

SYNCRETISM IN PRAYER FOR HEALING AMONG THE KANKANA-EY

By Robin Steen

Introduction

Soon after I arrived at APTS, I walked with a fellow student to the dining room for lunch. As we approached the cafeteria, he asked me to accompany him to the mountains to preach in some village churches. He honored me with this invitation, but I asked him to invite me again some time later when I did not feel so overwhelmed with homework. Unfortunately, that day never arrived. That young man was Balthazar, a Kankana-ey evangelist who helped me so much with the content of this paper.

On another occasion, my wife and I took a walk and ended up meandering up through a community above APTS. We stopped to buy some vegetables from a lady whose name is Pasita. She told us that her husband, Moreno, worked at APTS. They are a Kankana-ey family. Further down that road is a town called Lamut where the Lamut Assemblies of God Church is located. This church, a Kankana-ey fellowship, plays a central part in this paper. These people have become familiar to me as I have spoken with them and read about them with the purpose of knowing them as well as possible.

The purpose of this research paper is to answer the question, “In what ways have the traditional beliefs and practices influenced the Kankana-ey Assemblies of God Church’s practice of praying for the sick?” I used three methods to answer this question: observation, interviews, and literary review. The final component of the paper is my analysis of these three elements.

To properly answer the research question, we will discuss Kankana-ey culture and one of their traditional rituals, the *cañao*. We will inspect issues such as worldview, power, truth and allegiance

encounters, syncretism, mythology, contextualization and their view of the spirit world. Furthermore, we will look at the theological issues of prayer and faith healing and how culture and worldview affects the understanding of these things.

The Kankana-ey are wonderful people and the Assemblies of God has done a good job of bring the gospel to them, not only in truth but also in power. They have kept the faith pure and kept the practice of praying for the sick in the Assemblies of God Churches a truly unadulterated Christian ministry.

Kankana-ey Culture

The Philippines were initially inhabited by three great waves of Malays that gradually immigrated there. The Kankana-ey are descendants of those who came in the second great wave.¹ Those who settled in Benguet were peace loving; this is in contrast to their brothers in the Mountain Province who were warlike and aggressive. They had a system of settling differences among themselves, overseen by “*lalakays*” as their mediators and judges.²

The Kankana-ey are honest, self-reliant and friendly. The ritual at the center of both the traditional Kankana-ey religion and their social life is the *cañao* (aka: *sida*). The person or family that is performing the *cañao* normally invites the community to attend. After the sacrifice of pigs, which will be discussed in greater depth later, the host will give everyone that attends a piece of meat to take home.³ Igueldo explains that in his home municipality of Buguias, “no one became a Municipal Mayor if he did not render any *sida* (*pedit*), it means that you are a successful man. If you are a successful man, then you can be a successful mayor; thus, your constituents will also become successful.”⁴ One of my sources told me that it is not difficult for Kankana-ey converts to Christianity to be generous and to tithe, because generosity is such a part of their culture.

The economy of the Kankana-ey is predominantly farming, while many are involved in mining. It is common for a family to also raise animals.⁵ In La Trinidad, the region surrounding APTS, there are

¹Lolito T. Igueldo, "The Social World of the Kankana-eyes" (Dissertation, Baguio Central University, 1989), 74.

²Ibid.," 78.

³Ibid.," 91.

⁴Ibid.," 250.

⁵Ibid.," 99.

many green houses where farmers grow flowers and vegetables; there are also vast fields of strawberries.

Worldview

The traditional worldview of the Kankana-ey is animistic. Animism is “the belief in personalized supernatural power.”⁶

Animism is the belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them in order to determine future action and, frequently, to manipulate their power.⁷

The traditional Kankana-ey people are aware of the spirit world and believe that the spirits are intimately involved in all areas of their lives. To them the gods, goddesses and ancestral spirits are close to them and actively bring blessing when the gods are content. However, they are also fickle and actively bring blessing when the gods are content. However, they are also fickle.⁸ When they are offended or if they want something, they are capable of causing any number of negative things including bad dreams, personal trauma, sickness people and in animals and even natural disaster.

The Kankana-ey religion is animistic in nature. “It is a religion of 'carrot and stick.' The promise of blessing and the fear of retaliation enslave the Kankana-ey.”⁹ The gods and goddesses of the sky world, the ancestors, and even some of the spirits of the underworld are considered to be benevolent, but they can also be offended.¹⁰ When this happens, they need to be appeased. There are gods of the underworld who are less pleasantly inclined that also need to be appeased. These spirits can “retaliate severely if the demands are not met.”¹¹

⁶Gailyn Van Rheen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1991), 19.

⁷Van Rheen, 20.

⁸Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 197.

⁹Julie C. Ma, "A Comparison of Two Worldviews: Kankana-ey and Pentecostal," in *Pentecostalism in context* (Sheffield, Eng: Sheffield Academic Pr, 1997), 288.

¹⁰Van Rheen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 20.

¹¹Ma, "A Comparison of Two Worldviews,": 288.

Power

“The essence of animism is power—power of the ancestor to control those of his lineage, . . . power of magic to control human events.”¹² Igueldo describes the process a mayor must go through to be elected to office; it includes giving many “*pedit*.” A *pedit* is a series of pagan rituals, or *cañaos* where multiple pigs are sacrificed. From an etic perspective, the goals the mayor hopes to accomplish are of two natures. The first is supernatural: to call on the gods and the ancestors to aid the prospective mayor in his quest. The second is natural and social. The candidate must demonstrate to the community that he is a ‘big man’ by the amount of pigs he sacrifices and the meat that he gives away to those that are invited to the *pedit*. From an emic perspective, the lines between the natural world and the spiritual world are not clearly defined so the two categories blur together.¹³

Healing

“The pagan Kankana-eyes, like other animists, are spirit-conscious people. They believe that the spirits are responsible for disease. . . . Human beings can induce the healing power of the spirits via ritual performance.”¹⁴ The process of attaining healing through traditional means is expensive, so it tends to be a means of last resort, especially for the poor. When a person in the family gets sick, the first step in the ritual process to find healing for that person is to go to the ‘*mansip-ok*,’ the pagan priest. This priest is an elder in the community that is gifted in discernment. Through ritualistic means, he identifies the cause of the illness and prescribes a specific ritual for healing.¹⁵

As is usual in cultures with strong animistic roots, religion here is bent towards the more pragmatic problem of appeasing and having access to the powers. It is, at bottom, a mechanism for attaining cosmic homeostasis. . . . Instinct tells the indigenous Filipino that in some vague way disease or calamity is connected to a cosmic imbalance, a breakage in the fragile life system in which the world of the spirits and the world of humans intersect and impinge on each other.¹⁶

¹²Van Rheenan, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 21.

¹³*Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁴Ma, “A Comparison of Two Worldviews,” 276.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 276-7.

¹⁶Maggay Melba P., “Towards Sensitive Engagement with Filipino Indigenous Consciousness,” *International Review of Mission* 87, no. 346 (July 1998): 364.

Cañao

The Kankana-ey believe that healing can come from the power of the deities. They express their faith by performing rituals.¹⁷ The most common ritual is called the '*sida*,' or the '*cañao*.' A prescribed series of *cañao* with an increasing number of pigs sacrificed in each succeeding event is called a '*pedit*.' In his doctoral dissertation, Lolito Igueldo, who is a Kankana-ey and a practicing pagan, describes in detail the different rituals, the requirements for each, the purposes of each, and so forth. Since the purpose of this paper is not an in-depth study of all aspects of the Kankana-ey culture, I will only mention that he dedicated a sizable portion of his 435-page dissertation to this theme. I mention this to emphasize that their beliefs and myths are extensive in regard to the *canal* rituals.¹⁸ Julie Ma concisely categorizes these rituals as follows:

“The Kankana-ey vest the ritual performance with a number of meanings and values. Ritual is deemed essential: 1) to cure sickness, 2) to bring luck and blessings in terms of wealth, family or bountiful harvest, 3) to share one's wealth and blessing with the members of the family and community, and 4) to ward off evil.”¹⁹

The *canao* is central to both the traditional social structure of the community as well as being the central feature of the traditional religion. Julie Ma recorded the comments of a native Kankana-ey informant who said, “Ritual practice is the most meaningful and valuable activity in Kankana-ey life. Ritual and community involvement are integral and indispensable. . . . people encounter the spiritual beings which are relied upon to meet needs as they arise.”²⁰ To the pagan Kankana-ey, the line between the spirits of the living and the spirits of the deceased and of the gods is blurry at best; all coexist and interrelate with each other regularly.

Mythology

The Kankana-ey believe in many kinds of spirits. These spirits include the gods as well as the ancestors. Table 1 in the appendix

¹⁷Julie C. Ma, *When the Spirit Meets the Spirit: Pentecostal Ministry Among the Kankana-ey Tribe in the Philippines*, vol. 118 (Frankfurt am Main; New York; P. Lang, 2000), 135.

¹⁸Igueldo, n.p.

¹⁹Ma, *When the Spirit Meets the Spirits*, 118:137.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 118:135.

provides a breakdown of the names, categories, and descriptions of the different spirits. “The people are closely bound to the expectations, demands and sensibilities of the gods, and especially to the ancestors who are interested in the day-to-day life of human beings. The Kankana-ey take comfort in the belief that they have such spirits through which they may endure the hardships of their lives.”²¹

Implications for Ministry

Illness and health are important issues in the minds of the Kankana-ey people. It is extremely important that the minister learn how the people think they become sick and what the remedies are—from their perspective. “The missionary learns not only about indigenous perceptions of illness, but also about the spiritual beings that must be appeased or propitiated for healing to occur, types of magic employed to manipulate spiritual power.”²² This is obviously true for the missionary that comes from another place and a secular perspective,²³ but it is also true for the indigenous pastor. Either minister can become so removed from the resident mythology and worldview of their animistic congregants, new believers, and seekers that they fail to connect with the people at this level, setting the people up for split-level allegiance between the Christian and pagan deities. Bulatao describes this split-level allegiance within the Filipino Catholic Church in his book, *Split-Level Christianity*.²⁴ Filipino social anthropologist Melba P. Maggay makes a comparable observation for the Protestant-trained minister:

Theological training is a case in point. A Filipino evangelical who is formed in a process of education that responds to the cultural assumptions of the so-called American Bible belt, acquires a facility for discussing theological questions that have little to do with Filipino life and culture. Indeed, he or she learns to suspect the indigenous voices that question some of the theological formulations that he or she has come to regard as sacred. . . . Instead, through its influence, Filipinos are shaped to become preoccupied with trivial theological controversies

²¹Ibid., 118:107

²²Gailyn Van Rheen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1991), 36.

²³Ibid., 11.

²⁴Jaime Bulatao, *Split-Level Christianity* (Manila, Philippines: Capitol Publishing House, 1966), 1-17.

and to address their compatriots as if somehow they were post-Christian and not as people who have yet to see nature demythologized.²⁵

Maggay goes on to make some observations and suggestions that need further discussion. Her concern is that Western missionaries and the Filipino pastors that are trained under their tutelage do not always connect well with the Filipino layperson or the Kankana-ey person because of dramatic differences in worldviews.²⁶ She argues that it is imperative that the Filipino Kankana-ey pastor (by inference) needs to be able to communicate from the same worldview perspective as their congregants, so that the people can understand the gospel clearly.²⁷ Although Maggay is right in principle, some aspects of her conclusions would likely lead to syncretism. As this paper progresses, I will be discussing the two sides of the same theological coin: contextualization, which is to imbue native Christian symbols, stories and practices with pagan meaning. I am concerned that some of Maggay's suggestions may lead to the latter.

Syncretism

Not Dealing Appropriately with Mythology

The first concern of the Kankana-ey church is to deal appropriately with traditional mythology. Amos Yong observes that of all of the evangelical groups, the Pentecostals ought to be sensitive to the 'postmodernist critique' because it makes room for individual groups to theologize, drawing from their own experiences, categories and values.²⁸ On one hand, there is no reason to embrace without critique the prevailing Western perspective that the spirits of the evaluation "is to succumb to postmodern relativism."²⁹ The goal is not to meld Western with Kankana-ey thought to derive a middle way; rather the missionaries and the native communities need to bring their etic and emic ideas to the table to seek the best way that is faithful to Biblical direction.

Colonial missiological practices of the Catholic clergy provide unending examples of what can happen when foreign forms are

²⁵Maggay, "Towards Sensitive Engagement," 363-364. Emphasis added by author.

²⁶Ibid., 364.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Amos Yong, "Going Where the Spirit Goes: Engaging the Spirit(s) in J.C. Ma's Pneumatological Missiology," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10, no. 2 (April 2002): 119.

²⁹Ibid., 120.

imposed on indigenous peoples without taking the time to ground the people in the meaning of those forms. "Throughout Latin America the drive to forcibly baptize the native without any regard for his mythology has resulted in syncretism."³⁰ The similarities between Latin American and Filipino Catholicism are strong. Concerning Filipino Catholicism, Maggay said, "A strong, subterranean indigenous consciousness runs parallel to a ready accommodation to external religious influence. Filipino religion remains primarily a transaction with the powers, even if expressed in Catholic form."³¹

There needs to be an acceptable replacement in order for people of one worldview to fully embrace a second one. Experientially-oriented people are often able to embrace two beliefs and hold them both as being true even though they oppose each other. When this happens between Christianity and paganism the result in dual allegiance:

With this term I label the kind of situation in which Christians, though they have committed themselves to Christ, continue to go to shamans, diviners and the like to meet their felt need for spiritual power. The gospel message has encountered them at the point of allegiance and they study the Scriptures to discover God's truth but they have not come to experience anything within Christianity that confronts and replaces their previous sources of spiritual power. In spite of the prominence of the exercise of God's power through humans, it is an unfortunate fact that Christians all over the world are practicing a Christianity devoid of the ability to deal with the spirit world. . . . There are, of course, historical reasons for this, most of which have to do with deficiencies in the worldviews of the westerners advocates of Christianity.³²

Appropriate Engagement with the Spirit World

According to Yong, Ma reported that there was a certain amount of syncretism of Pentecostal and Cordilleran beliefs and practices in Pentecostal and especially in the Santuala churches. Yong went on to suggest that some of these practices might not be harmful. For example, the sacrifice of animals might be considered as a tithe (Yong, 2005, 49). He went on to say:

³⁰Van Rhenan, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 42.

³¹Maggay, "Towards Sensitive Engagement," 364.

³²Charles H. Kraft, "'Christian Animism' or God-Given Authority?", in *"Spiritual Power and Missions: Raising the Issues"* 3 (1995): 92.

For our purposes, note first that Kankana-ey and Santuala Pentecostalism seek, through ritual practices, to engage God, who blesses and heals by the power of the Holy Spirit; in these instances salvation is material, concrete, and experienced, not abstract or devotional. . . . Finally, since these are primarily oral, not written, cultures, they engage the divine primarily through narrative means such as dreams or visions.³³

Kraft is in favor of the practice of honoring ancestors to a degree that is somewhat disconcerting. He suggests making this a part of Christian religious expression. He thinks that this aspect will diminish with time.³⁴ In the area of prayer for the sick, the reverence for and the faith in the ancestors through the system of sainthood in the Catholic Church is not diminishing, nor will it. To this day, ancestor-directed prayers diverts most Catholics from praying to the Father in the name of the Son. In Latin America, certain of the “Christ” or the “Virgins”—idols—are recognized for their healing virtues.

Three authors from three cultural backgrounds suggest practices that will almost certainly and unnecessarily lead to unhealthy syncretism. It is good that many are exploring outside of the Western, dichotomist worldview box, but there is the concern of where these thoughts may lead.

High and Low Religion

When discussing syncretism in praying for the sick, it is necessary to consider the “high” and the “low” aspects of the Christian faith. The tendency for syncretism is multiplied when the minister focuses on the “ultimate meaning of life” (high religion) through his teaching and preaching but relegates the healing of disease (low religion) to science or to regional animistic practices.³⁵ Low religion embraces the everyday practical needs, fears, and concerns of human existence.

When Christianity does not address the problems dealt with by low religion, new converts will respond in one of two ways. Each of these responses reflects a type of syncretism. The first response is reversion to the traditional practices of low religion. . . . The second

³³Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Baker Academic, 2005), 49.

³⁴Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, 233-4.

³⁵Van Rhenan, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 64.

response is surface accommodation. In this case converts in animistic contexts take the symbols from high religion and attribute animistic meanings to them.³⁶

This is an important issue to keep in mind because missionaries that have a dichotomist worldview, with a natural/spiritual split, become a secularizing rather than a Christianizing force.³⁷ The causes for secularization are many. The Western influences come to the people through television, movies, education, and mass media, yet the missionary must understand that what he does contributes to or resists the secularization process more forcefully than he may expect.

Ma observes that, "Many forms are religiously tainted. . . . Christianity still remains an 'import.' With the development of theological maturity and with a new breed of young leaders, an attempt can be made to construct a 'Kankana-ey Pentecostal theology.'"³⁸ The missionary must do all that he can to assist the adaption of the gospel to the Kankana-ey culture, but the process of dealing with issues such as syncretism in prayer for the sick must be followed in relationship with indigenous theologians.

Yong refers to the example of Yoido Church in Seoul, Korea. Many people have criticized Paul Yonggi Cho for incorporating Korean shamanism into his version of Christianity. Yong suggests that this is not the case. As he compares what has happened in the church in South Korea with what is happening among the Kankana-ey, he makes this comment:

Given these parallels, are Pentecostals restorationists of New Testament Christianity, or are they accomodationists [sic] to the indigenous traditions of Asia? . . . defenders of Cho and Korean Pentecostalism see Pentecostal success as evidence not of syncretism but of the successful contextualization of the gospel in a shamanistic environment. . . . There is an enormous difference between interacting with shamanism and becoming shamanistic.³⁹

As a Westerner, I am aware that I need to approach the theme of Asian syncretism with an inquisitive mind and with willingness to explore new ideas. At the same time, I have lived outside of the West and have interacted with and lived among people outside of the United States

³⁶Ibid., 63.

³⁷Ibid., 64.

³⁸Ma, *When the Spirit Meets the Spirits*, 118:239.

³⁹Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 51.

that come from an animistic background most of my adult life so I cannot be fairly classified as a typical American. Therefore, I know that my reaction to practices that I believe would lead to probable syncretism is not a normal Western one. The Kankana-ey must establish their own theology, but for my part, I strongly urge them to travel this road carefully. The mountain roads around APTS are safe as long as the car stays on the road. The highway department has erected large and robust barriers on the precipice edge of the road to ensure that happens. I challenge the Kankana-ey to carefully build robust Biblical barriers into their theology to keep them on the road.

Contextualization

The other side of this proverbial coin is contextualization. The goal of the leadership of the Kankana-ey Church is to imbue their worldview, symbols, stories and practices with Christian meaning. From a religious studies perspective, the word “syncretism” describes any process by which two or more cultures mix and share ideas to produce a third entity that is not completely like either of the first two.⁴⁰ By this definition, the term “syncretism” describes both the desirable and the undesirable sides of the missiological coin. Yong describes appropriate syncretism this way: “Theologically responsible syncretism is enculturating Christianity in the non-Western world.”⁴¹

Van Rheenan emphasizes that presenting a holistic message is an important aspect of avoiding unhealthy syncretism:

If eternal Christian meanings are internalized in contemporary Christian forms, the result is healthy indigenization. If, on the other hand, Christian forms are given non-Christian meanings, the result is syncretism. If syncretism occurs, the essential meanings of Christianity are lost. . . . To counter such syncretism tendencies, the Christian message must be presented holistically. The message of a sovereign God who desires his people's trust and allegiance - beliefs on the level of high religion - is reflected by his power in defeating the principalities and powers on the level of low religion.⁴²

While the holistic concern of the Kankana-ey Pentecostal churches must go far beyond praying for the sick, the purpose of this paper is to emphasize that prayer for the sick must remain at the heart of the

⁴⁰Yong, "Going Where the Spirit Goes," 118.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Van Rheenan, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 62, 64.

Pentecostal message. If the people do not find healing in the local church, they will turn elsewhere.

Kankana-ey and Pentecostal Worldviews

Kankana-ey culture is deeply rooted in pagan beliefs and practices. Filipino religious practice as a whole “focuses on opening oneself to the strength and curative potency of beneficial powers, whether found in nature or in the spirit world.”⁴³ These influences have waned over the past sixty years among the Kankana-ey, however, due to a variety of influences. The first influence is that of Pentecostal Christianity.⁴⁴ The Pentecostals have done a remarkable job of confronting animistic beliefs and practices among their congregations. Because of the number of Pentecostal believers in society, their impact on the broader Kankana-ey culture has been notable. Second is the secularizing influences of education, especially advanced education and medical science.⁴⁵ A young Kankana-ey named Balisong wrote in *Theocultura*, a non peer-reviewed blog report on the Kankana-ey culture and religion, that in his observation, there are few that still hold to the old way from his generation; it is the older generation that mainly still practice the traditional rituals.⁴⁶

The fact that an external practice, such as the *cañao*, is diminishing is not a certain indicator that the animistic worldview of the culture is changing. It is important to remember that animistic expressions can change the way that they express themselves externally. In the Philippines, there may be few examples of old tribal religious worship practices still being observed in urban centers, but the worldview remains animistic. What has happened is that the practices have changed to other culturally acceptable expressions such as going to fortunetellers, reading horoscopes, or following one of the Filipino new religious movements such as the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*. The Christian minister must be careful to watch for these signs and to teach the people accordingly.

⁴³Maggay, "Towards Sensitive Engagement," 364.

⁴⁴Ma, *When the Spirit Meets the Spirits*, 118:239.

⁴⁵Marny Balisong, "The Gods of the Igorots," *Theo-Bloggers*, *Theocultura*, March 8, 2005, <http://theocultura.blogspot.com/2005/03/gods-of-igorots.html> (accessed April 3, 2012).

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

Similarities

Ma admits that the “Kankana-ey Pentecostals have been strongly influenced both by the traditional animistic pagan beliefs of their people as well as by Pentecostalism.”⁴⁷ The similarity between traditional Kankana-ey culture and Pentecostalism is precisely the reason she suggests that Pentecostalism has been much more successful in evangelism and church growth than any other group. Both groups have a clear consciousness of the spiritual world. They both expect there to be an interaction between the natural and the spiritual world. They both expect God, or the gods, to interact with the human world with blessings or curses, to solve the problems, and to bring physical healing. Yong notes:

Ma is convincing in her argument that the success of AG missionary efforts in contrast to non-Pentecostal enterprises can be explained by the central beliefs in spiritual beings and spiritual power in both Pentecostal and Kankana-ey world views. Pentecostal cosmology, for example, allows for a reinterpretation of power and hence of reality. Further, the Pentecostal belief in the healing power of the Holy Spirit answers to the deepest needs and circumstances of the Kankana-ey people.⁴⁸

Maggay emphasizes that the effectiveness of propositional teaching is limited with people who come from an animistic background. The presentation of conceptual or historical evidence has little value with people “for whom authenticity is measured in personal intimacy with power.”⁴⁹ Any verbal expression of teaching must be balanced with a non-verbal presentation of the gospel's transformative power and with the “indigenous reverence for mystery.”⁵⁰ The objective becomes clear when accompanied by the subjective; hearing makes sense when accompanied by feeling and seeing convincing demonstrations of spiritual power. This requires renewed attention to the ability to demonstrate “signs and wonders” as a complement to the verbal proclamation of the gospel.⁵¹ Ma described it for the Kankana-ey in this way:

⁴⁷Ma, “A Comparison of Two Worldviews,” 288.

⁴⁸Yong, “Going Where the Spirit Goes,” 119.

⁴⁹Maggay, “Towards Sensitive Engagement,” 366.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., 365.

Whereas other Christian groups appear to put old things behind completely, the Kankana-ey Pentecostal Christians seem to bring in some of the old religious orientations and enhance them in the new religious setting. Their active participation in prayer for healing is one noteworthy example.⁵²

There are also differences. The beliefs and practices of the traditional Kankana-ey religion follow the rules of animistic engagement with the spiritual world, which is through manipulation and appeasement. If the worshipers do everything right, then maybe the gods and ancestors will bless them. Worship of the gods and the ancestors is dependent upon following the prescribed ritual and requisite sacrifices; this is expensive. There is also the ever-present specter of retaliation. It is a religion based upon fear.⁵³ In contrast, the Pentecostals come into the presence of God with joy. Their rituals include song, worship, and hopeful expectation. One of Ma's informants described the difference in this way, "The new God never asks for anything. He instead gives and gives until he gives his own son."⁵⁴ They believe that God desires to bless them, to solve their problems and heal their diseases.

Challenges to Contextualization

The similarities between the worldviews provide challenges to proper contextualization. In the early days of the Assembly of God outreach in the Cordillera, in 1945-1970, the most successful workers were laypeople with little theological understanding.⁵⁵ They had great faith and God responded to their prayers with amazing signs and wonders. Many who were saved during those days came to the Lord because of personal healing or the healing of a family member. "Kankana-ey Pentecostal Christians expect the Holy Spirit to work in their lives on a regular basis. They believe that the Holy Spirit readily works when the people of God urgently beseech him."⁵⁶ The workers that attended the congregations during these years learned a few Christian terms but often applied pagan meaning to the terms themselves. When they taught, they were unable to explain the truth adequately so the people placed meaning upon the terms based on their

⁵²Ma, "A Comparison of Two Worldviews," 289.

⁵³Ibid., 288.

⁵⁴Ibid., 289.

⁵⁵Ibid., 278.

⁵⁶Ibid., 280.

own prior knowledge and worldview. The result was that there was a fair amount of “Folk Pentecostalism” in those days.⁵⁷

The early Pentecostals' theological weakness provided opportunity as well as risk. While these early church workers did not have the constraints of Biblical knowledge to keep them in line, neither did they have the burden of secularized, Western theology to hold them down. The people formed their own theology as they gave testimonies of those things God had done for them. Ma refers to this as the “democratization of theology.”⁵⁸ The spiritual context of the Kankana-ey community, and one could extend the parameters of this comment to include the spiritual context of Asia, “provides not only a fertile ground for Christian theology, but also the risk of creating an animistic Christianity.”⁵⁹

The focus upon signs and wonders was typical of Pentecostal mission activity during the first half of the last century. Religion has the tendency to set its deities far above human affairs; this is true of Christianity as it is of the Kankana-ey, whose creator god, *Adika-ila*, is unknowable. Whereas traditional Christianity was progressively distancing God from religion, Pentecostalism made God immanent once again to the Christian community.

Suddenly, “this worldly” (“down here”) concerns enter into public worship. Daily problems, relational conflicts, family problems, business concerns and every imaginable “earthly” issue. This is done in anticipation of God's direct intervention in human situations. Pentecostalism narrowed the distance between God and us.⁶⁰

The next phase of development in the Assembly of God ministry with the Kankana-ey is from 1970-1990.⁶¹ Young people that came to the Lord during the days of great blessing were now entering into ministry. They received Bible school training and were more adequately trained for the task of pastoring the Kankana-ey churches. This new generation did not demonstrate the same fervor for praying for the sick nor did they see as many miracles. Yet they provided stability to the church through improved Bible teaching. “Christian leadership among the Kankana-ey Pentecostals should be applauded for the educational work

⁵⁷Ibid., 289.

⁵⁸Wonsuk Ma, “Toward an Asian Pentecostal Theology,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1, no. 1 (1998): 15-41, 29.

⁵⁹Ibid., 36.

⁶⁰Ibid., 31.

⁶¹Ma, “A Comparison of Two Worldviews,” 278.

they are doing among the local converts. None of the Kankana-ey Christians [in field interviews done by Julie Ma] even so much as intimated that they would be tempted to return to the indigenous priests for ritual performances.⁶²

Toward Ongoing Theological Contextualization

A cornerstone of Pentecostal theology is prayer for the sick. Pentecostals believe that prayer for the sick was central to Jesus' ministry. Jesus verified his claim that the Kingdom of God had come by pointing to the miraculous healings that he performed (Mt 20:28; 26:28; 8:1-4; 12:9-13; Mk 1:29-34, 40-2; 2:1-12; 3:1-6; Jn 4:46-54; 9:17). It is also understood from Scripture that Jesus taught his disciples to substantiate the preaching of the gospel with signs and wonders. In turn, his disciples taught the early church to do the same. This includes prayer for the sick⁶³ (Luke 9:2, 10:9, Acts 4:30). The Kankana-ey Pentecostal churches believe and practice this.

Amos Yong asks a poignant question about moving into the future:

The question that arises is this: what will happen to Pentecostal Kankana-ey cosmology during the generations after such provisions are made available? What happens when medical supplies are accessible, or when the socio-economic conditions of the Kankana-ey people are transformed, such that disease is no longer as problematic? . . . My point is that when we depend on pragmatic criteria to undergrid our power-pneumatology, we run the risk of theological irrelevance once power is obtained through other sources.⁶⁴

Yong is reminding the Kankana-ey that theologizing is a constant process; it is not stagnate. How will the church minister in a rapidly changing world? The cosmology of animism is not singular. Its structure differs and its appearance changes from place to place; it also changes through time within the same culture. The rules of engagement with the spirit world in the Cordillera of 1945 are not the same today. That does not imply that the spirit world has ceased to exist, rather that it has morphed with the changes in culture through time.

Here is an example from the United States and Europe. The Church in the West found little reason to pray for healing during the optimistic stage of the onslaught of the secularizing years, but the

⁶²Yong, "Going Where The Spirit Goes," 114.

⁶³Ma, "A Comparison of Two Worldviews," 278.

⁶⁴Yong, "Going Where the Spirit Goes," 120-1.

Pentecostal renewal brought back the awareness of the spiritual world and the practice of praying for the sick. Yong's reminder is that "Pentecostals need to find ways of preserving their insights into the spiritual nature of reality not by returning to a pre-modern mentality about ghosts and spirits, but by reconceptualizing 'spiritual power' within the context of a post-Einsteinian cosmology. Failure to do so is to rely on purely pragmatic considerations in determining theological truth."⁶⁵

Conclusion

The question this article seeks to answer is, "How do traditional beliefs and practices of the Kankana-ey influence praying for the sick in Kankana-ey Assemblies of God Churches?" Throughout this paper, I have sought to understand and explain different issues that come to bear upon this question. Those aspects of the Kankana-ey religion that have to do with healing and the basic tenets of animism have been analyzed. I have studied the development of the Assemblies of God outreach in the Cordillera since its inception, specifically trying to understand historically the development of its practice of praying for the sick.

The traditional Kankana-ey religion is animistic. The traditional approach to healing was through ritualistic appeasement of the spirits. The Pentecostal evangelists have been remarkably successful in establishing a strong and growing church among the Kankana-ey because of the similarities in worldview. The Assemblies of God ministers have been reasonably faithful to the Biblical worldview, which affirms the existence of a spiritual world and gives the believer authority over evil spirits that can bring sickness and authority to pray for healing.

The similarities between the animistic worldview of the Kankana-ey and the Biblical worldview provide ample opportunity for either negative theological syncretism that will weaken the Christian practice of praying for the sick or positive theological contextualization of Biblical truth that would strengthen it. Research has shown that the Assemblies of God ministers have done a reasonably good job of contextualization in this area. In the early days of Pentecostal outreach in the Cordillera, there was more syncretism that produced more folk-Pentecostalism; improved Biblical teaching in recent years has

⁶⁵Ibid., 121–2.

diminished this effect. The process of contextualization is not finished. More work needs to be done to minimize the effect of past syncretism and further work needs to be to prepare the Kankana-ey church as it goes through expected cycles of change in the present globalized environment.

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