

Celebrating in the Waters and Frolicking with St. Peter: Performance of Folk Narrative and Catholic Church Narrative in a Kapampangan Community

Sir Anril P. Tiatco

Introduction

In Apalit, Pampanga, some members of the Catholic community have particular stories to tell or experiences to share regarding encounters with their patron/St. Peter, locally known as *Apung Iru*. Some are tales of miraculous phenomena but most are tales pertaining to the patron becoming an ordinary man, usually a farmer or a fisherman, two of the predominant traditional avenues for income in that town, or elsewhere in Pampanga (Larkin 1993). These narratives not only strengthen the Catholic Apaliteños' faith but also their folk tradition. Taken together, these narratives weave a spirit of solidarity as members of the Kapampangan community and at the same time as members of the Catholic community. This spirit is manifested through the Apaliteños' water ritual-festival celebrated during the season of *bayung danum* (new water) during which their patron, *Apung Iru* is transformed into a supernatural figure residing in the river – a guardian of the *El Rio Grande de Pampanga* (Pampanga River). Today, this glorification of *Apung Iru* is best understood as an offshoot of a Catholic tradition. However, the dynamism of the performance of this water ritual-festival suggests more than a Catholic tradition.

As a Kapampangan, I have always believed that my province has predominantly appropriated Catholicism into her everyday sensibilities: constant devotion to the Virgin Mary as represented in the province-wide celebration of her coronation as "Queen of Heaven and Earth," provincial holidays associated with feast days of Catholic saints, and the flagellation rituals, among others. Most of the time, this appropriation is explored in theological understanding. Little attention is given to a reexamination of Christianity (Catholicism) as a product of some cultural irregularities, paradoxes and discontinuities. It is in this light, that my fascination with the water ritual-festival in Apalit has been heightened into this ethnographic study.

This paper deals with the dynamism of the water ritual-festival locally known as *Apung Iru Libad*. It contends that in the three-day celebration of the water ritual-festival on June 28, 29 and 30, Apalit's folk tradition enters into a series of negotiations with the Catholic Church, a