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Animistic Elements in the Maranao Observance of Hajj and Ramadan: Toward a Gospel Pivot

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Introduction

In Islam, there is an aspect often concealed from outsiders: Folk Islam, which Don McCurry describes as "a broad catch-all phrase that describes a syncretized form of Islam, incorporating elements of animistic religions."[1] Among Folk Muslims like the Maranaos, Allah is viewed as distant and unknowable, prompting them to seek control over their lives by appeasing spirits. Gailyn Van Rheenen aptly noted, "It is an attempt to manipulate the spiritual forces of God's world to find out its secrets and manipulate them for personal benefit. Such motivations, based on greedy self-benefit, are alien to the mind of God. While the Christian way is relational, the animistic way is manipulative."[2]

Animism remains pervasive in spiritually rooted cultures like the Philippines. Historically, "Filipinos have an incarnational worldview, meaning their perception of the other world and the visible world are very much integrated."[3] When Islam arrived, it easily blended with the existing animistic and folk practices already present among the Filipino people.

This paper begins by exploring the influence of animism on the Maranao worldview, highlighting how deeply rooted animistic beliefs shape their understanding of the spiritual world. Then it examines how

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[1]Don McCurry, *Healing the Broken Family of Abraham: New Life for Muslims*, 2nd ed. (USA: Ministries to Muslims, 2001), 95.

[2]Gailyn Van Rheenen, "Proclaiming the Kingdom of God among Animists and Secularists," *Missiology*, (Mar. 14, 2011), http://missiology.org/folkreligion/chapter8.htm (accessed November 3, 2024).

[3]Leonardo N. Mercado, *Inculturation and Filipino Theology* (Philippines: Divine Word Publications, 1992), 47.

the Maranao community embeds these animistic elements within their Islamic rituals of Hajj and Ramadan. Finally, it discusses theological approaches that can address the Maranaos' felt and spiritual needs, including deliverance ministry, kingdom theology, and contextualized models, such as the Love Encounter—adapted from the broader Four Encounter framework. This study concludes by proposing that these animistic expressions can function as pivot points—moments of redirection—where the gospel redirects Maranaos' from seeking spiritual control, toward finding true freedom and relationship with God.

The Influence of Animism on the Maranao Worldview

Animism in Pre- and Post-Islamic Maranao Society

The Sulu *tarsilas* (*salsilah* in Arabic) are valuable historical records about Muslims in the Philippines. These texts contain genealogies, some written in an Arabic-based script, and are carefully preserved by trusted members of Muslim families.[4] These are useful sources of information tracing one's ancestry as far back as the Prophet Mohammed. And although these genealogical records are mostly undated and often mixed with myths and folklore, they are still the most reliable resource.[5]

The Sulu *tarsilas* report that an Arab Muslim missionary named Sharif Auliya Karim ul-Makhdum[6] landed in the old town of Bwasa in Sulu around 1380 CE.[7] He was later called Tuan Sharif Aulia, showing a possibility that he was a missionary and a preacher, as the term *aulia* sometimes carries that meaning in Malaysia.[8] According to Nejeeb Saleeby, "Makhdum was a true missionary who purposely came to Sulu to preach his faith,"[9] and people were drawn to him because he built a mosque and consolidated or reinforced Islamic teachings.[10] He was also noted for his so-called "magic and medical powers."[11] In the words of

[4]Mohammad F. Mahmoud, "The Muslims in the Philippines: A Bibliographic Essay," *The Philippine Center for Advanced Studies at the University of the Philippines* 12, no. 2-3 (1974): 177-197, https://asj.upd.edu.ph/mediabox/archive/Vol12No.2-3,Aug-Dec1974.pdf (accessed November 2, 2024).

[5]Ibid, 177.

[6]Some sources, such as Ceasar Majul's book, use the term *aulia,* but it refers to the same person.

[7]Datumanong Di Sarangani and Nagasura T. Madale, *The Muslim Filipinos; A Book of Readings* (Manila: Phoenix Press, Inc., 1981), 38.

[8]Ceasar A. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, 3rd ed. (Diliman, PH: University of the Philippines Press, 1999), 58.

[9]Najeeb Saleeby, *The History of Sulu* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1908), 159.

[10]Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, 58.

[11]Ceasar A. Majul, quoting Francisco Combés, who reported the attribution of

Ceasar Majul, "Many legends had been woven around the personality of this Makhdum. Among these were those that tell how he walked on water, communicated by paper, flew in the air, and saved people from drowning."[12] Additionally, he is believed to have been a Sufi, as Majul elaborates in his analysis of the Sulu genealogy:

> . . . There are other *tarsilas* that narrate how the Makhdum came walking over the water. This is very interesting, for it suggests that the Makhdum was a member of a mystical (Sufi) brotherhood (*tariqat*) of the *Qadiriya* order. The reputed founder of this *tariqat* was the famous Muslim mystic and saintly man called 'Abdul Qadir Al-Jilani (470 A.H.-561 A.H. or 1077 A.D.-1166 A.D.), to whom it is believed God gave the power to walk on the waters of rivers and seas. Actually, a study of many of the *makhdumin* who went to Malaya and Indonesia had been Sufis, and to them had been attributed extraordinary or magical powers. This is probably one reason why Karim *ul-makhdum* had been called "Sharif Awliya," for such men had been considered saintly and full of Allah's blessings to the extent that they were supposed to have barakah, that is, the power to confer blessings on other people.[13]

Given that the spread of Islam to the Philippines came primarily through Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula,[14] it reflects a religious tradition influenced by both orthodox Islamic teachings and Sufi spirituality.[15] Early figures such as Makhdum, a recognized Sufi, brought a version of Islam that resonated with indigenous animistic worldviews.

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magical powers to those who first brought Islam to the Philippines in *Muslims in the Philippines*, 3rd ed. (Diliman, PH: University of the Philippines Press, 1999), 58.

[12]Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, 58.

[13]Ceasar A. Majul, "An Analysis of the Genealogy of Sulu," *Asian Studies: Journal of Critical Perspectives in Asia* (1981): 1-17, https://asj.upd.edu.ph/mediabox/archive/ASJ-17-1979/majul-genealogy-sulu.pdf (accessed November 21, 2024).

[14]Mark R. Woodward, *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in The Sultanate of Yogyakarta* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989), 54-55.

[15]Tariq Ramadan's idea helps explain this: Islam, instead of staying separate from local culture, meets it, interacts with it, and transforms through it. That's what has happened in Indonesia—Islam here has blended with local traditions and realities to become its own distinct form, shaped by Indonesian culture. Thus, the form of Islam that took root in the Philippines was characterized by a fusion of monotheistic doctrines and mystical, folk-oriented practices. See Amin Abdullah, "Islam as a Cultural Capital in Indonesia and the Malay World," *Journal of Indonesian Islam,* no. 2 (2017): 310, https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2017.11.2.307-328.

Sufism is another form of a sect in Islam. The simple definition of Sufism is "a mystical expression of the Islamic faith."[16] For the Maranaos, incorporating animistic practices was not difficult, as animism was already a prevalent tradition long before the arrival of Islam, and it is still evident today. Although Douglas Youvan does not explicitly mention the concept of folk Islam in his research, his analysis offers valuable insights into its development in the Philippines. He observes that the arrival of Islam in the southern Philippines brought a transformative shift to local communities, as indigenous groups rooted in animistic beliefs began adopting Islamic monotheism.

However, rather than replacing their traditional practices, these communities integrated Islamic teachings with their existing spiritual worldview. [17] With the influence of figures like the Sufi Makhdum, who was associated with magical powers and seen as a source of *barakah,* Islam in the Philippines became, in effect, a "salad" of folk practices blended with formal Islamic teachings. This fusion explains why animistic elements continue to surface in Islamic rituals, celebrations, and daily life, particularly among the Maranaos.

Understanding the Maranao Worldview

Charles Kraft explains that a people's worldview acts as a "lens, model, or map" through which they perceive and interpret reality.[18] It shapes how they see and understand, and it also explains the reasons behind their actions and behaviors. Abdullah Madale, a Maranao scholar who has authored many books about his people, is convinced that "religion cannot completely erase local customs, practices, and beliefs, even if these are against such a religion."[19] This is evidenced by the fact that, even though the Maranaos have embraced the Islamic faith, their traditional worldview remains highly evident in their daily lives.

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[16]John Renard, *Seven Doors to Islam: Spirituality and the Religious Life of Muslims* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 307.

[17]Douglas Youvan, "Exploring the Depths of Muslim Influence in the Philippines: History, Autonomy, and Contemporary Dynamics," *Researchgate*, January 15, 2024, 6, https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.21025.58724.

[18]Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 19.

[19]Abdullah T. Madale, *The Remarakable Maranaws* (La Loma, PH: Omar Publications, 1976), 1.

Madale shed light on the Maranao worldview, explaining that it revolves around a mythical world and a history rooted in the epic *Darangen*, from beginning to end,[20]

> The mythical world of Darangen is a world in which birds and other lower forms of animals can talk and be understood by human beings, and angels from the sky are beautiful women who can just change into human form. In such a mythical world, the Maranao had to survive on his wits and with the assistance of spirits that inhabited the lakes, rivers, streams, and trees, and must be very careful not to make nature angry if he wanted to be spared from calamities or any harm.[21]

He explained that even before converting to Islam, the Maranaos spoke of ancestors who ate crows, worshipped spirits, and believed some forebears—called *bininta* or enchanted beings—became spirits dwelling in sacred places like Balete trees, lakes, rivers, rocks, and mountains.[22] These practices reveal syncretism within Maranao faith. However, some Maranao Muslims conceal their animistic practices, aware that these are considered *shirk* in formal Islam.[23] Madale even noted that the impurity of these religious practices is a source of embarrassment.[24]

Detri Romadhaniati, in his analysis of animism from a Qur'anic perspective, concluded:

> It can be concluded that the Quran has given a clear perspective on the belief of animism. The Koran does not recognize that animism is the earliest belief professed by man. The fact is that animism has appeared in tandem with the emergence of shirk in the history of human civilization. The historical displays of the previous people recorded in the Quran show that they have been involved with various forms and types of animism. Thus,

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[20]Abdullah T. Madale, *The Maranaws Dwellers of the Lake* (Sampaloc, MNL: REX Book Store Inc., 1997), 49.

[21]Ibid, 49.

[22]Ibid, 50.

[23]Formal Islam is characterized by a cognitive and truth-oriented approach, emphasizing doctrinal accuracy and legalistic frameworks. Central to its practice and beliefs are the Qur'an and sacred traditions, which provide guidance for both personal and communal life. As an institutionalized religion, formal Islam often operates within established structures and rituals. Mark Canon, "Folk Islam APTS 2021," May 7, 2021, Folk Islam IIS. Microsoft PowerPoint, slide 4.

[24]Madale, *Remarkable Maranaws*, 6.

> the Quran shows a firm stance that all forms of worship and glorification other than Allah SWT are *shirk.*[25]

The Maranao animistic worldview predates Islam and permeates every aspect of life. For them, daily existence must align with what they perceive as real. They ask: "What gives life meaning? How do we explain death, achieve a good life, or handle misfortune? How do we plan for the unknown, uphold moral order, and address disorder?" These questions express the Maranaos' felt needs as they navigate community life disorder."[26]

As Groenveldt observed, "They (Maranaws) seemed to have kept the religion of their pagan fathers and the bulk of the superstitions of their primitive forefathers, and what they have now is not pure Islamic [sic] but the aggregate of past and present creeds."[27] It is no surprise, then, that animistic practices persist in Islamic rituals. Before examining these, we first explore how rituals reflect worldview.

Rituals as Reflections of Worldview

Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou emphasize the importance of rituals, stating that "Rituals are important in building human communities and maintaining their beliefs."[28] Rituals provide structure and order, preventing society from descending into chaos. They also describe rituals as "deep cultural structures that shape how people evaluate situations and define concepts of right and wrong.[29] By making beliefs visible, rituals allow individuals to express their values, interpret how the world works, and guide their actions. This is because the "heart of folk religions often centers around rituals,"[30] which reveal a deeper underlying worldview. While rituals may appear integral to how humans function, they can also serve as fertile ground for animistic practices, as they often involve symbolic acts and beliefs that are deeply rooted in cultural tradition.

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[25]Detri Romadhaniati et al., "Animism in the Perspective of the Quran," 10, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366 (accessed November 1, 2024).

[26]In my nine years of serving among the Maranao Muslims in the community, these are the issues I have observed as I walk alongside them and as they have opened their lives to me.

[27]Cited in Madale, *The Remarkable Maranaws,* 5-6.

[28]Paul G. Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 283.

[29]Ibid., 228-29.

[30]Ibid., 283.

Animistic Elements in Islamic Rituals

Ramadan

The outstanding element of folk practice during the month of Ramadan is on the 27th day. It is called "the night of power, or *Lailat al-qadr*, which celebrates the first revelation of God to Muhammad."[31] This is the most important night for all Muslims, as they believe it brings increased rewards for worship. *Surah Al-Qadr* of their Qur'an states:

> Indeed, We sent the Qur'an down during the Night of Decree. And what can make you know what is the Night of Decree? The Night of Decree is better than a thousand months. The angels and the Spirit descend therein by permission of their Lord for every matter. Peace it is until the emergence of dawn![32]

The concept of *Qadr* encompasses several nuances, including congestion and restriction, as explained in the following excerpt:

> One of the many nuances of "Qadr" is congestion and restriction. Accordingly, the earth on that night will be flooded and occupied with so many angels that it becomes congested and pressured. And because it is filled with celestial beings of light and blessings, the earth is voided of every evil and calamity and becomes exposed to spiritual pressure. Sins are forgiven, and supplications are accepted.[33]

The chapter highlights divine revelation, the descent of angels, and the blessings of the night. While these ideas align with Islamic monotheism (*tawhid*), the belief that rituals performed on that night automatically secure blessings apart from sincere submission to Allah reflects animistic influences among the Maranaos.

Rituals like *Arowak* involve beliefs that the souls of the dead visit their kin during Islamic holidays.[34] Families prepare food for these

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[31]Earl E. Grant, "Folk Religion in Islam: It's Historical Emergence and Missiological Significance" (Ph.D. Diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, March 1987), 446.

[32]*The Qur'an*, trans. Sahih International (Jeddah: Abul-Qasim Publishing House, 1997), 97:1-5.

[33]"The Significance of Laylat al-Qadr," *The Islamic Republic of Iran Peshawar,* https://peshawar.mfa.gov.ir/en/newsview/676916 (accessed November 26, 2024).

[34]Nagasura, *The Maranaw*, 92-94.

souls, later shared with neighbors or given to the *tuan*, who prays for the deceased. During *Rikor*, at the end of Ramadan, graves are cleaned and lit with candles. Homes are also lit in hopes of glimpsing *Lailat al-Qadr*, when an angel—described with a turban and white beard—is believed to grant wishes.[35] These practices reflect animistic influences through their emphasis on celestial beings interacting with the earthly realm.

Hajj

Hajj is an annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Mecca is, first and foremost, considered a sacred place for Muslims because, according to Islamic history, it is where Muhammad began the religion of Islam. "The sacred Mosque, Masjid al Haram, with the Ka'aba as its center, is located in the middle of the city."[36] Muslims around the world dream of reaching this place at least once in their lifetime.[37] Before delving into the animistic elements of Hajj, it is important to understand the concept of *Baraka*. While we won't go into too much detail, it's crucial to recognize how Muslims seek power through the concept of *Baraka.*

Baraka, according to Hiebert, is the presence of divine favor. "It is a mysterious and wonderful power, a blessing from God granted to certain people, places, and things that endows them with grace, divine blessing, and mercy, power for leadership and protection."[38] People or objects transmit this power to others. For example, "anything that touches something with baraka may get baraka."[39] Folk Muslim see this as a "magical power that can be created by ritual and manipulated for human benefit."[40] Understanding these concepts helps those outside the Islamic faith grasp the reasons behind the practices performed during *Hajj*, such as:

> Kissing of the Black Stone; the stoning of Satan; the veneration of Muhammad at Medina; Zamzam water brought home from Mecca as healing power for sick relatives; returning pilgrims

[35]"Maranao," *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*, last modified October 14, 2024, https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/maranao-0 (accessed November 22, 2024).

[36]Samuel M. Zwemmer, *The Influence of Animism on Islam: An Account of Popular Superstitions* (Whitefish MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010), 146.

[37]One conversation that I have to prove this point is the elderly Maranao woman in the community who expressed her desire to die in Mecca, feeling that it is closer to Allah.

[38]Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 136.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid.

> and their clothes are touched to transfer *baraka* and photographs of pilgrims and buildings at Mecca as an attempt to transfer baraka from the object to their bodies and clothing.[41]

Simply being in Mecca is considered a source of *Baraka*. Muslims consider it as a sacred place where they feel closer to Allah. "Allah has made the Kaaba (which is in Mecca)—the Sacred House—a sanctuary of well-being for all people, along with the sacred months, the sacrificial animals, and the ˹offerings decorated with˺ garlands"[42] serving as channels for divine blessing and power.

An example of the overt practice of animism among Muslims can be observed in how the Ka'ba Stone is treated:

> In the southeast corner of the Ka'ba, about five feet from the ground, is the famous Black Stone, the oldest treasure of Mecca. The stone is a fragment resembling black volcanic rock, sprinkled with reddish crystals, and worn smooth by the touch of centuries. It was undoubtedly an aerolite and owes its reputation to its fall from the sky. Moslem historians do not deny that it was an object of worship before Islam. In Moslem tradition, it is connected with the history of the patriarchs, beginning as far back as Adam.[43]

In a hadith narrated by Al-Tirmidhi (959), Ibn ʿUmar was seen clinging to the two corners of the Ka'ba. When asked about it, he explained that he did so because the Prophet Muhammad said: "Touching them atones for sins," and "Whoever performs Tawaf around this House seven times, keeping count, it is as if he has freed a slave." He also reported that the Prophet said, "With each step, a sin is removed and a good deed is recorded."[44] This Hadith, attributed to Muhammad himself, highlights practices that, despite being denied as animistic by many Muslims, bear clear indications of animistic elements embedded within Islamic traditions.

In many Maranao households, one will find pictures of the Kaʿba, a symbol of a dream they hope to fulfill to receive the highest Baraka. However, only a few Maranaos can perform the Hajj because of financial constraints. Since Hajj is a central pillar of Islamic practice

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[41]Grant, "Folk Religion in Islam," 447.

[42]Qur'an, 5:97 (Surah Al-Ma'idah, Ayah), in the Qur'an, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 2001), 2:255.

[43]Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 147.

[44]Al-Tirmidhi 959, *The Book of Hajj*, Sunnah.com, https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:959.

worldwide, and with Saudi Arabia as its spiritual center, the Maranaos have likely adopted and practiced it in a similar manner. One of the most commonly observed practices in the community is the use of Zamzam water brought from Mecca by those who have completed the pilgrimage. Many Maranaos purchase it from returning pilgrims and believe that it has healing properties, particularly for physical illnesses.

Theological Approaches

Deliverance Through the Gospel: Lessons from Acts 19:11-20

The Book of Acts is an excellent starting point for understanding how the church's growth triumphed over the fiery darts of Satan. The Book of Acts recounts the initial response to the Great Commission, as the apostles went into the world with the sole message of salvation through Christ Jesus, beginning in Acts 8. The ministry entrusted to the apostles faced numerous trials, as Satan did not remain passive in the face of the church's expansion (Acts 8:9-24; 13:6- 12; 16:16-18; 19:13-16; 19:17-20). The gospel-transformative power freed individuals from animistic beliefs and practices, as powerfully shown in Acts 19:11-20.

God was doing extraordinary miracles through Paul. Schnabel and Arnold, in their commentary, said, "Spiritual power was transmitted through handkerchiefs and aprons that mediated physical contact between Paul's body and the body of the sick demon-possessed."[45] Healing came to the people as their debilitating diseases vanished; even the demon-possessed found freedom as evil spirits left them (19:12). Although some might misinterpret this passage ascribing power to the clothes themselves, Luke clearly stated from the beginning that God performed the miracles. Paul was just an instrument.

The Sons of Sceva were not recognized by the evil spirit (19:13-16). "[T]hey used the incantation quoted in verse thirteen in an attempt to expel an evil spirit from a person"[46] and the evil spirit answering back to them with a statement and a question, Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you? (19:15) Schnabel and Arnold explained, "The question who are you? clarifies that it is not a formula (in which the name of Jesus is used) that is powerful in the spirit world, but the identity of the exorcist."[47] Worse, the evil spirit overcomes the sons of Sceva, for they are powerless over it. Invoking the name of Jesus was

[45]Eckhard J. Schnabel and Clinton E. Arnold, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament—ACTS*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapid: Zondervan, 2012), 795.

[46]Ibid., 797.

[47]Ibid.

never intended to function as a mystical formula, but God can empower anyone he chooses, as demonstrated through Paul. "Paul acknowledges the power of Jesus as the Lord and thus drives out evil spirits in the name of Jesus—a fact known in the spirit world."[48]

The Lord, in his sovereignty, can use anyone—even the unexpected—to advance his Kingdom. As Keener noted, "Public exorcisms proved strategic in the expansion of Christianity in the Roman Empire."[49] The news spread all over Ephesus, and the Greeks and the Jews were gripped with fear and this was probably due to the "failed attempt to drive out an evil spirit by the invocation of the name of Jesus by those who do not believe in Jesus, they realized that there is a supernatural power connected with the name of Jesus"[50] and they cannot manipulate it. God used this event to bring about conversions among both Greeks and Jews in the city, and it did not stop there. True conversion was evident as they confessed their sins, admitted their practices and those who practiced magic publicly burned their books (19:17-19). This act was significant because "according to magical theory, the potency of a spell is bound up with its secrecy; if it is divulged, it becomes ineffective,"[51] and it demonstrated to the world their transfer of allegiance to Jesus Christ.

The implications of this narrative are a great encouragement to those ministering to animists, particularly within the context of Folk Islam. It demonstrated that the early church overcame challenges similar to those facing Christ's church today; however, the gospel prevailed, the church flourished, and the power of Christ was revealed.

Biblical Truths for Gospel Engagement with Animists

The Supremacy of Christ over All Powers Colossians 1:15-20

These passages provide exactly what animists need—to witness a greater exaltation of Christ and to see him as the Scriptures reveal him. Christ's supremacy over all spiritual powers directly confronts animistic fears of spirits, ancestors, curses, or territorial powers by declaring Christ's authority over every visible and invisible power.

The animist's worldview is deeply shaped by a spiritual realm inhabited by various spirits, believed to influence daily life. These spirits are often thought to require appeasement in order to secure protection or

[48]Ibid.

[49]Craig Keener, *ACTS: An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol 3, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 2842.

[50]Schnabel and Arnold, 798.

[51]Ibid., 799.

baraka. A key pivot in presenting the gospel is affirming the reality of the spiritual realm while redirecting the focus to the truth that there is only one sovereign and all-powerful God who rules over all created powers. Christianity does not dismiss the unseen world but proclaims that Christ alone has ultimate authority over it.

Christ is the key. This is where the battle is won. Powers and darkness will be shaken, for there is salvation in no one else; there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Only Jesus has saving power—not spirits, rituals, or saints.

Kingdom Theology

Love stated that "the ultimate goal of redemptive history is the reign of God,"[52] highlighting a critical aspect of evangelical theology. He pointed out that evangelical theology often "skips over the kingdom of God,"[53] placing more emphasis on reconciliation than on the reign of God. This observation is particularly relevant to folk Muslims, who are deeply engaged in animistic practices and live in continual fear of the spiritual realm. While reconciliation is undoubtedly important in gospel presentation, focusing solely on it presents an incomplete picture of the gospel message. Jesus not only came to save us from our sins but also to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). God is the "ruler and the rescuer."[54] The kingdom of darkness must be overthrown for the kingdom of God to take its rightful place. Love also mentioned that the Kingdom has both "present and future dimensions."[55] It is not merely a future hope but a present reality. Finally, the "kingdom encompasses both physical and spiritual dimensions, as its coming is closely tied to the presence of the King, the work of evangelism, and the manifestation of the power of God."[56] These points underscore the transformative and holistic nature of God's kingdom.

The folk Muslim must encounter Jesus as the Deliverer. He cast out demons (Matt 12:28), demons know him and are afraid of him (Jas 2:19), he heals people from sickness (Matt 12:22), he raised people from the dead (Mark 5:21-43; Matt 9:18-26, Luke 8:40-56), and he made miracles (John 2:1-11). A kingdom perspective then emphasizes that

[52]Rick Love, *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000), 16.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Ibid.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Ibid.

God, through Christ, has entered the world to establish his sovereign rule and overcome the powers of Satan.[57]

Kingdom Theology is a way of understanding the Christian faith that shows the whole picture of who God is and what he's doing in the world. For animists—people who believe that spirits are everywhere in nature—this view can help them see that God is real, powerful, and present in everything, not just in specific parts of life or certain places.

Instead of thinking of God as just a helper for personal needs, Kingdom theology explains that God is in charge of the entire world, working through all things, and that his presence is everywhere. This helps animists see how great and real God's role is in the world. Throughout Scripture, God discourages his people from turning to or focusing their attention on the powers and exponents of evil. Rather, he advocates that people should turn to him (Isa 8:19-20) and dwell on his power and attributes (Phil 3:10; Eph 3:17-19). It is a sad reality that the Muslims are bound by demonic practices and rituals, seeking power and control by appeasing spirits. Little do they know that these are all schemes of Satan to keep them in bondage. But praise be to God! His kingdom will advance even in the most remote and darkest places on earth because Jesus Christ is King, and the kingdom of God is already in their midst!

Love

Ministering to animists involves intense spiritual warfare, which often affects a person's mental, physical, and emotional well-being. When the Lord gave his greatest command, he knew the challenges his people would face as he commissioned them to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19). He also knew that a deeper battle rages within his people—the temptation to prioritize self, to choose comfort, to avoid rejection, and to take the easier path. That is why he continually reminds them that his kingdom is an upside-down Kingdom, where the first will be last and the last will be first (Mark 10:43-44) and where following him means taking the posture of a servant. Ministering to folk Muslims requires this kind of kingdom mindset. It involves dying to self daily and responding in love, even when misunderstood, used, and often rejected. The missionary must be prepared not only to proclaim the gospel but also to embody it through humility, sacrifice, and a servant-hearted life like his Master.

[57]Rheenen, "Proclaiming the Kingdom."

Adapting from Dave Johnson's Four Encounter Paradigm for ministering in a minority world context, the concept of the Love Encounter is particularly significant.[58] Johnson observed that "there is little love or compassion in animism, although devotion to the gods may be heartfelt. It is a religion of fear."[59] This highlights the stark contrast between the fear-driven practices of animistic religions and the transformative power of God's love, which alone can address the deep spiritual needs of those bound by such belief systems. God uses his church to reach the world, and believers are his agents of love—demonstrating his compassion and truth through both word and deed. There are many creative and contextual ways the church, united as one body, can engage Muslim communities and share the gospel faithfully and effectively.

The Lord, in his wisdom, encapsulated the greatest commandment into two. A believer's love for their neighbor affirms their love for God. Sacrificial love, modeled by Christ, must remain central in expressing his character. Believers are called to reflect on Christ's humility and sacrifice, allowing it to shape their actions. Humble service is a defining hallmark of his love, as seen in his own words—he came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28). These principles—sacrificial love, compassion, and service—are central to living out Christ's love in tangible, impactful ways.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has explored the animistic influences within the celebration of Islamic rituals, particularly Ramadan and *Hajj*, among Filipino Muslims of the Maranao tribe. It has shown how certain cultural practices retain elements of animism, blending spiritual beliefs and rituals that reflect a deep connection to both the spiritual and natural worlds—even within Islamic observance.

This exploration highlights that understanding these syncretic practices is essential for effective ministry and outreach among Maranao Muslims. The findings suggest that for evangelistic efforts to be fruitful, missionaries must recognize the role of traditional beliefs in shaping the worldview of Muslim communities. By thoughtfully engaging with these cultural and religious frameworks, the Church can approach outreach with greater empathy, insight, and love—fostering meaningful dialogue and creating opportunities to share the gospel.

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[58]Dave Johnson, *Pentecostal Ministry in Animistic Contexts*, (PowerPoint presentation, Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, September 2024).

[59]Ibid.

Moreover, Ramadan and *Hajj* are pivotal moments in Muslim spiritual life and can serve as strategic entry points for gospel engagement. These seasons often open hearts to reflection, making them significant opportunities to present the message of Christ in a way that speaks to their longing for cleansing, forgiveness, and connection with God.

The ongoing diaspora of Maranaos from Marawi, settling across the Philippines to support their families, presents another opportunity. This movement allows the church of Jesus Christ to engage them in new contexts, where the gospel can be shared with sensitivity and love. In the gospel, there is peace, true freedom, transformation, and hope of eternal life.

Ultimately, the prayer is for the Maranaos to experience the truth of Paul's words: "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:13-14 ESV).

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