

Embracing the Mother's Perpetual Compassion

The Specific Place of Our Mother of Perpetual Help Icon-Novena in the Philippines'
Varied Marian Devotions

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There is no question that all across the islands constituting the Philippine Republic, Mary's presence in our lives is constitutive of our identity as Filipinos. This is most especially true for Pinoys who are Roman Catholics. However, even among some Protestants (e.g. the Episcopalian Church and the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*), there has been a growing interest in honoring Mary. Even among the Moro people adhering to the Islamic faith, there is an attachment to Mary as Maryam, if they take to heart the Holy Qurans 19th *sura* (chapter).

PCP Acts and Decrees posit that "the Church of the Philippines, as a '*pueblo amante de Maria*' – 'a people in love with Mary' – will always continue to seek her intercession and learn from her way of life what we need to be as a community of disciples... for (s)he is truly what her oldest extant image in the Philippines calls her: *Nuestra Señora de Guia*, Our lady Guide of the Way." (1992, No. 153). The Catechism for Filipino Catholics refers to the people's devotion to the Mary as "an integral element of Catholic worship". (1997, No. 1539).

Throughout the year, four Marian solemnities are celebrated, namely, the Immaculate Conception, the Solemnity of Mary as Mother of God, the Annunciation of the Lord and the Assumption. Other feasts that are commemorated linking Mary to God's plan of salvation include her Nativity, Our Lady of Sorrows, Our Lady of the Rosary, Feast of the Presentation and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. Marian devotees can go to Saturday Masses, recite the rosary and join processions in her honor especially during the month of May. Thus, most "Filipino Catholics probably learn more about faith from their devotion to the Virgin Mary than any other way." (Ibid, No. 155).

Marian devotees also have specific places where they could go on pilgrimages to seek Mary's intercession. These include: Badoc, Ilocos (Our Lady of Badoc); Cagayan Valley (Our Lady of Piat); Obando, Bulacan (Our Lady of Salambao); Masbate (the Purification of Our Lady or Candelaria); Lapu-lapu City (Nuestra Señora Virgen de Regla); Antipolo, Rizal (Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage); Taal, Batangas (Our Lady of Casaysay); Manaoag, Pangasinan (Our Lady of Manaoag); Naga City (*Ina ng Peñafrancia*) and Zamboanga City (Our Lady of the Pillar).

Then there is the popular devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help (OMPH), centered in the national shrine in Baclaran, Metro Manila but which is present in practically all the parishes in the country through the novena conducted every Wednesday. Indeed, the "liveliness in devotional practice is especially notable for shrines and feast days associated with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, insofar as 'Marianism' remains a defining characteristic of Philippine Catholicism" as the "shrines of Mary are the most popular in the country and account for 75% of all shrines nationwide". (Sapitula 2014, 400).

This paper looks into how the Marian devotion became popular in the Philippines from a historico-anthropological perspective. Bringing together insights from Filipino (Ileto 1979/1994, Sturtevant 1976/1979, McCoy 1984, de Mesa 1987, Petierra 1988 Zialcita 1991, Reyes 1991, Gorospe 1992, Scott 1994, Ligo 1998, Schlegel 1999/2007, Gaspar 1998/2006/2010, Veneracion 1998, Del Pilar-Garcia 1998, , Mangahas 2006, McAndrew 2001) and foreign authors especially those dealing with the parallel Christianization process in Latin America (Lafaye 1974, Lockhart 1992, Hicks 1998, Weaver 1998), I situate the rise of Marian devotion to folk religion which resulted from the interfacing of indigenous belief systems and the Hispanic Catholicism of the Iberian peninsula.

As the belief system of indigenous peoples since time immemorial privileged a Goddess deity, it is also important to trace the connection between the Goddess worship (of various empires and epochs) to the rise of Marian devotional practices in the Middle Ages (cf. Miclat 1998/2002/2011/2014, Nobles 1998 and Flores 2006). Lastly it will situate the OMPH devotion in the rise of urban-based popular religion (cf. Gaspar 1998, Merene 2014, Sapitula 2014) to explain how different this devotion is to the other Marian pietistic religious practices.

FOLK RELIGION AMONG THE COLONIZED

Whenever we come to Baclaran on a Wednesday or go to Quiapo, Antipolo, Cebu and other places in the country with churches or shrines that attract devotees and pilgrims, we are reminded that for farmers/fisherfolk in the rural areas, squatters and laborers in the urban areas, the overseas Filipino workers – who constitute the great majority of Filipino Catholics – their religion is folk Catholicism or popular religiosity. It reflects the subjective, simple, inculturated faith or religion of the Pinoy, a popular “religion of the people (i.e. less educated majority) and emphasizes practical solutions to the problems of daily life”. (Gorospe 1992 , 75).

Negotiating with the Saints

It is characterized by trust in God, church attendance, seeking for favors if not miracles, and a year-round mixture of Filipino culture and religion. Its practices include the lighting of candles, walking on knees, making a vow (*panaad* in Cebuano, *panata* in Tagalog, *sapata* in Ilokano), offering flowers, and prayer intensions. Thus, the elements that constitute popular religiosity are very much connected with signs and symbols and how their meanings have been embodied through the unfolding of historical events that have shaped us as a people, in terms of our system of beliefs, hopes and dreams, values and norms.

The manner in which the believer approaches this folk religious practice is to enter into a “negotiation process” with the Sto. Niño, *Ina* or any of the saints. In the unfolding process, the supplicants present their prayer intentions to whoever they approach. There are various ways that are employed including the *pamisa* (offering a Mass with the intention), saying the rosary or a novena or a spontaneous prayer. Supplementary actions include offering flowers, lighting a candle, or walking on one’s knees along the aisle towards the altar.

Then a *panata/panaad/sapata* is made. If the prayer is answered - that is, the negotiation leads to a favorable outcome - the supplicants will fulfill the promises they made. This could take on various forms, e.g. in the form of enhancing one's religious life (regular prayer, attending Masses and the like), making sacrifices (get up at dawn to say the rosary or going on pilgrimage that involves a lot of inconveniences) and changing one's behavior (refrain from gambling and drinking alcoholic drinks). Where it is a big favor being sought (e.g. cure from terminal cancer, resolution of a major conflict that has death-life repercussions), the *panata* could involve life-changing options (e.g. joining a religious order, curing an addiction, giving up on an extra-marital relationship and the like).

Panatas are seriously fulfilled if the favors sought are received. There is the strong and binding belief that the non-fulfillment of a promise could bring a curse (*sumpa* in Tagalog, *gaba* in Cebuano). There is the belief that supplicants who receive a favor and ignore their promises will be in some kind of blacklist; next time they seek favors, their prayers will not be heard. So the faithful will do everything they could to make sure that promises are fulfilled.

If there is one particular characteristic of our people's prayer intentions to Jesus, Mary, the angels and saints it would be in the area of concrete everyday needs of peoples. In the rural areas, peasant families' prayer intentions would be for good weather and the absence of pests so they can have a good harvest. In places, where natural calamities take place regularly, they pray that they be spared more death-dealing disasters. In troubled areas where conflicts constantly erupt, their prayers are for peace and safety from harm.

Across the country, the Filipinos pray for their basic needs: food on the table, approval of loans that will help pay for tuition fees or a housing application, permanent employment, the granting of visas to be able to work abroad, safety in the streets and harmony within the family. The most popular prayer intention is, of course, dealing with good health, namely, to be cured of diseases (the more serious the illness, the more intense the prayers) or staying healthy or not get sick that would spell enormous costs in terms of medicine and hospitalization. Considering the various material needs of the average Filipino family – who until today remain poor, and in many cases, destitute and constantly faced with urgent needs - most individuals' prayer intentions are very much centered on concrete, material and day-to-day needs.

This type of religiosity enters the lives of our people “through religious ceremonies attached to *family celebrations* such as baptisms, marriages, funerals, and house blessings” as it is a faith of “*traditional pious practices...* drawn from our Filipino social, religious and cultural environment”. (Catechism 1997, No. 116). Indeed this is the faith for “most of our people today... centered on the practice of the rites of popular piety” (PCP II 1992, No. 13).

How Folk Religion Arose

To better understand the origin of *panata* as an integral element of the manner that Filipino Catholics relate to the divine realm, one has to go to the roots of folk religiosity which is embedded in our indigenous belief system. Long before the Spanish missionaries reached our shores, our ancestors believed in a supreme Deity (called by different names e.g. *Bathalang*

Meykapal, Apo Kabunian, Apo Sandawa, Magbabaya, Manama, Tianemen and the like) and a world of nature, guardian and ancestor spirits. As they were baptized into the Catholic faith, the lowland settlers embraced the three persons of the one God, the Blessed Mother, the angels and saints. Today there are still other indigenous communities who continue to practice their indigenous belief system even as a growing number of them have become Protestants or Catholics.

But in the pre-conquest era, all the peoples living in our archipelago shared many similar aspects of their belief system. Macdonald, an anthropologist who made a number of ethnographic studies among the Palawan tribes pointed out that while the idea of a monotheistic concept was present in some of the native religions in terms of Supreme Deity, nonetheless, such religions were polytheistic in terms of a belief system, given the number of supernatural beings and spirit personalities that impact people's lives as well as present in their rituals. (Macdonald 2004). In terms of the people's moral and religious life, their beliefs emphasized "reciprocity and propriety rather than spiritual merit, the notion of fault instead of sin, the importance of ancestral and other spirit-beings over a supreme deity, and the primacy of pragmatic and situational factors above a sacrosanct set of moral rules." (Pertierra 1988 in McAndrew 2001, 6).

If one were to summarize the dominant connection between our ancestors and the spirit world, this would have been the constant desire and wish for the maintenance of a good, to be able to gain prosperity through improved and to be able to avoid. This meant that they were embedded in an exchange system with the supernatural beings or to placate them through various rituals and ceremonies. (Gaspar 2010.)

When the Spanish missionaries encountered our ancestors and began to initiate them into the Catholic faith practice, their approach to evangelization is today referred to as "the one-way transfer of riches". (Modern Catholic Encyclopedia 1994, 299). The friars assumed that they possessed the truth and that their evangelizing mission was to transmit this to those they considered to live in the dark as pagans through the sacraments and catechetical instruction. In the process, however, they did not recognize "the sufficient worth in the wisdom and culture already present in those being evangelized... (as they) tended to suppress cultural practices which could have enriched faith and its practices by incorporation". (Ibid).

The unintended consequence of this evangelization process, however, was the interfacing of Catholicism with the indigenous belief system. Those who were baptized into the Catholic faith throughout the almost 500 years of Catholicism in our country have since given up on their ancestors' Deity and spirit world along with the indigenous rituals and ceremonies. In their places are the embodiments of Jesus, Mary, the angels and saints as symbolized in various statues, icons, pictures and other images that hold a pride of place during the prayer sessions when the people's supplications are addressed to them.

For some time, folk Catholicism was labeled as "animistic" and "syncretic", terms which were rejected by Pieres (1988) as pejorative; he proposes to refer to this belief system as "cosmic religion". Human beings adopt a posture vis-à-vis the various mysteries of life by relating to "cosmic forces – winds and cyclones, rains and sunshine, floods and drought, fire and

heat, as well as to human concerns – planting and harvesting, health and sickness life and death, marriage and politics” which “merge into the world of invisible powers that maintain the cosmic balance.” (McAndrew 2001, 2). Wolters likewise reject the word “syncretism” in favor of the term – “localization”, since the process of the interfacing of an indigenous belief system with another result in the “foreign materials (being) fractured and restated and therefore drained of their original significance”. (Wolters 1982, in McAndrew 2001, 3).

These practices persisted even as there arose a nationalist movement to end Spanish colonial rule. However, even as “we rebelled against the sword, we did not throw off the cross. We clung to the faith of our forebears in the faith. We have kept them even to this day: Our fiestas and festivals, our rites of Christmas and Holy Week, and our devotion to the Sto. Niño, the Virgin, the Saints, our dead – all witness to the strength of those traditions.” (PCP II 1992, No. 11).

In this context, for many Filipino Catholics, “the central experience of Mary, Mother and Model of the Church, is her constant help and protection through her *maternal mediation*, interceding for her children” (Catechism 1997, No. 1438), and that “(e)verything we know and revere about Mary....depends upon her unique God-given vocation to be the ‘Mother of God and of the Redeemer’”. (Ibid, No. 1431) On the other hand, “Jesus Christ has become a real Person in their lives through their devotion to *Mary* his mother, who knows him best.” (Ibid, No. 513).

WEAPONS OF THE WEAK

But why have these practices persisted? Popular religious practices have functioned in our history and culture as weapons of the weak or those who are the poor and powerless. (Scott 1985). During the pre-colonization period, our ancestors acknowledged their weakness as they related to the spirit world, the forces and spirits that surrounded them, as much as they acknowledged their powerlessness in the face of natural calamities like droughts and floods, hunger and disease. Their system of beliefs and their rituals were their weapons to placate the stronger forces from the deities and to thank them for blessings received.

Even as the names of the deities, the nature of the spirits, the forms of the rituals and the identity of the mediators changed owing to the imposition of Hispanic Catholicism, the core belief of the people in the efficacy of their popular religious practices did not radically change. They still acknowledged their weakness before God, sought Divine providence while seeking favors from Mary and the saints and thanking them for their intercession.

In this way, despite the dualism that came with Hispanic Catholicism, namely the manner that the afterlife was much more highlighted than this life, and faith was divorced from life’s realities, still the people sustained an indigenous spirituality that connected faith and life, this world and the next, the body’s needs and that of the soul. They managed to defy this dualism and prevented it from defining the practice of their faith.

Another area where the religious practices served as weapons of the weak is in identifying women as the weak, the powerless. It is acknowledged fact that popular religious

practices are the domain of women who because of patriarchy are oppressed and exploited . Except for the Black Nazarene of Quiapo where male devotees predominate, as well as the fluvial procession of Our Lady of Peñafrancia with the *boyadores* (the men pulling the pagodas during the procession), taking center-stage, in most devotions, the women are the ones to take an active participation. Given their marginalization in a highly male-dominated society, women appropriate religion as a privileged space where they can assert themselves. No wonder they are drawn to Mary’s compassion. And they appropriate the weapons of the weak by saying the rosary, singing Marian songs, going on pilgrimages to Marian shrines and reciting novenas.

THE MOTHER GODDESS SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL

Another dimension that needs to be explored explaining the Marian devotional phenomenon is to look into the “feminine principle” that was integral in our pre-conquest ancestors’ indigenous belief system. Like many other traditional societies, this feminine principle was at work within the belief system owing to the matriarchal elements in their culture. All across the islands, the spirituality arising from this belief system would have these common religious themes: “1) Both man and woman are equally affirmed as human and divine beings; 2) All creation which include the human, animal, nature and spirit, are ordained equally important to life, and as such, are considered one community; and that 3) God regards all creation His/Her partners in the creation process, with both men and women commissioned to be guardians of the earth”. (Miclait 1998, 13).

If one were to make a sampling of the various indigenous creation myths , one is amazed at the presence of both female and male deities, gods and goddesses in the spirit world as well as the non-heirarchical birth of the first woman and man. Thus the following matrix:

Ethnolinguistic Group or Tribe/ Places	Name of Female Deity	Name of Male Deity	Name of female spirits	Name of male spirits	Creation Story
Bagobo and Guingan	Tuglibong Earth Mother	Tuglay	-Darago, -Mebuyan goddess of underworld -Tiun, Bia t’oda, Bia-ka-pusod-an-Langit and Kadeyuna – goddess of the heavens	Mandanagan	Tuglay created humans out of ground corn... when showed his creation to Tuglibong, she discovered some limitations; she put joints in their bodies and took away scales from their skin
Tboli	Diwata	Diwata	spirit-owner for water and bamboo trees.	spirit-owner guardian of trees and mountains	D’wata created first man, Kludan and immediately Bo-i Henwu to be his partner and companion
Tagalog IPs	Bathaluman	Bathala	Ikapati goddess of fertility and guardian anito of agriculture.		Malakas and Maganda appear together as the bamboo split into two

			Binaye, mother goddess in Mindoro.		
Visayas IPs			Maguayen, goddess of the sea winds.	Captan, god of earth winds	
Panay IPs	Malaon	Makapatag			
Mandaya	Babawagon		Eboll is underworld goddess Manamoan		
Cordillera IPs	Kabunian	Kabunian			
Mindanao IPs Banwaon, Agusanun Manobos	Magbabaya	Magbabaya	Mebuyan		Imaged as Breastfeeding Mother
Manobo			-Alimugkat assigned watcher-goddess of upstream region -Tahambling goddess-protector of forests -Ibu is queen of underworld	-Gamawhamaw is god who takes care of downstream region -Mahumanoy god in the mountains -Dagau – goddess of rice	
Blaan	Fiuweigh the Goddess (Fiu We)	Melu			
Teduray	Minaden Goddess who is Co-creator	Tulus Creator God	Sinonggol, goddess of death		Tulus, created the first man and woman. In another story of the first creation, Tulus' sister, a female deity named Minaden, shaped the world and its first creatures before Tulus did.
Tagakaolo	Timanem	Timanem			
Mangyan	Binaye, mother goddess				
Mansaka			Eboll, Goddess of the underworld		
Mt. Arayat			Maria Sinukuan, mountain goddess		
Makiling			Maria Makiling, mountain goddess		

Cebu			Maria Cacao, mountain goddess		
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(cf. Miclat 1998/2011/2014, Stuart Schegel (1999:80-81), Michael Tan 2016, 17).

A number of indigenous narratives going back to the origins of the world convey this equal status of gods and goddesses, spirits and deities. and female and male characters in creation stories. In the Bikol region, there is the story of the great god Langit, his daughter called Dagat, the Sea, who became the wife of Paros, the wind, who was the son of Tubigan. Four children were born to Dagat and Paros, three of whom were boys called Daga, Aldao and Bulan, and one girl named Bitoon. (Realubit, 1998, 20). For the Manobo/Blaan there is the story of Lumabet and his sister, Mebuyan. Her roles as mother of the underworld include taking care of all babies who died at childbirth; thus her body is covered with nipples. (Miclat 1998: 15).

The belief in the Goddess Deity goes beyond our own ancestors; this is a belief shared by various cultures throughout the world through humanity's history since time immemorial. Today, the literature on this subject allows us a glimpse of how common this belief was in the past. As a result, for some groups of women, "(r)ecclaiming the Goddess... is to worship the Goddess as a deity while other women have drawn on the Goddess as a feminine symbol of the divine in order to express their faith in the feminine principle". (Miclat 2011, 27).

Across the various cultures that arose in various parts of the world, the most ancient human image of the Supreme Divinity is female and she was regarded as the Primal Matrix or Creator of the universe, gods, human beings, and nature with varying names, titles, roles and functions. Archaeologists have found evidence of these in caves and shrines across the planet that date back to 25,000 B.C.E, evidence of Goddess worship were found in caves, mountaintops, home altars, and shrines.

Her multiple roles "can be seen as different facets of one power" (Barker-Woolger and Woolger 1989: 22) and her "various manifestations" actually reveal her "often complex nature". (Olson 1992: ix). The primordial Goddess "stands in sharp contrast to the mistaken concept that the feminine is tranquil, passive, or inferior." (Ibid, 1) and "a passionate lover and a pure virgin" who is "terrible and benign." (Ibid, ix)

The following table shows the various cultures and civilizations where a Goddess was worshipped by the people:

CULTURE/CIVILIZATION (LOCATION)	NAME OF GODDESS	MEANINGS OF NAMES
Crete	Atana Potiniya	Ancient Mother Goddess as Goddess of Vegetation & Earth; depicted rising from the earth, holding sheaves of wheat in each hand, as originally found in a Mycenaean fresco in Crete
Sumer	Inanna, Namma, Nammu	Primeval Mother Goddess

	Nidaba	who created heaven and earth One who initially invented clay tablets
Babylon, Mesopotamia	-Ishtar -Tiamat	Mother who gave birth to heaven and earth
Canaan	Astarte	
Egypt	-Isis -Nut	Goddess of heaven
Graeco-Roman	-Gaia -Athene/Minerva -Artemis/Diana	Goddess of Earth Goddess of Wisdom Goddess of the wild hunt
Mesopotamia-Semitic	Asheh, Astarte	
Anatolia and Rome	Cybele	Mother Goddess
Aztec, Mexico	Tonantzin	Mother Goddess
Shintoism	Izanami	
Hinduism, I	-Durga -Goddess Sarasvati -Ananta, the Endless, the great serpent of the cosmic abyss and the serpent goddess Mucalinda in Mahayana Buddhism	-Inventor of the original alphabet -The great serpent of the cosmic abyss
Thai Buddhism Mahayana Buddhism	-Phra Mae Thoranee -Tara -Mucalinda	Goddess of earth Serpent goddess who offered the Buddha a protective canopy as he confronted the destructive powers of the universe
Ireland	-Danu -Cerridwen =Bridgit	Mother Goddess Goddess of Intelligence and Knowledge Patron deity of language
Austria	Venus of Willendorf	
Korea	Mago, Magu	Primordial Progenitor Goddess
East Asia	Guanyin, Guan Han	Goddess of Mercy and Compassion

(cf: Christ and Plaskow 1979, Olson 1992 Judith Ochshorn and Cole 1995, Barker-Woolger and Woolger 1989, Baring and Cashford 1993 and as cited in Miclat 2011/2014.).

The primordial Goddess is mostly referred to as Mother Goddess being the life force who symbolize fertility and being connected to nature. As the Great Mother Goddess, she was “worshipped variously” as “Queen of Heaven”, “Giver of Wisdom”, “Protectress”, “Goddess of Love”, “Queen of Death”, “Lady of the Beasts”, “Mother of All”. (Barker-Woolger and Woolger 1989: 23). From these titles, one deduces that the Mother Goddess was seen as the source of bountiful life and goodness bringing forth and sustaining but also destroying life.

Images of the Mother Goddess found in Spain, France, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Russia, spanning a period of at least ten thousand years portray her as naked and ample-breasted, and in some cases exposing her genitals e.g. Cybelle, Artemis and Diana. These representations show her body to be ample with her breasts, belly, and buttocks, “as if the very plenitude of her body would insure plentiful crops and herds “ and “her hands were frequently placed under her breast as if to display them (” and there are times “she is pregnant, her enlarged belly emphasized by special markings.., (and) sculpted nursing a child. ” (Christ and Plaskow 1979: 127).

The ancient belief is that “all the mother goddesses were born from the sea—from the Sumerian Nammu, the Egyptian Isis, the Greek Aphrodite, down to the Christian Mary, whose name in Latin means se”. (Baring and Cashford 1993: xiv). Nammu was known as “Self-procreating Womb of the Universe,” and “Mother Goddess of the Cosmic Waters” who gave Birth to Heaven and Earth, or An-Ki; thus An is Nammu’s son and Ki, her daughter. (Ibid: 186-187). This belief in Nammu as Mother of all Things, Goddess of Primordial Waters who created heaven and earth from her own body arose thousands of years before Yahweh – the male Deity of Abraham – became a dominant God. (Christ and Paskow 1979, 124).

The cult of Nammu endured for a thousand years but through time her vast powers as Goddess was diminished with the rise of a creator god leading to the completion of a process in which the Mother Goddess shifts to a Father God. (Baring and Cashford 1993: 273). This came about with the birthing of a new myth of the creation known as the Enuma Elish (From/When on High). This Babylonian myth tells the story of the conquest and murder of the original mother goddess, Tiamat, by Her great-great-great-grandson the sky, wind, and sun god Marduk. Following this myth, light conquers darkness as the solar hero of light vanquishes the Mother Goddess, who is now regarded as the darkness. All the myths of the Iron Age and “[t]he mythological roots of all three patriarchal religions descend from Enuma Elish”. (Ibid, 273-274).

As father gods struggled for supremacy in Mesopotamia, Persia, India, Anatolia, Canaan, and Greece and Egypt,” a paradigm shift from the Divine Totality of the Goddess to the oppositional paradigm of the conquering God arose. This led to Yahweh – who was at one time a tribal god ruling his tribe alone – but later becoming the only supreme and universal father of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. As Christian emperors reigned in Rome and the Byzantium, Goddess temples were closed and the cults of the Mother became scattered, suppressed and distorted. (Barker-Woolger and Woolger 1989: 27). The original Goddess was turned into “departmental goddesses, with “each now cut off from the original Mother, and they are from this point onward divided against themselves” (Ibid, 23). It is in this context that Mary would fill the gap created by the exile of the divine feminine.

For Catholics today, it is no longer easy to call God as Mother. One reason posited by Gajiwala has to do with “our male God-language (which) has no place for the womb and the breast, birthing and nurturing”, and for most Catholics, “the Goddess is a pagan symbol; (t)o mention her in our prayers, liturgies or teachings is sacrilegious.” (Gajiwala 2005, 11-12). Gajiwala has one more comment: “I sometimes wonder though that if this is not an escape, it is

an attempt to hide our discomfort at naming God, a failure to affirm the sacredness of women's bodies and lives". (Ibid, 11).

Thus, when the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE, declared the Virgin Mary as Theotokos, meaning God-Bearer or Mother of God, and not just Christ-bearer, it made the Ephesians readily turn to the Christian Mother Mary having been "deprived of their Goddess". (Baring and Cashford 1993: 550). Katoppo posits that the Roman Catholic cult of the Virgin Mary is perhaps an attempt to compensate for the absence of a female figure in Roman Catholicism, the aspect of our humanity that yearns for a mother's nurturance or the love and comfort a mother provides. (Katoppo 1982: 79).

Nobles posits: "No one among the Jews of Jesus' time foresaw that three centuries later the woman Mary from the sleepy town of Nazareth shall be called Mother of God. In the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD, the bishop of Alexandria, St. Cyprian, defended Mary's title as Teotokos, Mother of God. Through the centuries, Mary has filled the vacuum created by the passing away of the fertility Goddess, she has become the symbol of the total woman – Virgin and Mother. (1998 , 6). Indeed, among Christians, Mary has filled the gap created by the exile of the divine feminine.

Babaylan (Beliyan, Balyan, Baylan) – The Priestess as Intermediary to the Deities

The feminine principle of the indigenous spirituality is also in terms of those who officiate as rituals. These are the babaylans; from the word alone (*babaylan* or *babae lang...* only women), these officiants are mostly women (there were males who appropriated this role but they had to speak, dress up and gesticulate like women). Much has been written about the babaylans and this field of study has so far yielded a rich literature (McCoy 1984, Scott 1985 Mananzan 1989, Reyes 1991, Veneracion 1998, Ligo 1998, Obusan 1998, McAndrew 2004, Mangahas 2006, Gaspar 2010, Strobel 2010, Miclat 2011 and others).

In the pre-conquest communities, our ancestors have a very high regard for the babaylans. Along with the *datu* (chieftain), the *bagani* (warrior) and the *panday* (artisan), the babaylan occupies a most important role in the community for she "presided over rituals that maintained the psychic and religious equilibrium of the community" (Ligo 1998, 54). Indeed, their primary role was in "rituals... as shamans or priests" and they were known locally as "*balyan, baylan, baliana, mabaylan, waylan, katalonan, katalona*". (Miclats 1998, 23), although this role was not just concentrated on rituals where healing is of utmost importance.

They also were involved in "planting, weaving, dancing, chanting, and mediating between people and spirits" and all "are considered sacred tasks by the shaman women and have corresponding rituals". (Ibid, 33). In other words her scope of responsibilities range from nurturance to peacekeeping. In a vanishing world that integrates "magic and mysticism... a rarer... breed among them even have the ability to 'fly', 'redeem souls', narrate the history of the tribe, foretell the future, and wrestle with evil spirits." (Ibid).

Considering that the babaylans held the privileged space for rituals, it would be easy enough to imagine that they promoted the notion of the Deity as both Goddess and God and that the spirit world would be constituted by both female and male *diwatas*. All those belonging to their communities would have been enculturated into a belief system that did not insist on solely a Male Deity, institute a male celibate priesthood and promote a patriarchal hierarchy that dictated moral principles, doctrinal beliefs and ritual rubrics. This assured the perpetuation of a cosmic religion so different from the one that would be brought by the colonizers.

A number of the babaylans also resisted colonization and led revolts against the Spaniards who were out to vanquish their belief system. At the Xavier University museum in Cagayan de Oro City, there is a painting that celebrates the resistance movement of Salud of Kagayhaan (now Cagayan de Oro City), who led a revolt in 1659 in a futile attempt to sustain their traditional beliefs and practices. This is why the friars organized a systematic manner to demolish their influence over the people by various means: demonizing them as they were declared witches who were mentally ill; there were instances of outright persecution as they were arrested and paraded across towns in shame.

They also did their best to entice some of them to become active members in the church. (Veneracion 1998). As they shifted their allegiance to the friars' religion, it would have been natural for them to embrace Mary and appropriating a devotion to her based on their attachment to Goddesses and *diwatas*. What happened to the babaylans remain a tragic part of our history.

The datu and panday were easily co-opted into the colonial framework, becoming the *governadorcillos* (local leaders) and the *ilustrados* (educated middle-class). The babaylan, however, had no place in the new colonial government, which brought a Christian religion whose priesthood was male. The women priests were displaced and waged a long struggle for their space within the new framework. It is understandable why some of them joined in the rebellion against Spain and the new religion. They lost the struggle. Many accommodated the new faith and were domesticated. Eventually... through massive missionary campaigns, the babaylan were stamped out. (Ligo 1998, 54).

The first Catholic women *beaterios* and Institutes

It would take a long while before women found a minor place within the Spanish colonial church-State structure; it was only in the 17th century when women were recognized in terms of their piety and commitment to the promotion of the Catholic faith. In 1619, Sor Geronima dela Consolacion of the convent in Sta. Clara in Toledo, Spain arrived in Manila to set up a monastery; however only Spanish women were allowed to join. Thus the native women who would have joined the Poor Clares formed their *beaterios*.

“About a century of Christian tutelage brought the Yndia to a level of religious maturity that impelled her to aspire for the perfection of Christian life through the practice of the evangelical counsels. Missionary chronicles mentioned Cecilia Tangol of Bataan, +1673; Melchora of Abuca, +1680; Maria Guinia of Binaltongan, Pangasinan, +1673; and Sebastiana de Santa Maria of Pasig, all observing the Dominican spirituality. Clara Caliman, +1639, and Esable, +1646, were both from Butuan, Mindanao, of Augustinian spirit. The Augustinian Recollects in Binangona de Lampo write of Juana de Jesus' heroic practice of all virtues, while those of San Sebastian claim the honor of directing the Tampas Sisters; Cecilia Rosa and Dionisia. The 17th

century Jesuit missions of northern Mindanao wrote lengthily of the pious life of Maria Utay of Dapitan.” (Ferraris 1998, 122-123).

Then there was Ignacia del Espiritu Santo, who first set up a beaterio in 1684, at the age of 21, before founding the Religious of the Virgin Mary (RVM) in 1747. The beaterios were “the first formal institutions of Filipino women living in community the life of piety and apostolic zeal”; these “were not juridically recognized by the Patronato Real as religious institutes” however, “some of them ... were truly such in all but name.” (Ibid, 122). A few other Institutes would follow the RVMs; practically all of them would integrate Mary into their name and/or charism. This included the one founded by the sisters Dionisia and Cecilia Talampas who “were known to work with Augustinians and were called ‘*tierras del beaterio de Pasig*’”. (Veneracion 1998, 35).

Thus, one can surmise that the babaylan tradition has persisted within the Roman Catholic church. But this is true also of those who would be “localized” church groups but not incorporated into the Roman Catholic church. This is true of the many women’s groups in Mt. Banahaw whose religious and community life has been sustained until today. Mt. Banahaw is one of those mystical mountains in the country that gave birth to important religious and political movements in Philippine history including those of Apolinario de la Cruz’s *Confradia de San Jose* (1840-1843) as well as Macario Sakay, who sustained the Katipunan revolt long after Aguinaldo surrendered to the American colonizers (1896-98).

One example of a women’s movement in Mt. Banahaw is the *Ciudad Mistica de Dios*, founded by Maria Bernard Balitaan at turn of century during the early years of American colonization. The group has an interesting creation myth: “When God created the world, it was not perfect, because the man He created sinned. So He sent God the Son to come down and redeem the world. But he, too, failed. For though he died on the cross for forgiveness and ransom of sin, sin remained in the world. So God the Mother has come to set things right with the world.” (Ligo 1998, 29).

Thus, the members look at history and salvation in three periods: “the periods of the Father (pre-history), the Son (present time till 2000) and the Mother (2000 onwards).” (Ibid). They consider themselves Christians, but not Roman Catholics. In their theology, they recognize a *Bathalumang Ina* (God Mother). If one were familiar with the peasants in Mt. Banahaw, one would find out how Ciudad Mistica is “esteemed as a spiritual resource and a locus of healing power; thus, they would join rituals at Ciudad Mistica “for healing or to fulfill their panata... as an act of thanksgiving or petition for favours asked from God.” (Ibid.)

There were other *samahan* or *kapatiran* (association of sisterhood/brotherhood) set up in Mt. Banahaw including the *Iglesia Mistica Filipina* (1915) and the *Iglesia Mistica Asiatica* (1937) (Ibid, 33.) This was the period when various millenarian movements among the peasantry sprouted all over the country including the “Dios Buhawi of Negros, *Pulahanes* of Samar, *Babaylanes* of Panay, *Guardia de Honor* in Pangasinan, *Colorums* of Cavite and Batangus, *Confradia* sects in Quezon, *Santa Iglesia* in Pampanga and *Rizalistas* in Laguna”.(Ibid). Other groups would arise in the years leading towards Vatican II including the setting up of mandated organizations. Meanwhile Marian devotion will branch out to other titles

of Mary as foreign missionaries would introduce such titles wherever they have foundations e.g. the case of the Redemptorists and OMPH.

One can resonate with Sapitula's assertion that within "the complex interplay between religion and social forces" the phenomenon of "the vibrancy of Marian piety in the Philippines rests on the ability of agents to make popular religious practices relevant to their emerging needs and aspirations". (Sapitula 2014, 401). Through the Spanish occupation, the *frayles* did their best to get the converted natives abandon their indigenous belief system, even as our ancestors accepted the forms introduced from hispanic Catholicism while appropriating their local worldview, thus leading to a "(s)yncretic mingling of Christian and indigenous elements (which) assimilated a Christian framework into local practices and beliefs. (Ibid). The outbreak of the revolution and Aglipayanism saw the shift of Marian piety towards a nationalist perspective, specifically in places like Mt. Banahaw where Mary helped inspire the people's anticolonial struggles. Consequently, as the Spaniards lost their "privileged status ... institutional Catholicism justified the use of Marian piety in reinforcing Catholic values as moral foundations of Philippine society". (Ibid).

CASE STUDIES OF A MOTHER GODDESS SHIFTING TO A MARIAN DEVOTION

Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia

To illustrate in actual concrete historical events how the worship of a Mother Goddess shifted into a Marian devotion, two presentations will be provided here as case studies; one in the Philippines (Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia, known as *Ina* throughout the Bicol region) and the other in Mexico (Our Lady of Guadalupe) who is venerated throughout Central and Latin America, including the Latinos in the U.S.A. *Ina* has other titles across the Bicol region as the "Virgin invokes Mary as Patrona de Bicol, Reina de Nuestra Region, as well as Gran Madre de Dios". (Gorospe 1992, 73).

There is no question that "(o)ne of the most popular Filipino devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary which has withstood the test of almost three centuries (283 years) is the Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia". (Ibid, 63). The story of how this devotion begun and how it has sustained its popularity is told through various lens. One view is strictly the narrative of the ecclesial authorities which connects the devotion that began in Spain and got exported to the Philippines. But a more contextual narrative connects the devotion with an indigenous belief in a Bikol Goddess popular among the natives long before the conquest era.

The first narrative traces the origins of *Ina* to Salamanca in Spain; this story involved a Frenchman, Simon Roland, who found the original primitive image at the slopes of Sierra de Francia, " a mountain of rock situated between Spain's two famous provinces: Salamanca and Caceres". (Ibid, 64). The image found its way to Manila into the hands of Don Miguel Robles de Cabarrubias, son of a Spanish couple who settled in Cavite, who studied in UST and later was ordained. As a sign of his gratitude for favors received, he vowed to build a chapel by the bank of the Pasig River to honor the Virgin of Peñafrancia. He found a local artisan who was able to carve a statuette following a picture of the Virgin. However, this plan did not materialize

as the Msgr. Andres de Gonzales, OP, the bishop of Nueva Caceres asked Fr. Miguel to join him in Bicol. It was there in 1710 that he built a chapel near the bank of the Bicol River, about two kms. from the center of the pueblo. (Ibid, 67).

Gorospe then provided an analysis as to how Ina became very popular with the Bicolanos as he tried to trace its religio-cultural roots.

From a Filipino Christian perspective, the favorite Filipino image of Mary based on Filipino culture and the Christian gospel is that of the Virgin and Mother. No wonder the Virgin of Peñafrancia has become Bicolandia's endearing Ina... Filipinos are very miracle prone. Perhaps in desperation when everything is going wrong in the Philippines, it is quite understandable that our last refuge and security blanket is to run to "miracles". It is said that when God does what we want, we Filipinos call it a miracle. (Ibid, 73-74).

Aureus (1998) provides the second narrative to explain how Ina became a popular Marian devotion. He connects the Ina to the many matriarchal-oriented civilizations of "Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, India, South America and China"... where "a Mother Goddess was worshipped instead of a male God", "agriculture, arts and crafts were combined... and thus, "women took on leadership roles". (Aureus 1998, 104).

He posits that:

Recent researches reveal some very interesting facts about the choice of this site;... in fact, the choice of the site of her shrine was dictated by the needs of the Cimarrones, also known as remontados or monteses..." (Ibid, 103)... Thus, "it has to be located 'about half a league' from the Spanish city of Nueva Caceres so that it could be more accessible to the mountain people were uncomfortable in urban environment." (Ibid).

The remontados were natives who resisted conversion to Christianity. They chose to live in the mountains across the Bikol river... But surprisingly they had a special devotion to the Virgin of Peñafrancia and participated in the feast. The interesting question is, why would the remontados who rejected Christianity honor a woman saint of the Christian Church? This raises interesting possibilities. Recent researchers in Woman's studies speak of a Mother Goddess. Could it be that the remontados see in the virgin the symbol of the Mother Goddess? (Ibid).

Aureus then asks pointed a question for our reflection: Is the popularity of *Ina* "a reaction of a people who for a long time have been deprived of the femininity of God?" He posits an answer: "The Virgin is proof enough that God's nurturing nature cannot be completely denied. The Virgin symbol continually affirms this. They are showing that the Catholic Church, or any church for that matter, should not and cannot remain purely patriarchal." (Ibid).

Our Lady of Guadalupe

One of the most popular Marian devotion in the whole world is that of Our Lady of Guadalupe. "There is a (s)trong devotion to Mary among Mexican American and Natives in the USA; and (o)ver the centuries, she has become a powerful symbol and uniting force for Mexicans". (Hicks 1998, 33). The story of Guadalupe goes back to December 1531 when she appeared to Juan Diego, who was told to tell the bishop to build a temple on a hill in Tepeyac so she "could show her love and mercy as the mother of all who confide in her." (Ibid, 34).

Weaver locates this devotion within the religio-cultural context of the Americas: the devotees have been drawn to Mary because they “recognize Mary, the mother of Jesus” as “la Virgen de Guadalupe, or White Buffalo Calf Woman, or Corn Mother, or La llorona refusing to be consoled at the death of her child:” this belief system is “not the hermeneutics of professional exegetes”; rather it is “the folk theology upon which Christianity at the ground level has always thrived as a living faith”. (1998, 19).

Hicks posits that the Guadalupe “cult is often stated to be a perfect example of syncretism of Native and Christian religion – a fusion of the Aztec earth goddess and the Spanish Catholic Virgin”. (1998, 33). How and why did this devotion arise? One view is that it originated among the Nahuas as well as the Aztecs, the native Americans who inhabited the central and southern areas of Mexico, as it provided the first devotees an “opportunity to hold to their old religion and yet, at the same time, be accepted by the Christian church”. (Ibid). But then Hicks posits that such an explanation is a simplification as there is “a much more complex devotion to a fixture that is much more than the superimposing of the two images”. (Ibid). Hicks posits that this devotion did not :

... spring up like a phoenix from the ashes of the conquest with a high Indian following, rather it developed over time, and Guadalupe’s symbolism changed over time to match the changing spiritual needs of the Indians. The relation of the Virgin to the old Aztec religion goes beyond a comparison to an earth-mother-goddess and the Nahuas’ view of Mary was heavily influenced by the views of the Spaniards, as well as by circumstance of post-conquest Indian life. (Ibid).

Hicks posits that this cult was influenced by a combination of Spaniards’ beliefs, Aztec mythology, and the circumstances of early colonial Nahua life. He then provides clues as to how the symbolism of the Guadalupe image developed over time. In the pre-conquest era, the Nahuas and Aztecs worshipped a Goddess named Tonantzin or *totlacotatzin* (meaning, our precious mother). As Mother-Goddess she was connected to the earth, agriculture, and cosmic patterns. There were other mother-goddesses who were fertility goddesses; some of them were seen as destructive. (Ibid, 39). As the Spanish friars began their conversion process, they realized that by building “their churches on or near the sites of pre-Columbian shrines “ they could “remedy the great evil of the worship of Tonantzin”; thus, “the missionaries built the shrine as a way to replace the worship of Tonantzin with devotion of the Virgin”. (Ibid, 36).

Tonantzin, Mother Goddess (Aztec-Mexico) and Virgen De Guadalupe (Christianity)



(photos from Miclat n.d.)

The early devotees' belief was that Guadalupe was a new incarnation of Tonantzin who came to their lives to bring comfort and security after a period of total disruption that came with colonization. In the wake of the entry of the colonizers, the people flocked to Guadalupe and "thousands were converted in the early days of devotion." (Ibid). Mary as Guadalupe was now seen as "more of a protector, healer, intercessor, and consoler for the weak; this reflects the changing circumstances and needs of the colonized and marginalized Indians." (Ibid,39). As Aztec goddesses were not all loved by the people some were destructive, Mary was now seen as the Mother-Goddess who was "all-good and lovable"; and as "God and Jesus were more feared than loved...Mary, was the beloved intercessor who worked to deflect or soften the harsh judgments of a stern God". In the process "Mary became a non-threatening and loving image as she "lost the negative features of the ancient goddesses, which were absorbed by the Father-God". (Ibid).

There is a bit of an irony when the woman who appeared to Juan Diego was later named as Our Lady of Guadalupe; this name came from the popular Virgin of Guadalupe of Estremuda in Spain. Conquistadores like Cortez and others were "loyal to the Virgin because she symbolized the struggle of Spanish Christianity against the Moslems, and therefore she was also a symbol of the struggle against Indian pagans." (Ibid, 36). The first images seen by the Indians at the dawn of colonization were those of the Virgin and St. James; these were images in the banners brought by Cortez when he invaded Tenochtitlan. This led to the rise of stories that "Mary appeared in battle and helped Spaniard soldiers conquer the Indians" and as a "result, Nahuas believed that their old gods had been defeated by the more powerful Christian deities, including Mary". (Ibid, 38).

Two more reasons are provided by Hicks as to why the veneration of Mary as Guadalupe became popular. Another element was the manner that the devotion is expressed which is mainly through “song, dance, offerings, processions and other ceremonies” which paralleled “the religious traditions of the Nahuas”. (Ibid 39). On the other hand Christian devotion to God consisted of passively listening to sermons of God’s judgment and punishment which the natives found boring. Of the twelve annual Christian festivals, four were Marian and these consisted of “processions, offerings of food and flowers, singing, dancing and reenactments of celebrated events” very much like the indigenous celebrations of yore. In these occasions, the women did not feel excluded unlike in “most other religious activities” and they see “Mary ...as a deity who directly intervened in their lives” “helping them through “miracles”. (Ibid).

Another factor was the appeal of Our Lady of in terms of her role as intercessor. The people’s relationship with colonial authority was one of patron-client just like the system of Spanish rule, which consisted of administration and justice that depended on intermediaries. In a way during the rituals, the Virgin was approached like the colonial governors were in humility. “Just as Mary mediated between the people and God, she also interceded with the authorities, helping Indians survive the colonial system.” (Ibid, 43). Lastly, through the centuries, her image also “symbolized a rebellion against the Spaniards and was used to promote action against them; thus symbolizing “ the rights of the oppressed and poor Indians”. (Ibid).

OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP

Finally, we now situate the devotion to the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help by making a synthesis of the various points we have raised in this paper so far. The author posits that this devotion would not have arisen if not for the following reasons:

1. The popular religiosity or folk Catholicism that arose in the Philippines owing to the introduction of Hispanic Catholicism that led to the popular veneration of Jesus as Sto. Niño and Nazareno, Mary and the saints..
2. The indigenous people’s belief in Gods/Goddesses and male/female spirits and the role of the babaylans.
3. The matriarchal belief system that arose since time immemorial that privileged not just the notion of a female Deity but one who is mostly revered as Mother Goddess.
4. The combination of all of these.

The icon of OMPH has its own unique features and stands out as very different from the other Marian devotions. Various reasons account for these, including: when the icon was introduced in the Philippines (at the beginning of American occupation), the locations where it has become quite popular (mostly in highly urbanized centers), the manner that its novena content or its “text” has evolved through the years, the ecclesial/pastoral orientation of those who “made her known” and how the devotees have appropriated this Marian devotion to the circumstances of their lives (Gaspar 1998, Sapitula 2014, Merene 2014).

In the process of explaining further the symbolism behind the OMPH icon, it will be important to deal with Turner's theory of *societas/communitas* (Turner 1969/1982, Obusan 1998) as well as the various theories related to the meaning of symbols (Geertz 1966, Douglas 1970, Whitehead 1928, Dillistone 1986). There will also be a discussion on how Mariology has been interpreted in various documents of the Magisterium and by theologians to see how the Marian devotion has been promoted since after Vatican II. All these will impact the unique character of the OMPH devotion in the Philippines.

The OMPH icon came into the hands of the Redemptorists through a series of events that go back to Crete in 1495. A Roman merchant stole the icon and brought it to Rome where he kept it in his house. Before dying he asked his wife to have it brought to a church; she refused. Miraculous stories then evolved before the dying man's wish was fulfilled. The story was that Our Lady appeared to the man's daughter telling her to inform her mother of the Lady's wish that the icon be placed in a church; consequently, the icon was turned over to the Augustinians who then placed the icon in their church just outside the center of Rome along via Merulana in 1499.

However, years later owing to the eruption of violence, the church was burned but the icon survived and was then transferred to a chapel, far from the public gaze. Eventually the Redemptorists whose new residence was located where the Augustinian church used to stand along via Merulana found out about the icon and through the help of Pope Pius IX, they were able to convince the Augustinians to have the icon placed in the church of the Redemptorists along via Merulana in 1866. When it was turned over to the Redemptorists, Pius IX admonished them to "make her be known across the world." (Hechanova 1998, Guidebook of OMPH mission, 2016).

The icon came along with the Redemptorists when they arrived in the Philippines in 1901. It would take another three decades before the icon's novena would be introduced. The first recorded novena in the Philippines took place inside the St. Clement's church of the Redemptorists in Iloilo City on 6 May 1946 (a Monday, instead of Wednesday); a few years later, Baclaran followed suit; and then it spread to other Redemptorist churches in Cebu, Dumaguete, Davao, Lipa, Tacloban, Butuan, Iligan and Davao.

As the Redemptorists conducted missions in the Ilokano, Bikol, Tagalog, Ilonggo, Waray and Cebuano-speaking areas of the Visayas and Mindanao, the icon came along and the devotion to OMPH spread. It was in 1948 when the first communal novena began in Baclaran attended by 70 participants mainly from the fishing village of what Baclaran was at that time. By the 1950s, the novena became even more popular as a growing number of non-Redemptorist parishes – mainly under the diocesan clergy – began to incorporate the novena on Wednesdays. Even as there were already a number of Marian devotions introduced in the country by early 1900s and more would arise much later, the OMPH icon steadily attracted devotees since it arrived in the Philippines more than a hundred years ago. There would be a number of explanations for this.

Impact of folk religion

As already indicated earlier, popular religiosity remains a reality for most Catholics even as the demographic data shows that a growing number of Filipinos are migrating to urban areas. As the majority of Filipino Catholics are unchurched and un-evangelized, it follows that their Catholicism is basically grounded in folk religion. Mary is the most central figure in this kind of Catholicism; any devotion linked to her would attract devotees. As the icon of OMPH grew in popularity – with its image being easily made accessible in churches and chapels across the country apart from the Redemptorist shrines – today the nation-wide OMPH devotion is as popular as the other Marian devotions.

The Marian devotion can be traced back to our indigenous belief system of our ancestors “considered themselves living in a world inhabited by numerous invisible beings, spirits, and deities;” there were “Gods and goddesses, known as diwata, and ancestor spirits” (who) “were generally benevolent or neutral and could be approached for good crops, health and fortune”. (Scott 1994, in McAndrew 2001, 5). But with colonization, this belief system had to accommodate elements of a foreign religion. Rafael posits an explanation through an exploration regarding the conversion of our ancestors to Catholicism where he “restores the dynamic of Philippine language and culture in negotiating the processes of colonialism and evangelization”. (Rafael 1988 in McAndrew 2001, 3). McAndrew contends that in the translation of Catholic precepts into localized ones, it was inevitable that the “natives appropriated the message in ways that misconstrued the intent of the friars” (Ibid.). Thus, “relations with the spirit world were ...subject to bargaining and manipulation.” (Ibid, 4). Like many other Marian devotions, Mary would be seen as the main saint to bargain with when the people are confronted with a variety of problems that couldn't be solved on their own.

As Mary could be approached for good crops, health and fortune, the devotees will show their devotion to her through various ways within their own cultural context. For Filipinos this is the context of expressing their faith in the concrete, in their trait to wipe, smell, touch, kiss, embrace sacred objects and wiping these with their handkerchiefs (Merene 2014, 15). Thus in Baclaran, the popular religious practices involve “*pagpapahid sa mga imahen at pagsisindi ng kandila*” (wipe the image, light a candle) which “describe the dynamic presence of God in one's life through the blessings and healings/'miracles' they encountered”. (Ibid, 101-102).

The OMPH icon as sacred symbol

Like many of the Marian statuettes, pictures and images, the OMPH icon is a religious and sacred symbol. There are various definitions of such symbols which are useful in our understanding of the meaning of the OMPH icon not only to its devotees but to the society in which it is situated. For Geertz, symbols “function to synthesize a people's ethos – the tone character and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood – and their world view – the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, there most comprehensive ideas of order” (Geertz 1966 in Banton 1968, 3). Thus a symbol is: “any object, act, event, quality or relation which serves as a vehicle for conception”. (Dillistone 1986, 115). Religious symbols then help to integrate and synthesize both the world as lived and imagined, thus, serving to produce and strengthen religious conviction.

Gathering together various definitions of symbols by different authors, Dillistone posits that a symbol can be regarded as:

1. A word or object or thing or action or event or pattern or person or concrete particular
2. Representing or suggesting or signifying or veiling or communicating or eliciting or expressing or recalling or pointing to our standing in place of or typifying or denoting or relating to or corresponding to or illuminating or referring to our participating in or re-enacting or associated with
3. Something greater or transcendent or ultimate: a meaning, a reality, an ideal, a value, an achievement, a belief, a community, a concept, an institution, a state of affairs. (Ibid 13).

When symbols appear in rituals, these words or objects become “intimately related to social cohesion and to social transformation”. (Ibid, 15). For Douglas, a ritual is “the institutionalized means of establishing and preserving symbolic order. (1970 in Dillistone 1986, 107). Thus for her, “symbols are of vital importance, not only for the ordering of society but also for the expression of its cosmology”. (Ibid). Turner provides a more thorough explanation as to the importance of symbolic rites; he posits that

Symbolic rites are needed to ensure a safe passage and happy return. Thus there are on the one hand forms necessary for the maintenance of regular health and ordered existence of the whole society. These constitute a kind of intellectual framework, subject to only minor deviations or adjustments from generation to generation. There are on the other hand forms necessary to rouse and encourage and provide a sense of purpose for those facing unknown hazards, whether in individual or community life. Such forms are more variable, more related to the emotions and dependent more upon charismatic leadership.” (Turner 1969, in Dillistone 1986, 111).

Turner further distinguishes between *societas* which is the structured social order where functions and roles are well-defined and *communitas* which is the opposite e.g. those we observe in “tribal rites of passage, in millennial movements, in monasteries, in the counter culture and on countless informal occasions is of very wide application” or when people are faced with new situations. (Ibid, 111-112). “Basically the ritual pattern may appear to be unchanged, but if the flow of life is to continue, the symbolic forms which constitute the ritual must be open to new interpretation related to new circumstances”. (Ibid). As *communitas* arise, “a sense of communion is felt among the members as structures, roles and statuses are blurred” and “(e)galitarianism, feeling of goodwill and kindness dominate the atmosphere.” (Obusan 1998, 52).

For Obusan, both aspects need to co-exist as “*societas* provides the framework for an orderly, structured society, while *communitas* – short-term, temporary experiences where a community feels a deep understanding about their core values - give life and meaning to the everyday living.” (Ibid, 52). This short-term period is known as liminal where “we experience what is more, what is greater in life, the realities underlying life itself; and where we are able to have a glimpse of life’s meanings” (Ibid).

In the past, liminality is reached primarily through religious rituals which were directed mainly to transcendent powers or possibilities. In the contemporary times, liminality is reached through arts, music, chanting, rallies, demonstrations, theatrical productions, visual art and films

which present reality, movies which create something beyond the normal beyond the ordinary and can appeal to peoples of different cultures and locations. However, in the Philippines, both in rural and urban areas, this attraction to rituals remains and is evident in religious processions, masses, novenas and fiestas” as these “ rites and rituals provide the people with the liminal experience - a necessary process to *communitas*”; thus, these are building blocks for cohesion with a community” (Ibid).

When the OMPH icon meets the Wednesday novena, then where it takes place, the ritual becomes a liminal space for the devotees. This certainly is one reason why they flock to the site of the novena, especially in a place like Baclaran. At these novenas, all categories of population are represented: men and women, adults and millennials, rich and poor, living in urban and rural areas, with high or low educational attainment, highly paid or unemployed, healthy and sick and those considered society’s undesirables – prostituted women, drug users, thieves, beggars. They all gather in one space where everyone is considered of equal footing, as everyone needs to implore the Mother of all to be intermediary for their problems and needs. In this liminal space, everyone finds a home under the care of one Mother whose heart is open to all even if this shared space lasts only an hour or so. The embrace of this *communitas* is what possibly provides them the energy to face life’s trials and tribulations as they return to their space within *societas*.

In dealing with symbols, we can also point to the Redemptorist church/shrine in Baclaran as a symbol in itself. It embodies meanings far more radical that we can ever be conscious of or understand. This church-shrine have been drawing thousands of people every Wednesday in the last 60 years. To enter the shrine is to be enveloped by the spiritual energy radiated by those who knelt and prayed during all these years. Millions of Pinoys have been inside the church; now hundreds of them work overseas as OFWS and have brought the novena to other parts of the globe. This is a continuity of what their ancestors did with their own deity in places and times beyond this sacred ground by the Manila Bay and our contemporary times.

In owning Baclaran as their gateway to God through OMPH, the devotees have re-appropriated the church-shrine as a symbol, or more precisely, a counter-symbol. It is a counter-symbol of:

The continuing contractions within our society that have not made possible the bridging of the gap between the rich and the poor, the bringing of the poor to the table so that, they, too, could enjoy the fullness of Gods love in the abundance of food, security and that which constitutes a decent life for peoples.

- The inability of our various governmental agencies from the Office of the President to Congress, local governmental units and the like to effect a genuine comprehensive land reform, to provide for basic services e.g. health, water, housing and education for the vast majority, owing to corruption, nepotism, and politicians’ indifference to the plight of the poor
- The harshness of life in the urban jungle of Metro Manila with the dog-eat-dog reality, coupled with worsening materialism and consumerism as evidenced in the rise of malls.
- The Church’s lack of prophetic witness that could challenge the powers-that-be but also empower the poor to organize and collectively engage the civil society to work for justice, peace and integrity of creation.

- The humanization brought about globalization which has led to our enormous foreign debt, ecological devastation, further resulting in the ever worsening poverty, the still increasing diaspora of Pinoy and all kinds of dysfunctionalities in our society.

The list is depressing and as sad and dark as the sorrowful mysteries. But this is precisely why the Redemptorist church in Baclaran serves as a counter symbol, as a beacon of light, as a *parola* by the shores of Manila Bay for the weary travellers out there in the pitch darkness of night .Because in this church-shrine which lies at the crossroads of people’s pains and struggles, but also their hopes and joys; which is open 24 hours a day from Monday to Sunday, through sunshine and rain, earthquakes and typhoons, dictatorships and people power; allows the devotees to sit still under the gaze of a loving Mother who bridges them to the God of small people, the *anak-dalita*, the most abandoned. Here the poor came home to the bosom of God who does make possible plentiful Redemption.

A further “reading” of the OMPH icon provides us another explanation for its popularity. The icon does not only constitute one symbol; various symbols (or images) constitute the totality of the icon. Thus one has this matrix:

Images within the icon	How these images appear in other Marian devotions	Various meanings of these symbols
1.Mary as Woman and Virgin	Guadalupe, Fatima, Miraculous Medal, Lourdes	Mary as symbol of womanhood, the woman/virgin chosen by God to pay a key role in God’s plan of salvation
2.Mary as mother with her son (Teotokos)	Our Lady of Barangay Our Lady of Manaoag Ou Lady of Carmel	Mary as symbol of a caring mother who looks tenderly on her son (by extension, on all of us, her children)
3.Mother and son surrounded by angels	Our Lady of Consolation, Nuestra Señora del Carmen Our Lady of Angels	With Mary and Jesus surrounded by angels, they are no ordinary mortals, they belong to another layer of reality. Thus, she is indeed the Mother of God.
4.Infant Jesus	Infant Jesus of Praque Sto Niño de Cebu	Jesus as child, as Emmanuel. God is accessible as a child (not some powerful supreme Deity, very remote from the people), someone we could carry in our arms, also symbolizes innocence
5.Sandals of child Jesus	Sandals in the streets e.g. streetchildren wearing slippers	Poverty, simplicity Innocence
6.Angel with cross and sponge	Nazareno Jesus crucified, nailed on the cros San Miguel	Suffering Victory of good over evil
7.Cryptic signs in Greek	Latin words in amulet shirts or pendants	Symbol of mystical, mysterious, the terrain of God, giving favors

As a summary, we can infer that one possible reason for the popularity of the OMPH icon is because the icon is the totality of so many popular statues and images of Mary, Sto. Niño, the angels, cryptic signs and the other symbols.

The location of Baclaran within Metro Manila

In the 1930s, Baclaran was a fishing village with a peripheral status to urbanized Manila. Built in 1932, Baclaran shrine functioned mainly as a rural mission church. “Until 1947 most attendees of novenas were local fisher folk” while today “it attracts devotees way beyond its immediate geographic territory, eventually becoming a translocal place of worship” as a result of the “onset of transformation of Baclaran brought about by the rise of a pilgrimage-based economy centered on the shrine.” (Sapitula 214, 411). Surrounded by the busiest streets of Paranaque, Baclaran is constantly clogged by traffic as devotees and jeepneys/taxis/private cars compete for limited space.

Another reason for the icon-novena’s popularity especially in reference to Baclaran and this has to do with time and space (Gaspar 1998). In 1948, the people of Metro Manila were still recovering from the massive destruction of the Second World War. New migrants were coming in from the provinces seeking new opportunities that came with the peace after the war. Families were being reconnected as others were being separated. Life was not easy for the great majority of the people in the 1940s and 1950s. They had their share of displacements, anxiety, instability, poverty. It was a period that would draw people to devotions such as OMPH.

There must be also something about the social location of Baclaran. Situated between Manila and Cavite, Baclaran’s outreach includes the fisherfolk villages of the coastal towns and villages, the peasant village nearby (now gone with the onslaught of middle class housing villages), and the squatter colonies that mushroomed in Pasay and elsewhere (home to vendors, beggars, thieves, prostitutes – Metro Manila’s *les miserables*). As Baclaran also became the locale surrounded by the *hoi polloi*, its surroundings have also become one big, cheap shopping center for those seeking bargains owing to having very little money in their pockets.

The combination of Baclaran becoming both a site of a popular shrine and a huge shopping center provides the thousands of devotees with a space where negotiation takes place back-to-back. Inside the shrine, they negotiate with OMPH for their material and spiritual needs; outside as they seek to find cheap goods, they also make *tawad* (Tagalog) or *hangyo* (Cebuano-Bisaya), that is, they negotiate for the lowest prices as they buy the merchandise. Whoever can better negotiate towards the fulfillment of their desires are the ones who find it worthwhile to be a regular Wednesday devotee. And no matter how much sacrifice they may have to endure – the traffic, the heat, the crowds impinging into one’s space – the effort is truly worth it with the result of the negotiations.

Popular religion and how it adjusted to the modern times in urbanized centers

Sapitula (2014) offers his own explanation as to why OMPH devotion is popular as he labels this devotion as part of popular religion that thrives in urbanized centers and thus

differentiates this from folk religion which are more present in rural areas where religious practices are agriculture-based:

The Perpetual Help Devotion is an example of modern popular religion and its continual refashioning by various agents in order to cater to emerging needs and aspirations. The transformative capability goes beyond personal interests; it ensures that popular religion remains relevant to a broad range of communal interests, thus retaining its public character. This view recognizes the relative independence of popular religion from other forms of religious practice and is contrasted to earlier accounts that pegged it as a residual category vis-a-viz institutionalized religion. (Sapitula 2014, 400).

In making his own analysis of the continuing popularity of OMPH devotion, Sapitula refers to the “rationalizing culture of modernity” where a “modern popular religion may be deemed a response to the increasing complexity in a cultural field exploding with new contributions giving life to a plural world”; in such location the “devotees... straddle these cultural heterogeneities and in the process utilize the opportunities afforded by modern conditions to craft life trajectories and public action”. (Ibid, 401). Unlike the Marian devotion in Peñafrancia and Manaoag which were localized forms in a pre-modern setting, the OMPH devotion arose in the Catholic church in the modern setting of the 1900s when devotional practices needed to be modified in keeping with the shift of the devotees’ mindset.

In this modern setting, religious authorities needed to privilege “doctrinally conscious devotional practice to attract new generations of Catholics, most of whom are not particularly attached to the Hispanic-oriented religiosity of the past”; they, therefore responded with rationalization in order to “accommodate shifting conditions that offer challenges and opportunities for devotional practice”. (Ibid, 418). In rationalizing religious practices, the same ecclesial authorities came up with guidelines to minimize the tendency of a Marian devotion going the way of being magical and superstitious including the promotion of miracles.

Thus they took on the responsibility to “assess and evaluate devotional practices in the shrine to bring them closer to approved and recommended normative standards”; one move was to have an “alignment of devotional practices (Novenas, veneration of images and relics, and pilgrimages, among others) to official rites (Benediction of the Sacrament, celebration of the mass, and other forms of liturgical prayer) as a means to increase the laity’s participation in church life”. (Ibid, 415). As a result, the show of emotions and outright seeking of miracles, the wiping the saints’ images and walking on their knees were no longer encouraged.

This rationalization could only happen because the arrival of the OMPH devotion took place at the beginning of the American occupation when the Spanish friars no longer had a dominant presence. While the devotion can still be linked to “traditional piety, the devotion differed from previous Iberian-inspired forms of Marie piety as it epitomized a doctrinally conscious and tempered emotional vestige characteristic of post-hispanic Philippine Catholicism”. (Ibid 404). The religious agents who introduced the OMPH icon-novena were from Australia and Ireland whose missionary perspectives differed from the Spanish friars. Even as they encouraged the people to sustain their Catholic religious practices, they fostered “new forms of piety based on ‘religion of the heart’ yet firmly under institutional controls.” (Ibid.).

This rationalization process deepened with the impact of Vatican II. This would clearly be manifested in the text of the novena. As the text underwent various revisions, there arose a more defined theological content integrating the spirit of Vatican II. The novena text was no longer just a set of “established formulas of prayers” but it had sections meant “to educate devotees about the basics of the Catholic faith and the reading of social issues in line with Catholic principles”; by such revisions, the text “suggests veering away from magical notions of the icon toward doctrinally informed, restrained and updated set of prayers”. (Ibid, 404). The novena text also promoted:

Prayers ... (that) provide ample recognition of ‘temporal needs’ as evidenced by explicit references to petitions about bodily healing, stability in everyday life, and protection from disasters... (Such a shift) “reflected the changes in theological directions within Catholicism in the 1970s, inspired by the Second Vatican Council. (Ibid, 405)... Thanksgiving letters... to Mary are replete with expressions of their aspirations for *mabuting buhay* (good life) and upward mobility that are combined with notions of *biyaya* (blessings) and *grasya* (grace). Through their religious practice, devotees form *social imaginaries of class* that intersperse notions of material prosperity with aspirations for interpersonal and spiritual wellbeing. (Ibid 405-406)

With the issuance of the Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council (PCP II), the Redemptorists began to popularize the discourse of integral evangelization. Along with the novena texts, the homilies as well as texts in “official shrine newsletters and promotional materials emphasize this need to integrate faith and everyday practice”. (Ibid, 418). To be mission-oriented and to develop a deep sense of social consciousness were now exhortations directed at the devotees. The notion of a “*deboto-misyonero/a* or *debo(mis)yon* ... proposes a synthesis between religious expression and social awareness, arguing that diminution of either constitute an incomplete or misdirected religious practice”. (Ibid.)

Echica contrasted the prayers integrated in the novena of OMPH with that of the Santo Niño devotion in Cebu City which he considers as having an “apolitical nature”, as prayers in this novena are “most explicitly other-worldly”. (2010, 44-45). He adds that there is hardly any prayer that “the Sto. Niño would disturb and afflict our consciences whenever we have been unjust to our fellow men and women” as these prayers “do not spell out the broader social and political context of one’s concern” for others. (Ibid: 45). On the other hand, Echica points out that in the OMPH novena text there are references to “collecting unjust high interest rates... interfer(ing) with justice by bribery or perjury... to bring about justice, peace and progress”. (Ibid, 46).

Evangelization and Mary in the post-Vatican II church

The Redemptorists, by and large, have done their best to listen to the voices of the Magisterium in their critique of Marian devotion in the country. Since Vatican II, the Magisterium and church authorities have cast a critical eye on these popular religious practices. Such critical comments include:

We look at our expressions of popular piety and the strong residues of pre-Spanish religion in them – superstitious they often are: sacramentals becoming anting-antings, saints taking over the place of anitos, the Supreme Deity approachable only through lesser intermediaries.

Aberrations they are in plenty and they must be recognized as such, they must be corrected. (PCP II 1992, No. 12).

These religious practices are rich in values... But we need to foster these popular religious practices in such a way that they do not become distortions of religion or remain at the level of superficial forms of worship, but become rather true expressions of faith. (Ibid, 173).

We must continue to foster devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary...But we must make sure that devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other saints are seen in relationship with, and in subordination to, Christ, the one Mediator between God and humankind.. (Ibid, 174)...They have to be really related to Filipino life, and serve the cause of full human development, justice, peace and the integrity of creation. (Ibid, 175)

Both the Catechism and PCP II expressed critical comments regarding popular religiosity. The former warns that folk piety's faith is "dangerously open to proselytizing by other religious sects of all kinds, or corrupted by the attractions of worldly secularism" while the latter indicates that this kind of faith is not centered on "the word of God, doctrines, sacramental worship, community or building up our world unto the image of the Kingdom". As for Marian devotion, the Catechism posited:

(These) should foster "the disciple who works for that justice which sets free the oppressed, and, for that charity which assists the needy; and above all, the 'disciple who is the active witness of that love which builds up Christ in people's hearts'... Our Philippine Bishops...state: devotion to Mary shows itself in works, and the works which are needed in the Philippines today are the works of justice and free from oppression...our mission is 'to be present in the heart of the world, proclaiming the Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed and joy to the afflicted'". (Catechism, No. 1550, 1551).

We rarely associate devotion to Mary with the social dimension of Christian living, and this is when devotion to her can tend to become pious individualism. Mary should always be seen in Biblical context, for she was the production of the heritage of patriarchs, prophets, and psalmists of the Old Testament. We see this clearly in her song of praise, the Magnificat, where she turns naturally from herself to her people. (Ibid, No. 94). Our devotion to Mary should never lose sight of the present plight of the vast majority of our Filipino brethren who live lives unworthy of human beings. (Ibid, No. 96).

Cardinal Tagle, echoes the same exhortation in interfacing Marian piety with evangelization. He proposes that the faithful refrain from being trapped in the "split between devotion to Mary and transformation of society, between faith and involvement in human concerns". (Tagle n.d., 8). Thus devotees of Mary tended to reduce Marian piety to rosaries, processions and novenas, while those involved in social transformation looked down on Marian devotion as superstition. Believing that the "humanizing power of Marian piety could be a powerful force in this important aspect of evangelization", Tagle proposes the ideal, namely, the more devoted persons are to Mary, the more they should be impelled to work for social transformation. (Ibid).

The *debo(mi)syon* missiological thrust of Baclaran is deepened as we look to Mary as a woman of faith, who can help us proclaim the message of salvation to all and to enable new disciples to become evangelizers in turn. In this regard Mary becomes the best model as we contemplate on her humility and tenderness. In her there is the interplay of justice and

tenderness as well as the interfacing of contemplation and concern for others. This way, we can truly look up to Mary as the model of being an evangelizer.

Choi refers to Mary being a model for us as an evangelizer. She posits that a “new understanding of Mary’s position and role has a big influence on the dignity and identity of women.” (n.d., 12). This could help us realize that the “Church must be born again as a holistic church combining God’s masculinity and femininity, a horizontal and equal church, and a life-giving church of generating and nourishing life moving out of the authoritarian, hierarchical and patriarchal church.” (Ibid). Such a perspective, in turn can bring about “gender equality and world peace (that) plays an important role in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.”

CONCLUSION

Through the years, these theological discourses and missiological insights have found their way into the text of the novena as changes have been made through the years as well as the sermons or reflections shared by Redemptorists during these occasions. Sapitula makes a sharp observation that “the mechanisms of ‘strategic accommodation’ utilized by religious authorities and devotees... have enabled them to portray the religious practice in the face of the emerging challenges”. (2014, 420). Truly they have crafted “‘modern religious lives’ in shaping their life trajectories”.” (Ibid, 418).

But even as this rationalization has taken place within the OMPH devotion, there are devotees who join the novena from a pre-modern perspective, namely, to negotiate with the Mother figure for needs that are solely personal and have no pretension at being concerned with justice, peace and integrity of creation. This only manifests that Roman Catholics are of different mindsets and religious views; thus it is “better to speak of ‘Catholicisms’ (in the plural) to account for the myriad ways by which the Catholic tradition is appropriated”. (Carroll 1089 in Sapitula 2014, 421).

In Baclaran and other shrines of OMPH, all Catholicisms are represented which accounts for the big number of devotees. They enter the liminal space, accepting one another and not making judgments against each other. There are those who will sustain their folk religious belief system; thus, they will continue to walk on their knees, wipe the image and light candles; all these actions are all they need to do and they may or may not heed the words spoken during homilies. On the other hand, others embrace the popular religion and welcome exhortations of promoting *debo(mis)yon* and taking part in this missiological thrust. What brings them together is the firm belief that here in this sacred place in front of OMPH icon, they can be assured of the Mother’s perpetual compassion.

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