

Dave Johnson, *Theology in Context: A Case Study in the Philippines*, foreword by J. Russell Turney (Baguio, Philippines: APTS Press, 2013), xii + 204 pp. ISBN 978-971-011-594-5. Available at [www.aps.edu](http://www.aps.edu).

The publication of Dave Johnson's doctoral work is a welcome contribution to the quest of developing an authentic Filipino theology. His book *Theology in Context: A Case Study in the Philippines* is a perceptive study on what it takes to do theology in a Folk Catholic setting. The author correctly acknowledges that although the Philippines is known to be a Christian nation and predominantly Roman Catholic in population the indigenous practices of the traditional religion are taken for granted by the people. (1) The animistic worldview is still ingrained among the Filipinos. Johnson is not convinced by the Filipino Catholic thinkers. He thinks that Catholics are doing "cultural accommodation rather than transformation through the power of the Word of God." (2) Evangelicals and Pentecostals have done only minimal studies on animism. And "no such contextual theology, liberal or conservative currently exists" that deals with the Waray worldview. (2) His research therefore considers the Waray animistic religion in relationship with folk Catholicism as well as the factors that make the Assemblies of God thrive among this ethnic group, which lives mainly on the islands of Samar and Leyte in the central Philippines. Johnson views the Catholic Waray as practicing animistic folk religion and that the Assemblies of God impact to the Waray due to the gospel proclamation with signs and wonders is an effective link that can be accented in addressing the Waray religious understanding using the revelatory Christian Scripture. (4) The author conducted interviews for his investigation. He used research questionnaires to both sample population of the common people and Assemblies of God congregations. Questionnaires are well used and effectively executed. Johnson utilized the conventions of behavioral science to gather data for evaluation.

After an introduction, Johnson identifies Pedro Sumulat as the pioneer of the very first Assemblies of God work in Catbalogan, Samar in 1960—representing the first period of Assemblies of God work in Samar/Leyte from 1960 until 1972. The second period, from 1972 to 1988, highlights the impact of Zion Bible Institute. The third period, from 1988 onward is marked by the birth of the Leyte/Samar District Council of the Assemblies of God. In the second chapter Johnson deals

with the doctrine of salvation through the love of Christ. Door to door evangelism, home Bible studies and open air crusades with Christian concerts as well as radio broadcast and praying for healing were proven to be beneficial in church planting. The next chapter deals with the “Waray culture and worldview.” Johnson is correct to maintain that a Filipino is as serious about dealing with the spirit world as he is with deliverance from sin. (46) He also views “God,” “patron saints,” “this worldly spirit beings” and “the *anitos*, the spirits of the ancestors,” following Agaton Pal, as the “four tiers” of “the Waray spirit world.” (47) The fourth chapter talks about the roles of sorcerers who are bring terror through their black magic and witchdoctors who are heal the sick through their access to supernatural power. Johnson explains what sorcerers can do in bringing illness. The following chapter introduces the theological and contextual matters like the assumption that God is far off bringing a need for mediator. The concern of a mediator is a significant Christological question among the Waray.

Johnson’s tabulated data is very helpful from chapter six onwards. In chapter six Johnson observes that the Assemblies of God believers are over ninety-five percent praying to God alone while the general population of Samar/Leyte people prays to God, Virgin Mary and the Catholic saints (87-88). The Assemblies of God people pray to God or Jesus without a mediator while the general Waray population pray to God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Santo Nino, the saints and other spirits. (91, 93; cf. 94) The seventh chapter presents the disparity between the Pentecostals and the Catholics in their All Saints’ Day activities (108-110). And in response to the Waray views of fiesta Johnson contends that “the town fiesta is idolatry because the fiesta or at least the religious parts of it, is dedicated to the saint of the area in which it is being held.” (119) In the succeeding chapter Johnson demonstrates that the belief in the spirits, sorcerers and witchdoctors as a source of sickness is relatively similar for both the general population and Pentecostals (133). Additionally, while ninety-nine point six percent of the Assemblies of God people believe that God or Jesus heals sickness, over eighty percent of the general population attributes healing not only to God or Jesus, but also to witchdoctors, Santo Nino, other saints and the Virgin Mary (139). The essence of chapter nine is the idea that the Waray are doing religious practices to protect themselves from the evil spirits. The use of amulets for the general Waray population is notably low and those who will go to a pastor for prayer of protection is a bit high (149-150). The tenth chapter deals with the transformation of the people in the Assemblies of God

churches through the preaching of the gospel. Here Johnson analyzes the effect of the doctrine of salvation among the Waray Pentecostals. “In all cases, a positive paradigm shift had taken place in their lives.” (168)

The author concludes in the final chapter that “by preaching the gospel, accompanied by demonstrations of the power of God in healing and deliverance from demonic powers...contact points can be drawn between the Waray belief system and biblical teaching that will enable the gospel to be presented to the Waray” (184). Johnson’s conclusion is based on empirical research and shaped by his missionary experience. He is to be commended for taking the pains of researching the worldview of Filipino Folk Catholicism and articulating the biblical response to this way of thinking. The purpose of *Theology in Context* is “to first understand, respect, explain and engage this worldview while comparing it to biblical revelation” with the intention to demonstrate on “how Christians can impact this worldview through an explanation and demonstration of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Filipino within their cultural context.” (1) He is able to demonstrate what he intended in his research. Johnson is correct to presuppose that “all theology is written with a particular worldview in mind.” (i) Thus, he asks “not so much as whether theology is written in context, but which context does it reflect?” (i) The approach that the author pursues throughout his research is ethnography at its best. A disturbing finding of Johnson is that only one pastor—in his questionnaires and interviews—talks about the Spirit baptism which is surprising, given that the Pentecostal distinctive has not been emphasized among the Waray. (35) Perhaps, the most important result of his study is that which he has established, the evidence that the power of the gospel brings a “paradigm shift” in the lives of the Waray. Johnson concludes that from an animistic worldview, the Pentecostal Waray now view “God at the center of the universe” (193). Although this result is not unexpected it confirms what the power of the gospel can do to change the mindset of people.

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