

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS OF THE CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES¹

KENNETH D. MULZAC
Andrews University

The Philippines consist of 7,250 islands. About 700 of these are populated with approximately 89.5 million people, at an average population growth rate of 1.8 percent per year. These citizens represent a unique blend of diversity (in languages, ethnicity, and cultures) and homogeneity.² Despite this diversity, one common element that characterizes Filipinos is a deep abiding interest in religion that permeates all strata of society. Fully 99.3 percent of the population identify with a specific religion (see Table below).³

The overwhelming Christian majority makes the Philippines the only country in Asia that is predominantly Christian. Christian behavior, therefore, is influenced not only by the convictions of the respective faith communities, but also by certain psychosocial values held in common by the Filipino people. In order to understand the Filipino Christian, these values must be apprehended and appreciated.⁴ As one Filipino thinker has noted, we must

¹I am writing as an outside observer. From September 2000 to November 2004, I taught religion at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, a graduate school owned and operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church that is located in the Philippines. In an attempt to understand the Filipino mindset and possible response to teaching, preaching, and evangelism, I undertook this investigation. I discovered that this is a wide field that has been properly studied and documented, though in scattered places. Hence, my observations are made in dialogue with a rich supply of sources, written by both Filipinos and non-Filipinos.

²Geographically, the country is part of the East, but culturally it is strongly influenced by the West because of almost four hundred years of colonization by Western powers. The Spanish ruled from 1565-1898, hence the Catholic majority and numerous Spanish customs. Following the end of the Spanish-American War (1898), the United States gained control except for the years during World War II, when the Japanese occupied the archipelago. In 1946, the Philippines attained independence. Nevertheless, strong ties between the countries have remained. Further, there has been a revival of interest in ancient traditions such as music and dance, arts and crafts, and religious beliefs (that are blended with current religious practices). This has helped the Philippines to strengthen its Asian moorings without abandoning its acquisitions from Western culture.

³All statistics have been derived from *The World Factbook 2006*, "Philippines," <www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/tp.html>. Last updated December 19, 2006. Accessed May 28, 2008.

⁴F. Lando Jocano, ed., "Filipino Social Structure and Value System," in *Filipino Cultural Heritage*, Lecture Series 2: Filipino Social Structure and Value Orientation (Manila: Philippines Women's University Press, 1966); Tomas Quintin D. Andres, *Understanding Filipino Values: A Management Approach* (Quezon City: New Day, 1981).

“know the sociological and psychological traits and values that govern Filipino life. Together, these traits and values contribute to the development of the typical Filipino personality.”⁵ Four of these significant values are *Anting-Anting*, *Pakikisama*, *utang na loob*, and *biya*. These now occupy our attention.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION	PERCENTAGE OF FILIPINO POPULATION
Christianity	92.5
- Roman Catholic	80.9
- Evangelical	2.8
- Iglesia ni Kristo	2.3
- Aglipayan	2.0
- Other Christians	4.5
Islam	5.0
Other	1.8
Unspecified	0.6
None	0.1

Anting-Anting

Even before colonizers set foot on Philippine soil, there was an established culture with written laws and social order. It was believed that the individual is part of a wider social universe under the control of supernatural beings.⁶ In

⁵Methusalem Q. Castillo, *The Church is Thy House* (Manila: Alliance, 1982), 106-107.

⁶Records of early Spanish contacts with inhabitants of the Philippines indicate that early Filipinos believed in many gods. They were classified into three main categories. The highest order was the *Bathala* or *Captan*, the gods of the high heaven. Since they were the source or creators of the things in the world, they were responsible for all events in the world: life, suffering and death, rain and drought; thunder and lightning. Direct access to these gods was impossible. One could channel petitions and offerings only through lesser gods. The second category of gods was the *Pandague* or *Sumpay*, which are connected with death and the underworld. The perception was that when a person died, his soul was delivered to the underworld by one of the gods of the high heaven. The third category consists of gods of the earth. Offenses against these will result in natural calamities that demonstrate divine displeasure.

Beneath the gods were groups of environmental spirits or suprahuman beings that inhabit the immediate environment of human beings. The most widespread group is the *anito*. Though some are good (until offended by people), the majority are evil and act as agents of the highest gods or *Bathala*. See Fernando G. Elesterio, *Three Essays on Philippine Religious Culture* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1989), 4-12. Cf. Reuel Almocera, “Popular Filipino Spirit-World Beliefs, with a Proposed Theological

other words, human beings are minor players, if not pawns, in a world dominated by the spirits. To be certain, “These beliefs, religious or otherwise, were not eradicated with the coming of Western civilization.”⁷ They still provide the Filipino with an understanding of “existential needs both material and psychic.”⁸

Spirits are generally perceived as hostile and vindictive, ready to pounce on anyone who violates a taboo.⁹ Punishment could be in the form of ailments and disease, business failure, loss of crops and property, or even death. This is the essence of the following penetrating commentary: “The Filipinos’ world at present, as in the past, is permeated with the religious element. Suprahuman beings inhabit the environment in which he lives. Illnesses and even death are attributed to the suprahumans. Man in his activities will experience success only if the deities and suprahumans . . . are pleased.”¹⁰

Hence, in an attempt to relieve fear of the spirit world and appease the wrath of the spirits, people wear amulets called *anting-anting* or *pangontra*. These charms¹¹ supposedly possess the power to ward off evil and danger and provide protection to the person.

The *anting-anting* is generally worn on the body as jewelry (necklace, earring, and bracelet) or clothing, or placed in some prominent part of the house or building. Different kinds of amulets provide benefits for the person possessing it. For example,

The *anting-anting* or *agimat* insured a man against weapons of every kind. The *gayuma* made a man lovable to all ladies, the *odom* . . . made the *Bicolano* invincible. The *Visayan uriga* and the *Tagalog sagbe* could make the possessor of this charm walk in a storm or swim in a river without getting wet, and the *Bicolano tagabpa* was mixed in a drink and made the unfortunate drinker a sort of vassal to the man with the magic potion.¹²

Response,” *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 3 (2000): 10-14.

⁷Teodoro A. Agoncillo and Milagros C. Guerrero, *History of the Filipino People*, 5th ed. (Quezon City: R. P. Garcia, 1977), 53. Cf. F. Lando Jocano, “Filipino Folk Catholicism,” *Philippine Educational Forum* 15 (1966): 59.

⁸Francisco R. Demetrio, “The Engkanto Belief: An Essay in Interpretation,” *Philippine Studies* 17 (1969): 591.

⁹Rodney L. Henry, *Filipino Spirit World: A Challenge to the Church* (Manila: OFM Literature, 1986), 8-9.

¹⁰Elesterio, 11.

¹¹These may be carvings or figurines formed from wood or various metals, preferably gold. Teeth, sometimes obtained from a deceased ancestor, and small body parts of animals (e.g., the claws) are also used. Two common amulets are empty bullet shells and the *Carmen* (a piece of cloth). Bits and pieces of roots from medicinal plants, an incantation written on paper, and sacred coconut oil are placed in these. Almocera, 13, says that the concoction “is prepared with specific rituals accompanied by solemn prayers.”

¹²Agoncillo and Guerrero, 9.

The amulet is worn especially for warding off sickness and insuring protection from disease. Disease is so widespread that the traditional folk healers (*Tambalans* or *Mananambal*) have formed an organization called the Philippine Benevolent Missionaries Association (PBMA). These healers are the ones who most often “prescribe” the *anting-anting* to be worn,¹³ as well as the daily prayers that are to be recited by the wearers.¹⁴

Instead of condemning belief in the spirit-world as being mere superstition¹⁵ or hoping that such beliefs will just wither away because they have no theological value,¹⁶ Reuel Almocera argues “that the Filipino spirit-worldview has the potential of becoming a springboard, a vehicle in developing authentic Filipino Christianity without necessarily corrupting the gospel.”¹⁷ In order to accomplish this, he convincingly demonstrates that the Bible speaks extensively about spirit beings or angels, both good and bad. This is common ground between the church and the Filipino. However, the church must go beyond this and show that God is “sovereign over nature, over the spirit world, and over man.”¹⁸ Further, the theme of the victorious Christ (the *Christus Victor*) must be emphasized. Christ “was victorious over evil spirits . . . over the kingdoms and powers of this world . . . as the destroyer of demons. Christ has decisively defeated the demonic powers (Col 2:15) and has given believers authority over demons (Luke 9:1; 10:17).”¹⁹ Finally, says Almocera, “Filipinos must be taught that through the ministry of various divine agencies, especially through the Holy Spirit, man’s needs in life can be provided by God (Rom 8:9-11; 1 Cor 12:7-11; 2 Pet 1:3).”²⁰

Pakikisama

Pakikisama deals with social acceptance²¹ and “harmony with others, nature and oneself,”²² according to Evelyn Miranda-Felicion. She also notes that

¹³See Jamie Z. Galvez-Tan, “Religious Elements in Samar-Leyte Folk Medicine,” in *Filipino Religious Psychology*, ed. Leonardo N. Mercado (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1977), 15.

¹⁴Almocera, 14.

¹⁵Maria G. Villegas, “Superstitious Beliefs and Practices in the Coastal Towns of Eastern Leyte,” *Leyte-Samar Studies* 2 (1968): 232.

¹⁶Douglas Elwood, “Are Spirits Part of a Real World?” *Church and Community* 10 (1970): 16.

¹⁷Almocera, 16.

¹⁸Ibid., 21.

¹⁹Ibid. He adds: “There is too much emphasis on the *Santo Nino* (Holy Child) and the *Santo Entierro* (the tragic victim on the cross or in the tomb) views of Christ. Most Filipinos think of Christ either as a baby or as a martyr, not so much as a living person.”

²⁰Ibid., 22.

²¹Andres, 75.

²²Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano, *Filipino Values and Our Christian Faith* (Manila: OMF

Pakikisama is rooted in the intrinsic Filipino values of *pakikipagkapwatao*. This core value refers to one's desire to be treated as an equal. *Pakikipagkapwatao* is thus translated into acts of helping, sharing and cooperating with others. A Filipino would like to think that he lives and moves with his co-equals. He would also expect that the consideration he shows to others will be reciprocated.²³

This is of such signal importance to Filipinos²⁴ that a person prefers "yielding to the will of the leader or majority"²⁵ than to stand out as being outspoken or independent-minded and run the risk of being labeled as *walang pakikisama*, that is, antisocial. In short, *pakikisama* means conformity to the group, by which "a person's individuality to some extent becomes merged with those of others."²⁶

Again, Miranda-Feliciano is informative regarding *pakikisama*:

It aims for unity, peace and cooperation. And to establish this smooth interpersonal relationship (SIR), one learns to subject his own personal desires, convictions and standards to those of his group—be it family, clan, social club or *barkada* (gang). Often the implicit motto is "One for all and all for one."²⁷

Pakikisama is manifested in many ways: indirect communication or use of euphemisms so that the group, not the individual, reaps the best results; generous praise for others; refusal to show negativity or depression; refusal to show anger or losing one's temper; smiling, even when things go wrong; and using a go-between or intermediary—someone respected by both parties—when there is a rift in the group. "This ensures that nobody is put to shame and that everyone's self-esteem remains intact."²⁸

Obviously *pakikisama* has several implications. However, I will make mention of only a select few:

Literature, 1990), 22.

²³Ibid., 21.

²⁴Virgilio G. Enriquez, "Filipino Psychology in the Third World," *Philippine Journal of Psychology* 10 (1977): 318.

²⁵Virgilio G. Enriquez, *Philippine World-View* (Manila: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986), 8. He calls this a "core concept in Filipino Social Psychology."

²⁶Miranda-Feliciano, 21, refers to an unnamed Filipino lecturer who likens Filipinos to a batch of eggs fried "sunny-side up." The yellow yolks remain separated and distinct, but the whites fuse together. She adds: "On the whole we want to make connections with people and blend our lives with theirs. Somehow we do not feel too good about ourselves when we are alone."

²⁷Ibid., 22.

²⁸Ibid. Cf. G. M. Guthrie and F. M. Azores, "Philippine Interpersonal Behavior Patterns," in *Modernization: Its Impact in the Philippine III*, IPC Papers, 6, ed. W. F. Belo and A. de Guzman II (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 1976), 26.

(1) It is important in evangelism to pay attention to the “group think.”²⁹ This is not the place to push the Western ideal of individualism and self-centered opinion. It is more important to win the confidence of the group. This is especially true for the family, which “is still the most important and the most highly valued reference group . . . in Philippine society. Its membership extends to two generations up and two generations down. Consequently, the Filipino extended family is large, more so because all relatives of both parents become the kin or relative of the children.”³⁰

(2) *Pakikisama* could have a negative influence. A weak-willed person may subsume him or herself to a group that practices poor behavior or involves itself in illegal activity (e.g., a gang). The church must be aware of this as it delivers the message of Ps 1:1: “Blessed is the man that does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, or stands in the way of sinners or sits in the seat of the scornful.”

(3) The church today is plagued with many of the problems experienced by the first-century believers: jealousy, discrimination, gossiping, backbiting, arguments, and in-house fighting. Paul’s counsel is still appropriate: “Carry each other’s burdens” (Gal 6:2); “be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:2-3). Indeed, “Within the church, Christians need genuine *pakikisama* that stands on biblical principles, not on superficial unity, personalities, or expediency.”³¹

Utang na Loob

This concept is derived from two *Tagalog*³² words: *utang* (“debt”) and *loob* (“inside”). It literally means “debt in the inside.” In a meaningful way, it declares a “debt of gratitude,” but even this “fails to impart the feeling and commitment that a Filipino with his deep colonial, feudal and religious background puts into exercise of such value.”³³ This is part of the very psyche of every Filipino. Miranda-Feliciano comments: “*Loob* is a Filipino’s inner person or self that constitutes his intellectual, volitional, emotional, and ethical life. . . . *Loob* covers the whole emotional ethical range of mercy, charity,

²⁹Tomas Quintin D. Andres and Pilar Corazon B. Ilado-Andres, *Understanding the Filipino* (Quezon City: New Day, 1987), 74.

³⁰Reuel U. Almocera, “Christianity Encounters Filipino Spirit-World Beliefs: A Case Study” (DPS dissertation, South East Asia Graduate School of Theology, 1990), 36. Cf. Castillo, 96-104.

³¹Miranda-Feliciano, 27.

³²There are about 169 languages and dialects spoken in the Philippines. While English is the official language of commerce and government (making the Philippines the only “English-speaking” nation in southeast Asia), there are three languages that are broadly known: Tagalog, Ilocano, and Cebuano.

³³Tomas Quintin D. Andres and Pilar Corazon B. Ilado-Andres, *Making Filipino Values Work for You* (Manila: St. Paul’s Publications, 1986), 32. They maintain that *utang na loob* plays a part in every walk of life, e.g., farming, education, business, and politics. It is part of everyday life.

clemency, leniency, benevolence, and tolerance.”³⁴ In short, “*Utang na loob* specifically means debt of volition. It is an interior law which dictates that the recipient of a good act or deed behave generously towards his benefactor as along as he lives.”³⁵

Leonardo N. Mercado translates the concept from *Tagalog* as follows: “A debt of volition no matter how small remains a debt even if repaid. It is an expression of humaneness and right sentiment, and no amount of money can ever fully repay it.”³⁶ A local proverb describes it succinctly: “There is no measure to repayment in kind.”³⁷ One social observer contends that any gift or service, whether offered by a friend or stranger, if accepted, places the recipient in the position of returning a debt of gratitude equal to or superseding that which she or he received. Hence, “For every free service received, whether requested or not, the recipient contracts a debt of honor towards his benefactor.”³⁸ It must be understood that “the benefactor does not set any conditions, or ask for an expression of gratitude. All depends on the inventive generosity of the recipients, a generosity which can last for a lifetime.”³⁹

In the context of the church, I will make three observations concerning *utang na loob*, one of the most significant moral values that undergirds Filipino society.⁴⁰ First, this value can be easily misplaced, exaggerated, or exploited. Hence, one has to be careful in the dispensing of services and gifts so as not to have people in a state of constant indebtedness. Therefore, respect for the individual is of principal worth. We must see and treat each person as the creation of God, made in his image and likeness (Gen 1:27).

Second, *utang na loob* tends to “create a patron-client relationship that is oppressive.”⁴¹ Christians, regardless of their different positions accorded due to wealth, profession, education, or family background, and so forth, must not (even by their acts of kindness), make anyone grovel in “gratitude.” We must seek to avoid any kind of dependency or mendicancy that reduces the true freedom or self-respect of the individual and/or the group. We must practice the biblical way of life: “freely you have received, freely give” (Matt 10:8); “let

³⁴Miranda-Feliciano, 69-70.

³⁵Ibid., 70.

³⁶Leonard N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology* (Tacloban City, Philippines: Divine Word University Publications, 1975), 116. Andres and Ilado–Andres indicate that it is quite insulting to attempt to give money for one’s *utang na loob* (*Understanding the Filipino*, 79).

³⁷Mercado, 116.

³⁸Fred Eggan, “Philippine Social Structure,” in *Six Perspectives on the Philippines*, ed. G. M. Guthrie (Manila: Bookmark, 1971), 15.

³⁹Mercado, 117.

⁴⁰Enriquez, *Philippine World-View*, 8.

⁴¹Miranda-Feliciano, 72.

us not become weary in doing good . . . let us do good to all people” (Gal 6:9-10).⁴²

Third, we can emphasize that because Jesus Christ has died to save us from our sins, then *utang na loob* can be appropriately directed to him. It may serve the church well to consistently forward the idea that we do have a “debt of gratitude” to God. Indeed,

Jesus died on the cross for our salvation and to give us eternal life. We owe Him our all. To Him belongs our gratitude. Again and again the psalmist repeats this grand refrain: “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever!” No heart is too big not to be grateful to God, nor too small to squeeze it out. With this attitude our lives will overflow constantly with thankfulness to the One who made us in His own likeness.⁴³

Certainly the church can capitalize on this internalized value that makes the Filipino “aware of his obligation to those from whom he receives favors.”⁴⁴ But care must be taken not to be exploitative. Rather, the person’s self-worth must be guarded by pointing him to Christ. The ecclesiastical and social scientist Mercado rightly observes: “The Filipino’s concrete thinking and personalism is also applied to Christ. He has an *utang na loob* to Christ for saving him from eternal death or for redeeming him.”⁴⁵

It must be pressed home, however, that this *utang na loob* must not be presented as an obligation that brings slavish subservience. As such, it reduces the person to nothingness. This would be joyless and burdensome. Rather, the church must present the gospel in such a way that the person experiences the joy of true forgiveness and freedom in Christ, and out of a heart of gratitude joins in fellowship and communion with God and other people.

Hiya

The term *hiya* is used in a variety of ways: “embarrassment,” “modesty,” “shyness,” “shame,” “feeling inferior,” or “losing face.” No single choice exactly captures its meaning. Hence, all the nuances must be kept in mind when dealing with *hiya*. Perhaps the following extended definition is appropriate: “A painful emotion arising from a relationship with an authority figure or with society, inhibiting self-assertion in a situation which is perceived as dangerous to one’s ego. It is a kind of anxiety, a fear of being left exposed.”⁴⁶

Maybe it is this “fear of being left exposed” that allows for the word

⁴²All Scripture quotations are from the NIV.

⁴³Miranda-Feliciano, 74.

⁴⁴Mary R. Hollnsteiner, “Reciprocity in the Lowland Philippines,” in *Institute of Philippine Culture Papers*, 1, ed. Mary R. Hollnsteiner (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University, 1961), 16.

⁴⁵Mercado, 117.

⁴⁶Andres and Ilado-Andres, *Understanding the Filipino*, 76.

“shame” to be used most frequently when referring to *hiya*. This is especially so since “the Filipino has a shame culture.”⁴⁷ In fact, shame is inculcated in the Filipino from childhood.⁴⁸ The home or family is the central place where *hiya* is taught and appropriated.⁴⁹

Alongside or corollary to *hiya* is a related value called *amor propio*. It originates from Spanish and means “self-love.” In practical terms, it is the Filipino’s defense of his ego, his personal pride and dignity. To be sure, “His dignity and honor are everything to him, so that the wounding of them, whether real or imagined, becomes a challenge to his manhood.”⁵⁰ Hence, the Filipino is extremely sensitive to “personal affront”⁵¹ since this could bring about *hiya*.⁵²

F. Lando Jocano is highly instructive, therefore, in his commentary that *hiya* is “put into practice when what is infringed upon deals with relationships pertaining to (1) personal dignity or honor of the individual; (2) the status or position of the principal actor relative to other people; (3) the internal cohesion of the family as a unit; and (4) the reputation of the entire kin or group relative to the outside world.”⁵³

An illustration of numbers 3 and 4 may be observed when a third person intervenes between quarreling parties, hushing them with the words: “Stop! It’s embarrassing!” The major concern is that the neighbors may have a bad impression of the family and not that the confrontation may threaten potential violence. *Hiya* is so deep-seated that Mercado comments: “When faced with the choice of being put to ‘shame’ and committing sin, the typical Filipino chooses the lesser ‘evil’ of committing sin.”⁵⁴

How then can the church be responsive to this matter of *hiya*? There are several suggestions:

(1) Inasmuch as the group is important, the church must also point to the

⁴⁷Mercado, 79-80.

⁴⁸George M. Guthrie and Pepita Jimenez Jacobs, *Child Rearing and Personality Development in the Philippines* (Manila: Bookmark, 1967), 190-191.

⁴⁹Jamie Bulatao, “Hiya,” *Philippine Studies* 12 (1964): 424-438; idem, “The ‘Hiya’ System in Filipino Culture,” in *Filipino Cultural Heritage*, Lecture Series 2, Filipino Social Structure and Value Orientation, ed. F. Lando Jocano (Manila: Philippines Women’s University, 1976), 29-30.

⁵⁰Andres, 8.

⁵¹Virgilio G. Enriquez, “Kapwa: A Core Concept in Filipino Social Psychology,” in *Philippine World View*, ed. Virgilio G. Enriquez (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Study), 8.

⁵²An example of this is in describing a person as *walang hiya*, that is, having no shame. This is the “ultimate insult.” See Alfredo Roces and Grace Roces, *Culture Shock! Philippines* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1989), 30.

⁵³F. Lando Jocano, *Growing Up in a Philippine Barrio* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), 98.

⁵⁴Mercado, 79.

biblical injunctions that indicate personal responsibility. Further, right and wrong cannot be left to the collective morality, that is, what other people say or think. A person's conscience is valuable in discerning and choosing between both options. People must also have moral standards that inform their decisions and behaviors. Again, Miranda-Feliciano's point is well taken:

A person with no moral moorings of his own, and who only goes by the standards of the marketplace, will be a wishy-washy individual, a moral jellyfish not worth respecting. On the other hand, a moral but rigid person may solidify into an obnoxious, holier-than-thou snob, too upright for any fellowship or social interaction.⁵⁵

(2) If Christians are to successfully attract others to their respective faith communities, their behavior and lifestyles must accord with the ethics of the Kingdom of God and not merely with winning the applause of the group. For the church this must be nonnegotiable. The church must heed the words of Jesus: "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16). The biblical imperative is also to be taken seriously: "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:30).

(3) The church should be emphatic that shame results from sin. Sin also incurs condemnation by both God and humankind. One writer insists:

We Filipinos should hone our sensitivities to sin—for all its lure and guile—in order to deepen our sense of shame. *We should rather be more careful about not losing face before God than saving face before men. For God's eyes penetrate through and beyond what is culturally acceptable.*⁵⁶

(4) Finally, the church must teach that repentance can help people to deal with feelings of shame. When we acknowledge our transgressions (Ps 51) God willingly forgives and cleanses us from sin (1 John 1:9), including our shame. One example of this is the woman taken in adultery whom Jesus forgave (John 8:1-11). From this perspective, the church can be influential in moving people beyond the shame incurred because of sin. In this sense, Miranda-Feliciano's conclusion is *apropos*:

The Christian sense of *hiya* is more than cultural accommodation. *Hiya* is refined to a higher degree of spiritual sensitivity, taking into account what God says. It goes beyond public censure, or adulation. The Christian sense of *hiya* dispels false shame when what is necessary is forthrightness, honesty, courage and being responsible. It upholds delicacy of feeling by observing decorum that does not violate other people's privacy or property. *Our sense of hiya must be rooted in the ethical and moral standards of the Bible to show just how different we are from the world.*⁵⁷

⁵⁵Miranda-Feliciano, 43.

⁵⁶Ibid., 45, emphasis supplied.

⁵⁷Ibid., 46, emphasis supplied.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that the Filipino people are highly religious and that their religion does not exist in a vacuum. Instead, it is closely linked to their psychosocial values. Four of these have been discussed: *anting-anting*, *pakikisama*, *utang na loob*, and *hiya*. The church cannot afford to ignore such matters. To do so will be detrimental.

On a more personal note, it is of absolute necessity for missionaries and, in fact, all foreigners who come to work on Philippine soil, to quickly apprise themselves of such values. This will save numerous embarrassing moments. Further, such an ongoing learning experience will foster better working and interpersonal relationships between the Filipino and his or her non-Filipino counterpart. And the gospel will be effectively presented.