

MISSION IN THE CONTEXT OF FILIPINO FOLK SPIRITUALITY:
BAHALA NA AS A CASE IN POINT

Tereso C. Casiño

(drterry63@ttgst.ac.kr)

Filipino spirituality is a product of a conglomeration of religious worldviews and value systems.¹ It is no surprise then for Filipinos to be known for their religious and spiritual devotion in both 'lived experience and as reflections on that experience'.² One good example of valuing a 'lived experience' from a religious perspective is the famous People Power Revolution, which sent former President Ferdinand E. Marcos to exile in February 1986. In hindsight some evangelicals and Catholics in the Philippines interpret the People Power Revolution as an indigenous form of Filipino spirituality.³ In the Filipino context, that which provides an indigenous framework for Filipino 'lived experiences' is the traditional concept of *bahala na*.

Christian mission in the Philippines began with Catholic missionaries in the 1500s. This was followed by a surge of Protestant missions at the turn of the 20th century when Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States of America. However, almost five-hundred years of Christian presence across the archipelago have not dislodged the fatalistic bent of Filipino spirituality, which evidently hinders authentic Christian discipleship among millions of Filipinos. This essay seeks to assess the interface between authentic Christian discipleship and the Filipino paradigm of folk spirituality known across the country as *bahala na*. This fatalistic bent is the epitome of Filipino folk spirituality that continues to baffle missionaries today. This study will identify major religious worldviews that provide the framework for solidifying a fatalistic mentality among Filipinos. Overall the study investigates various aspects of fatalism and its effect on and implications to Christian discipleship within the larger context of mission spirituality.

1. Linguistic Roots of *BAHALA NA*

The Filipino *bahala na* may be derived from the Hindu concept of *Bathala* or the Sanskrit word, *bhara*, which means, 'load'.⁴ In the early times, the shift from /r/ to /l/, and in this case, from *bhara* to *bhala*, was a common linguistic phenomenon. 'Load' could mean 'responsibility,' which seems to be the closest linguistic meaning of *bahala*. Filipinos speak over 80 major languages, but the phrase, *bahala na*, appears to have a nationwide linguistic acceptance.⁵ The fatalistic connotation of *bahala na* is expressed similarly in the Spanish phrase, *Que sera, sera* (Whatever will be, will be).⁶

1.1 Religious Streams behind *Bahala Na* Spirituality

Bahala na evolved from four major religious worldviews, namely, animism, Hinduism, Islam, and Catholicism. A fifth may be added, the Chinese religion, but the Chinese influence in the Philippine society, both ancient and contemporary, is basically confined to economics, trade, and material culture with no dent on the common religious psyche of Filipinos. Of course, there is an emerging trend in some parts of the Philippine society to embrace the practice of *feng shui* in Philippine modern architecture.⁷ But this lacks nationwide acceptance in the contemporary Filipino society.

The four major religious traditions remain to have a strong influence in the Filipino religious consciousness and spirituality. The first stream of Filipino spirituality is animistic in essence and form. Animism remains the bedrock of Philippine religious experience. Ancient

Filipinos practiced spirituality by worshiping celestial beings and nature, including ancestral spirits.⁸ The breadth of animistic influence continues to manifest even in the present-day Catholicism, and to some extent, the Philippine society as a whole.

The second major stream of spirituality came when Hinduism reached the Philippines as early as 900 A.D. by traders from India and nearby islands. The Hindu traders brought with them social, economic, and religious systems. Filipino anthropologist, F. Landa Jocano, notes that *bahala na* is traceable to the ancient Filipino's highest-ranking deity known as Bathala, believed to be of Hindu origin.⁹ Bathala was known to be a powerful yet benevolent deity. Anthropologists assume that the reassuring benevolence of this deity accounts for the dominant risk-taking and adventuresome trait of the Filipinos. Regardless therefore of what will happen to them in the future, Filipinos believe that Bathala is available to lend assistance and help. Apparently such belief in Bathala became a dominant element in the fatalistic consciousness of ancient and contemporary Filipinos.

The third stream developed upon the arrival the Islamic faith in 1380 A.D. through a visit by a Muslim missionary named Mukdum.¹⁰ The Muslim influence in the Filipino *bahala na* seems to account for the predeterministic consciousness of Filipino life. The Islamic philosophical system allows one to resign himself or herself to fate (*kismet*) according to the will of Allah. When facing life's crises and adverse circumstances, a Filipino concedes, "If this is my lot, what can I do?"¹¹ *Bahala na* reinforces the belief that every event and circumstances in the universe emanates from the will of Allah. Of the Islamic concept of predeterminism, David L. Johnson observes, "When a man acts, God creates in him the will, the power, the intention to act. Yet a man is responsible for what he does. God acts through a man, but a man acquires the responsibility for the act."¹² This extreme predeterministic attitude best expresses the core of Filipino folk spirituality.

The fourth religious stream began with the arrival of Catholic Christianity in the 1500s. When Catholic friars arrived in the archipelago, they discovered that Filipinos already had existing religious representations. So they simply assimilated these religious expressions in their missionary work. The result was the baptizing of local deities with Christian names. As a matter of fact, folk Catholicism developed by giving local deities equivalent functions and powers with patron saints. As the Spanish brand of Catholicism spread across the archipelago, it affected little the traditional fatalistic Filipino concept of *bahala na*. Over the centuries, Filipino Catholics, and later, many Protestants, embraced the concept without critical objection. They seem to find in *bahala na* the Christian equivalent of the believer's prayer of "Thy will be done".¹³ The common practice of combining *bahala na* (fatalistic worldview) with "Thy will be done" (faith worldview) produces the Filipino experience of *split-level spirituality*.¹⁴

1.2 The Sociological Application of Bahala Na

From a sociological perspective, *bahala na* allows Filipino individuals to connect with others. As a form of trust, a Filipino facing adversities in life would say, "Bahala ka na sa pamilya ko" (Take charge of my family).¹⁵ Thus *Bahala na* takes a sociological function when used to relate to others, especially in terms of trust, responsibility, and stewardship. When invoked, *bahala na* becomes a binding covenant through which people commit themselves to help or to care for one another. The concept then becomes a boundary-marker for interpersonal relations among Filipinos. Nevertheless, *bahala na* may also encourage Filipinos to embrace an unproductive perspective about life. Resigning totally to the work of *kapalaran* or *suwerte*, the Filipino may appear indifferent in the face of graft and corruption as well as welcome personal misfortunes impassively. The Filipino behaviorist, Tomas D. Andres, pointedly writes:

Bahala na works against individual and social progress. The Filipino takes on a posture of resignation to the fact: *Talagang ganyan ang kapalaran*. It harnesses one's behavior to a submissiveness that eats up one's sense of responsibility and personal independence. It provides

one with a false sense of self-confidence to proceed with an unsound action in the belief that somehow one will manage to get by.¹⁶

1.3 The Psychological Dimension of Bahala Na

Bahala na functions as a psychological mechanism, combining both negative and positive points. The downside of bahala na lies in its fatalistic bent where a Filipino leaves everything up to kapalaran (destiny); doing so would free a person from human responsibility. However, bahala na could pad the Filipino ego against failure and disappointment.¹⁷ Similarly bahala na mitigates a Filipino from becoming a "mental hospital patient."¹⁸ In daily practice though, bahala na is considered undesirable because Filipinos tend to use it as a negative psychological justification for their failure to take up human responsibility and accountability in times hardships and crises. Still, others use it as a psychological defense mechanism to cope with adversities and failures.

Many in the Philippines view bahala na as the "spirit to take risks."¹⁹ A fitting illustration is that of Sarah, who, at a tender age of fourteen, left the Philippines to work as a maid in a Middle East country.²⁰ The risk-taking spirit epitomized by bahala na is characterized with hope because many Filipinos, even in extreme difficulties, hope for the best.²¹ When conditions are tough, the Filipino spirit of courage blends well with strong hope. In worst times the Filipino spirit is unbending and tends to dare the impossible. This daring spirit is expressed in local songs, poetry, and proverbs.²² Given the Filipino daring spirit, bahala na serves as a reservoir of psychic energy and functions as an effective psychological prop on which one leans whenever life's situations get tough. Jose M. de Mesa stresses, "Bahala na provides Filipinos the capacity to laugh at themselves and the situations they are in. It reflects, in addition, the oriental philosophy to be in harmony with nature. While it may appear passive, it is nevertheless dynamic without being coercive."²³

1.4 The Religious Orientation of Bahala Na

The heart of the traditional Filipino spirituality lies in the bipolar religious potential of bahala na.²⁴ This means that bahala na possesses both positive and negative religious dimensions. Religiously speaking, bahala na operates on the belief that somewhere, a cosmic force exists (not necessarily a Supreme Being) that controls the flow of the events in the universe. It is common for a Filipino to believe that his or her life is lived according to a fixed blueprint, which was designed by a cosmic force.

Paradoxically, the notion of an existing cosmic force that controls earthly life produces an element of trust.²⁵ As a result, bahala na serves as a religious tool through which one's life may be interpreted. There is therefore an element of optimism in bahala na despite its strong fatalistic orientation. Filipinos, for instance, who live in abject poverty still hope that one day, the wheel of life (*Gulong ng buhay* or *kapalaran*) can still turn in their favor no matter how long it would take. If *suwerte* (luck) does not come to the parents, it might come to their children or grandchildren. The Cebuano proverb puts it rightly, *Sa likod sa itom nga panganod, aduna baya'y pag-laom* (Behind a dark cloud is a ray of hope).²⁶

Optimism, however, which is produced by a bahala na attitude, could be taken to the extreme. Filipinos who put their trust in *kapalaran* (fortune) tend to be complacent about their work or future. Added to this is the view that time is elastic, which makes it difficult for many Filipinos to enforce a sense of urgency in their daily life. Oftentimes, the common dictum, "There is always a tomorrow," makes many Filipinos work leisurely.²⁷

Furthermore, the kind of spirituality informed by the bahala na worldview could function as a religious escape mechanism whereby Filipinos shy away from being active participants in the events of life. In many cases, bahala na translates into a religious "I-don't-care" attitude. Under the influence of spiritual apathy, the Filipino says, "Hindi naman kami pababayaan ng *Maykapal*" ("The Supreme Being will not at all abandon us"). Even though bahala na develops

an attitude of passive resignation, it does help an individual to accept misfortune acquiescently. This makes *bahala na* functional as a religious 'shock absorber,' whereby a Filipino protects himself or herself from experiencing potential or actual impact of failures and fears in life. *Bahala na* thus functions to 'maintain one's sanity in the presence of actual difficulty'.²⁸

2. The Essence of *BAHALA NA* Spirituality

Even before Spanish Christianity came to the Philippines, the inhabitants of the archipelago were deeply religious as they worshiped the sun, moon, stars, trees, rocks, and other sacred objects. Islam and Hinduism notably influenced the religious consciousness of the pre-Spanish Filipinos. When Spanish Christianity arrived in the archipelago, this religious consciousness became deeply entrenched in the psyche of the inhabitants.

One notable aspect of the religious consciousness that is buried in the depth of the Filipino psyche is the courage to accept or face adverse circumstances. In the Filipino psyche, the world is a series of karma, an ethical predetermined system of cause-and-effect. Anything, then, that happens to a Filipino (whether good or bad) is attributed to a cause, that is, an impersonal force known as *suwerte* (luck), *tsamba* (chance), or *kapalaran* (destiny). *Suwerte*, *tsamba*, *kapalaran*—all of which are non-ethical in nature—and karma, which is ethical, account for the Filipino's unbending spirit amid crisis and bad circumstances. In this connection, a Filipino's response to crisis and hardships is epitomized by the expression, *bahala na*.

Against this backdrop, *bahala na* evolves as a religious tool or device in which a Filipino practically copes with the adverse demands and circumstances of life. In order to survive, a Filipino toys with fatalism as a means of easing the pain of his or her circumstances as well as lessening the burden of his existence. In such case, *bahala na* functions as a convenient theodicy for Filipinos. Ironically, *bahala na* suggests to a Filipino that he or she is a mere automaton whose existence is at the disposal of the impersonal forces, namely, *suwerte* or *kapalaran*. In this context, *bahala na* operates as a paradigm for traditional Filipino spirituality.

The spread of Catholic Christianity in the Philippines did not correct the traditional fatalistic Filipino concept of *bahala na*. In many instances, Filipinos who have been converted to Christianity (whether Catholic or Protestant) retain the traditional concept of *bahala na*. Interestingly enough, many Filipino Christians have adopted the concept without critical objection and seem to interpret it as equivalent to the Christian notion of 'Thy will be done.' This syncretistic tendency poses a challenge to many Filipino Christians who simply hang up on the issue because they do not know what to do with it. These opposing paradigms construct in the contemporary Filipino religious experience a syncretistic form of spirituality.

3. The Clash between *BAHALA NA* and Christian Spirituality

Friends call him Bunso, an intimate word for the youngest in the family. Bunso spoke gently as he narrated his experience. He worked in a Middle East country for years but suddenly lost his job because of the economic crunch that hit even the oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf. Instead of returning to the Philippines, he decided to go to Kish Island, a territory of Iran, where he waited for his next entry visa to Dubai. At first he was optimistic that the visa would arrive in 10 days, but weeks passed so quickly and the days rolled into 20, then 40, and the counting never ends. By the time Bunso survived the island for more than 70 days, the hotel had enough of him because he could not pay his bills. So the hotel management had him deported. The night he was deported, he was confused but did not lose hope. Friends stood by him. Saying goodbyes, tears rolled down his cheeks, knowing what would happen next to him. Yet, his courage was there, a combination of *bahala na* and God's will.²⁹

Filipinos confront two frameworks of spirituality in their daily life. They either live in a life of faith in a personal God who cares for them or abandon themselves to fate and simply wait passively on their fortunes or misfortunes. Of course, they can also decide to combine faith with

fate, which seems to be common in Philippine society. Many, however, equate the two without critical objection and reflection, which results in a syncretistic form of spirituality.³⁰

As noted Bahala na survives almost 500 years of the presence of Christianity across the Philippine archipelago and the onslaught of secularism and modernization. It has become a popular expression to cope with the pressing demands of life. Bahala na has become a paradigm of folk spirituality and functions as a theodicy in the Philippine society through which a Filipino lessens the pain of his or her adverse circumstances. In strict sense, *bahala na* worldview offers a kind of spirituality that is fatalistic in orientation and execution. This poses problems to missionary work across the archipelago as messengers of the gospel teach that God acts within and through human history and that God is very much interested in the daily affairs of human beings. Interestingly many Filipinos equate Christian spirituality, expressed in the prayer language, 'Thy Will be Done,' and *bahala na* easily, taking the two without critical reflection and theological objection.³¹ This results in a confused understanding and experience of spirituality, and poses theological and missiological problems. This uncritical acceptance and interpretation resulted in a unique blend of spirituality from animistic, Hindu, Islamic, and folk Catholic traditions. Contemporary Filipinos face an impasse regarding the issue of knowing when they have already crossed the boundary that gulfs between the Christian version of God's will and *bahala na* spirituality, or whether both paradigms of spirituality are either complimentary or dissonant.³²

3.1 "Bahala Na" Spirituality Operates within a Fatalistic Worldview Over-against a Theistic Worldview of Christian Spirituality

Bahala na derives from a fatalistic world view. The vague conceptualization of God by pre-Spanish Filipinos resulted in a belief that is still prevalent in the contemporary Philippine society. Accordingly everything that happens is predetermined by an impersonal force or supernatural powers. On the basis of predetermined events, Filipinos try their best to forecast future events in order to avoid the curse of *palad* (fate). Because *palad* is faceless, Filipinos struggle to find ways to cope with life's inevitable events and circumstances. So they end up surrendering to the impersonal forces of the universe. Fatalism operates within the broader spectrum of Philippine society, and many Filipinos view *bahala na* as a psychological necessity more than a philosophy of life. Others perceive *bahala na* as primarily an ethical spirituality--a proper religious behavior in line with the will of an impersonal force known as Bathala. However, Filipinos conceptualize Bathala in plain anthropomorphism, an impersonal force that possesses 'a will'.³³ Whenever people face difficulty in determining Bathala's will, they exert extra efforts to maintain proper behavior. In this sense, a Filipino may know that he or she conforms to the will of Bathala by reading and interpreting one's karma, a practice that is mostly done on a trial-and-error basis.³⁴

In contrast Christian spirituality operates on the basis of a knowledge and experience of the providential will of a personal God.³⁵ In the Judeo-Christian tradition, God relates himself to creation actively, purposively, and personally. In this manner, faith serves as the Christian's response to the creative acts of the personal God in and through history. Christians understand faith as a 'personal trust in God on the basis of knowledge' of his will.³⁶ This being the case, Christian spirituality finds fulfillment in a theistic worldview that guarantees an informed basis of a person's faith in God. Here the formation of one's faith results from a personal encounter with the God whose providence continually reaches out to humanity. 'To know and experience the power of God in our lives,' explains Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano, 'is superior to the derring-do of *bahala na* because our confidence to act does not arise from desperation but from a firm belief that ours is the right action. Of course, such assertion assumes that our faith is both biblically well-formed and well-informed.'³⁷ The heart of Christian spirituality lies in the conviction that God discloses his will to humanity as the guide, framework, and potential for personal growth and creative possibilities in one's life. The grammar of this disclosure is the will of God, something that could be 'communicated to and acted upon by human beings'.³⁸

3.2 Fatalistic Impersonal Force Directs "Bahala Na" Spirituality While the Relational Providential God Sustains Christian Spirituality

Common among many Filipinos is the belief that impersonal forces act behind the universal system and determine the events and affairs in the world. The notion of Bathala as impersonal rather than active, dynamic, and related reinforces this belief.³⁹ Over the centuries Bathala and other supernatural forces have been consistently depicted in non-personal languages.⁴⁰ Both the 1935 and 1973 Philippine Constitutions maintain the term 'Divine Providence' in the Preamble, attesting to the long history of a belief in vague identity of supernatural forces or a supreme being. Culturally, the category, 'Divine Providence,' appears equivalent to the Cebuano usage of Bathala, which, interestingly bears equal status with Panahon (time). One may say, *Ang panahon ra gayod ang magbuot kung unsay mahitabo kanato* (Only time can determine what will happen to us).⁴¹

Interestingly the 1986 Philippine constitution made a major shift. Rather than imploring the aid of the 'Divine Providence,' which is impersonal, the 1986 Constitution now invokes the aid of the 'Almighty God,' a relational language.⁴² This departure from the traditional notion of a cosmic force shows that the worldview that supports bahala na is no longer adequate to meet the religious needs of contemporary Filipinos. Bahala na promises only a manipulative fatalistic form of spirituality that commits Filipinos to the control of impersonal supernatural forces. Nonconformity to the 'will' of impersonal forces could result in misfortunes and bad events. Thus, behavioral orientation depends largely on adapting oneself to nature rather than the mastery of it. In times of fortunes and misfortunes, Filipinos look up to a transcendental reference point: 'Bathala has caused it.' This cause, however, appears to be a human personification rather than a portrayal of a personal deity.

In contrast, Christian spirituality stresses on a relational bonding between God and the believers, a relationship that is consummated in a covenant. As a moral relationship, God and believers bond in a covenant that allows the exercise of respective 'wills.'⁴³ The moral aspect that underlies this covenant relationship shows a stark contrast between Christian spirituality and bahala na. Christian spirituality then hinges on the 'will of God' in contradistinction with the impersonal grounding of the spirituality which bahala na offers.⁴⁴ While Filipinos seek to experience harmony with nature, and, consequently, conform to the 'wheel of fortune,' the Christian seeks to establish a sound relationship with an all-wise, all-powerful, all-loving providential God. In the strictest sense, cosmic order is achieved through a personal relationship with God.⁴⁵ Christian spirituality discloses a personal reality that orders the world not from within but from beyond, while bahala na portrays an impersonal reality that orders the world from within and is in itself subject to that order.⁴⁶ The impersonal supernatural force of bahala na is directly accessible to and knowable by Filipinos by their actions and behaviors as determinant factors. Christian spirituality, on the other hand, points to an orderly universe that roots itself in God's providential will, something that is accessible to and knowable by faithful believers.⁴⁷ Thus, Christian spirituality depicts two wills--God and humanity—that interact dynamically with each other within the boundaries of a covenant. But bahala na portrays an impersonal supernatural force whose 'will' is vague and could be experienced basically through a series of fortunes and misfortunes.

3.3 "Bahala Na" Spirituality Operates within a Cynical Impersonal Ethic of History Over-against Christian Spirituality that Functions with a Definite Goal-Oriented Vision of God's Activity in and through History

Impersonal ethic characterizes bahala na spirituality, stressing that human life is executed according to *gulong ng palad* (wheel of fortune). The traditional Filipino psyche holds that 'Life is like a wheel, up today, down tomorrow'. To many Filipinos, the wheel metaphor is a blueprint for one's destiny, something that is directed by a supernatural force, either personified as Bathala or the impersonal categories of time or providence that controls the 'wheel of

fortune'.⁴⁸ Such worldview rules out any concept of purpose or goal in life as time is the bringer of one's fate and destiny. Even Bathala and other supernatural forces, which many Filipinos perceive as the ones that control cosmic affairs, do not have the freedom within the system that they themselves supposedly created.⁴⁹ Future events then become predictable, and the impersonal cosmic forces do not have the power to alter them. Although bahala na necessitates proper action in order to conform to the 'will' of Bathala, there is limited freedom on the part of the Filipinos to experience authentic existence. Spirituality here becomes a burden rather than a blessing to many Filipinos as the blueprint of life does not change according to the bahala na world view. Bahala na, laments Miranda-Feliciano, 'means that life is determined by an impersonal force called palad, suwerte or fate. Destiny has no face. It is unfeeling, disinterested and bears a stamp of unmoving finality'.⁵⁰

Aimless and fixation become trademarks of bahala na, which operates effectively within the Philippine concept of a cynical, impersonal ethic of time and history.⁵¹ Many Filipinos see repetitive patterns in the blueprint of their lives, which control one's life and future events. This explains the Filipino plight of struggling within a belief system that relegates them as pawns of the cosmic forces that rule and determine the events in the world. Having resigned to the notion that they lack the power to counter-control the forces of the universe, many in the Philippines simply adopt an escapist attitude in life saying, *Ito na talaga ang buhay ko* [This is indeed my lot].⁵²

Christian spirituality, however, operates on a goal-oriented vision of God's activity in and through history. It offers a vision that is pre-figured proleptically in the resurrection of Jesus. To Christians, the universe is open-ended; it is not, as the fatalistic bahala na spirituality suggests, a closed-ended cosmos where everything happens according to the whims and wishes of impersonal forces like suwerte, tsamba, and kapalaran.⁵³ Spirituality that is oriented by the will of God presupposes a definite goal, new possibilities, a new horizon, and works within the context of novelty based on the new act of God. In contradistinction with the fatalistic orientation of a 'wheel of fortune,' Christians look up to God for a personal divine in-breaking into human time and history. Apparently an open-ended universe facilitates a dynamic interaction between God's providential will and responsive human will within the confines of freedom. In a Judeo-Christian worldview, God radically relates to time, history, and creation. It is crucial then for Filipinos to understand that Christian spirituality points to God who works purposively in and through human history without depreciating human freedom. God's providential will forms the basis of order in the world, which is sensitive to human freedom and human responsibility. Human history has meaning, purpose, and direction when God's will and human freedom come into active interplay and thereby maintain actual relations.⁵⁴

Furthermore Christian spirituality, although inclusive of the past and the present, has an apocalyptic mooring as it anticipates God's new acts in the future.⁵⁵ As Christians endeavor to live up to God's will, they enter into an apocalyptic consciousness resulting from their fresh encounter with the living God. For in the Judeo-Christian world view, history is purposive and moves toward a grand climax, and that human beings are 'free' and undetermined in the face of history. However, this has to be understood from the perspective of God whose freedom is unrestricted and cannot be curtailed by events in the world. God, in relation to human freedom, cannot be bribed but rather acts to fulfill the best for humanity. Here history becomes a reality to humanity, a matrix of God's new acts and freedom rather than as a slaving cycle of karma or suwerte. In other words, future, and the contingent events of history, can be seen as 'the free actions of God'.⁵⁶ In this sense, history translates as 'redemptive history' in contrast with an enslaving history that bahala na proposes.⁵⁷

In a polytheistic-oriented framework of spirituality like bahala na, the gods are subject to the cosmic order that they themselves created; hence, there is no room for adherents to open up to a new horizon and face up creative possibilities in life.⁵⁸ In this case the forces that control a fatalistic universe are static, barren, and too impersonal. But Christian spirituality accentuates the God who could be 'encountered as the One who perpetually opens up to novel dimensions

of creativity'.⁵⁹ The dynamic will of this personal and relational God serves as the center of genuine and authentic spirituality, working in and for human history with purpose. ⁶⁰

4. Conclusion

The indigenous form of folk spirituality epitomized by *bahala na* offers both challenges to and opportunities for Christian mission across the Philippine archipelago. The interface between *bahala na* and the Christian understanding of God's will continue to exist. The clash between these two forms of spirituality will go on. The fatalistic bent inherent in Filipino folk spirituality will continue to baffle missionaries and messengers of the gospel. This is because the indigenous concept of *bahala na* is imbedded in the Filipino religious psyche and operates within a fatalistic framework of distinguishable religious worldviews like animism, Hinduism, Islam, and folk Catholicism. *Bahala na* depicts a Filipino as a mere automaton whose existence is at the disposal of impersonal forces like *tsamba*, *suwerte*, or *kapalaran*. The worldview surrounding *bahala na* folk spirituality presupposes a radical fatalism that operates within a fixed and closed-ended universe. This produces only an environment of fear and uncertainty that is prevalent among fatalistic Filipinos today. The Christian response to *bahala na* is 'Thy Will be Done,' a spirituality that portrays a personal God who seeks to establish covenant relationship with those who are willing to exercise their faith and trust in his providential will.

ENDNOTES

¹An earlier version of this theme is given fuller treatment in my essay, 'Bahala Na: A Critique on a Filipino Paradigm of Folk Spirituality,' *Asia Pacific Journal of Intercultural Studies* 1:1 (January, 2005), 145-60. Much of the insights from this present essay were taken from this article, unless noted otherwise.

²Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq (eds), *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), xvi.

³See for instance, Jose C. Blanco, "The Gospel of Absolute Respect: A Spirituality of People Power," in *Toward a Theology of People Power: Reflections on the Philippine February Revolution*, ed. Douglas J. Elwood (Quezon City: New Day, 1988), 103-09.

⁴Mercado, *Elements of Philosophy*, rev. ed. (Tacloban City, Philippines: Divine Word University Publications, 1976), 183.

⁵Mercado limits the word *bahala* ("responsibility") to the Tagalog dialect. However, in Cebuano, *bahala* also connotes 'responsibility'. For example, one could say, *O sige, ikaw na ang bahala dinha* [Alright, take responsibility there!]. Similarly, the Ilongo dialect gives the same weight to the word: *Ti, ikaw na gid ang bahala dira, ha?*

⁶Miranda-Feliciano, *Filipino Values and Our Christian Faith* (Mandaluyong, Philippines: OMF, 1990), 14.

⁷Sonia M. Zaide notes that the early Chinese visited parts of the archipelago to 'buy and sell only' (*Philippine History and Government*, 4th ed. [Quezon City: All-Nations, 1989], 46). See also, Johanna M. Sampan, 'Feng Shui Experts Optimistic in 2009'; http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2009/jan/26/yehey/top_stories/20090126top6.html; accessed January 26, 2009.

⁸See F. Landa Jocano, *Philippine Prehistory: An Anthropological Overview of the Beginnings of Filipino Society and Culture* (Quezon City: Philippine Center for Advanced Studies, 1975), 215-16.

⁹F. Landa Jocano, *Folk Christianity: A Preliminary Study of Conversion and Patterning of Christian Experience in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Trinity Research Institute, 1981), 5.

¹⁰Zaide, *Philippine History*, 47.

¹¹Wilfredo C. Paguio, *Filipino Cultural Values for the Apostolate* (Makati, Philippines: St. Paul, 1991), 135.

¹²David L. Johnson, *A Reasoned Look at Asian Religions* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1985), 157.

¹³Miranda-Feliciano admits that the issue of the difference between "God's will" and *bahala na* is important because "Christians seem to have retained the *bahala na!* mentality, *only using more religious-sounding jargon*" (italics mine, *Filipino Values*, 14).

¹⁴Jaime Bulatao, a Filipino Catholic priest, coins the term 'split-level Christianity' to characterize the form of Christianity common across the Philippine archipelago ('Split-Level Christianity,' *Philippine Sociological Review* 13 [1965], 119-21). Religious fervor among Filipino Catholics does not wane even with the introduction of modernity and secularization. See for instance, 'The Black Nazarene'; <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/143183/The-Black-Nazarene#>; accessed January 21, 2009.

¹⁵Wilfredo C. Paguio explains, 'We say that these words imply complete charge of a person over another or over something because it usually happens that, if a person gives this right to another and the "giver" still meddles with the affair, the "given" gets angry and says: "Pinamahala ako, pagkatapos pakikialaman!" (He has given me the charge over it yet he still meddles with the affair)'" (*Filipino Cultural Values*, 137-38).

¹⁶Tomas D. Andres, *Understanding the Filipino Values: A Management Approach* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1981), 132.

¹⁷Socorro C. Espiritu et. al., *Sociology in the New Philippine Setting* (Quezon City: Alemar-Phoenix, 1977), 76.

¹⁸Cited by Miranda-Feliciano, *Filipino Values*, 14.

¹⁹Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 183.

²⁰Sarah is a pseudonym but the girl cited here is real. I met her as one of the 'stranded diaspora' peoples on Kish Island, Iran.

²¹Jose M. de Mesa, *In Solidarity with Culture: Studies in Theological Re-rooting*, Maryhill Studies 4 (Quezon City: Maryhill School of Theology, 1987), 164.

²²One particular song was written by the Cebuano song writer, Yoyoy Villame, in tribute to the fearless Filipino guerilla captain, Francisco Dagohoy, who refused to surrender although his men ran out of ammunitions during a battle against the Spaniards. For an analysis of this risk-taking attitude in the light of Villame's song, see Carolyn O. Arguillas, "Letter from Mindanao," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 9 September 1991, 1,4.

²³De Mesa, *In Solidarity with Culture*, 162.

²⁴This section is primarily derived from Casiño, 'Bahala Na,' unless otherwise noted. 152-53.

²⁵See Paguio, *Filipino Cultural Values*, 138-42. For a list of proverbs related to Filipino fatalistic resignation, see Leonardo N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology* (Tacloban City, Philippines: Divine Word Publications, 1975), 68-74.

²⁶See Tomas D. Andres, *Management by Filipino Values* (Quezon City: New Day, 1985), 15-19.

²⁷From the standpoint of work ethic, Andres explains, "The attitude stems back to the time of the Spaniards when they exported Christianity to us. The kind of faith they taught the Filipinos was one which encouraged indolence. They taught us to pray for everything we needed and they made us understand that God would do everything for us. The *bahala na* attitude would probably not be a part of our culture had they taught us to work for our needs and ask God only for help" (Andres, *Management by Filipino Values*, 5).

²⁸Elma Buguen, cited in an interview by Valentino L. Gonzales, 'Understanding the Dynamics of the Filipino Family: Pastoral Care Perspective' (A Paper Presented to the Faculty of Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary, Philippines, October, 1983), 15.

²⁹This is a true story. Many Filipino Christians continue to face similar painful situation and find themselves crying out, *Bahala na*, echoing 'Thy will be done.'

³⁰For further discussion on the syncretistic tendency of Folk Catholicism in contradistinction with folk Protestantism in the Philippines, see Jae Yong Jeaong, 'Filipino Pentecostal Spirituality: An Investigation into Filipino Indigenous Spirituality and Pentecostalism in the Philippines' (ThD thesis, University of Birmingham, August 2001), 205-09.

³¹Insights in this section are derived primarily from Casino's "'Bahala Na: A Critique on a Filipino Paradigm of Folk Spirituality,'" *Asia Pacific Journal of Intercultural Studies* 1:1 (January, 2005), 154-58; "'Thy Will be Done': A Framework for Understanding Christian Spirituality," *Asia Pacific Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 2:1 (February, 2005), 56-63, unless otherwise noted.

³²On 'dissonance,' see Leon Festinger, Henry W. Reicken and Stanley Schacter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World*. The authors write, 'Two opinions, or items of knowledge are *dissonant* with each other if they do not fit together - that is, if they are inconsistent, or if, considering only the particular two items, one does not follow from the other. . . . Dissonance produces discomfort and, correspondingly, there will arise pressures to reduce or eliminate the dissonance' (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964.)

³³Agaton P. Pal writes, 'When the people are faced with difficult situations, they stoically say: 'Bahala na' - This is an expression of the belief that 'Bathala wills the happening of every event'" ('The People's Conception of the World,' in *Social Foundations of Community Development: Readings on the Philippines*, ed. Socorro C. Espiritu and Chester L. Hunt [Manila: R.M. Garcia, 1964], 392).

³⁴Pal notes, "Everything which happens to man is the will of *Bathala*. Birth, marriage, death, good crops, poor crops, accidents, and other personal events happen because *Bathala* allows or wills them to be. Favorable events happen because his behavior has been displeasing. The occurrence of a preponderance of favorable events is a sign that a person has earned *panalangin* of unfavorable events, that he has earned *gaba*" ('The People's Conception,' 392.).

³⁵For an excellent introductory study on Christian spirituality, see Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

³⁶Morris Aschraft, *The Will of God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1980), 30.

³⁷Miranda-Feliciano, *Filipino Values*, 18.

³⁸Garry Friesen and Robin Maxson, in their book, *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View*, identify three meanings of God's will: (1) Sovereign = "God's secret plan that determines everything that happens in the universe"; (2) Moral = "God's revealed commands in the Bible that teach how men ought to believe and live"; and (3) Individual = "God's ideal, detailed life-plan uniquely designed for each person" ([Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1980], 29-44).

³⁹Leonardo N. Mercado has an excellent treatment of this idea in "The Filipino Image of God," *Philippiniana Sacra* 26:78 (September-December, 1991), 401-15, specifically 404, 409.

⁴⁰To solve this vague concept of "God" in the Filipino psyche, Benigno P. Beltran recommends a new look at Christology. He writes, "Filipino Christology should elaborate an idea of God consistent with the Christian belief that God acted in history through Jesus of Nazareth . . . One can only speak about God himself as one talks about Jesus-Christology begins with Jesus in order to find God in him" (*The Christology of the Inarticulate: An Inquiry into the Filipino Understanding of Jesus Christ* [Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1987], 232).

⁴¹When an average Filipino says he or she trusts in God, there is a suspicion that the concept of God is not personal or related but impersonal, i.e., 'Time' and 'Providence.' See Onofre D. Corpuz, 'The Cultural Foundations of Filipino Politics,' in *Social Foundations of Community Development: Readings on the Philippines*, ed. Socorro C. Espiritu and Chester L. Hunt [Manila: R.M. Garcia, 1964], 420-23.

⁴²See Jose N. Nollado, *The Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines* (Manila: National Book Store, 1986), 1, xvi.

⁴³Gordon D. Kaufman notes, "A covenant relationship is one that can be obtained only between moral wills, i.e., between beings who are capable of setting purposes for themselves and who can take responsibility for realizing those purposes, beings who are capable of determining themselves and their activities with respect to the future" (*The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* [Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1981], 108).

⁴⁴Cf. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 187. Mercado notes, "If there is Fate, both Christians and Buddhists agree that man holds the steering wheel of his life, that man is responsible for his own actions. Hence the Filipino is no less a fatalist than other people, for he is also very conscious of his own freedom. The Filipino is no less a fatalist than a devout Christian who believes that God's will is supreme, and that resignation is often the wisest course" (187).

⁴⁵Within a Judeo-Christian worldview, observes Kaufman, "order is personal in origin and character; it is an order established by will and through purposive activity" (Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination*, 107).

⁴⁶See Gordon Kaufman, *God the Problem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978) 219.

⁴⁷Mercado admits that '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 the one hand, those who worship a personal God on the other hand, and those in between the continuum' ('The Filipino Image,' 409).

⁴⁸See de Mesa, *In solidarity with Culture*, 150-53.

⁴⁹For a list of Philippine indigenous pantheons, see Jocano, *Folk Christianity*, 4-17.

⁵⁰Miranda-Feliciano, *Filipino Values*, 14.

⁵¹For an extensive discussion on the Filipino concept of time and history, see the works of Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology*, 30-35, 105; *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 107-118.

⁵²Tomas D. Andres points out that *bahala na* accounts for the indolence of the Filipinos. He writes: 'He [Filipino] starts when he wants and he ends when he wants. Time for the Filipino is any time; so abundant commodity that one can waste it away' (*Understanding the Filipino Values*, 126).

⁵³For an excellent discussion of the themes "open-ended" and "close-ended" universe from a sociological perspective, see Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: The Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor, 1967) 105-26. In a closed-ended universe, human life is completely controlled by external powers or gods. Glen Lewandowski, in his survey of how the peoples of ancient times in the countries surrounding Israel expressed the inability/ability to change their life situation, graphically notes: "Each individual and even whole nations were subject to the arbitrary decision of the gods. No one could break out that closed, enslaving circle. One had to choose either to resign oneself passively to one's predetermined 'destiny' or to bribe the gods with the gifts and vows so that the gods would do them, no harm" ("God's Future," *Word-Event* 13:51 [February, 1983], 13). The notion of an open-ended universe introduces an encounter with a transcendent reality (i.e., God) not as a threat but as a challenge. In this case, the universe is seen, as Paul D. Hanson points out, "as organically participating in one unified creative and redemptive act" (*Dynamic Transcendence* [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1978], 17).

⁵⁴Langdon Gilkey writes, "If God is to redeem history as history, and give its own meaning, it must be through a wayward freedom and not over against it, through participation in the full human condition and

not through the eradication of it" (*Reaping the Whirlwind: A Christian Interpretation of History* [New York: Seabury, 1981], 282).

⁵⁵Of apocalyptic consciousness, Paul D. Hanson writes: "Apocalyptic describes a firm of literary expression employed by people knocked off balance by crisis in life and groping edge of abyss. It is further characterized by the fact that explanation and hope are found not within the context of historical events, but by reference beyond this world to an order above or below, the realm of heaven or the realm of arcane" (*The Diversity of Scripture: A Theological Interpretation* [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1982], 41).

⁵⁶See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality* (London: Search, 1977), 18-19.

⁵⁷See Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1950), 121-11.

⁵⁸See Kaufman, *Theological Imagination*, 101-08.

⁵⁹Hanson's contribution to see the dramatic unfolding of a notion of God's activity as "Dynamic Transcendence" is worth noting. "Dynamic transcendence" views God as "the creative and redemptive, sustaining and purifying Reality at the very center of life" (*Dynamic*, 21).

⁶⁰Hanson concludes, 'God . . . is not seen as a static Being over against life, to which life against the very nature must conform. God is rather seen as dynamic Reality at the heart of all reality, encountered in life in its manifold forms, and yet transcendent as that upon which all that is and will be is utterly dependent' (*Dynamic Transcendence*, 21).

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