

Mount Banahaw: The Power Mountain From Ritualism to Spirituality

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Nagtalik ang hangin at ilog sa dilim
Nagpugay ang mga dahon
Nanawan ang kayumangging lupa
Umaalingawngaw ang tinig sa bundok Banahaw

These poetic lines from a Banahaw folk song describe very well the magical lure of Mt. Banahaw which echoes a mysterious voice that invites and haunts travelers and entices visitors. In the tradition of Egypt, Jerusalem, and Tibet, a mountain of spiritual power is emerging in the Philippines. It originally gained popularity through reports of miraculous cures. But Mt. Banahaw continues to expand its influence beyond the rituals of structured religions and religious cults and has attracted psychics and mystics, thousands of pilgrims, and in growing numbers those who seek to develop and enrich their prayer life and spirituality. Unlike enchanted Mt. Makiling, Mt. Banahaw is not only a sacred place of prayer and worship but it has become the center of religious pilgrimages, of physical and spiritual healing, and of Filipino popular religion and spirituality. In short, it has become a "Power Mountain."

The Place and the People

Located in the province of Quezon close to the eastern borders of Laguna province, Mt. Banahaw rises 7,350 feet or 2,100 meters above sea level. It was once an active volcano but now is believed to be the "holy land" (Santa Tierra, Santong Lugar). It is the highest of many peaks in the area like Mt. San Kristobal, Mt. Masalacot, and Mt. Kalbaryo, and is surrounded by San Pablo City, Tiaong, Candelaria, Sariaya, Lucena City, Tayabas, Lucban, Majayjay, Liliw and Nagcarlan. It is known as the "rain mountain" for no dry sea-

son touches it throughout the year; also "water mountain" because it is blessed with many natural springs, waterfalls, running streams that are even bottled and sold. It is also the one mountain that has not been ravaged by legal or illegal logging, although small areas at the lower levels have been burned by "kaingeros." The ambiance of Banahaw is a combination of mountain slopes and peaks lush with vegetation in a dazzling variety of patterns and colors, ancient giant trees bearded with moss and hairy vines, waterfalls and volcanic caves, gurgling brooks and crystal clear pools, waters that tumble down over huge boulders, rain clouds that cover the peak and even an early morning haze that hovers now and then to this mountain an enchanting place for people from all walks of life to come and pray and rest. Even the way to the remote barrio Kinabuhayan blooms with the healthiest and reddest bougainvillas and poinsettias. Banahaw's *amihan* breeze serves as a cool respite for Manila pilgrims and other visitors.

The most popular starting points for a religious pilgrimage (*pamumuwesto*) are Dolores, 1300 feet above sea level, 100 kilometers from Manila and 15 kilometers southeast of San Pablo City, and its barrio Kinabuhayan, Quezon. During Holy Week Mt. Banahaw attracts thousands of people including dozens of religious sects who flock to Dolores or Kinabuhayan. The Holy Week pilgrims either begin at Sta. Lucia River and Falls and culminate at Mt. Kalbaryo. At Kinabuhayan pilgrims pray at the *Yapak ni Kristo* (a clear pool with a rock supposedly bearing the footprint of Jesus) or *Pinagapusan* (a massive rock where Jesus was supposedly bound before crucifixion) or *Santos Koleyos* (grotto of different saints). One can also follow a scenic route along Sta. Lucia River through *puwestos* (places of ritualized prayer) to Kinabuhayan and from there climb to Kristalina Falls and Suplina Falls and end up at *Kuweba ng Diyos Ama* ("cathedral" cave which is the ultimate goal and dream of every pilgrim). The more energetic climbers can continue a three- to four-hour trek to the summit Durungawan to view the *ilalim* or extinct volcano crater.

Historically the legend of Mt. Banahaw apparently started with a few historical mystics among whom was a man named Agripino Lontok, from Taal, Batangas, an "insurrecto" or rebel who in 1886 went to the mountain to hide from the Guardia Civil and to acquire secret powers (*anting-anting*) from the mountain. The story goes that everytime he would try to leave the mountain, he would go blind. This phenomenon made Agripino stay in Mt. Banahaw to become

its first hermit and caretaker. From 1886 to his death in 1930, Agripino Lontok developed an intimacy with Mt. Banahaw and became its conduit to the human race. The spirits of the mountain, through a voice now popularly known as "Santong Boses," revealed its secret and special natural places to Agripino, identified the holy beings or patrons of each special spot or *puwesto*, and dispensed power prayers (*tigilpo*) mostly for healing and protection. The secret language dictated by the spirits or "Santong Boses" was *Bornay*, an old vernacular which is colloquially unintelligible today. A few other individuals also found their way to Mt. Banahaw, linked up with Agripino Lontok and became co-disciples of the mountain. However, these disciples went back to their places of residence after their pilgrimage and became largely responsible for introducing the mountain to their communities. The best example of these co-disciples is Inang Goring, whose husband was a contemporary of Lontok and whose religious community now resides in Cardona, Rizal. Although their *Sentral* and *Dasalan* are located in Cardona they are Mt. Banahaw devotees and make regular pilgrimages to the sacred mountain.

Other followers of the Banahaw legend settled in Banahaw either in Sta. Lucia, Dolores or Kinabuhayan. This explains the origin of the hundreds of religious sects and cults that made the sacred mountain their place of residence and worship. Fr. Vicente Marasigan, S.J. (1982, 552-62) wrote an essay about his own spiritual experience of the dream of whispering spirits in Kinabuhayan which he incorporated into his book entitled *A Banahaw Guru* (1985) which is about the life, teaching, and symbolic deeds of Agapito Illustrisimo, founder and father of the religious community of *Samahan ng Tatlong Persona Solo Diyos* (STPSD). (See also "Dreams" [1986]: 20-23). *A Banahaw Guru* (1985) is about the symbolic deeds of Agapito Illustrisimo. More than half of this book is a translation of the MDKAI Document which is a pioneer contribution. However, Fr. Marasigan's writings about Mt. Banahaw are limited to the Samahan Tatlong Persona Solo Dios of Kinabuhayan. He uses Bernard Lonergan's theological insights to understand Banahaw religiosity. Based on the history of STPSD as found in "Mga Dakilang Kasaysayan ng Amang Illustrisimo" (MDKAI), Agapito Illustrisimo was first a *pulahan* rebel in Limutan, Cebu, then was converted into a man of peace, and became an itinerant preacher in Luzon, and finally founded the STPSD. Miss Teresita B. Obusan, in analyzing the STPSD's oft repeated prayer for peace, *Amang Makapangyarihan*, notes the two themes of God's per-

sonal and intimate love (*tunay na nagmamahal sa amin*) and peace for our country as God's gift (*pakamtan ang kapayapaan*). Moreover her study shows that their beliefs in the Trinity and the Virgin Mary are orthodox Christian beliefs (Obusan 1989, 71-80). This prayer for peace is translated into the culture of the group which can be described as *mahinahon*, defined as being "calm in one's speech, action and conduct." The present leader of the STPSD is Jose Illustrre, the son of the founder.

Today the disciples who guard the secret revelation of Agripino Lontok are his daughter, Lola Titay, and his grandson, Ka Esing. The granddaughter of Lontok is Inang Justay who heads the *Anak, Ina at Ama ng Santissima Trinidad*. Mention has already been made of Inang Goring of Cardona. Long before the arrival of Lontok, Mt. Banahaw was already the mountain refuge of revolutionaries (for instance, the eighteenth century Apolinario de la Cruz who revolted against the Spaniards) and colorums, the place of different religious leaders and cults and the center of forms of Filipino popular religion and spirituality. Most of the numberless religious sects at present believe that Mt. Banahaw is the altar of brave Filipino heroes like Jose Rizal, Andres Bonifacio, Emilio Aguinaldo, Gregorio del Pilar, Agapito ilustrisimo, and Bernardo Carpio. Hence their nationalistic character. Because of their autonomy and self-sufficiency they are independent or isolated from the official Catholic faith or Church. Suffice to mention just a few of these religious sects. On the Kinabuhayan side, besides the STPSD, there is the *Watawat ng Lahi* (Rizalistas) who believe that Jose Rizal is the Holy Spirit of the Trinity; *Iglesia ng Diyos na Buhay* inspired by Titong Banal. On the Parang, Dolores side, there are *Cinco Vocales*, *Siete Virtudes* and *Dolorosa* headed by Rogelio Alinea. The *Suprema* of *De la Iglesia Mistica Filipina* is Isabel Suarez; Maria Bernadez Balitaan is the saint of Mystica. The cult of the Ten Commandments (concrete tablets at the entrances of barrio Parang and Santong Lugar) was introduced by Litos Baleros of La Union. These are some of the more important religious people who inherited the legacy of Lontok and who pass on the secret of Mt. Banahaw.

The people living at the foot of Mt. Banahaw believe that the Holy Land (Santa Tierra) was transferred by *Dios Makapangyarihan sa lahat* to Mt. Banahaw and the *Santong Lugar*, the *Ciudad Mystica de Dios*, was finally established atop the holy mountain. Tradition says that four angels transported Calvary from Jerusalem to Mt. Banahaw, which for some believers is Mt. Ararat where the ark of the right-

eous will survive the last floods on earth, or the new Mt. Sinai where the Covenant and the Ten Commandments are renewed for sinful mankind. In the meantime, while awaiting the *Ciudad Mystica de Dios*, the suffering, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is relived and ritualized by the devotees and pilgrims as a form of sacrifice and prayer in the context of nature. Hence, the Dolores side of Mt. Banahaw signifies the Passion of Christ while the Kinabuhayan side signifies His Resurrection.

The Puwestos

According to U.P. Professor Prospero Covar (1986, 24-30) the ritualized pilgrimage to Mt. Banahaw is called *pamumuwesto* and it is this religious pilgrimage that has made the sacred mountain very popular all year round but especially during Holy week. There are four kinds of puwestos or natural shrines: *bato* (rocks), *bukal* (springs), *kuweba* (caves), and *taluktok* (peaks).

Rene D. Somera (1986, 436-51) has made a scientific study of "Pamumuwesto of Mount Banahaw," and has already given us a sequence of the traditional puwesto-trek and an adequate classification of the puwestos and their symbolic significance. What follows is a selective description of puwestos that, with the guidance of local *Pators* or local guides, I have experienced as natural shrines of prayer and worship. The spiritual journeys (*pamamakas*) into the *Santong Lugar* anchored on Mt. 7: 7 ("Ask, and you will receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you") followed the route of the traditional and most popular puwestos, chosen with the help of experienced *Pators*.

Dolores: Pasyon and Sin-Purification Rites

No one enters a home by the back door and a guest or visitor must first pay his respects (*pag-galang*) to the elders (*ninuno*) of the house. So pilgrims who come for the first time to Mt. Banahaw must begin their *pamumuwesto* at the front door which is Santa Lucia Falls. This mountain stream is a portion of the Lagnas river that winds from Kinabuhayan, around Mt. Kalbaryo, and down to San Bernardo. Before anyone can visit the other puwestos in order to climb Kalbaryo, he must be cleansed and purified from sin. Catho-

lics confess their sins to God through a priest (Sacrament of Reconciliation), but according to the Banahaw folk, pilgrims must bathe in the waters of Sta. Lucia (both the stream and two Falls) to be cleansed of sin. Sta. Lucia river is below the town level of Dolores and about two hundred and sixty concrete steps lead down to the river shrines, hidden by tall trees and a dense forest. The Sta. Lucia complex is guarded by San Miguel to whom a candle is lit and placed on the huge boulder at the bottom of the steps. After prayers are offered the pilgrims bathe first at the *Tubig ng Amah* (*nunong lalake falls*) and secondly at *Buhok ng Birhen* (*nunong babae falls*). Then one takes a dip in the cold but refreshing mountain stream of barrio Santa Lucia. Sin purification or cleansing is a long, never ending process of symbolic ritualized *paliligo* in all the springs and waters of Banahaw. Thus Santa Lucia symbolizes physical cleansing; Santong Jacob, emotional cleansing (from fear) and Husgado, mental cleansing (from lack of faith and trust in God).

The entrance to *Santong Lugar* is marked by the Ten Commandments inscribed on two concrete slabs. Pilgrims light candles and pray at the grottos of San Jacob on one side and San Isidro on the other side. On the way to the shed of *Santissima Trinidad* there is a subterranean spring called *Hilamusan*. The water catchment is made out of split bamboo tubing about a meter long that sticks out of the side of a mound. Through the bamboo trough ooze droplets of drinking water. One accumulates these droplets in his cupped open palms, and drinks or washes his face with it. It is a refreshing balm after the ascent from Sta. Lucia Falls. Normally the first puwesto after Santa Lucia is the *presentahan* where pilgrims must present their cleansed bodies before the twin *kuweba* inside a pit about seven feet deep. Entrance and exit are provided via an iron ladder that has been permanently installed in the puwesto to facilitate the pilgrims going in and out of the twin grottos. The pilgrim prays inside the *kuweba* of San Pedro and then in the *kuweba* of San Pablo. Depending on the number of pilgrims, the second puwesto is the *Balon ni Santong Jacob*, a subterranean spring at the bottom of a steep rocky descent. *Santong Jacob* is a geological fault that has sulphur water underneath. It is about twenty feet deep in a cave-like structure below the entrance. It is refreshing to take a cool dip in *Santong Jacob's* sulphur water. It is believed to be medicinal against many forms of disease. When the smell of the water becomes strongly odorous, *amoy bangkay*, some people claim that the spirits of the dead are taking a bath in the pool. If this happens, prayers transform the

bad odor to the fragrant smell of coffee tree blossoms and incense. Jacob's well is so mysterious that some pilgrims find it bottomless, while others easily touch the watery floor.

Ina ng Awa to Husgado

The third puwesto is the cave *Ina ng Awa* where pilgrims offer lighted candles and prayers to the Virgin of Perpetual Help inside the massive cave. The opening of the cave is guarded by a massive overhanging boulder which is kept in place by a tiny rock. Although it has withstood the test of time and even the 1990 earthquake, one wonders what would happen if the huge rock which hangs precariously suddenly slipped. About ten feet above the shed of *Ina ng Awa* is the fourth puwesto which opens into a tortuous and labyrinthine passageway about twenty feet in length from entrance to exit, but seems much longer because of its snake-like structure. No first pamumuwesto is complete without going through this cavernous route called *Husgado*. From the name, the sinner is judged repentant or not, depending on whether he can go through the cave. *Husgado* is the ultimate sin-purification test because the unrepentant sinner cannot negotiate the tunnel even with a pator or guide. Pilgrims on different occasions who panicked were able to go through the cave only with extreme difficulty. For one pilgrim the experience was so traumatic that he decided to drop the pilgrimage and immediately went back to Manila by himself.

The entrance to *Husgado*, both threatening and dangerous, frightens not a few visitors from attempting *Husgado* the first time. Pilgrims must remove all shoes, watches, rings, eye glasses and any other object that might impede a smooth passage. Each one is provided with a candle to light the way through the pitch black tunnel. One enters the cave in an inclined standing position by sliding down through a vertical funnel and resting one's feet in niches until one enters through the side. The narrow passageway lined with sharp rocks and pointed stones that protrude from the cave walls impedes an otherwise smooth passage. One negotiates *Husgado* in a prone position crawling inside the maze with lots of candle drippings whose smell provides an eerie atmosphere. Body language and the instructions of the guide are essential. The passageway swings upwards towards the exit. The manner of negotiating the exit is to jump astride a huge boulder. The final stage is achieved when one

finds himself on the wooden floor of the roofed shed of *Ina ng Awa* with one's guide and companions smiling and ready to offer a word of congratulation.

Santisima

For pilgrims who wish to spend the night on the mountain there is a long meandering route leading to the fifth puwesto of *Santisima Trinidad*, skirting *Batang Kiling*, a puwesto manned by the *Samahagan Cinco Vocales, Siete Virtudes*. Pilgrims can stay overnight at this puwesto where there is a protective shed in case of rain. One can take a bath at a hidden spring made into a concrete reservoir with an iron pipe as an outlet. The water flows continuously. With this contraption, which is five feet high, one can take a shower standing up. The drainage water flows into the Lagnas river about thirty to forty feet below and then down to Sta. Lucia, San Bernardo and beyond.

Another source of drinking water is the spring called *Balon ni San Isidro*. One scoops water from the clear clean mini-spring with a dipper. About ten feet away from this spring is a flat sandy surface where a pator sometimes pours water three times over a pilgrim's head as a symbolic baptism of water.

Santos Kalbaryo

Every pilgrim who is able to negotiate the difficult labyrinthine passageway of *Husgado* is forgiven his sins and is given a new lease on life that qualifies and prepares him for *pangangakalbaryo*. The climax of any religious pilgrimage on the Dolores side is the difficult climb to *Santos Kalbaryo* where Jesus is believed to have been crucified. Santos Kalbaryo is a rocky mountain that is about 704 feet above sea level. It has three wooden crosses at its highest point. The trek from *Husgado* to Santos Kalbaryo is initially gradual, becoming steeper as it nears the peak. The elevation has some shady trees, but the higher portion has only grass as cover for reddish volcanic rocks. The barren rocks are especially rough and inhospitable to barefoot-worshippers. But the more painful the trek, especially under the scorching sun, the more meritorious the *pagsasacrificio*. Following the custom, each pilgrim carries a stone or tiny rock from the beginning of the trek to the summit. These stones are laid at the

foot of the three crosses as a token of the sacrificial climb. Candles are lighted there and, together or singly, the pilgrims make their *panalangin*. There is a magnificent panoramic view of the surrounding lowlands from the top of Santos Kalbaryo.

Kinabuhayan: Resurrection Rites

It is believed that after three days, Jesus Christ rose from the dead and resurrected at Kinabuhayan. Hence the name of barrio Kinabuhayan—*muling pagkabuhay o bagong buhay*. Like Dolores, Kinabuhayan is a complex of rocks, waterfalls, caves, peaks, and a running river. But most important of all are the most popular puwestos of *Pinaggapusan* (rock of the scourging), *Tubig Kinabuhayan* (clear pool with rock underneath bearing the “Yapak” of footprint of Jesus), *Pinagburolan* (cave where Jesus was interred with a figure of the Risen Christ) and *Santos Kolehiyos* (grotto of the saints).

The central *kapilya* of the *Samahan ng Tatlong Persona Solo Dios* (STPSD), which is the subject of Fr. Marasigan’s book, is located in Kinabuhayan a stone’s throw away from the mountain stream where both the Pinaggapusan and Yapak are found. A visit to the *Sentral* or chapel of STPSD reveals on the mural above the altar what looks like three Christs, but really represents *Tatlong Persona*. There is smaller but similar painting of the “Triune Christ” on the right side of the altar. In the wide front yard fronting the chapel is a statue of Agapito Illustrisimo. Stone steps leading to the stream bring the visitor or pilgrim to Pinaggapusan where Christ is believed to have been bound and scourged. It is a huge rectangular shaped rock lodged in the dry river bed bearing the imprint of four parallel lines of rope which apparently tied Jesus to the rock, together with the imprint of a horse’s hoof, which is said to have missed hitting the body of Jesus. A visiting German scientist studied this hard rock of the scourging and concluded that it was impossible for human hands to have chiseled or carved the imprint of the ropes and the hoof. Another extraordinary puwesto—Tubig Kinabuhayan—is the crystal clear pool of water whose transparency was made possible by filtering rocks constructed by the Banahaw folk. It is believed that Christ walked here and left the imprint of a footstep (“Yapak ni Kristo”). The rocks around the pool of “Yapak” are bedecked with fresh and wilted flowers and candles that have been lit and relit by visitors who also throw coins into the pool and make a wish.

The most popular Kinabuhayan puwesto, especially during Holy Week, is the Pinagburolan, a cave which is believed to be the burial place of Jesus after the crucifixion. Inside the cave, after getting used to the dark, the visitor will see the figure of the Risen Christ. A huge living rock (*batong buhay*) oozing with moisture stands guard by the figure. The water when applied to the body has curative powers. One tragic story about this cave is that it was once covered by a flood as punishment for sin, and so what remains of the cave today is man-made.

Pilgrims can then continue at the shallow portion of the Lagnas river which changes into a reddish color and tastes like soda water, and then follow the long meandering mountain stream, hopping from rock to rock, wading knee and waist deep, and finally swimming the last stretch of the river to the puwesto of *Santos Kolehiyos*—a half-dome cavern covering a flat earth landing believed to be the assembly of the saints. Even the saints have to learn new things about the next life in school. Hence, the name of the puwesto—*Santos Kolehiyo*. Not a few pilgrims recall how they felt the presence of spiritual beings in the cave.

Tubig Kristalina, Suplina and Salaming Bubog

What is the religious significance of the collective puwesto-trek embracing *Ina ng Awa*, *Santos Kalbaryo* and *Kuweba ng Dios Ama*? The devotee or pilgrim cannot proceed to the Son at *Santos Kalbaryo* (Christology) except by passing through the Mother and *Ina ng Awa* (Mariology) but the Son is the only way to the Holy Spirit and to the Father at *Kuweba ng Dios Ama* (Trinity). Just as the climax of the pamumuwesto at Dolores is *Kalbaryo*, so the peak and ultimate pamumuwesto in Kinabuhayan is *Kuweba ng Dios Ama*. Once again, one must be further cleansed for the new life (*bagong buhay*) by the waters of *Kristalina* and *Suplina* Falls along the more scenic ascent to the *Kuweba ng Dios Ama*. The alternative but very steep and therefore more difficult route is by way of *Tatlong Tanke*. On the trek above the Lagnas river there is an open field with all kinds of vegetables. Beyond this rolling vegetable patch is a rain forest that is damp and shady, the sanctuary of different varieties of butterflies, cicadas, and birds. After a thirty minute hike under cover of a semi-dense forest, a crystal clear waterfall cascades a bridal veil. Hence

the name *Kristalina Falls*. Ferns, orchids, and moss cling to the cliff forming a mantle of multishaded green that climbs about thirty feet high and extends about fifteen feet wide in a semicircle. Here is natural beauty at its best. At the bottom of the waterfall is a crystal clear pool whose clean waters provide a refreshing drink for the thirsty traveler. To take a dip into this pool is a soothing relief after a back-breaking climb that counts as *pagsasacrificio*. A deep peaceful silence pervades the cascades and the banks of the mountain stream as well as the surrounding forest. All nature in silence puts the traveler in a meditative and contemplative mood at *Tubig Kristalina*.

The next puwesto is *Suplinang Tubig*—a more than a hundred feet high waterfall, dropping as long strands of water. Below the Falls there is a natural rock platform, like a sacrificial table, on which one's whole body can lie prostrate under the falling waters. After the pounding of water on one's back, the flesh becomes tender and pinkish, not unlike the actual effect of *pagsusuplina* using a metallic whiplash at *Ciudad Mistica de Dios*. *Suplinang Tubig* strengthens the spirit for the *Kapangyarihan* at *Salamin ng Bubog*. Whereas *Kristalina* symbolizes man's aesthetic taste, *Suplina* symbolizes the sacrificial or penitential spirit of man.

The pool of water in the area at the foot of *Suplinang Tubig* forms a mirror-like floor in which one's whole being is reflected. The *Salamin ng Bubog* mirrors whatever blemish still remains after all the water-cleansing before presenting oneself to *Kapangyarihan* at the *Kuweba ng Dios Ama*. The way to the ultimate cathedral cave is a treacherous trek amidst deep precipitous ravines. At one point, each pilgrim has to hold on to a strong vine or rope along a very narrow path over a cliff beyond which is a sheer drop to the rocky stream below. A midway stop, or *Papirmahan*, is a rectangular structure that has a bedlike narrow platform cliff that serves as an altar for a wooden cross. Around it everyone is enjoined to sign his name symbolically for posterity.

Kuweba ng Dios Ama

The crowning point of a pamumuwesto in Kinabuhayan is the natural cathedral *Kuweba ng Kapangyarihan o Dios Ama* almost at the summit of Mt. Banahaw. As one approaches the one hundred foot tall cave entrance, decorated and festooned with giant hairy ferns, overgrown moss of all shapes and colors, and overhanging orchids,

the Kuweba looks like a gigantic gaping black hole in the side of the mountain. Contrary to all expectations, it is a very shallow cave whose opening is both wide and very high. The natural floor or platform is narrow, about eight feet from the cave walls. At the center is a sculptured rock and, before it a wooden cross. Candles are lit and prayers are offered by the *mananalangin*. There is a mysterious spring inside the cave and it is said that on rare occasions when clear, crystal water miraculously oozes from the spring, one must immediately get rid of whatever drinking water was brought or else the magic spring will dry up. After a seven-hour mountain trek the weary pilgrims can rest a while and say a prayer of thanksgiving for having reached the goal of their search for the Absolute—the All Powerful—which, in the context of the sacred mountain, is God the Father. The more energetic travelers or mountaineers can proceed about three more hours to *Santos Durungawan* and finally to the extinct volcano crater or *Ilalim*. On the summit of Mt. Banahaw on a clear day one can see the provinces of Laguna and Quezon and both the China Sea and Pacific Ocean.

The Pilgrims

Who are the people who go to the sacred mountain and why do they go there? Why has Mt. Banahaw become a centuries-old center of year-round Filipino religious pilgrimages and the origin of indigenous prayer and spirituality. Why is Mt. Banahaw a Power Mountain? In more recent times why has it become a way from ritualism to spirituality. Under the general heading of "Pilgrims," the people who go to Mt. Banahaw fall under the following categories: (1) those looking for a place of religious pilgrimage in the tradition of Lourdes, Fatima, Medjugore, Akita or Manaoag, Peñafrancia, Antipolo, and Lipa; (2) those seeking all kinds of healing, physical and spiritual, including faith, herbal or pranic healing; (3) those interested in mediums, mystics and trance-possession (*langkap*), para-psychic phenomena and the occult; (4) those looking for anting-anting or occult powers.

Most pilgrims go to Mt. Banahaw not as tourists, but to pray and offer whatever fatigue, discomfort, and hardship they endure as a form of sacrifice or penance to obtain a special grace or favor. This is true of the religious sects and hundreds of pilgrims who go to Mt. Banahaw during the Lenten season and participate in the Holy

Week rituals. Many visitors, both local and foreign, among them psychics, yogists, and a new breed seeking new forms of spirituality have frequented Mt. Banahaw. Tourists go to Banahaw not because God dwells there but out of curiosity, recreation, adventure or to escape boredom and pollution. Fr. V. Marasigan, S.J. recounts two miraculous interventions of nature that stopped the plans of a business syndicate in 1968 to construct a public swimming pool at the site of the miraculous spring, and in 1981 of the tourism industry in cooperation with multinational corporations to convert Mt. Banahaw into an "international center of psychic and spiritual research" which was just another gimmick for a recreation and amusement national park (Marasigan 1982, 556 and 562).

Apart from the traditional *manggagamot*, *hilot*, and *arbolario*, today pranic healing has become the popular vogue and a new Center for Pranic Healing has been opened in Parang, Dolores. In the past Banahaw was famous for many reported miraculous cures, either from the natural waters of Banahaw or the local mediums and healers. Today Mt. Banahaw has become the center of holistic healing not only of body, mind, and spirit but of the whole person. Modern health and medical care is highly specialized. The poor cannot afford specialists. That is why the *arbolario* or *hilot* is the poor man's doctor. A specialist cures only one particular part of the body, but the new concept of *arbolario* means a holistic healer who cures the whole person (*ginagamot hindi lamang sakit kundi tao*). Fr. Bulatao describes three models of Philippine faith healing; namely, healing that is effected through the mediation of a charismatic figure, or of a *manggagamot*, or of a sacred place or object (statue or nature) (Bulatao 1981, 31-36). It is the faith of the subject to be cured, not the healer, that mobilizes the subconscious to come up with a cure. Therefore from a psychological viewpoint, the subconscious is mobilized to do the healing through the curative waters or the medium or faith healer. From a theological viewpoint, healing was part of Christ's ministry and it requires faith on the part of those to be healed.

Almost a decade ago Fr. Jaime Bulatao, S.J. (1981, 14-31) wrote an article on "The New Mysticism in the Philippine Church." Mysticism is as old as Mt. Banahaw and certainly the sacred mountain is the locale of Filipino mystics, old and new. The hypothesis of altered state of consciousness (ASC) is the psychological explanation behind the trances, (*langkap*), possessions, reading of hearts, clairvoyance, foretelling the future, communicating with the dead, speaking

in tongues, and other wonders that the Filipino mystics perform? Whether it is truly God, the Virgin Mary, or one of the saints speaking to the church and to the world through the mediumship of the mystics is a theological question. Truly the gift of prophecy has scriptural basis and its authenticity is the fruit of prayerful discernment. The majority of the Banahaw pilgrims are the poor. The lives of many mystics in Mt. Banahaw are paragons of faith and complete surrender of the self into the hands of God. They lead poor lives and their teaching and healing ministry is mostly among their fellow-poor.

Finally, it must be recalled that Agripino Lontok went to Banahaw not only to hide from arrest but also to look for power hidden in the anting-anting. Boy Fajardo who is an authority on Mt. Banahaw explains how occult powers of three kinds of anting-anting in the context of Mt. Banahaw make it a Power Mountain (Agregado 1990, 16ff). The first kind of anting-anting are derived from nature and are called *mutya*, e.g. stones, santong cahoy, carabao's tooth and certain insects. The mere possession of this natural anting-anting bestows upon the bearer the quality of the essence of the particular *mutya*. For instance, langka fruit makes its owner "mabango sa ibang tao." Whoever possesses the lightning *mutya* inherits the quality of being swift and forceful. The second kind of anting-anting is the triangle *medalyon*, the *solo mata*, and the medalyon with three A's (Aram, Akdam, Aksadam or three archangels who guided Jesus Christ). Possession of the medallion allows the bearer to invoke the guidance of these angels and receive their assistance. Likewise one can activate a handkerchief with the drawing or Latin symbols of deities and communicate with the deities, thereby making the amulet work for him. Another means of activation or a third kind of anting-anting is the *pabaon* or *pakain*. These amulets or talismans are imbedded in the human body, either by ingestion or burying them under the skin. This application renders the individual invincible to knives and even bullets. Another function is to make an individual invisible or enable him to walk on water. Do anting-anting have power? It is said that an anting-anting that is given is more potent than an anting-anting that is bought. There is no doubt that the effectivity of an anting-anting is dependent on the consciousness of the person using it. If a person's consciousness deteriorates, the amulet becomes useless. Involvement with the anting-anting and with occultism can lead to fanaticism or can be the stepping stone to the discovery of a person's spirituality. Power can be misused for evil

or material gain. But true power is only given when the individual learns to be compassionate to others. I know Boy Fajardo as a personal and faithful friend and can bear witness that his involvement with Mt. Banahaw and the use of the anting-anting has only served to open the door to spirituality.

In conclusion the pilgrims who frequent Mt. Banahaw, whether for reasons of a religious pilgrimage, for healing of body, mind, and spirit, for prayer and meditation, for involvement with mysticism and the occult, should in the end discover that all these structured religious sects and ritualized forms of prayer are stepping stones from ritualism to spirituality and the true God.

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