

# ***Maka-Diyos and the Thomistic Virtue of Faith***

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**Abstract:** In 1988, the then Department of Education, Culture, and Sports implemented the Values Education Program which was considered as one of the ways to fight corrupt practices pervading the private and public sector and to improve the morals among the Filipino citizens. One of the components of the said program is to intensify the value of *maka-Diyos* among the students which seemed to be complicated since no definition was given to encapsulate the concept. By looking into Lourdes Quisumbing's *A Study of the Philippine Values Education Programme (1986-1993)*, this article aims to provide the value of *maka-Diyos* some definition for grounding. A survey of the concepts *bahala na* and *gulong ng palad* is also presented as an analysis of the two common expressions which are commonly associated with the virtue of *maka-Diyos*. The paper likewise examines the writings of Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* regarding the virtue of faith which could help deepen the understanding of this Filipino virtue. It is my hope to identify ways to better speak about this virtue to younger Filipinos to support the values education program of the government and to counter public and private sector corruption.

**Keywords:** Filipino, values, virtue, faith, *maka-Diyos*, values education, *bahala na*, *gulong ng palad*

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## Introduction

It is well acknowledged that the Philippines struggles with public and private sector corruption. In 2022, Transparency International, one of the global think-tanks in fighting corruption, ranked the country at 116 among 180 countries in their Corruption Perception Index having a score of 33/100. The scale marks 0 as “highly corrupt” and 100 being “highly clean.”<sup>1</sup> In response, over the years, the Philippine government has initiated several national programs to combat corruption and reverse a perceived gradual decline of morals among the Filipino people.

Significantly, Senate Resolution No. 10 filed by Senator Leticia Ramos-Shahani in 1987 established a top-level inquiry to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Filipino character. The investigation sought to fortify the moral fiber of the nation. One consequence of this was the implementation of the Values Education Program (VEP) of the Department of Education, Culture, and Sports (DECS) in 1988, though values education was first mentioned in the 1935 Philippine Constitution (Article XIII, Sec. 5). One of the values that was contained in the said program is *maka-Diyos* which was a very important tool that helped the country regain its democratic systems after the martial law. In her theological reflections on the People Power Revolution in the Philippines, theologian Ma. Christina Astorga emphasized that the revolutionary movement, “gave a vision of what is in the Filipinos and in their culture, empowered by their innate religiosity, that enabled them to respond to the cause of justice and freedom in the spirit of nonviolence, founded on moral courage, self-transcendence, and solidarity.”<sup>2</sup> But what exactly is *maka-Diyos*? How do we understand this term based on the documents that established the values education program?

The paper is divided into three parts. First, we will examine the Filipino virtue of *maka-Diyos*, which can be loosely translated as “recognizing God,” as it is understood by the Values Education Program of the Philippines, and by looking into the two common expressions of *maka-Diyos*, *bahala na* and *gulong ng palad*. Second, we discuss the treatises of Aquinas on faith which could be found in the *Summa Theologiae*. Lastly, we shall explain how *maka-Diyos* and faith could be put into dialogue. In this study, our goal will be to deepen our understanding of *maka-Diyos* as a virtue, and to identify ways to better speak about this virtue to younger

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<sup>1</sup> Jelo Ritzhie Mantaring, “PH ranks 116th in global corruption index, still among ‘significant decliners,’” *CNN Philippines*, February 1, 2023. Available at <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2023/2/1/ph-ranks-116th-corruption-perception-index-2022.html>. Original report available at <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022>.

<sup>2</sup> Ma. Christina Astorga, “Culture, Religion, and Moral Vision: A Theological Discourse on the Filipino People Power Revolution of 1986,” *Theological Studies* 67 no. 3 (2006): 601. Available at doi:10.1177/004056390606700305.

Filipinos to support the values education program of the government and to counter public and private sector corruption.

### ***Maka-Diyos* in the Values Education Program**

The concept of *maka-Diyos* was proposed as an important value for the character development of Filipinos in Presidential Executive Order No. 319, “Institutionalizing the Moral Recovery Program (MRP) in All Government Departments, Offices, Agencies, and Government-Owned and Controlled Corporations through the Establishment of Integrity Circles,” which was signed and promulgated by then President Fidel V. Ramos on April 3, 1996.<sup>3</sup> The Executive Order envisions “a Filipino nation that is God-centered, people-empowered, prosperous national community living in Unity, Justice, Freedom, Love and Peace governed by a visionary government that is democratic, responsive and effective, graft-free, transparent and self-corrective with a community of civil and military servants who are professional, competent, disciplined and trustworthy.”<sup>4</sup>

The implementing rules that accompanied the Executive Order declared that it was the policy of the Ramos administration to “strengthen the moral resources of the Filipino people rooted in the Filipino culture, values, and ideals that are *Maka-Diyos*, *Maka-Tao*, *Maka-Bayan*, and *Maka-Kalikasan*.”<sup>5</sup> However, neither the Executive Order nor the implementing rules provided a definition of the virtue of *maka-Diyos*. Interestingly, the national motto of the Philippines, adopted on February 12, 1998, affirmed: “*Maka-Diyos*, *Maka-tao*, *Makakalikasan*, at *Makabansa*,” which can be translated, “For God, for People, for Nature, and for the Homeland.”

To better situate the understanding of the government on the value of *maka-Diyos* at that time, we now turn to a paper, “A Study of the Philippine Values Education Programme (1986-1993),” by Lourdes Quisumbing, which was presented at the 44th International Conference on Education in Geneva, Switzerland, October 3-8, 1994.<sup>6</sup> This comprehensive paper describes the history, implementation, and

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<sup>3</sup> Fidel V. Ramos, “Institutionalizing the Moral Recovery Program (MRP) In All Government Departments, Offices, Agencies and Government-Owned, and Controlled Corporations Through The Establishment Of Integrity Circles.” *Official Gazette*. April 3, 1996. Available at <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1996/04/03/executive-order-no-319-s-1996/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Fidel V. Ramos, “Implementing Rules and Regulations Government Moral Recovery Program as Laid Down Under EO 319,” July 11, 1996. Available at [https://lawphil.net/executive/execord/eo1996/eo\\_319\\_1996.html](https://lawphil.net/executive/execord/eo1996/eo_319_1996.html).

<sup>6</sup> Lourdes R. Quisumbing, “A Study of the Philippine Values Education Programme (1986-1993).” *US Department of Education Educational Resources Information Center*. October 3-8, 1994. Available at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED379203.pdf>.

challenges faced by the Philippine government as it attempts to implement its VEP from 1986 to 1993.

In its preliminaries, Quisumbing established that the Aquino government recognized that “it would be more difficult to rebuild the nation by re-establishing its democratic institutions and by restoring the Filipino people’s freedom and dignity than it was to remove the late dictator, Ferdinand E. Marcos from power.” Therefore, the then DECS identified “Social Transformation through Education,” as its priority and implemented the Values Education Program, to rebuild the democratic foundations of the country.<sup>7</sup> Values education was defined “the process by which values, attitudes, and habits are formed as the learner interacts with the environment under the guidance of a teacher. Studying values will not necessarily influence behaviour. Behaviour can only be influenced when a value is experienced and a commitment made to it in belief and attitude.”<sup>8</sup>

It is clear from the government documents surveyed by Quisumbing that the primary goal of the DECS’s Values Education Program is the development of a person committed to building a free, democratic, peaceful, and progressive Filipino nation. With regards to *maka-Diyos*, one of its specific objectives is to form a Filipino who possesses the value or trait of having “an abiding faith in God and spirituality.”<sup>9</sup> At the primary level in elementary schools, the VEP seeks “to prepare a child for becoming an enlightened, disciplined, self-reliant, productive, nationalistic, and God-fearing Filipino citizen.”<sup>10</sup> More specifically, in elementary schools, the program sought to develop a child who is “God-loving, with an abiding faith in God.”<sup>11</sup>

At the secondary level, the VEP affirms that “values education aims to develop skills for rational thinking and judgments, makes use of the experiential approach and revolves around four concepts.”<sup>12</sup> One of these concepts is *pagkamaka-Diyos*, which the DECS translates as “valuing God.”<sup>13</sup> The measured outcomes to evaluate the success of the VEP with regards to spirituality are divided into two: (a) assessment of verbal behavior consists of determining whether the student “speaks about one’s reflections on spiritual life and relationships with others; shares personal experiences relative to faith, hope, and love”<sup>14</sup> and (b) assessment of actions includes

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 17.

whether the student “manifest [*sic*] desirable attitudes, habits and actions; influences others to become better persons.”<sup>15</sup>

Finally, for the DECS, values education at the tertiary level, i.e., at the college and university level, was only offered to those students who would be teaching in the Values Education Program in the future. A revised program implemented in 1993 had the specific goal of producing “teachers who value building a humane nation (*makatao*), nationalism (*makabansa*), and who love God (*maka-Diyos*).”<sup>16</sup>

In sum, from survey of Quisumbing on the documents of the government, the framers of the values education program understood *maka-Diyos* as that value that acknowledges the existence of a supreme being and endows Filipinos with a spiritual life. Because of this recognition of God, the Filipino would then be able to share that spiritual life and other personal experiences of faith, hope, and love, with his fellow citizens. Other outward manifestations of *maka-Diyos* include the capacities to influence others to become better individuals and to manifest desired attitudes, habits, and actions.

### **On Bahala Na and Gulong ng Palad**

Looking into the Filipino value of *maka-Diyos*, it is important to understand Filipino religiosity. The Philippines was influenced by different foreign nations thru trade and colonization which have shaped our understanding of religion. Thus, it would be difficult to encapsulate the description of this value by using the standard of any one religion. Elesterio pointed out that a determinate part of the human-ness of a Filipino is composed of, “his religious beliefs and practices derived from Islam, Roman Catholicism, American Protestantism, or from more ancient roots - that is, from elements which are considered as pre-Islamic or pre-Christian in the context of Philippine cultural history.”<sup>17</sup>

These external forces, in the form of different religions, have not, however, eliminated a specific viewpoint that shapes how Filipinos understand the world. Like their Asian counterparts, Filipinos embrace a holistic worldview. The world, even the self, is regarded as a whole, where the physical, spiritual, and divine, together are integral portions of reality. Therefore, the Filipino mind is not particularly focused on making categorizations or compartmentalization of reality.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>17</sup> Fernando G. Elesterio, *Three Essays on Philippine Religious Culture* (Manila, Philippines: De La Salle University Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Jove Jim S Aguas. “The Filipino Value of *Pakikipagkapwa-Tao* Vis-À-Vis Gabriel Marcel’s Notion of Creative Fidelity and Disponibilitè.” *Scientia* 5.2 (2016): 17-39.

Even today, a general notion that the world is something that cannot be controlled pervades the Filipino mind. This leads to a supernaturalistic tendency to believe that the success and failure of everyone could be attributed to elemental beings and spirits.<sup>19</sup> From these spring two such commonplace Filipino attitudes called *bahala na* (come what may) and *gulong ng palad* (wheel of fortune).<sup>20</sup>

*Bahala na* can be understood as an expression of fatalism in which a person relies on “spirits” to take care of his or her every concern in life. Because of their lack of control in their world, Filipinos can resort to divine resignation.<sup>21</sup> Take for example a student who is supposed to face a major examination in the coming week. Having the *bahala na* attitude, the student will not review material for the exam since he believes that what will happen will happen, and that there will still be chances to make-up for his failures. This attitude reveals a lack of sense of responsibility and a wrong notion of trust in the divine.

Yet this limited viewpoint has been contested by Fr. Vitaliano Gorospe, S.J., who claimed that linguistic experts have corrected the notion that the term *bahala na* is derived from the ancient Tagalog deity, *Bathala*. It should not be understood in terms of “God will provide.” Rather, based on a more current understanding, he stated that in invoking *bahala na*, a person resorts to “a kind of fatalistic resignation which really represents a withdrawal from engagement or crisis or a shirking of personal responsibility.”<sup>22</sup> From an analysis of common languages in contemporary Filipino society, Ranie Villaver reduces this *bahala na* notion to two attributes: (1) a person’s resignation to whatever the future may bring or to fate, after having done everything she could; (2) simply deciding on a course of action in the hope that things will turn out all right.<sup>23</sup> Between the two features, the second seems to be related to the value of *maka-Diyos* since this proposes a surrender to God’s hands for blessing in contrast to the first which is a reliance to one’s fate and has nothing in connection with God.

The other Filipino attitude, *gulong ng palad*, can also be considered as a reason why a Filipino would just accept whatever life would bring without question.

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<sup>19</sup> Vivian Ligo-Ralph, “Some Theses Concerning the Filipino Value System.” *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 18.3 (1990): 149-161; 154.

<sup>20</sup> Jason V. Hallig, “Communicating Holiness to the Filipinos: Challenges and Needs: The Path to A Filipino Theology of Holiness.” *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 2.1 (2002): 1-16. Available at <https://whdl.org/en/browse/resources/6723>.

<sup>21</sup> Hallig, “Communicating Holiness to the Filipinos,” 7.

<sup>22</sup> Vitaliano R. Gorospe, SJ, “Christian Renewal of Filipino Values.” *Philippine Studies* 14.2 (1966): 191-227; 218. For a thorough conceptual discussion of *bahala na*, see Jose M. de Mesa, *And God said, “Bahala na”! The Theme of Providence in the Lowland Filipino Context*, Maryhill Studies 2 (Quezon City: Maryhill School of Theology, 1979).

<sup>23</sup> Ranie B. Villaver, “Li and Filipino Behavioural Propriety.” *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* 16.2 (2020): 85-115; 97.



Likening life to a circular shape of the wheel, this attitude views life as a dynamic movement that rolls necessarily with its ups and downs compared to the goodness and difficulties of life. Having this vantage point makes a Filipino hope less for new things. Instead, he surrenders everything to *Bathala* as he travels his life's journey. In the end, in his view, life is composed of repetitive circumstances which no one can control or change.<sup>24</sup> The imagery of *Bathala's* wheels evokes a "circular manner of thinking" which puts perspective "aright in the course of time like a true wheel of *karma*."<sup>25</sup> Quito opines that this philosophy generates virtues such as prudence (to be reminded of the image of the wheel and its cyclic motion) and optimism (to serve as reminder especially when one experiences to be at the "bottom").<sup>26</sup>

In sum, this section has considered *bahala na* and *gulong ng palad*. We have seen that the view of the Filipinos regarding the virtue of *maka-Diyos* does not only involve acknowledging a supreme being but also encompasses a total resignation to the divine. Since their framework emerged from a standpoint which sees the world as inhabited by spirits, this leads Filipinos to the idea that they have a little or no control over life. Therefore, in times of hardships or difficulties, the approaches that they embrace involve fatalistic tendencies which are *bahala na* and *gulong ng palad*. It is up for the *Bathala* to guide the course of their daily lives and to bring about the results which they aspire.

### The Thomistic Virtue of Faith

To deepen our understanding of *maka-Diyos*, we now turn to the Thomistic account of the virtue of faith, focusing on the opening questions of the *Secunda Secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*. As we will see, this virtue can illuminate and deepen the view of *maka-Diyos* described in the government documents supporting its values education program.

In the first article in the *Summa theologiae* on faith, St. Thomas Aquinas tells us that whenever we speak of faith, this virtue pertains to the knowing of God himself who has revealed himself in his word.<sup>27</sup> When we have faith, we believe God and the things that pertain to Him. Moreover, though God in himself is simple, we do not know him simply because our intellects are limited in their ability to know him.<sup>28</sup> Thus, our minds struggle to do their best to know God in a way that can be expressed

<sup>24</sup> Hallig, "Communicating Holiness to the Filipinos," 7.

<sup>25</sup> Villaver, "Li and Filipino Behavioural Propriety," 97.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q.1 a. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q.1 a.2.

in propositions.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, though our minds can fall into error, the propositions of faith, in principle, cannot be mixed with falsity since the object of faith, by definition, is the truth about God who is the First Truth.<sup>30</sup>

With regards to the act of faith, the verb, “to believe,” according to Aquinas, means, “to think with assent.”<sup>31</sup> This object of this act of assent can be distinguished in three ways. Internally, the first way of understanding the assent of faith is to say that we believe in a God who exists. The next way is by affirming that we believe God. Lastly, this leads us to say that we believe in God.<sup>32</sup> After manifesting our act of faith internally, it is also imperative that we express it externally in an act of confession such a way that our faith is heard in words and seen in deeds.<sup>33</sup>

After discussing the act of faith, which involves both the intellect and the will, Aquinas moves to the virtue of faith. It is a habituation of the intellect such that it can habitually assent to the truth that is God and all that he has revealed.<sup>34</sup> What this means concretely is that the person who has faith is disposed to believe God and what God has revealed. Importantly, for the virtue of faith to be active and living, charity must be present or else faith will be lifeless or formless.<sup>35</sup> Finally, Aquinas affirms that among all the virtues, living faith holds primacy of place since there would be no other supernatural virtues without it.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, it is noteworthy that Aquinas affirms that the virtue of faith is a gift from God.<sup>37</sup> Faith is not something that someone can earn or obtain on his own. It is infused into the individual by God. With regards to believers, Aquinas that it is possible that one person has a greater faith in comparison to other individuals. This happens when one has a fuller and clearer understanding of the matters about faith than the other. This is also possible since there are some who have a greater devotion and a more robust practice of their faith.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Filipino Virtue of *Maka-Diyos* in Light of the Thomistic Account of Faith**

The Philippine government documents establishing the Values Education Program consistently refer to *maka-Diyos* as a value. But what exactly is a value? How

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 3 a. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 6 a. 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 4.



does a value guide human action? This is not clear. Therefore, in light of the Thomistic account of faith summarized above, I think that it is more accurate to affirm that *maka-Diyos* is a virtue. It is a habituation within the individual that predisposes him to affirm that God, as the supreme being, exists. Unlike the theological virtue of faith described by Aquinas, Filipinos regardless of their religious tradition can possess *maka-Diyos* as a philosophical virtue. Therefore, with *maka-Diyos*, Christians can affirm that the Triune God exists. With *maka-Diyos*, Muslims can affirm that Allah exists. And with *maka-Diyos*, animists can affirm that some supreme deity exists.

How would our account of *maka-Diyos* as a virtue impact the Values Education Program of the Philippine government? Habituation is an extended process that takes time. As a philosophical virtue, *maka-Diyos* would habituate the intellect so that it is open to and capable of religious thought. This process of habituation process would occur at home, in school, and out in Filipino society, and would begin when the child is still young. To facilitate this habituation process and to complement the religious formation that should be happening within the family, the government's Values Education Program should seek to remove any philosophical objections that a student may have on the existence of God. By responding to these objections, and providing reasonable rebuttals to them, the VEP can prepare Filipinos to better grasp and embrace the diverse theological claims of their particular religious traditions. As the scholastics often observed, philosophy is the handmaiden of theology.

## Conclusion

In this study, we have discovered that *maka-Diyos* was understood as an acknowledgment of the presence of a supreme being who empowers the Filipinos with spiritual life. A further analysis of the prevailing expressions of *maka-Diyos* including *bahala na* and *gulong ng palad* expands our understanding of the said value by positing that recognition of the divine also includes our total resignation as influenced by the Filipino worldview. *Maka-Diyos* could be considered as a virtue, following the Thomistic viewpoint, because by habituation, the individual is predisposed to affirm that God, as the supreme being, exists. How do we apply these realizations in a concrete reality? Moving back to Astorga, her analysis suggests that the religiosity of the Filipino people – grounded in my view, by their inherent embrace of *maka-Diyos* – explains well the powerful and yet non-violent movement that successfully overcame a corrupt administration. It is a story that should be used to remind the Filipino people that their religious faith has been and can once again be an antidote to the public and private sector corruption that continues to delay the development and prosperity of the nation.<sup>PS</sup>

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¶ La salute Regina q̄da



Elle te Dios Reyna yma  
dee de misericordia vida

dulçura y esperança nra. Dios  
te salute ati llamamos los deste  
crados hijos de Eva. Ati suspi  
ramos quiendo yllorando en  
aqueite valle de lagrimas. Ca  
pues abogada nuestra buelue  
anofores effios tus misericor  
diosos ojos. y despues de a