture. There were times when she would fall into a trance; she would lose consciousness for around five minutes. In that state her voice would change into a big voice. Since her parents could not understand her trances, they brought her to a psychiatrist, who concluded that nothing was wrong with her and told her parents to let her do what she liked, e.g. studying.

During her High School days at Espiritu Santo, there were times when she fell into a trance during the masses, having to be brought home.

Later she got married, and got two daughters. She finished medical technology and nursing and worked in Toronto. Her husband made several bad investments and the family was financially down.

With her husband's consent she came to the Philippines. Six months before she came to the Philippines she dreamed almost weekly of the bloody face of Christ crowned with thorns. Upon arrival in Manila she first went to Quiapo church where she was deeply attached. Since she was a child she would walk on her knees on the center aisle. When she was walking on her knees, she saw the eyes of Christ with the crown of thorns, she fell into a

trance. The people who revived her said she was saying: "*Go back to where you came from. Ako'y nasa iyo noong bata ka pa. Hindi mo lang alam akong gamitin. But it's time to use me. Your mission is supposed to start now. Go back home.*"

Right after that experience she returned to Toronto, Canada, where she started healing.

Before every healing session Alanah spends three days of fasting and prayer. Her diet is a toast of bread and juice. If she cannot stand the pain, she takes some chocolate or candy to keep her going. She does not eat at least six hours before healing.

Alanah says that when she goes into a trance, she loses her senses and the people put her on a chair. When she is seated she begins her healing session. Although she started with the traditional healing with *tapal* (traditional leaves put over the sick part), with pig Latin, she changed her procedure. She used the oil from St. Joseph in Montreal. She makes the sign of the cross with the oil on both feet, on both hands, the throat, nape and forehead. Then she puts her hands on top of the head. Her formula is like this: "*I anoint you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. May the Holy Spirit penetrate every single part of your body. May any blockade in your heart be taken out. May our mind, body and spirit rest completely in the Holy Spirit.*" She became trinitarian in her formula as she has been purified by the Lord. In the healing session she instinctively prays for the diseased parts of the patient although she is not told which part is sick.

When she was stronger before her surgery, she used to heal as many as from 80 to 100 persons every night. The session would finish around 3:00 a.m. Then she limited it to once a week.

Alanah Vahlerio started prayer groups in Montreal, Kingston (both in Canada), in Michigan and Ohio, USA. Her first contacts were Filipinos. Soon non-Filipinos joined also the group.

She drives to those places on her own expense. She takes along the statue of the *Santo Niño*, the picture of Jesus as Divine Mercy, the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph. Wherever she goes, she picks a volunteer who will transfer the statue to each family each week.

Where the parish priest is amenable, she has the prayer group at the church. Novena to the Perpetual Help is followed by benediction and healing.

3. The Case of Eddie Virrey

Eddie Virrey and his family are immigrants to Ontario, Canada, for the past eight years. Prior to their arrival, they lived for ten years in the United

States. He is 34 years old and comes from Lipa City (Batangas, Philippines). His wife Aida is a nurse and comes from the province of Nueva Ecija (Philippines). Their three children were born in Canada.

He was not religious in the beginning. Although a Catholic, he did not go to church. He did not join the prayer group of which Aida was a member. On the evening of May 29, 1993, he and Aida returned home early because Aida had a swollen tooth. Since she could not pray her usual rosary, she asked Eddie to pray the rosary in her stead. He told her that he would do it after seeing a televised game of hockey.

Their family altar had a small crucifix and a picture of Christ with the crown of thorns (*Ecce Homo*). As he began to pray the rosary, he noticed that the picture of the *Ecce Homo* and the crucifix were moist with oil. He called Aida whether she wiped the statue and the picture. She said no. Because they could not explain the phenomenon, they called some of the Filipino members of Aida's prayer group. They came to the house and prayed before the oil-wet images.

The following day, the prayer group had a pilgrimage to Marmora, which is around three hours' drive from Toronto. Since they had no driver, Eddie reluctantly was the driver. He said that his faith was still weak then. While the group made the stations of the cross, he stayed in the car. While they were at the tenth station, Eddie said, "*Hindi ko alam kung paano ako napasunod sa kanila.*"

When they got back to their house in Scarborough, a friend visited them. That person and his wife prayed the rosary, while Eddie just watched them. Then an inner force pushed Eddie to go to the bedroom. While he was laying in bed, Christ appeared to him. "*Sacrifice for me,*" Jesus told him. "*Pray daily the rosary. Go to church.*" Eddie went to confession and surrendered himself to Christ. Eddie went into a trance. "*Pumasok sa aking kaluluwa si Jesus Christ.*" Eddie received the gift of healing.

The following are my personal observations on Eddie on the night of August 9, 1994 at his house in Scarborough, Greater Toronto:

That evening—like other evenings—a group gathered at his house for a prayer session. The prayer began with the rosary, followed by some readings, and string of other prayers.

After the third decade of the Sorrowful Mysteries, Eddie (who was kneeling) got stiff and fell backwards. Some companions caught him from falling flat and assisted him to lay on the floor. Eddie stretched his arms and feet as if crucified. His back arched. He shouted, "*Ako si Jesucristo na nakapako sa krus.*" He asked those present to honor his mother. Then somebody anointed his forehead and feet with holy oil. After he recovered they gave him two glasses of water to drink.

On the night of Aug. 15, 1994, I noticed the following. The prayer group began the rosary at 8:45 PM at his house. Towards the end of the third decade of the rosary he began to wobble on his knees while some companions were behind him ready to catch him in case of collapse. At the third Hail Mary of the fourth decade he fell on his back. When he was at the floor, he cuddled up like a child while his eyes were closed. His hands were holding an "invisible" round thing which he entrusted to a companion who "received" it. [Later they explained that he gave the globe which the *Santo Niño* always holds.] His companions put a glass of milk beside him. He lapped on the milk like a child. [Eddie is allergic to milk but he drinks milk when possessed by the *Santo Niño*.]

Throughout the one-hour trance, the prayers continued while Eddie went around on his knees with eyes closed. During this time patients would kneel before him. He put his hands on each and blessed each one. He would advise some. Example: "*Kailangan magdasal kayo sa aking Ina ng Laging Saklolo ng siyam na araw.*" On one instance he went to the altar on which was the bible; she flipped some pages. Then he pointed to the flower vase and asked that the flowers be distributed to those present.

After around one hour, he said in a small voice that he was leaving. Then he blessed the crowd (similar to what the priest does at the end of the mass). Then he got back the "globe" from the person whom he entrusted it at the beginning of the trance. Then he said "goodbye" while the audience replied goodbye. Then he lay on the floor, quivered, and lay still. After he regained consciousness, the companions gave him two glasses of water which he drank. An Italian friend/devotee massaged his back, shoulders and arms.

According to Eddie, Christ said to him: "*If you do not fall into a trance, you will finish the rosary. You will feel happy.*" When he is in a trance, the type of spirit inside him can be seen from what he assumes. If he stiffens (arched back), stretched hands, feet together as in the crucified Christ, it is obvious that he is tranced by the crucified Christ. Sometimes he is tranced by *Santo Niño*. Here he talks and behaves like a child. Sometimes he may assume his hands like those of Mary (hands in inverted "V").

Eddie says that he feels happy ("*masarap ang pakiramdam ko*"). He feels the power of healing entering his hands. Healing the sick is part of his mission. While he heals he is not aware of what he is doing. His eyes are closed. The spirit inside directs him.

The term for mission in Eddie's case is "sakripisyo". It means that he (with his companions) goes to different houses to pray the rosary. He says that these houses need his presence. If he goes, the Holy Spirit comes along.

Eddie does not receive monetary donations. He says that if he accepts money his power of healing would disappear. But he accepts candles and flowers for the altar of his house.

In terms of lifestyle his house is open to the public. His family has almost no more private life because of the constant flow of visitors.

His life is a constant cycle of work, sleep, prayer. Occasionally he goes to Marmora.

His prayer group is called "Immaculate Heart of Mary Prayer Group."

Every Holy Week Eddie has the stigmata. The scars are visible in his hands, feet and right side. His companions attest that during Holy Week Eddie "sweats" sweet smelling oil (like that of the oozing oil of the statues). □