

# The Filipino Image of God

By

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A Filipino devotee in Quiapo Church piously wipes with a handkerchief the feet of the Black Nazarene statue. He uses the same handkerchief to wipe his ailing head. The critic who watches the whole scene will dismiss the devotee's action as plain superstition and will further find fault with the whole popular religiosity in Quiapo Church. Each one, the devotee and the critic, has his own model of the sacred.

It is clear that the model of sacred which a people takes has implications in their image of the Absolute and, in turn, practical repercussions in their lives.

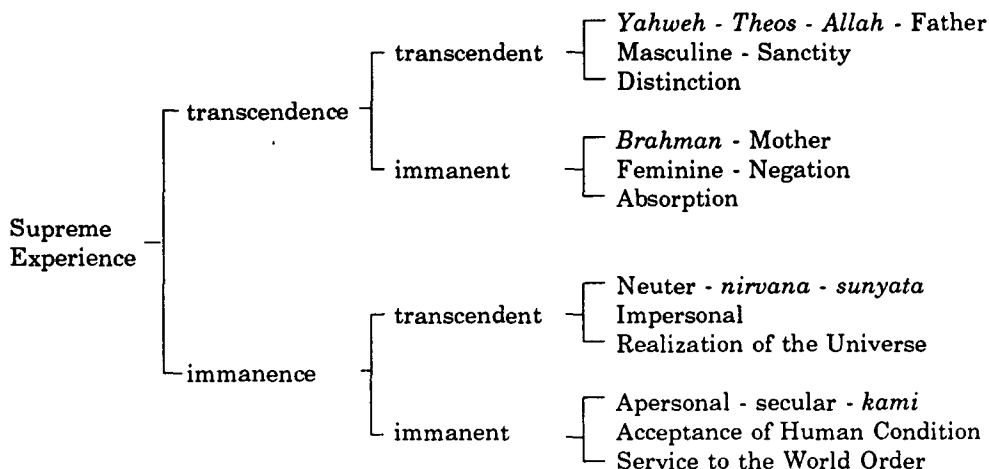
## I. FOUR MODELS OF GOD

In the context of experiencing the Ultimate, Panikkar provides four models of the holy or sacred as illustrated in Table 1.

The models amount to varied combinations of the transcendent and the immanent. The variations are mathematically exhaustive and possible. For example, if we have two variables, A and B, their combinations would be AA, AB, BA, and BB. The same combinations are found in the variables which Panikkar proposes. He gives examples for each possibility. Let us have a look at each model.

The first one, the transcendence-transcendent archetype which considers the Ultimate as a Person (*Yahweh, Theos, Allah...*), is common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam where the Ultimate or God is the Wholly Other.

TABLE 1  
Four Archetypes of the Ultimate\*



\*Source: Raimundo Panikkar. "The Supreme Experience: The Ways of East and West," *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, Cross Cultural Studies (New York: Paulet Press, 1979), p. 312.

This is the context of Rudolf Otto's definition of the holy in his classic work *The Idea of the Holy*.<sup>1</sup> In this book, Otto coins and uses the word *numinous* (from the Latin *numen*, divine spirit, localized power) instead of the word *holy*. This is because he associates holy with the ethical and good while the numinous goes beyond the ethical.<sup>2</sup> Behind the numinous is a feeling of creaturehood or of dependence before the divine presence.

When Moses saw the burning bush in Mount Horeb (Ex. 3:1-6) he was aware of a mystery which fascinated and drew him and which at the same time, scared him. God ordered Moses to remove his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. He covered his face because, according to the Semitic culture of the Old Testament, no person could see God and live. This awareness of God's presence, described from the viewpoint of religious experience, is explained as an awareness of mystery, which is awe-inspiring or overpowering as well as fascinating.

The English term "holy" refers primarily to an attribute of God (e.g., Thou art holy); secondarily, it is an attribute of things that derive their holiness from God (e.g. the Holy Bible, Holy Grail). It is also an attribute of people or actions which are in conformity with God's expectations (e.g. a holy person, to lead a holy life). But the term "sacred", a more recent English word, refers more to the secondary attributes of holy. Thus God is not "the Sacred One of Israel" but "the Holy One of Israel."

<sup>1</sup>Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p.6

Platonism and Neo-Platonism dichotomize matter and spirit, such as body and soul. This philosophy is concretized for instance in the Greek and Greek-inspired Roman temples where *the holy* was a small enclosed sanctuary for the gods. The *fanum* was a place solemnly consecrated to the Gods on the temple precinct. On the other hand, the *pro-fanum* was the front of the temple where people stayed. So *profanare* is literally to bring out the offering before the temple precinct.

The Hebrew counterpart for the holy is *gadosh* (from *gd*, to set apart). And the "profane" counterpart of *gadosh* is *herem* or the thing banned, the object set apart for destruction. It is an idea similar to damnation or condemnation through anathema. Hence the perspective of the holy in Hebrew thought is cultic. This is also true with the Arabic, whose root word *hrm* is parallel to the Hebrew *gadosh*.

While the first model or archetype considers the Ultimate as male, the second one takes the Absolute as feminine or as Mother. This may be true particularly for Brahmanism. In the immanence-transcendent model the Ultimate is neither male nor female; it is neuter because the impersonal is stressed. "Immanence here is so radical that only by transcending everything built upon it can one reach the Ultimate."<sup>3</sup> The supreme experience of the Ultimate is pure nothingness (*sunyata*). The Buddhists describe it in *Nirvana*, which is both psychological and ontological. It is psychological in the sense that one no longer thinks and behaves self-centeredly; it is ontological because the goodness of the world and even of human nature are affirmed. In Mahayana Buddhism, what is holy is the *conjunctio oppositorum*, that is, the meeting of opposites like body and soul, or life and death.

The previous models hold that the Ultimate is either masculine, feminine, or neuter. In the last one, the immanence-immanent model, the Ultimate is apersonal. "There is no other world than this, and there is no use sublimating our longings and desires or projecting our dreams outside the realm of our verification."<sup>4</sup> In other words, it is secular. One example is the Shinto *kami* which is variously translated as "God" or as "divine forces" such as whatever is superior to man. Norinaga's definition of *kami* is "any entity with an unusually powerful function that imparts a feeling of awe."<sup>5</sup>

*Kamis* may be classified either as natural deities – present in natural phenomena/objects –, and anthropological deities, that is, those that control the aforementioned, serve as idea or symbolize an abstract power. The first group includes the ancestral and the nature *kamis* that inhabit stones, mountains, rivers, and trees. Their believers think that reverence and obedience to them brings about the desired aid.

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<sup>3</sup>R. Panikkar, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 314.

<sup>5</sup>Ueda Kenji, "Kami," *The Encyclopedia of Religions*. VIII: p. 243.

The Melanesian religions centered in power belong to this model. Power entails a religious experience of the whole person. It has a "real presence" because it is supposed to give energy. The reaction to power is twofold: Positively, power is *mana* which can be used for something concrete, since Melanesians are pragmatic; negatively, power is taboo or something to be avoided for safety's sake. Thus the believer thinks he eludes danger by insulating himself with amulets or charms.

Taoism also belongs to this model. If the Melanesian religions have their *mana*, Taoism has its *te* or charism. The holy person in Taoism is the sage, the "superior man," or the "true gentleman" of the Confucianism ideal who is in perfect harmony with the *tao* or cosmic order. "... When the charisma of a person goes together with the charisma of office, one has an especially powerful force for harmony."<sup>6</sup>

## II. THE FILIPINO CONCEPT OF GOD

We said at the beginning that the model of the sacred which a people takes has implications in their image of the Absolute. Then we briefly described the four archetypes of the Ultimate as proposed by R. Panikkar. In the following pages we will now explore more in particular the immanence-immanent model. Can one defend, for instance, the idea of God as apersonal and still remain a Christian? Let us try to analyze the feasibility and orthodoxy of this model in the Filipino context.

Since Filipinos vary, we shall begin with the ancient Filipinos, then move to the tribal Filipinos as represented by the Hanunoo Mangyans; and finally to the lowland Filipinos.

### *Ancient Filipino and Myths*

The ancient Filipinos idea of God is reflected in their creation myths. A myth means:

a story accepted as true by the people who narrate it. Thus the Incarnation and the Resurrection can be called mythical because, among other reasons, the Christian believer believes the story of the Incarnation and the Resurrection.<sup>7</sup>

Its Greek etymology *mythos* (word, message, news, story) means that myths are designed to communicate truth. A myth is not work of a person because it "has been *received* through revelation, a vision, or a dream" and

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<sup>6</sup>Alan L. Miller, "Power," *The Encyclopedia of Religions*, XII: pp. 467-476. For further study regarding the models of the Holy or Sacred, cf. Leonardo N. Mercado, "Religious Models and Filipino Thought," in *Solidarity*, 128 (December, 1990), pp. 21-23.

<sup>7</sup>Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures. New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 266.

therefore "enjoy extraordinary authority and respect."<sup>8</sup> Myths differ from folktales because the latter "deal with the present rather than the cosmic order of things; folktales are also focused on personal rather than group behavior."<sup>9</sup>

The study of myths uncovers a people's world view which is unified. Furthermore, myths "legitimize social behavior" since they forcefully control society and because they revitalize society.<sup>10</sup>

The interpretation of myths has many schools of thought. For Jung myths are "the projection of that part of psychic reality which is accessible to us in the collective unconscious;" myths are "the experience and expression of what happens in the soul."<sup>11</sup> A myth "voices the aspirations, the struggles and also the horror and terror that are inevitably bound up with human existence."<sup>12</sup> Besides being a projection of the unconscious, myths may also be the ultimate explanation of reality for a people; or they may be "validations of the social" or they may mediate "conflicts and contradictions."<sup>13</sup>

One class of myth deals with creation. Creation myths usually explain why things are at present. To use the technical term, creation myths are etiological. The events told in myths occur in a primeval setting. "Etiological myth have been called the oldest narratives in human history, arguing that they ask about the 'why' and causes of events."<sup>14</sup>

The idea of God for the ancient Filipinos is reflected in the three states of creation myths. Demetrio assigns three stages in Filipino creation myths.<sup>15</sup> The first stage was when the sky and the earth were close to each other. The second stage started after the sky raised its level. In this second stage came "the ideology of the sky as heavenly father, creator of the universe, giver of life and master of death, and guardian of morality and order who rewards the good and punishes the wicked."<sup>16</sup> The third stage is the retirement of the creator god/s to the highest heavens as idle gods (*dei otiosi*). With the retirement of the creator/s develops the role of "a god who comes down and lives among the peoples, acts as mediator between them and his father in heaven, and plays the role of the culture-hero."<sup>17</sup> Let us examine each stage.

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 267-268.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>11</sup>Hans Schaefer, *Religion and the Cure of Souls in Jung's Psychology*, Bollingen Series XXI (New York: Bollingen Foundation Inc., 1950), pp. 69-70.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>14</sup>Adolf E. Jensen, *Myth and Cult Among Primitive Peoples*, trans. by Marianna Tax Choldin and Wolfgang Weissleder (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 71.

<sup>15</sup>Francisco R. Demetrio, *Myths and Symbol, Philippines*, rev. ed. (Manila: National Book Store, Inc., 1990), pp. 32-33.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup>*Loc. cit.*

In the first stage the earth may be inhabited by people from the sky who lost contact with the sky after landing on earth. A variant myth says that the people came from the surface of the earth.<sup>18</sup> In this connection, some myths narrate that the earth and sky were close to each other.<sup>19</sup> Thus in the Tinguian myth, a hawk (kite) made the sea and sky fight. This fight resulted in the sky ascending and the earth coming into existence through the struggle between the two elements.

The second stage is that of the creator gods. "The Bisayans variously called the creator *Bathala*, *Sidapa*, *Malaon*, *Badadu*, *Makapatag*, *Makaobus*; the Tagalogs, *Bathala Maykapal*; the Negritos, *Maylupa*, and so on."<sup>20</sup> We shall not entertain variant myths of the evil/rival god who is also involved in creation.<sup>21</sup>

The third stage coincides "with further advance of human culture, when men were no longer dependent on food collecting and gathering, and the crafts of skills had been perfected which made man sufficient untohimself."<sup>22</sup> Hence the people were more concerned with the lesser deities who had particular specializations. However, the people did not forget the creator gods whom they involved only in extreme situations like calamities.

This third stage is the context of the culture hero (Heilbringer or tribal ancestor). What is the relationship between the culture hero and the creator god? The concept of *dema* may clarify the point. A *dema* is a culture hero who, through his death, is transformed to a plant or animal important to the tribe. Through his death the *dema* moves from primal time (*in illo tempore*) to human time. His presence is therefore different from the omni-presence of god. The *demas* "continue their existence in the shape of natural objects."<sup>23</sup> Whereas the creator god is removed from the affairs of human kind, the *dema* is concerned for his people whom he guides to their destiny. However, the creator god and the *dema* can sometimes be fused. "When the High God is taken to be the ancestor of man, he takes on characteristic traits of the *Dema*."<sup>24</sup> For example, *Kabunian* of the Cordillera people seems to have both roles. However, *Kabunian* did not die as a *dema*.

Since the creator god in the third stage is remote, this god tends to become impersonal or apersonal. Because since the early Filipinos were concerned with the *anitos* or those who were immediately responsible for their particular

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<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup>Damiana L. Eugenio (comp. and ed.) *Philippine Folk Literature. An Anthology* (Quezon City: University of the Philippine Press, 1982), p. 32.

<sup>20</sup>Demetrio, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>22</sup>*Loc. cit.*

<sup>23</sup>Adolf E. Jensen, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 104.

needs, the idea of the creator got weakened. The Spanish missionaries were successful in substituting the saints for the *anitos* (tribal, nature, or ancestor spirits) depicted as statues.

In short, God for the early Filipinos, as reflected in the third stage, is not a person.

Is this idea present among the present-day tribal Filipinos? Tribal Filipinos continue the traditions of their early ancestors. Let us take a look at the Hanunoo Mangyans.

### *God for the Hanunoo Mangyans*

This group of tribal Filipinos live in Mindoro. The Mangyan name for God is "*Mahal na Maka-ako*" (to be abbreviated as MM). '*Ako*,' the stem of '*maka-ako*' means improvement, betterment, or a promise. Hence '*maka-ako*' is "one who takes it upon himself to improve or to make another better, or one who has pledged himself to do so."<sup>25</sup> '*Mahal*,' on the other hand, is like the Tagalog, 'dear'. In this context, it can be translated as 'divine' as in divine providence.

What is the nature of MM? Dinter, a missionary who has lived with the Mangyans for several years, says MM is quite remote from the Mangyans. "He" interacts with the spirits who in turn interact with people. "He" is equivalent to what is called *deus otiosus* (lazy god). The distant or far-away God is more for the traditional and older Mangyans. However, for the younger ones who have encountered Christianity, MM is near, friendly, and perhaps even like a kind benefactor. The Christian contacts therefore has colored the younger Mangyans' concept. So they also call him *Panginoon* (Lord), or *Diyos Ama* (God the Father).<sup>26</sup>

What is the gender of *Mahal na Maka-ako*? Dinter say he does not know.<sup>27</sup> Postma believes that MM is like a source which is overpowering.

The Mangyans are more concerned with the good and evil spirits than with MM.<sup>28</sup> Their behavior reflects the pan-Philippine behavior of other tribal Filipinos.

We suspect that the personal gods of tribal Filipinos, such as *Kabunian*, actually are not equivalent to MM but as demas or intermediaries to MM.

Is not what we are driving at against the testimony of earlier writings? The answer, I think, depends on the nature of the informants and of the

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<sup>25</sup>Encarnacion Iturralde, "The Religion of the Hanunoo of Southern Mindoro: An Anthropological Approach to Mission Work," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Sto. Tomas, 1973, p. 207.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 236-237.

<sup>27</sup>Personal communication, Aug. 29, 1991, Manila.

<sup>28</sup>Masaru Miyamoto, *The Hanunoo-Mangyan: Society, Religion and Law among a Mountain People of Mindoro Island, Philippines* (Tokyo: National Museum of Ethnology, 1988), pp. 72-83.

ethnographers. A foreign missionary who lived with the Mangyans for decades could not really go to the depth of the Hanunoos until he married one of the Mangyans and became one of them. Only then was he allowed to the inner knowledge of the Mangyans. A German missionary had to be with the Hanunoos for at least five years before the Mangyans began to open up. One reason, perhaps, of the reluctance was the fear of being branded as heretics.

In the two above-mentioned examples, it took years of acquaintance and patience before the Mangyans opened up to their true beliefs. Now we have several cases of researchers who stayed from a few days to weeks or a few years with the Mangyans. In their short stay, they have produced tomes of writings. But how reliable are they? One researcher stayed one month with the Hanunoos and wrote a thick dissertation about them. We also know that Filipinos answer questions in order to please the other party.

The early Spanish missionaries often observed the Filipinos from the biases of the former. For example, they said that the shamans under trance were supposedly under the spell of the devil. What they reported about the names of God, his nature, etc. suffer from the biases of the ethnographers and from the reluctance of the informants.

### ***Lowland Filipinos***

The apersonal nature of God may perhaps be confirmed in two concepts: *palad* (fate) and *gaba* (divine retribution).<sup>29</sup>

The following proverbs may reflect the belief of *palad* which is like a wheel.

*Ang buhay ng tao'y gulong ang kahambing,  
Sa ibabaw ngayon, bukas sa ilalim.*

(Man's life is like a wheel.  
Up now, tomorrow down.)

The same idea is contained in the next proverb.

*Ang panaho'y tambiling, ang mundo'y baliktarin,  
Ang napapailalim ay napapaibabaw din.*

(Time changes and the world is ever turning.  
He who is down under maybe on top sometimes.)

The concept of *palad* has no gender. It is an overpowering force which man has to bow down.

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<sup>29</sup>See Leonardo N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1974), p. 183 ff.; *Elements of Filipino Theology* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1975), pp. 67, 71-72; 84-88; 90-91.

The same is true of *gaba* and its positive counterpart, *suwerte*. *Gaba* is similar to the Hindu concept of karma, although *karma* is both positive and negative. *Gaba*, however, refers to the negative karma. *Gaba* is not only personal but sakop-oriented. For example, a pregnant woman makes fun of a hare-lipped person. When the child is born hare-lipped, people say that she is punished for the mockery that she made. *Pambayad sa utang* (literally, for paying debt/s) means a daughter. It means that a profligate father will pay for his extra-marital infidelities through the daughter/s who will also be victimized by other men.

The opposite of *gaba* is *suwerte* (luck) or *biyaya* (grace). For example, people in an airplane are confident of a safe trip because of the presence of a nun or a priest as co-passenger. They are confident that a person's karma will also extend to them.

Veneration of ancestors has been the traditional Filipino religion.<sup>30</sup> The Christian inculturation of this phenomenon has been the veneration of the saints. In both instances the role God has been distant because the ancestors and the saints are supposed to mediate for the people. The Ilocanos, for example, believe that "the role of *Kabunian*, the High God in the indigenous system, is not significant in the daily and practical encounters between humans and the supernatural."<sup>31</sup>

Although God for the traditional Filipino has been apersonal, Christianity ushered in the personal concept. So we find a continuum of Filipinos: those who still adhere to the apersonal God on one hand, those who worship a personal God on the other hand, and those in between the continuum.

### III. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

We mentioned at the beginning the various models of the sacred where images of Absolute were presented. The first image of the male, personal God has been the dominant Christian, Jewish and Muslim images. Are the three other images theologically defensible or compatible with Christianity? In particular, can one be a Christian by keeping the image of the Absolute as impersonal or apersonal?

#### *A Change in Thinking*

Numbers 11:24-30 tells how the spirit of Yahweh came on 72 elders who thereby prophesied. The same spirit also descended upon Eldad and Meldad

<sup>30</sup>See Stephen K. Hislop, "Anitism: A Survey on Religious Beliefs Native to the Philippines," *Asian Studies* 7 (1971):144-156; Robert E. Fox, "The Function of Religion in Society: the Christian Worker and Social Change," in *Acculturation in the Philippines*, ed. by Peter G. Gowing and William Henry Scott Quezon City: New day Publishers, 1971, pp. 1-8.

<sup>31</sup>Raul Pertierra, *Religion, Politics, and Rationality in a Philippine Community* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988), p. 134.

who were not with the group. A young man asked Moses to let the two stop from prophesying. Moses replied: "Are you jealous on my account? If only the whole people of Yahweh were prophets, and Yahweh gave his Spirit to them all" (v. 29). Likewise Acts 10 shows how Cornelius, the Roman centurion, received the Holy Spirit outside the official church as envisioned by the first Christians. These two biblical accounts reveal how God's grace can work even outside official church structures.

Vatican II's *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* acknowledges that salvation is possible in non-Christian religions. "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions."<sup>32</sup> Vatican II holds that these religions only find their fulfillment in Christ. ". . . Whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations, as a sort of secret presence of God, this activity frees from all taint of evil and restores to Christ its maker, who overthrows the devil's domain and wards off the manifold malice of vice."<sup>33</sup>

The Catholic Church which was intolerant to other religions now advocates religious freedom. "Hence every man has the duty, and therefore the right, to seek the truth in matters religious, in order that he may with prudence form for himself right and true judgments of conscience, with the use of all suitable means."<sup>34</sup> Vatican II also backs up the human freedom of inquiry and its expression: "man [is] free to search for the truth, voice his mind, and publicize it."<sup>35</sup>

The council also favors other cultures since "the Church . . . is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, nor to any particular way of life or any customary pattern of living, ancient or recent."<sup>36</sup> Likewise "in the investigation of revealed truth, East and West have used different methods and approaches in understanding and proclaiming divine things."<sup>37</sup> These different approaches "are often to be as complementary rather than conflicting."<sup>38</sup>

In post-Vatican II developments some statements of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference go further in holding the salvific nature of non-Christian religions. Through the centuries the mystics of various faith have always shared more commonality in expressing their religious experiences instead of doctrinal differences. For the mystics the Ultimate is the *coincidentia oppositorum* (the conjunction of opposites).

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<sup>32</sup>*Nostra Aetate*, no. 1.

<sup>33</sup>*Ad Gentes*, no. 9.

<sup>34</sup>*Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 3.

<sup>35</sup>*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 59.

<sup>36</sup>*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 58.

<sup>37</sup>*Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 17.

<sup>38</sup>*Loc. cit.*

### *Four Images of God*

The models mentioned above present four images of God: as masculine, as feminine, as neuter, and apersonal. Are those images contradictory or complementary? All statements on the Ultimate are analogous. Thus God as Father is not in the same sense as man begetting a child. While the Ultimate or God is Being, all creatures are participatory beings.

One current debate in Christian circles is the claim of the feminists who want to remove the male dominance in the church. They claim that the male bias in the Bible is culture-bound and not that absolute. Congar has shown that God has feminine traits in the Bible. This femininity is attributed to the Holy Spirit. Besides the traditional images of the Holy Spirit such as fire, water, dove etc., the Holy Spirit is also depicted as a woman by some Greek fathers, Eastern liturgy, and by some modern theologians.<sup>39</sup> Boff argues that there is no theological reason which disallows the ordination of women to the priesthood.<sup>40</sup>

The recent attack on the sexist nature of the Bible is similar to the surpassed issue of slavery. The writings of St. Paul, for instance, do not question the slavery but take it for granted. It took centuries for mankind to realize the evil of slavery as institution. Is the Bible therefore wrong? Vatican II holds that "the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of salvation."<sup>41</sup> The commentary on this point quotes St. Thomas Aquinas who says that "any knowledge which is profitable to salvation may be object of prophetic inspiration [while] things which cannot affect our salvation do not belong to inspiration."<sup>42</sup>

Mantovani contends how cultural background influences the idea of the Ultimate and of religion in general.<sup>43</sup> He has shown link between economy, social relations, and ideology (which includes theology, ethics, and religious symbolisms). Thus herders or pastoral cultures may foster male dominance and the male idea of God. However, the case is not so in the cultivators' culture. Details of comparison are in Table 2.

If the four models are like four kinds of ball games (such as soccer, basketball, volleyball, tennis), the rules of each game are analogous. Thus the good athlete in soccer may not be as good in basketball and vice versa. Nor can

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<sup>39</sup>Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 3. trans. by David Smith (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983): 155-164.

<sup>40</sup>Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiology*, The Basic Communities Reinvent the Church, trans. by Robert R. Barr (New York: Orbis Books, 1986): 76-97.

<sup>41</sup>*Dei Verbum*, no. 11.

<sup>42</sup>Walter M. Abbott (ed), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: The America Press, 1966): 119.

<sup>43</sup>Ennio Mantovani, "Comparative Analysis of Cultures and Religions," in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions* (Goroka: the Melanesian Institute, 1984: 49-86.

**TABLE 2**  
**Comparative Analysis of Culture and Religions**

|                           | Economy               | Social Relations                    | Ideology                      |                   |                                      |                                                                    | Ethics                                                                     |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                           |                       |                                     | Symbolism                     | Mythology         | Ritual                               | Theology                                                           |                                                                            |
| Digging-stick Cultivators | Collect and hunt      | Small band                          | Expressing otherness and care | Myths of creation | Narration of creation myths          | Theism                                                             | Acceptance of God's will                                                   |
|                           | No manipulation       | Share work                          |                               |                   | Offering part of collection and game | God intervenes as creator and provider, as giver of law, and judge | Obedience<br>Sin is: disobedience, destroying killing without needing food |
|                           | Nomads                | Special social role of father       | Vertical: father              |                   |                                      | God is personal and near                                           |                                                                            |
| Pastoralists or Herders   | Follow the herd       | Organized to defend the herd        | Vertical sky, high mountain   | Creation myths    | Prayer of thanksgiving               | Theism/Idealism                                                    | Acceptance of God's will                                                   |
|                           | No manipulation       | Male oriented                       |                               |                   | Primitival offering                  | God is personal, spiritual, giver of everything. Judge             | Obedience<br>Humility<br>Sin is: personal disobedience                     |
|                           | Nomads                |                                     |                               |                   | Consecration of animal               |                                                                    | Atonement is personal repentance                                           |
| Collectors or Gatherers   | Cut, burn, dig, plant | Woman is linked with life           | Horizontal: sex               | Dema myths        | Making present the dema event        | Impersonal: all-per-vading life                                    | Active participation<br>Sin is: breaking of taboo, Impersonal              |
|                           | Manipulation          | Ancestors are part of the community |                               |                   |                                      |                                                                    | Atonement is reconnecting oneself with life, impersonal                    |
|                           | Sedentarians          | Matriarcal                          |                               |                   |                                      |                                                                    |                                                                            |

Source: Ennio Mantovanni, "The Comparative Analysis of Culture and Religions" in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1984), pp. 80-81.

the soccer athlete condemn the other games as funny because they do not follow the soccer rules.

The history of religions tells how religious ethnocentrism have led to war and bitter results. Those who valued the first model (for example that God is male) have branded those of the other models as pagans, heathens. The first model of paradigm has been forced on other groups and cultures as necessary.

The clash of models can also lead to controversy. For example, Christian missionaries who come to India insist that charity is the first law. Christians claim that the law of love is unique in Christianity. On the other hand Hinduism believes that the cause of evil is ignorance. Two persons may fight ultimately because of ignorance. Once ignorance is eradicated, the two persons cease to be enemies. Hinduism therefore considers itself superior to Christianity because the former goes to the root of the problem.

Mission history is a witness to this and similar controversies. Christian missionaries of the First World during the colonial era forced the ways of the first model or paradigm on other cultures.

The foregoing analogy applies to the four models of the holy. One application is the idea of the saint and of the ethnical. Each model will have its own counterparts which suit the system. Likewise there is no monopoly in religious symbolism. Tantric Buddhism claims that even the Ultimate can be symbolized sexually.

Can one be a Christian while not espousing the transcendent transcendence model? Can one be a Christian if he belongs to the immanent immanence model of the holy? Pope Paul VI, with the backing of Vatican II, said in Manila in 1970 that the man of Asia can be Christian while remaining Asian. In biblical (Mt. 9:16-17) terms:

No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on to an old cloak, because the patch pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; if they do, the skins burst, the wine runs out, and the skins are lost. No, they put new wine into fresh skins and both are preserved.

Biblical commentaries point that Christ meant the tradition of the pharisees is not compatible with Christian norms. Hence the need for fresh skins for the new wine. However, the same metaphor applies to the idea of the holy and religion in general. In the language of sports, the basketball player who asks a tennis player, "How many shots did you make today?" does not make sense. He is asking the wrong question. Theologians who were dominated by the first model could not get out of their mind-set when they asked questions to those of the other religious paradigms.

The main tradition of Christianity has been a positive (kataphatic) theology which uses concepts to affirm God. But Christianity has also a lesser known tradition of negative (apophatic) theology especially in mysticism.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love, Mysticism and Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1978), p. 8.

Christianity has valid traditions which allow a pluralistic concept of God. Some Christians hold God as a Mother.<sup>46</sup> Feminist theologians have tried to attack the masculine concept of God. But even earlier fathers of the Greek Church already depicted the Holy Spirit as a woman.<sup>46</sup>

Likewise God can also be considered as nothingness. The Ultimate as nothingness is Buddhism is really positive.<sup>47</sup> Some Christian mystics speak of Ultimate in terms of nothingness in the tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>48</sup> Examples of this school are the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and St. John of the Cross.<sup>49</sup> Some distinguished Christian writers have labeled "St. John of the Christian Buddhist . . ."<sup>50</sup>

In view of the pluralism possible in the idea of God, Western theologians have also reconsidered the idea of a personal God.<sup>51</sup>

It should be noted that man's images of God are only analogical. "Father" as applied to my parent is not the same as when applied to God as Father. In terms of masculinity one cannot assign genitals to God because "God is spirit" (Jn. 4:24). One should not be tied up to the idolatry of concepts but to the reality which is the Divine Absolute.

The various images of God are similar to the various models of the sacred. If culture has its themes and counter-themes to keep a healthy dynamism, the various images of God are also healthy checks and balances.

Maloney's remarks may perhaps summarize the main ideas of this article.

Christianity above all other religions strives to keep a happy tension between two currents of a God personalized and abiding beyond man the adorer and a God identified with the enlightened man, the mystic. Christianity seeks through the incarnate Word of God a man is one person to synthesize the two, seemingly opposed emphases. God remains always totally "other" to man, yet through a progressive mystical union God and man become one through grace. God's indwelling life within man assimilates him into the trinitarian life through love which does not destroy man's subjectivity but differentiates his individuality until he becomes aware of his oneness with God.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Female Nature of God: A problem in Contemporary Religious Life," in *God as Father?*, ed. by Johannes-Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx (New York: the Seabury Press, 1981), pp. 61-66.

<sup>46</sup>Congar, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-164.

<sup>47</sup>Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 120-123.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>51</sup>See Edward Schillebeeckx and Bas van Iersel (eds.), *A Personal God?* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977).

<sup>52</sup>George Maloney, "Prayer in the Personal Divine," in *A Personal God?*, p. 146.

Maloney notes that while the *coincidentia oppositorum* (coincidence of opposites) in oriental mysticism makes the identity of both disappear, the Christian counterpart is different. Nicholas of Cusa and St. Bonaventure teach that *coincidentia oppositorum* does not destroy the profane and the sacred "as the two move into a greater union."<sup>53</sup>

Why does oriental mysticism prefer the *coincidentia oppositorum*? Why is it not popular in Western Christianity? We think the reason is social philosophy. In Asia the individual is not stressed because the individual is part of a larger group. On the one hand, the individual is stressed in the West. One example of this is art. The human body has been the focus of Western art. On the other hand, man is a part of a greater tradition of apophatic theology.

We said above that the traditional Filipino image of God is apersonal. But with the coming of Christianity, a form of inculturation has set in. So we have Filipinos who continue the traditional idea of the Absolute as apersonal while they focus themselves on the veneration of the departed ancestors. The other extreme are Filipinos who worship a personal God as most Westerners do. The latter belong the elite, westernized Filipinos. We believe that this model may be harmful to those who have not been fully westernized. This is because their roots are Filipino (oriental) whereas the model of God as apersonal may jar their world view. The result can be a host of problems.<sup>54</sup>

In short, the Filipino model of God as apersonal may be justified in the less-known Christian tradition of apophatic theology and of mysticism.

In view of this pluralism, what pastoral action must be done? These are the options. First, the personalist God followers must allow the traditional Filipinos to continue with their idea of the Absolute as apersonal. Second, the personalists – if they want to go back to their roots and be reinculturated or be intellectually converted – may return to the image of God as apersonal. A nun, who has been steeped with feminist theology, found great consolation in making her meditations on God as apersonal. □

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<sup>53</sup>*Loc. cit.*

<sup>54</sup>See some of the problems mentioned by Florentino Timbreza, "A Second Look at the Filipino Concept of God," *Sophia* 14 (May-August 1984): 1-23.