

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM IN THE PHILIPPINES: A BIPOLAR APPROACH TO DIVERSITY

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My exploration may be better described not as a search for common roots but as a journey to the North Pole and the South Pole of our unity. Let me briefly explain my choice of this bipolar image.

If you have two points along the equator, be they close to, or far from, each other, their lines can be made to unite either by going up the North Pole or by going down the South Pole. The Christianized and Islamized peoples of the Philippines are like these two equatorial points. Theologically, we can find unity by rising up to the North Pole of a Semitic divinity through the line of patriarchs and prophets beginning from Christ and Mohammad. Beyond these two central figures, both Christianity and Islam draw a common straight line through Mary, Joseph, David, Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, Moses, and all the way to Adam and Eve and ultimately to the Semitic conception of a Supreme Being. This we can all do by looking up to the North Pole of our unity.

What do we find common in Islam and Christianity that can lead us to mutual understanding and unity? So much in fact that it is a great wonder why up to now local and national leaders have not utilized it for integration and development. What we find in Islam and Christianity is a whole complex of principles, beliefs, rituals, and religious personalities and entities that are like a common vocabulary and grammar of a common language. Christians and Muslims have no

difficulty talking this language because it is about Adam and Eve, Jesus, Joseph and Mary, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; it is about sin and forgiveness; about penance and sacrifices, about the devil (*iblis*) and satan (*Shaitan*), the good and the bad angels; about salvation, heaven and hell. It is the ethical and moral language of love of neighbor and submission to God.

This is not to say that there are no differences in the interpretation of these common elements. But why focus on differences before we have explored the similarities? One measure of how far this concern for differences rather than similarities has taken us can be given for Christian and Muslim names. Few people have taken the trouble to point out that such names, though variously spelled, derive from a common source. The following are some examples:

Eastern Spelling

Adam
Hawa
Harun
Nuh
Ibrahim
Ishak
Yakub
Musa
Sulaiman
Yahya
Yusuf
Miriam
Gibra'il
Isa
Masi
Nazrane

Western Spelling

Adam
Eve, Eva
Aaron
Noah
Abraham
Isaac
Jacob
Moses, Moises
Solomon
John, Juan
Joseph
Mary, Maria
Gabriel
Jesus
Mesaiah
Nazarene

Would it not be better for Christian and Muslim Filipinos to adopt both Western and Eastern spellings of Semitic names, without regard to religious affiliation, so that a Tagalog can be a Jose or Yusuf, a Waray can be a Maria or Miriam, and a Maranao can be an Abraham or Ibrahim, etc.? This would underline the commonality of our Semitic heritage of personal names. This is just a small detail and a bit of psychology.

But we can also turn our eyes to the South Pole through anthropology, there to find an Asiatic humanity that links the Indonesians, the Malays, and the Filipinos in a common ethnic foundation. It is to this anthropological substratum that I wish to discuss.

A central concept in anthropology is acculturation. Acculturation, fundamentally means a process whereby a given group or culture reacts to an outside group or influence by selective rejection or adoption of the introduced elements. Therefore acculturation implies that 1. an outside influence or culture is brought in by outsiders, and 2. a pre-existing group or culture adjusts to this foreign influence according to its needs and circumstances. A basic task of anthropology is the analysis of the roles of carriers and recipients in acculturation, in which the principal viewpoint is that of a recipient group coping with and incorporating a foreign input.

My reason for citing such parallelism is to highlight the concept of acculturation that looks at the recipients and their pre-existing values rather than at the influences and the carriers. In other words, we need to view history not from the deck of a *dhaw* or a galleon, but from the eyes of a Filipino standing on a beach or on a hilltop. Let us look at Islam and Christianity as insiders.

Our first task is to look at ourselves as peoples before the advent of Islam and Christianity, i.e., as the receiving group. What were we before Islam and Christianity changed our lives? What is our pre-Islamic and pre-Christian heritage that lie buried in our ethnic subconscious, in our myths and legends, our arts and language, our values and customs? To answer this, we need to recall our bipolar metaphor. Let us visit the South Pole of our ethnic foundation and rediscover the sources of our unity. Our answer will not be in a foreign theology but in an emerging anthropology which would reveal common origins.

While doing research on the history of Philippine anthropology, I have been struck by the imperceptible shift of values given to the major segments of the Philippine people. At the time the Arabs and the Chinese started trade with the Philippines, the inhabitants of the archipelago can be classified into three basic types – 1. the Negritos or Agta; 2. the so-called upland peoples, the *taga bukid* and *taga ilaya*, inhabited the mountains and upper reaches of rivers; 3. the lowlanders,

who inhabited the coastal regions and the valleys and lower portions of rivers. Of these types, the most distinctive are the Negritos because of their dark skin and kinky hair. But we must not forget that Negritos are as Filipino as any other, if by that we mean inhabitants of the Philippine islands.

For our discussion — the most important groups belong to the second and third types that have been given many names. Some would designate uplanders as “Indonesians” and the lowlanders as “Malays”. Other would call the former “proto-Malays” and the latter “deutero-Malays.” These are essentially questions of nomenclature in physical and anthropology and do not concern us much. What is important is that we recognize two related types, the uplanders and the lowlanders.

How were these two types distinguished? The upland types were *technologically* less advanced than the lowlanders. They lived by hunting and by *kaingin* slash-and-burn farming; in Northern Luzon they developed terracing. The lowlanders were technologically more advanced. They lived by wet-rice farming, fishing, and trading within and outside the archipelago, going as far as Malacca and Formosa. Their artisans were expert boat-builders, cannon-makers, and fashioners of bladed weapons, jewelry and unglazed pottery. No wonder the early Spaniards in the 16th century regarded all the lowlanders as “the civilized nations.”

But this favorable assessment suffered under the Americans who limited the category “civilized” to the Christian lowlanders, and excluded the Islamized lowlanders, suggesting that they belong to a lower grade of civilization. This exclusion was made because the classification was based on Western cultural and religious standards. I suggest that we revert to the more objective *ecological* standard which regards people simply as lowlanders and uplanders.

Who were these lowlanders and uplanders? Where did they come from? What relationships did they have before the idea of a state and a republic enabled them to think of a single national community? The lowlanders were the ancestors of the present Tagalogs, Ilocanos, Pampangos, Bicolanos, Pangasinans, Visayans, Taosugs, Samals, Maguin-danaons, and others. The uplanders were the ancestors of the Igorots, the Mangyans, Bukidnons, Tirurays, Tagbanuas, and Manobos. Although

the uplanders and the lowlanders were differentiated technologically, racially and ethnically, they were of the same stock and clearly were distinguishable from Indians and Chinese and Japanese. That is, if you educate an Igorot and dress him as a lowlander, he could pass for an Ilocano, just as the latter, in a G-string, could pass for an Igorot. The same interchangeability is possible between a Maranao and a Bukidnon.

An important fact is that since time immemorial the uplanders and the lowlanders formed one trading community or a common market tied together by the rules of supply and demand. The lowlanders supplied fish, salt, porcelain, ironwork, brasswork, and other trade items to the uplanders. The uplanders in turn, traded back products such as rattan, beeswax, resin, honey, rice and gold. The lowlanders also traded among themselves, maintaining contact with each other, from Ilocos to Borneo, Malacca and Java.

Similarities are most evident in common concepts and vocabularies that show a common lingual family — Malayo-Polynesian — of tongues spoken by the peoples of the Philippines, excepting perhaps the Negritos. Such common concepts and terms cover the most elemental areas of the peoples' lives and environments. Examples of such shared words and ideas are the following:

Environmental features:

heaven	<i>langit</i>
earth	<i>lupa; yuta; tuna</i>
inland, upland	<i>ilaya, bulud, bud, guimba</i>
coast, shore	<i>pasig, pasil, baybay</i>
sea, ocean	<i>dagat, laud, laut</i>
bay	<i>lu'uk</i>
wind	<i>hangin</i>
S. W. Monsoon	<i>habagat, balat, barat</i>

Spiritual features:

spirit	<i>anito</i>
deities	<i>diwata</i>
soul	<i>kaluluwa, alua, arua</i>
conscience	<i>budhi, buddi</i>
child-birth monster	<i>mantianak, pantianak</i>

Technological features:

farm, swidden	<i>huma, uma</i>
smith, artisan	<i>panday</i>
house	<i>bahay, balay, bayay</i>
roof	<i>atop, atip</i>
nipa leaves	<i>nipa</i>
bamboo	<i>kawayan, boho; bugtong</i>
rice (husked)	<i>biga, bugas</i>
rice (unhusked)	<i>palay, paoay</i>
root crop	<i>gabi, ubi</i>

Sociological features:

leader, chief	<i>pangulo, datu; rajah</i>
grandfather, ancestor	<i>apo</i>
older sibling	<i>kaka</i>
child, offspring	<i>anak</i>
male	<i>lalake</i>
female	<i>babae</i>
great, noble	<i>dakula, dakila, daku'</i>
community, group, class	<i>bangsa, bansa</i>

The most fascinating similarity is in the concept and terminology of brotherhood or siblingship. The two archetypal symbols of brotherhood is blood and umbilical cord. The majority of Philippine terms for siblingship is derived from the idea of infants being cut off from the same umbilical cord.

Examples of this can be found in the following:

Tagalog	<i>Kapatid</i>
Ilocano	<i>Kabsat</i>
Pampango	<i>kaputol</i>
Ilongo	<i>utod</i>
Cebuano	<i>Igso'on igbugto'</i>
Palawanun	<i>tipusod</i>
Yakan, Samal	<i>bugto' tina'i</i>
Maranao	<i>repud sa pusod</i>

The other archetypal symbol stems from the idea of being of the same blood, *sandugo*. This idea is even widespread in Indonesia and Malaysia where the term *saudara* is cognate to the Philippine *sandugo* or *kadugo* (kadara – Ilocano). We know that the blood compact was used by Filipinos, like Sikatuna and Soliman, with the Spaniards to symbolize the closest band of equality and brotherhood. It is interesting

to note that even between Filipinos the blood compact is resorted to for very solemn declarations of unity. De la Costa recounts a blood compact between Bwisan of Cotabato and the Waray datu of Leyte:

They sat down with Bwisan and entered into a blood compact with him. They slashed their wrists and let the blood drip into a bowl of brandy. They then drank their mingled blood from the common bowl, and so became brothers.

Significantly, this blood compact was between Christianized and Islamized Filipinos. Its implications were aptly noted by Majul:

Despite the pre-Islamic and pre-Christian character of this ceremonial, the Muslims and the Christianized natives participated apparently without hesitation in this ritual. Christians could not have failed to recognize that the ceremony recalled a pagan past; while the Muslims, must have known, too well, that the drinking of blood was a religious taboo. It may, therefore, be conjectured that the chiefs who entered into the pact must have recognized however, vaguely, a common racial beginning or cultural history and that, at bottom, the common enemy of the datu of Leyte and Maguindanao were the Spaniards.¹

Whichever we look at — customs, language, economic ties, or racial characteristics — there is only one conclusion to make the people of the Philippines were basically one people. Although in the 16th century the peoples of the Philippines did not constitute a single nation or state, the bases and conditions for eventual consensus were there. If we are to find an appropriate image of this fundamental ethnic unity of pre-constitutional Filipinos is that of the South Pole where all lines originate and converge. The Filipinos, like lines, are one at their ethnic beginnings.

This pristine point of ethnic and cultural origin soon diverged into two lines of development in response to the rivalry between Islam and Christianity. It is now history that the lowlanders of Luzon and the Visayan opted for Christianity and the lowlanders of Mindanao, Sulu, and Borneo opted for Islam. It is to be noted that because both Islam and Christianity were seaborne influences they tended to affect the coastal populace, leaving the uplanders to their pre-contact beliefs and practices. The effect has been a heightened contrast between the converts of the coasts and the unconverted people of the hinterlands. This

contrast can be seen in the Christian Ilocanos and the unconverted Igorots, the Muslim Maguindanaons and the unconverted Tirurays, the Muslim Bruneis and the unconverted Dayaks in the hinterlands.

The problem, however, in the evaluation of national community did not arise from the contrast between the converted of the lowlands and the unconverted of the highlands. The problem was that conversions were in two different directions, one towards Islam, the other towards Christianity. Although both religions originated from the same North Pole of the Semitic prophets, complications arose because Christianity passed through the Western Hemisphere and masqueraded as European, while Islam passed through the Eastern hemisphere and masqueraded as Indo-Malay with an Arab garb. Islam, therefore, ended up passing for a non-colonial element in contrast to Christianity which was a colonial element. Islam may be non-colonial, nevertheless, it is definitely foreign. It is precisely this befuddlement on Islam as a foreign religion that has prevented us from appreciating the Muslim Filipinos as Filipinos rather than as Muslims. Whereas in the development of Philippine nationalism we can readily distinguish the Tagalog from his Christian veneer, we still find difficulty in distinguishing the Maranao, Maguindanaon, or Taosug from his Muslimness.

It is in this task of analyzing acculturation, of distinguishing the indigenous which accepts and adapts, and the foreign element which introduces new influences, that anthropology can help in integration efforts. Anthropology can help refocus our minds on the true nationalist impulse in the Filipino which lies beneath the aura of Islam and Christianity. Anthropology tells us to analyze the process of conversion. For conversion is the act of a person who turns away from his past, his beliefs, and his nativeness in order to adopt what is presented to him as better, higher, and more civilized. But in the process of turning away from his traditional human structure, there is much good and beautiful that gets rejected, wrongly, as pagan or *kafir*. Islam and Christianity may have introduced many valuable things into our culture, but they have also occasioned the destruction and abandonment of many that should have been preserved.

The Philippines is now undergoing a massive renaissance directed towards that heritage which the Filipinos abandoned when some em-

braced Islam and others Christianity. We need to recapture some of the good, the true and the beautiful that are still enshrined in our native legends, myths, and handicrafts, artifacts, and traditional courtesies. We need to relearn from some Filipinos who escaped the levelling effect of Islamization and Christianization, the uplanders of Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. We need to find again the foundation of our nativeness which is neither Islam nor Christianity but Filipino.

There is no alternative to the ethnic base of national unity. Nowhere else in the world does religion substitute for ethnicity. The Europeans may have been Christianized for a thousand of years, but there are French Catholics as there are Irish, Italian, and Spanish Catholics. In all of them, their ethnicity shines through their Christianity.

Similarly, Islam has spread wide throughout the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. But nowhere in all these areas has Islam succeeded in substituting itself for the ethnicity of peoples. Even in the Arab world where Islam was born and developed, people assert their ethnicity before their religion. How else can you explain the fierce pride of the Egyptians, Syrians, Jordanians and the Saudi Arabians in their nationality? They may be all Muslims, but they are first and foremost Arabs who will defend the cause of their brother Arabs in Palestine.

In the Philippines we have missed the entire question of ethnicity by posing the issue in terms of religious affiliations. We insist in using the dichotomized framework of Christian-Muslim concepts. Majority of Filipinos have been guilty of prolonging this dichotomy by refusing to regard *the principle of ethnicity*. The Filipinos of Mindanao and Sulu are daily operating on this principle when they confront each other as Maranao, Maguindanaon, Taosug, and Samal. But the Filipinos of Visayas and Luzon confuse the dialogue by operating on the colonial rhetoric of religious, instead of ethnic, differentiation. The effect is like forcing Italians to express themselves solely as Christians, thereby suppressing their Italian ethnicity. What we have been doing in the Philippines is akin to this. We have overworked the term Muslim to such an extent that ethnicity and nationalism have been eaten up by the religious terminology and stereotype. It is about time to put both *Christendom* and *dar-ul-Islam* in perspective by recognizing them as the medieval philosophers' way of escaping the fact that the blood of

ethnicity is thicker than the water of belief.

In conclusion, I wish to return to our metaphor of the North Pole and the South Pole of our unity. Some people assert that the road to reconciliation is a better understanding of Islam and Christianity as systems of beliefs and rituals. If they seriously think that this is the only possible solution they may be compounding the problem without realizing it, because one-sidedly concentrating on the element of religious affiliation they deepen the dichotomy of several centuries. But I would encourage the theological approach to the problem provided that we go all the way to the common semitic roots of Islam and Christianity through *an institute of comparative theology and philosophy open to all Filipino Asian scholars from the Islamic and Christian communities.*

Let us go beyond the narrow and culturally conditioned understanding of Islam and Christianity. For beyond the peculiarities of their historical rituals, both religions are in essence based on faith in God and in the commandment to surrender oneself in obedience to Allah-God and his will.

By this interpretation, the greatest of Muslims is Jesus Christ or *Nabi Isa* who obeyed Allah even into death. And one of the greatest Christians is Muhammad, an exemplar of those who surrendered their entire being to God. Theoretically, each religion claims to be a universal one, to the extent that Catholicism (with a small "c") is supposed to mean "the true religion" valid for all. Why have these universalistic goals not been achieved? Could it be that their identification with peculiar rituals and political forms hampered their universalistic value? Can the differentials of rituals be counter-balanced by the similarities of basic sufficient of support a *common catechism*, at least for the Old Testament portions of their doctrinal corpus? Can there be a Christian-Muslim international summit, as there had been between democracy and communism? All these tantalizing and crucial matters await those who wish to pursue the exploration of the theological summit at the North Pole.

I am more inclined to feel, because of my anthropological orientation, that there is much to be gained at the South pole of ethnic studies. We must study the Maguindanaons, the Maranaos, and

Taosugs in their ethnicity and let that nativeness shine through their Muslimness. Let us grant to the Muslim Filipinos the same privilege granted to the Indonesians and the Malaysians. Although they are devout Muslims, they have the right to express themselves as Malays or Sumatrans or Javanese. Let us cut down on the unrestricted and uncritical use of the designation Muslim, whether in praise or otherwise, to give a chance for ethnicity and nationality to assert themselves.

A Muslim Filipino in the community of foreign Muslims has no identity as the Indonesians, Malaysians, Pakistanis and Arabs have. To declare himself simply as a Muslim is meaningless in that context. He must have his ethnic and national identity — a Maranao, a Maguin-danaon, a Taosug and a Filipino. There is a world of difference between being a Filipino Muslim or being a Muslim Filipino. In the first, his ethnicity is but an attribute of his religion. In the second, his religion, is but a quality of his ethnicity, of his substance. The substance of all Filipinos, be they Islamized, Christianized, or unconverted, is that they belong to the Filipino nation, and that they are inhabitants of this archipelago.

Finally, there is a need to rise to the reality of nationalism to the greater reality of internationalism. The world is not just the North and the South Poles, not just religion at the top and ethnicity at the bottom. Our world is a multi-polar sphere; it is a web of life, a biosphere; and it is an interdependence of ethnicities, a humansphere. The rivalries of religion, of political ideologies, of economic blocks of producers and consumers, are losing their absolutism in the face of the planet's finiteness and the emergence of a *sense of species*. From this perspective of a single species in a single planet floating in deep space, could not the noise of the polarities of skin and symbol, of creed and color, by only different notes in a grander symphony, a deeper harmony of the spheres?

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The believer, the ecologist, and the poet are all alike in their ability to perceive the interconnectedness of things and to rejoice as well in unity as in diversity. We all need to share a vision — a faith if you wish — of a Center that suffuses all diversities, giving meaning to

all. As the poet Gerald Manly Hopkins wrote in "Beauty in Diversity":

Glory be to Allah for dappled things —
For skies of copule-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced — fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and trackle and trim.
All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is part change;
Praise him.

(adopted from Hopkins' **Pied Beauty**)

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