



Ragpat: Prayer for the Dead and Quest for Transcendence

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ABSTRACT

Among members of a Christian Spiritist group, it is believed that earthbound souls seek help from the living through omens, visions, dreams, mediums, or infliction of illness. Consequently, *ragpat ti minatay* [lifting of the soul], an intercessory prayer for the dead, is performed to help alleviate the sufferings of the earthbound soul seeking for help. As a member of the Spiritist group, I had the privilege to observe and participate in the conduct of *ragpat ti minatay* (*ragpat*, for brevity), thus, acquiring information that may not be readily accessible to non-members. My interviews with key informants and participants have revealed that the primary reason behind *ragpat* is helping ease the burdens of earthbound souls or suffering souls who are restless spirits fleeing to and fro or bounded in a dark state or place and ensuring these souls of a better spiritual state, happier and more peaceful than earthly life. For Spiritists considering themselves Christians, praying for the dead (i.e. *ragpat*) is a duty meant to be fulfilled in accordance with the Christian virtue of charity, in that loving and helping one another is extended to the living and the dead. A successful *ragpat* rests on the proper observance of its elements. Its success is also dependent on the soul's willingness to repent, but ultimately, the success of *ragpat* rests on God's forgiveness and abundant grace to repentant souls.

Keywords: *prayer, prayer for the dead, transcendence, spirit/soul, disincarnated*

INTRODUCTION

The promise of afterlife, being far better than earthly existence, has been echoed by Bible preachers in many occasions that I have attended Sunday masses. This belief in life after death, although treated variably, is pervasive among ancient human beings (Obayashi, 1992) and continues to be so among present-day religions. For believers, death is a transition from one form of life to another, and it is the responsibility of society to ensure a smooth transition for the deceased (Obayashi, 1992). In effect, this attention for the afterlife makes it impossible for the living to simply ignore the dead (Gordon & Marshall, 2000). Mortuary rites are then carefully performed and praying for the dead is one ritual to ensure that the dead would be put in their proper place.

The usefulness of prayer in helping both the

living and the dead is pervasively shared among cultures (Sheldrake, 1994). As an invocation, prayer is used to communicate with the Being for the purpose of asking something, giving thanks, or praising; and, when we pray, we pray for ourselves, for others, for the living or for the dead (Kardec, 1987). For the living, in the context of healing, prayer serves as an active process of appealing to a higher spiritual power (National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, 2005) for the improvement of health so that many people continue to believe that prayer improves their health even if empirical evidence supporting its healing efficacy is limited (Masters & Spielmans, 2007). For the dead, our prayers comfort them, lessen their unhappiness, reanimate them, and instill in them the desire for repentance (Kardec, 1987).

Adherents to the idea of death as a journey straight to heaven or to hell contend that praying

for the dead could not, however, change the destiny of the departed. They argue that the story of Lazarus and the rich man recorded in Luke 16: 19-31 of the Bible proves this. St. Paul also wrote that “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrew 9:27, English Standard Version); thus praying for the dead would seem futile. Despite these biblical pronouncements, however, why do many Christians continue to pray for their dead? In particular, why do some Christians pray for earthbound spirits or souls who remain in the physical plane of existence or go wayward upon leaving the dead body (Gogh, 2010), instead of proceeding to the spiritual plane?

In a Roman Catholic high school which I attended, our Religion teacher introduced to us the concept of purgatory. Purgatory, from Medieval Latin *purgatorium*, “place of cleansing” (Collins English Dictionary, 2012), is a state of purification for God’s elect “so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven” (Catholic Church, 2012, *In Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1030). The teacher taught us that souls in purgatory need help from the living, thus, we have to pray for these souls. In several Catholic masses I have attended, I recall that at the start of the ceremony, the priest would say, “We offer this mass for the repose of the soul/s of [name/s of the dead]”. Apparently, the mass is being celebrated for somebody who is already dead. There is also the observance of All Souls Day, in which Catholics commemorate the dead whose souls are in purgatory (Richert, 2015). These are Catholic traditions which I thought were commonly practiced by Christians but such is not necessarily the case. Some non-Catholic Christians declare that the doctrine of purgatory “is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture” (Protestant Episcopal Church, 1801, Article XXII). Praying for the dead is consequently rejected by these non-Catholics as gleaned from Bishop Jewel’s (1571) “Homily on Prayer,” which tersely said, “neither should we dream any more, that the souls of the dead are anything at all helped by our prayer”.

Purgatory is not commonly talked about in the Spiritist church where I belong, but the

congregation certainly acknowledges the need to offer prayers for the departed members by their living kin. While communications with spirits through mediums (persons who can channel messages from spirits) have revealed that the departed need the prayers of the living, details about the predicament of the earthbound soul and why prayers are still needed confound me. Recognizing then the need to clarify issues surrounding prayer for the dead, I attempt to explore the origin and development, and the elements of a peculiar mortuary ritual called *ragpat ti minatay*, loosely translated as, “lifting of the dead,” or better, “lifting of the soul” as practiced by the Hope Christian Spiritist Church (HCSC) [Note: The title ‘Hope Christian Spiritist Church’ (HCSC) is a pseudonym], a group of Christian Spiritists in Northern Luzon, Philippines. The term *ragpat* is an Ilocano word, which may be loosely translated as ‘reach’, ‘attain’ or ‘see’. When preceded by the prefix ‘ma’; hence, ‘*maragpat*’, the prepositional phrase, ‘to reach’, ‘to attain’, or ‘to see’ is formed [(E.g. “*Siasinoman a di agtulnog iti Anak, dinanto maragpat ti biag*” (Juan 3:36, Revised Ilocano Popular Version) is translated as, “He who does not obey the Son shall not see life” (John 3:36, Revised Standard Version)].

This exploration about the soul and the afterlife is my attempt to join the conversation about transcendence as a central characteristic of Christianity. Hence, in this study, the HCSC is presented as a Christian religion that fundamentally adheres to the concept of transcendence. Furthermore, I enjoin readers to re-evaluate their perspectives about the relationship between the living and the dead as manifested in religious rituals (like *ragpat*) in particular, and incite their interest in transcendence (i.e., beyond the physical, material earthly life) that characterizes Christianity, in general. It should be noted, however, that this study is not meant to refute or reject any belief about life after death. This study only serves as an invitation to researchers who are interested in looking at Christianity as a heterogenous religion, variably understood and practiced in everyday life. It simply offers a glimpse of the beliefs, rituals, and aspirations of a group of Christians who call themselves Christian Spiritists or *Espiritista*.

Conceptual Framework

Transcendence in Christianity. Joel Robbins (2012), arguing for a distinctive anthropology of Christianity, points out that transcendence is one of the key features of Christianity. As such, Robbins situates Christianity as a “tradition in which the relationship between the mundane and the transcendent is caught between this- and other-worldly tendencies” thus rendering Christianity as fundamentally malleable. Such malleability is manifested in the different handlings of the transcendent-mundane relationship by various Christian religious groups thereby meriting investigation (Robbins, 2003 as cited by Robbins, 2012). Along this thought, I present *ragpat ti minatay* or *ragpat* as a ritual in which negotiation with the transcendent-mundane relationship is played out by Christians. Christians in this study refer to the Christian Spiritists (i.e., the HCSC). What might qualify the HCSC as Christian is not the object of this paper but suffice it to say that the HCSC believes in Jesus Christ as the mediator between God and man, and the savior. HCSC also acknowledges the Holy Bible as the source of its doctrines and evokes the presence of the Holy Spirit in all its religious rituals and activities. The centrality of the Holy Spirit in the conduct of Christian Spiritist rituals explains why the members call themselves Spiritists. It is true, however, that these Spiritists believe in the existence of other disembodied spirits, in that they have ways of communicating with them. In a nutshell, “the religious practices of Christian Spiritists are based exclusively on a positive and beneficial relationship with disembodied spirits who serve humanity under the direct tutelage of the Holy Spirit” (Martin, 1998).

Identifying transcendence as the take-off point for understanding Christianity leads us to possibly understand how and why the HCSC puts so much emphasis and effort on the performance of one ritual (among others), the *ragpat*. Transcendence in this paper refers to a morally higher and more valued (Eisenstadt, 1982 as cited by Robbins, 2012), peaceful, heavenly spiritual state of being as opposed to a morally flawed, troubled, earth-bound existence.

Transcendence is a preferred spiritual (as opposed to the earthly) condition as determined by God. To achieve transcendence means to be forgiven of one’s sins, to be accepted by God, to be accommodated in God’s heavenly kingdom, to be granted salvation. Transcendence would not then simply refer to the spiritual as opposed to the physical or material since the spiritual realm is not all heaven or “eternal bliss”; the spiritual realm may be hell or a state of darkness or “eternal suffering”.

Transcendence and the Soul. Christian Spiritism’s pre-occupation with transcendence points to the notion of the existence of the soul—the embodied spirit (i.e., the soul that is enveloped by a material/physical body), which is referred to in various terms. In ancient world literatures, for example, the idea of the soul as embodied is reflected in the Egyptian’s *ka* (subtle body of life-energy), in Homer’s *thymos* (life-force), and in Socrates’ *psyche* (breath, soul) (Thompson, 2002). The translated works of Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) and Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail or Allan Kardec (1804–1869) unveil more details about the life of the soul after the death of its physical body (See Swedenborg’s *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell*, 1758; Kardec’s *The Spirits’ Book*, 1857 and *Heaven and Hell*, 1865).

Filipino traditions also reveal similar beliefs in the existence of the soul (See L.N. Mercado’s *Soul and Spirit in Filipino Thought* (1991) for an informative articulation of the Filipinos’ belief in the existence of the soul). For example, early Filipinos believed that a human being has a *kaluluwa* or *kalag* (soul) and *ginhawa* (breath). When the body dies, the *ginhawa* ceases to exist, but the *kaluluwa* survives and becomes the *anito* or spirit (Salazar, 1999). Likewise, the *Kankanaey* Igorots of Northern Philippines identify an entity called *kadkadwa/abi-ik*, which is the person’s spirit/soul. When the person dies, the soul is supposed to join other spirits in the sky world. The soul, however, is termed *kak-kading* (Kankana-ey) or *kedaring* (Ibaloi) when, after a person has just died, is believed to be still lingering on earth (Sacla, 1987).

For disambiguation, “soul” and “spirit” are

interchangeably used in this paper to refer to the same concept. Hence, the soul or spirit would be treated as the Tagalog *kaluluwa* or the Ibaloi *kedaring*, which is called ghost (*al-alia* in Ilocano, *banig* in Ibaloi/Kankana-ey) when it haunts or makes itself visible to the living.

Transcendence and Cultural Change. Robbins (2012) describes Christianity as “a religion that focuses a good deal of attention on the need for radical change and grounds the possibility for such change in ideas about the ways the transcendent realms can sometimes influence the mundane.” Robbins further expounds that Christianity creates rupture on continuity of history, focuses on rupture in time, and demands conversion. For radical change to happen, rituals of rupture have to be performed by Christians because in these rituals, the transcendent divine is believed to effect the needed radical change, thus, leading the converts to a different and better life. Robins (2015) exemplifies the Evangelical and Pentecostal Christian churches as strong advocates of radical discontinuity demanding that the converts “reject their former cultural commitments and ways of living” and embrace the teachings and rituals of Christianity.

In the context of the departed soul’s quest for transcendence, I see that *ragpat* has elements reflecting the cultural change—from traditional to Christian—that Christianity demands from the HCSC members the success of the said ritual. In other words, *ragpat* highlights aspects of the mundane and earthly life that need to be changed or discontinued just so the spirit/soul attains the transcendent state it strives to achieve. Such rupture includes the discontinuity of traditional beliefs and practices that are believed to run counter with Christian doctrines and practices.

Looking now on transcendence and its link to the practice of *ragpat*, we could imagine an earthbound soul who establishes communication with his/her living relatives. Through such communication, the predicament of the soul is revealed. *Ragpat* then is performed to help the earthbound soul go to a better spiritual realm, thus alleviating the soul of its burdens and

sufferings. Consequently, a successful *ragpat* heals the departed’s relatives of their physical illness, emotional and mental distresses that may have been caused by the dead. In other words, when the soul’s suffering has been alleviated, the well-being of the relatives of the dead is likewise sustained.

OBJECTIVES

This paper explores and presents how *ragpat* is conducted as a prayer for the dead within the framework of a quest for transcendence. Specifically, this study aims to trace the beginnings and development of *ragpat* as practiced by the HCSC; determine the condition of the soul and how it requests for *ragpat* from the living; and describe and analyze the performance of the major elements of *ragpat*.

METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative in design. Gummesson (1991), as cited by Askenas and Westelius (2003), explains that in qualitative research designs like “in case study research, good access to the organization is crucial: access that allows the researcher to follow the course of events... and develop an understanding of the processes and the people.” Such method was selected since I, the researcher, am an insider, that is, a member of the HCSC; thus, having close ties with the key informants and have been involved in the practice of *ragpat*. Permission was granted by the General President of the HCSC to do this study. However, I used pseudonyms when referring to the key informants in the text for ethical purposes.

Informal interviews with key informants (knowledgeable members of HCSC) were conducted on several occasions. Key informants included mediums, *ragpat* ritual leaders, Bible preachers, one pioneer aide of the acknowledged founder of the HCSC, and the General President of the HCSC. Informal talks have also been conducted with several members of the HCSC. No structured interview instruments were used for data gathering. In the interviews I conducted, I freely exchanged experiences, beliefs, and knowledge about *ragpat* with the informants and

participants; thus, the reader of this study would perhaps observe that I included my personal inferences.

As a member of the HCSC, I have attended prayers for the dead many times in years; thus, I have been able to draw insights from the experiences and observations I had, in relation to *ragpat* to further support the data I gathered from the interviews and from pertinent documents. However, proper attributions and citations were done where applicable so as to support my observations and inferences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The HCSC and its Founder

The Hope Christian Spiritist Church (HCSC) is a religious organization which was formerly affiliated with the Christian Spiritists in the Philippines, Incorporated (CSPI), but formally split in 1985 (B. Guintodan, personal communication, July 28, 2014) due to differences in some *wagas*, or rituals. On the other hand, the CSPI is also a split group of the Union Espiritista Cristiana de Filipinas, Inc. (UECFI). It severed ties with the UECFI in 1966 due to a basic doctrinal difference (Licauco, 2013). Such difference was a pronouncement made by the UECFI's General President against Jesus Christ's divinity (Buasen, n.d.). UECFI was founded by Juan Alvear, Agustin de la Rosa, and Casimiro Pena in 1905 and was registered as a corporation in 1909. This group pioneered the Christian Spiritism movement in the Philippines (See H. Martin's, *The Origins and Philosophy of Filipino Christian Spiritism* [Parts 1-3] (2002) for more details about the history of Spiritism).

HCSC's doctrines are fundamentally similar to UECFI's and CSPI's doctrines. These fundamental doctrines could be gleaned from the HCSC's intention of "primarily undertaking religious works centered on prayer, meditation, and healing of the sick as well as counselling[*sic*]" (Securities and Exchange Commission, 1985). Specifically, HCSC's purposes, as manifested in the group's Articles of Incorporation, are, to send missions to propagate the teachings of Jesus Christ, to cast

out evil spirits, conduct spiritual baptism, help heal the sick, establish brotherhood guided by charity, promulgate equality among all men, propagate Spiritism with the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit and conduct Christian prayer rituals for those who are in need of such services (Securities and Exchange Commission, 1985).

Gemel, an HCSC member, described HCSC as a religion founded by an *Igorot* for the *Igorots*. The term *Igorot* is the English rendition of the Spanish term *Ygolotes*, universally written as *Igorrote*, which means "highlanders". It is derived from the Tagalog word *golot*, meaning "mountain" and the prefix *I*, meaning "people from" (Wilcox, 1912). The *Igorots* are referred to as Filipinos born in the Gran Cordillera Central, Northern Philippines who might be accurately referred to by their ethnolinguistic grouping (i.e. Isneg, Kalinga, Bontoc, Ifugao, *Kankanaey*, and Ibaloy) (Scott, 1974).

As Gemel explained, the HCSC was founded by an *Igorot* woman, *Dauman*, a *Kankanaey-Ibaloi* native of Benguet, to render spiritual help to fellow *Igorots*. Perhaps, to be an *Igorot* for the *Igorots* would also mean that being an *Igorot* herself, *Dauman* is in a better position to better understand the peculiarities of *Igorot* culture (which might not be well understood by a non-*Igorot*). Because of this, it would be much easier to attend to the needs of her fellow *Igorots*.

Moreover, the identity of HCSC as an *Igorot* organization could be explained by its rituals that contain elements of traditional beliefs and practices of the *Kankanaey* and *Ibaloi Igorots*. This amalgamation of Christian Spiritist and some *Kankanaey-Ibaloi* rituals is arguably what distinguishes the HCSC from the mainstream Espiritista (the CSPI and Union Espiritista Cristiana de Filipinas, Inc. or UECFI). Examples of the non-Christian *Kankanaey-Ibaloi* practices observed by the HCSC which are not practiced by the mainstream Espiritista are: playing of *gangsao* and *solibao* (gongs and drums); performing *tayao* (traditional dance); *kalkal ni puhel*, (exhumation of the bones of the dead); singing *bad-diw* (*Ibaloi* chant); *lawit/alaw* (calling for a lost soul); and, *palti* (butchering of animals during specific occasions).

In relation to the aforementioned non-Christian *Kankanaey-Ibaloi* practices, Juaning, a pioneer companion and aide of the HCSC's founder in the latter's mission as a *hilot* (traditional masseuse) in the early 1960's to several far and near *barangays* (J. Gaspar, personal communication, September 20, 2014), recalled what Dauman said. She said, "*En-asneng ni* (CSPI)-Trancoville, (Baguio City) *kito tep singen semi-pagan kito kono. Mengemag kito ngo ni simbaan tayo* [CSPI of Trancoville, Baguio City no longer welcomes us because we are allegedly semi-pagan. We will then put up our own church]. Apparently, it could be inferred that Dauman's decision of establishing a new Spiritist center separate from the CSPI was a result of CSPI's disapproval of Dauman's practice of infusing *Igorot* beliefs and practices (which were interpreted by the CSPI as pagan rituals) with Christian Spiritist rituals. Thus, during its founding in 1985, HCSC started with nine *sentroan* (centers), all of which are found in several towns in the province of Benguet. The center at La Trinidad became the "home center". More centers were established within Benguet Province, and one center was also established in Nueva Viscaya.

Dauman, a Spiritist Medium. Dauman's calling to become a healer has been guided by the words: "The Spirit of the Lord will be upon you. If you listen to My words, you will have the power to heal through the blessed name of Jesus Christ" (Guintodan, 1985). The General President of HCSC said that Dauman was a medium gifted with hearing the voices of spirits and through this gift known as *palti-ing* (divine revelation), Dauman was sent by the Holy Spirit on healing missions to different places in Benguet. Dauman's method of healing was through conducting prayers for the sick. During a prayer service, the sick would place his/her right hand on an opened Bible, then verses from the Bible are read and appropriate hymns are sang. The healer then utters intercessory prayers for the sick. In due time, if it was the will of God, the sick is healed of his/her illness (Guintodan, 1985). There were other healing rituals that Dauman utilized to complement the prayer conducted for the sick.

Key informants narrated that Dauman's

mediumistic and healing abilities were developed when she was a member of the UECFI. As a new member, she was guided by the church's elders, healers, and mediums. Prominent of these UECFI healers was Eleuterio Terte, Sr, the first known Filipino psychic surgeon who is also CSPI's acknowledged founder (Licauco, 2013). When Terte decided to leave the UECFI and established CSPI, Dauman followed Terte in the CSPI. From then on, Dauman's mediumistic abilities gradually improved, so that she would lead healing missions to varied locations independent of other CSPI members. In these missions, Dauman would employ the prayer for the dead, which she learned from the Espiritistas to help alleviate the suffering of disincarnated souls.

News about Dauman's successful healing missions spread and consequently, many people flocked to her residence to seek spiritual help. After 20 years of healing since becoming a member of the CSPI, Dauman decided to form an organization that would help her in her "divine" healing activities, which the Holy Spirit told her to do. Thus, with the support of Dauman's followers, the HCSC was formed (Guintodan, 1985). Today, selected mediums of several HCSC centers continue the healing missions that Dauman started as more and more people, mostly Igorots of Benguet, continue to seek spiritual healing and guidance from HCSC.

Ragpat: Its origin and development

Ragpat, according to the General President and older members of the HCSC, is a form of intercessory prayer meant to help a suffering soul enter a better spiritual realm. It is meant to beseech God to grant His mercy to a disincarnated soul. Along this thought, Kardec (1865/2003) explained that praying for the dead is done due to the requests of suffering spirits who "earnestly implore us to pray for them" and as an act of charity, it is a means of bringing spirits back to goodness. *Ragpat* is also a ritual that could lead to the healing of an illness caused by disincarnated spirits.

Unfortunately, not a single informant I had spoken with knew the exact origin of the

term *ragpat* as presently used by the HCSC. In the early 1960s, Juaning recalled that prayer for the dead was simply called *kararag para minatay*. She had no memory of how the term *ragpat* came about; she was, however, certain that the term *ragpat* was widely used by the Spiritist group (the CSPI) she was affiliated with in the 1970s. The HCSC General President opined that the term *ragpat* may have been adopted from the CSPI. Gleaning from the CSPI's guidebook written by Carlos Buasen Sr. (n.d.), the ritual is indeed called *kararag iti panangiragpat ti kararua* or prayer for the soul.

In the history of Christian Spiritism in the Philippines, praying for the dead traces back to the beginning of the 20th century. In 1900, when Agustin dela Rosa and fellow believers founded the first Spiritist Center in Manila (UECFI, 2014), the initial activity of this Spiritist group was to engage in "*consultas familiares*" or communicate with the spirits of the dead. Through mediums, the spirits revealed their situation in the afterlife and asked for prayers from their relatives (Pavia, 2000). A selection of these prayers for the dead could be gleaned from a small prayer book of the UECFI. A closer inspection of such prayers reveals that these incantations seem to be patterned from, if not a translation of the examples of prayers found in Allan Kardec's (1866/1987) *The Gospel According to Spiritism*. Actually, Allan Kardec's books such as *The Spirits' Book* and *The Gospel According to Spiritism* were invaluable sources of the teachings of the UECFI. To the first Filipino Christian Spiritists, Kardec was the first apostle of Spiritism and Juan Alvear, co-founder of the UECFI, wrote a textbook adopted from Kardec's works (Martin, 2002). Since its inception in the 1900, praying for the dead would become a common practice of the UECFI. Such practice would also be continually performed by the split groups (i.e. CSPI and HCSC) even to this day. HCSC would later on introduce new ways of doing this.

Communication with spirits (the spirit of the dead included) was not introduced by the Christian Spiritists. Pre-Christian Filipinos had their own shamans (*katalonan* and *babaylan*) that had access to the spirit world through trances

and spirit possessions (MacDonald, 2004; Martin, 1991; Demetrio, 1975). Among the *Kankanaey* and *Ibaloi* Igorots, the dead is believed to communicate with the living through dreams (Sacla, 1987; Moss, 1920), omens, a medium, or by causing sickness among its living kin (Sacla, 1987). For the *Ibalois*, a person possessed by a spirit is called *mayshedpo*. I would point out, however, that when the spirits of the dead communicated with the pre-Christian Filipinos, these disincarnated spirits did not ask to be prayed for; rather, they requested for material things, for "feasts in their honor, so that they would intercede in behalf of the living to the spirits of nature" (Hislop, 1971). Thus, the spirits of the dead in the pre-Christian tradition were not being prayed for; they were prayed to; in a sense, they were worshipped. This worship and reverence for spirits of the dead continue to exist among Igorot Christians as Casiño (2006) has observed that "Cordillerans have embraced Christianity, but the practice of devotion to ancestors persists, which results in a clash of world views".

Praying for the dead is not also a Christian Spiritist invention; it is a long-held Catholic tradition. Under Spanish rule, these prayers for the dead called *Animas* were part of a whole series of religious practices that christianized Filipinos had to say at the sound of the bell each night (Schumacher, 1984). The outcome of the *consultas familiares* of the first Espiritistas as earlier mentioned is therefore only a confirmation of the Catholic belief that certain disincarnated souls needed to be prayed for by their living relatives.

Back in 1964, when Juaning was yet a new member of the UECFI, she had an encounter with a co-member of the UECFI who had the ability to see the unseen or the spirits. When Juaning's child fell ill, Juaning went to seek help from Dauman. As Juaning and her child were about to reach the healer's doorstep, Dauman's mother, Asyang, remarked, "*Itan net kono'e toon engagto ni ngangga!*" [There is a man carrying a young child on his shoulders!] Surprised, Juaning inquired what the remark meant. It turned out that Asyang was a *mengsas* or *man-ila* (someone who could see, especially the unseen or spirits) who saw a man's ghost carrying a child on his shoulders. Dauman

explained that the ghost belonged to Juaning's dead father-in-law and the child was Juaning's child's soul. Dauman further explained that the ghost was so fond of his grandchild that he wanted the child to be with him always. This, Dauman claimed, was the reason why her child was sick. The healer did not elaborate on how the dead man's soul caused the child to fall ill.

Informed of the diagnosis about her child's ailment, Juaning asked how the matter could be remedied. Dauman said a ritual was needed to appease the dead man's spirit and a prayer had to be conducted for the same spirit. On the scheduled date for the ritual, Dauman went to Juaning's home and performed the ritual. The ritual was rather simple: the healer called for the dead man's spirit, presented it to God in prayer, gave the spirit some advice, and pleaded to God for the acceptance of the spirit in the spirit realm. No songs and other actions were involved in the ritual. Soon after the ritual, Juaning's child regained her health. This, according to Juaning, was her first encounter with the effect of prayer for the dead.

On another day, while Dauman was telling stories with Juaning and some companions, the healer called Juaning's attention: "*Iyay kono'e kansyon; idistam...*" [Here is song, write it down...], and she started singing what came to be a ritual hymn used in the *ragpat ti minatay*. The first line of the song was adopted as the title—*Oh Dios co a Nadungo* [Oh My Loving God].

Juaning and other older members of HCSC recalled that sometime in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the action for *ragpat* involved a member of the departed's family whose cupped palms were used as platform on which the soul of the dead was summoned to stand upon. Standing on the person's cupped palms, the soul would await for his/her time to be lifted to the spiritual realm, while hymns were being sung. This method became necessary because a single ritual leader could not conduct the *ragpat* by him/herself if several souls had to be lifted simultaneously. A prayer from the prayer book of the UEFCI was also adopted by HCSC as a required prayer, together with additional hymns, in the conduct of *ragpat*.

In 1985, by the time the HCSC was formally registered as a new organization, the Bible replaced the cupped palms as platform for the soul to be lifted. This change had to be introduced in the *ragpat* because according to those who have experienced lifting the soul with their cupped palms, they felt itchiness on their palms during and after the conduct of the *ragpat*. Such irritation, they claimed, was caused by the contact of the soul with the skin. From hereon, prayers and hymns used in conducting *ragpat* were incorporated in a ritual book of the HCSC also termed as *cultos*. It is not clear why the Bible was introduced as a substitute for the cupped palms, however, one HCSC member opined that the Bible serves as a protection and guide of the soul to be lifted.

At present, *ragpat* is conducted by a medium or by a designated ritual leader of the HCSC with the assistance of its faithful members. Usually, the ritual is performed on a quiet time of the day. The quietude ensures that the ritual would proceed as smoothly as possible without distractions. In my observation, most cases of *ragpat* are conducted late in the afternoon or at night—a time when all other rituals and activities (cleaning of the departed's bones, prayer service for the concerned family, dancing of *tayao* if required by the departed's spirit), related or unrelated to the *ragpat*, have been complied.

Soul manifestation and request for *ragpat*

There is this belief among members of HCSC that when a person dies, the person's disincarnated soul remains on earth. The soul does not immediately go to the spiritual realm or to heaven or to hell. During this period, which has no exact duration, the soul wanders and visits the places it used to go to when it was still physically incarnated. HCSC members also believe in the *Kankanaey* and *Ibaloi* belief that *kakkading/kedaring*, spirits of the dead, may make their presence felt by people to whom they are affiliated with through dreams, visual manifestations (as a ghost), via mediums, or by causing illness. When manifesting itself, the disincarnated spirit may or may not communicate with the person/s to which it showed itself.

HCSC members also claim that disincarnated spirits who have already reached the spiritual realm may be forced by some circumstances (e.g. family conflicts, *atang* or food offered to spirits) to return to the physical plane. These spirits and other earthbound souls are the ones who would need *ragpat*.

When it is time for the wandering soul to be lifted (*ma-iragpat*), which, in most cases, if the soul requests for it, the relatives of the dead would inform the congregation; thus, *ragpat* is performed. The duration of time needed before the soul is lifted to the spiritual realm varies. There are members of the church who would perform the *ragpat* the soonest (i.e. 40 days since the dead person's burial), while there are those who would allow the soul to wander for more than a year before conducting the *ragpat*.

As mentioned, the disincarnated spirit seeking for *ragpat* may reveal its request through a medium. Such medium enters into a trance, which is commonly understood by most members of the HCSC as possessed by the soul seeking for help. Through the medium, the deceased's spirit communicates with its kin giving details of its situation. For instance, before the *ragpat* for our dead grandmother's spirit, my paternal aunt claimed that she had been sensing the presence of a spirit in their house but had no inkling who this was. Perplexed by her intuitions, my aunt consulted a medium about the matter. True enough, by influencing the medium, our grandmother's spirit talked to our aunt and complained that she was continually disturbed by some of our relatives who kept on calling her (our grandmother's spirit), asking her to help our relatives find an alleged buried treasure. We heard the spirit say that she was so burdened by the summons that she came down here on earth from the spiritual realm. Thus, she requested for *ragpat*, so she could go back to the realm of the spirits.

Other mediums, by mental telepathy, could also communicate with the dead after which, they relay the soul's messages to the deceased's relatives. There is thus no need for the spirit to possess or influence that medium just so the spirit could communicate with its relatives.

Another means by which the soul of the dead manifests itself to the living is through apparitions where the dead appears as a ghost. By repeatedly appearing to their kin, the spirit's family would be troubled and therefore would have to consult a medium to inquire about the matter. If the medium confirms that the apparitions are indeed true, communication with the spirit is sought. In some instances, a spirit may communicate directly to a member of the family who has mediumistic abilities, usually by mental telepathy or communication through the thoughts (T. Balictan, personal communication, March 14, 2015). If the spirit requests for *ragpat*, the said ritual would be performed the soonest.

Similar to visual apparitions, spirits could manifest themselves through dreams. Members of the deceased's family repeatedly dream of their *minatay* (dead relative's soul). In those dreams, the spirit may reveal its condition, such as appearing to be dressed in wet clothing, crying, or in melancholic disposition. Again, these dreams have to be consulted to a medium for interpretation. If the medium confirms that the *minatay* needs help, the necessary rituals have to be performed. *Ragpat* is the culminating ritual in most cases.

Still, one way by which a soul makes its request for *ragpat* is causing a member of its family to fall ill. For the affected person/s, this manner of spirit manifestation is usually the most "unlikeable", because being afflicted with unexplainable illness causes much anxiety and physical pain. Feelings of discomfort and distress become worse if the sickness would linger for a longer period of time. For instance, one of HCSC's members narrated to me that she got sick for a month. Such member felt as if there were insects crawling all over her arms and legs. She also felt as if she was heavily beaten that she could not even lift herself up. According to a medium, the sick member's dead mother was requesting for a blanket. Immediately, the sick member sent her husband to check on their mother's tomb. Upon opening the coffin, the husband noticed that the deceased's blanket was rotten and white ants were crawling all over the bones. They performed *linis* or cleaning and the *ragpat*. Since then, the sick member became well.

From the abovementioned narrative, a request by the burdened soul had to be fulfilled before the *ragpat* was performed: *linis*, cleaning the bones and changing the corpse's blanket. Exhuming the remains of the dead is an ancient tradition practiced in the Philippines and in Southeast Asia. This is called secondary burial or "re-deposition of the bones after a period of temporary deposition to allow for the decomposition of the flesh" (Tillotson, 1989). Among the *Ibalois*, this ritual is called *Okat* ("bring out [the corpse]") (Baucas, 2003). As practiced by the HCSC, secondary burial is done in compliance to the request of the departed's spirit. It is performed as a way of showing care and respect for the dead. Non-performance of the *okat* or *linis* could be a reason for the *ragpat* to fail, so for the family of the departed, such ritual (i.e. exhumation and cleaning of the bones) has to be performed first even if this would entail monetary costs and sacrifice of time.

Meanwhile, sickness attributed to the spirit of the dead is termed "ghost illness" (Freed and Freed, 1990; Putsch, 1988). In Putsch's study, three cases of individuals suffering from combined physical, mental, and emotional illnesses were examined. All three patients narrated about their recurrent disturbing dreams of deceased relatives. These dead relatives according to them, were believed to have caused their sickness, thus, some traditional rituals, coupled with Christian ceremonies and medical treatment had to be performed. Interestingly, Putsch's study revealed that the traditional rituals have helped the patients overcome the mental and emotional distresses brought about by the belief that the dead have inflicted them with sickness. The physical ailments suffered by the patients, however, had to be treated with conventional medical procedures.

Similarly, the Christian Filipino Bicolanos, as Cannell (1999) observed, believed that the spirits of the dead could inflict sickness on their living relatives. If an ailment, Cannell explained, has been diagnosed to be caused by the dead, a local healer (usually a medium) is sought to appease the spirit, thereby healing the sick person. Cannell further elucidated that rural Bicolanos believe that when spirits of the dead visit their surviving family, a member of the family would often get sick; thus,

to prevent the spirit from going to their home, the surviving kin would have to offer Christian prayers and masses for the dead so as to appease the spirit of the departed.

At this point, it is apt to ask: What exactly is the condition of the soul seeking for *ragpat*? In several occasions that I have had the chance to listen to the messages communicated by the departed's souls through mediums, one vivid circumstance that these souls mention about their whereabouts is that they are in *sipnget*, a "dark place or a dark state". One soul of an old woman, for example, told us that when the *ragpat* was not yet conducted for her, she was in a dark place. Other souls would say they are *agkatang-katang*, fleeing to and fro without a definite destination. Still others would simply say they are *kakaasi ken marigrigatan*, pitiful and burdened. There are also earthbound souls who become envious of souls who have been *nairagpat*, lifted and so they would ask their relatives to help them find their way to that better spiritual world. Whatever is the condition these souls say they are in, one thing is sure: they are all burdened by some kind of predicament, problem, or situation that hinders them from leaving the physical plane and go to a better spiritual world.

In the *The Spirits' Book of Kardec* (1893), spirits have explained that when a spirit says he/she is suffering, it is "mental anguish, which causes him/her tortures far more painful than any physical sufferings." Moreover, when a spirit complains of suffering from cold or heat, it is the spirit's "remembrance of pain" while yet in the physical body that causes him/her the mental torture; it is a "remembrance as painful as though it was a reality".

Soul manifestation in its varied forms is a cause for alarm for a devout member of the HCSC. This is because when a soul manifests him/herself to the living, this could mean that the soul needs something or has something important to convey to his/her living kin. In many instances, a burdened soul would repeatedly manifest himself to its family through dreams, omens, or ghostly appearances. If these repeated manifestations are not heeded, the burdened soul may inflict sickness on any member of its living

kin. The common term used when one has been afflicted with sickness is *nasagid*, “touched”. Being touched by a disincarnated soul means harm on the part of the living. To be touched would result to physical ailment—from tolerable body pains to lingering physical sicknesses. It is therefore imperative that soul manifestations, if experienced by a devout member of the HCSC, have to be revealed to mediums who could interpret such manifestations for proper action. It should be noted, however, that not all spirit manifestations result in the conduct of *ragpat*. There are times when disincarnated spirits establish communication with the living simply to leave an advice to particular members of the departed’s family or to members of the HCSC.

Elements and conduct of the *ragpat*

Ragpat as a ritual has the following major elements: (1) prayer; (2) hymns; (3) action; and, (4) moral advice. These elements are performed solemnly in sequential order.

The ritual starts with a Bible opened and placed on top of a table. The ritual leader instructs a member of the family of the dead to hold the Bible. Then, the ritual leader talks to the soul of the dead, saying, “*Ita, sika a kararua ni* [name of the dead] *ket ma-iragpat ka. Adtoy dagiti anak ken kakabsat mo. Ket naggastos da tapno ada ti ipigsa dagitoy tat-tao nga tumulong a mangikararag kanyam. Ket agsagana ka ngarud ta iragpat daka iti mabiit.*” [Today, you, the soul of [name of the dead] will be lifted. Here are your children and your brothers and sisters. They spent money [to feed] the people who are here to help in praying for you. So prepare, for you will be lifted in a little while.]

In the above-quoted statement of the ritual leader, the departed’s spirit is being informed of his/her relatives’ fervent intentions to help him/ her ascend to a better spiritual plane. In particular, the ritual leader mentions to the spirit of the *gastos*, expenses of his/her family, perhaps, as a way of telling the spirit that his/her family has exerted effort (*inkarkarigatan da*) and spent much time and money just to fulfill the spirit’s request for *ragpat*. The ritual leader also informs the departed’s spirit of the willingness of the church

members to offer intercessory prayers for him/her.

In many instances, there are spirits requesting for *ragpat* who would ask their living kin to butcher animals (e.g. pig/s) and cook these to be eaten by those who would attend and help in the *ragpat*. The food is not meant to be offered to the dead; it is the departed’s way of showing (through his/her family) generosity and gratitude to the congregation. One HCSC member told me those persons (while still alive) who used to attend or do ceremonies (eg. *kanyaw*, expensive ritual feasts) that involved butchering of animals are often the ones who would require pigs to be cooked and eaten prior to the conduct of the *ragpat*. Actually, the material requirements associated with *ragpat* makes it costly. The economic cost and effort are doubled if a spirit requests *okat* and *linis* from its living relatives before the *ragpat*. Exhuming and cleaning the bones of a requesting spirit entails the purchase of new clothes, blanket, and new coffin for the corpse. It is for these economic reasons that some HCSC members would have to negotiate with their *minatay*, asking the disincarnated spirit to patiently wait for a time for him/her (the spirit) to be *mairagpat* while the *minatay*’s living relatives are sourcing out funds to be used for the material requirements of the *ragpat*.

At times, a medium present in the assembly gets to be possessed (influenced) by the soul of the dead and through such medium, the soul communicates with his/her living relatives. The soul leaves some messages or gives advice to his/ her family. Then, the ritual leader summons the soul, saying, “*Sika nga kararua ni* [*nagan ti natay*], *umay ka; agbatay ka ditoy Biblia.*” [You, the soul of [name of the dead], come and stand on top of the Bible.] This action is called *panangibatay iti cararua iti Biblia* (laying of the soul on the Bible). Clairvoyants would attest that disincarnated spirits being summoned would literally go on top of the Bible. These spirits would shrink in size so they could fit the size of the Bible being used as a platform.

The ritual leader signals the congregation to sing the following song:

O Apo Shios gavat mo e tacday co/ Agak amta e shanden co Nabdeyac ja ultimo, ni anap ni shanden co/ O Apo itneng mo, e shawat co

*Moga itusho say amtac e shalan co/Silvim e davdavan co
Egshiim e tacday co, bantayim e catin co/ O Apo makasac nem
ayshi ha*

*No calabi-an mala, ambulinget ja pasiya/ Ultimon agac ma
amta Aknimac ni namnama, say ayshi e shuashua/ O Apo
itneng mo e shawat co (HCSC, 2012, p. 38)*

[Oh Lord God take my hand/ I don't know
which way to go I'm so tired searching for my
path/ O Lord hear me, this I pray

Show me which path to take/
Light my way to wherever I go
Hold my hand, guide my steps/
Oh Lord, without you I will fall

When night comes and all is dark/
I could no longer discern
Give me hope, dispel my doubts/
Oh Lord hear me, this I pray]

The above-quoted song is based on the gospel song “*Take My Hand, Precious Lord*,” a song that has become a traditional tune played and sung during a deceased’s wake in many Christian homes in Benguet. Apparently, such song has been appropriated by the HCSC in the context of the *ragpat*. Thus, a closer inspection of the lyrics of the song would make an impression of a suffering soul, in a state of darkness, weary of finding the light and right path towards God’s kingdom. The soul, being burdened and losing hope, prays for God’s help and guidance; thus, he cries: “*Nabdeyak ja ultimo* [I’m so tired], *ni anap ni shanden ko* [searching for my path]... *Moga itusho say amtac e shalan co* [Show me which path to take]... *Egshiim e tacday co, bantayim e catin co* [Hold my hand, guide my steps]... *Aknimac ni namnama, say ayshi e shuashua* [Give me hope, dispel my doubts]...”

After the first song, the ritual leader talks again to the soul, saying,

*Ita nga oras nga ma-iragpat ka, saan mo kuman nga
lagipen pay iti anyaman nga problema iti kuarta
man wenno al-alikamen mo ta dagitoy ket
makalapped iti panaka-iragpat mo. Kitaem, adtoy ti
pamilyam, ket naggastos da piman ditoy a
panaikararag mo, gapo met laeng iti ayat da
kanyam. Ket manipud ita, agtalec ka ken Jesu
Cristo, a dika pasulug iti siasinoman nga
mangngayab kenka nga agsubli ditoy lubong tapno
dika kaka-asi nga agkatang-katang ditoy daga.
Ditoy daga, panay rigat ken tuoc ti malak-aman,*

*ngem ijay pagarian ni Jesu Cristo, ada ti inkari na
nga pagyanan dagiti annac na a mammati
kenkuana; ket ragsac ken talna ti ipa-ay na. [At this
hour, you are to be lifted up, and so do not think of
any problems about your money or your properties
for these things will hinder you from ascending.
Look, here is your family; they spent [money and
effort] for this prayer service, for your sake and
love for you. From now on, entrust yourself to Jesus
Christ; do not heed the temptations of those who are
summoning you to come back here so that you will
not be miserably wandering here on earth. In this
world are hardships and sorrows, but in Jesus
Christ’s kingdom, He has promised a dwelling
place for His children who believe in Him; He, too,
will give you happiness and peace.]*

The foregoing statements are referred to as the *pamagbaga iti kararua* (moral advice to the soul). In this section of the *ragpat*, the ritual leader is appealing to the soul to realize his/her family’s efforts, sacrifices, and love for him/her. The ritual leader ensures that the soul realizes that earthly things are hindrances for his ascent to a better spiritual realm, so he says, “*Saan mo kuman nga lagipen pay iti anyaman nga problema iti kuarta man wenno al-alikamen mo... Dika pasulug iti siasinoman nga mangngayab kenka nga agsubli ditoy lubong* [Do not think of any problems about your money or your properties... Do not heed the temptations of those who are summoning you to come back here].

Of the acts that tempt certain spirits to come back on earth is *peltek*, which is offering a few drops of wine to the spirit and *atang*, which is offering of food (meat, rice) to the spirit. These food and drink, according to the elders of the HCSC, when repeatedly offered to spirits, rekindle in the spirits the desire for earthly needs. Thus, if the disincarnated spirits are tempted to join the group that offered them food and drink, they (the spirits) would be earthbound once more. Furthermore, the moral advice makes it clear to the soul that between earth and Jesus Christ’s kingdom, the best option is to reach and dwell in the place where believers of God would stay.

After the moral advice, another song is rendered:

*Inca ken Cristo, dica agtactac/
Ta isu’t adda dita arpad
Awisen naca a siaayat, cunana, ‘umay ca’*

*O, amangan a nagsam-it da/
Timec na a panangayab kenca
Dica bumdeng, mapan ca ita, ur-urayen naca*

*Awan sabali a maca-iccat/
Iti liday mo ken dandanag
Suctan na't adu a ragragsac, cunana, 'umay ca'*

*Dica bumdeng, dica agbain/
Basbasol mo't inca itaclin
Pacawan ennanto kenca itden, cunana, 'umay ca'
No cunam, 'inton madamdama'/
Ngem amangan ton maladaw ca
Cabsat inca ken Cristo ita, cunana, 'umay ca'
(HCSC, 2012, p. 39)*

[Go with Christ, don't dally/ For He is by your side He
invites you with love, He's saying, 'come'

*Oh, how so sweet/
Is His voice as he calls for you
Don't hesitate, go now, He's waiting for you*

*No one else could take away/
Your sadness and worries
He gives much happiness, He's saying, 'come'*

Don't doubt, don't be ashamed/ Confess your sins to Him
He will forgive you, He's saying, 'come'

*If you say, 'in a while'/
You might be too late
Brother, go with Christ now, He's saying, 'come']*

The above-quoted prayer is made on behalf of the suffering soul. It is an intercession imploring God to bestow His mercy on the soul. The prayer further pleads from God to send His spirits (note the plural form of the term) to help the soul discern righteousness. The preceding statement reveals a belief that spirits are sent by God to guide or render help to souls in need. Furthermore, the prayer for the dead reveals how prayers could alleviate the sufferings of souls, when it avers: "*Aramidemman a maliwliwa itoy a cararag...* [Let this prayer comfort him/her]". In this regard, Kardec (1987) writes that when souls recognize the prayers offered for them, such prayers provoke in them a desire to repent, make them turn away from bad thoughts, thus, shortening their suffering.

After the prayer for the dead has been recited, the third and final song is sung:

*O...o...o...o...o...o...o...o...
Diosco a nadungngo
Hmm...mmm...mmm...
Mangisuro nga napudpudno*

*Jesu Cristo a pangulo, a nasantuan/
Agur-uray ditoy daga
Anian a tuoc ti linac-am na ditoy a disso*

*Ibaon mo ti Espiritum a nadungngo
Nga napudpudno isu't mangsalabay caniac
Ket kibinnenac ita, umayac dita ayan mo Apo*

*Hmm...mmm...mmm.../
Mangisuro a nasantuan, nga sursuro ni Jesu
Cristo/ A...a...a...a...a...a...men (HCSC, 2012, p.
40.)*

*[Oh...oh...oh...oh...oh...
My loving God
Hmm...mmm...mmm...
Teach me righteously*

*Jesus Christ, holy king
In waiting here on earth
He suffered great torment in this place*

*Send your loving Spirit/ Who is the true one to
accompany me And lead me by the hand; I will
come to you, Lord*

*Hmm...mmm...mmm.../ Teach me holiness, the
teachings of Jesus Christ/
A...a...a...a...a...men]*

The final song, *O Dios Co a Nadungo*, is prescribed as the final song to be sang during the *ragpat*. It has a similar theme as the first one (*O Apo Shios Gavut Mo E Tacday Co*). In the lyrics, the impression is that the soul recognizes the sufferings of Jesus Christ while incarnated here on earth, which may be an allusion to what souls may go through if they remain lingering here on earth instead of going to the spiritual realm. In the second-to-the-last stanza of the song, the soul asks for God's Spirit to help him reach the dwelling place of God. While the second-to-the-last-stanza is being sung, the ritual leader signals the person holding the Bible to slowly lift the book upward. When the song has ended, the ritual leader signals the person holding the Bible to put the book down. He (ritual leader) then gently blows the open pages of the Bible, closes it, and declares the end of the *ragpat*.

The lifting of the Bible where the soul is placed is an important act of guiding, of prodding the soul to embrace or go with the Holy Spirit to the spiritual place God has prepared for willing, repentant souls. In conversations I had with some members, mediums, and *ragpat* ritual leaders of HCSC, they told me that prayers without the actions of *ragpat* may comfort suffering disincarnated souls but these souls would still remain earthbound because they are not shown the right path to take in order to reach the better spiritual realm. The whole action of *ragpat* and specifically, the lifting of the Bible, apparently, is the key action in guiding the souls to reach their rightful destination. The act of lifting the soul is somehow an act of *panakisabet*, meeting with the Holy Spirit that was sent to take the penitent soul to a better spiritual realm.

Immediately after the end of the ritual, the ritual leader tells the assembly, “*Bediente, umay yo ibaga wenno ibingay nu anya ti inpalubos ti Apo nga inpakita na kadakayo*” [*Vidente*, come and tell or share what the Lord has allowed you to see]. *Bediente* comes from the Spanish term *Vidente*, which means “seeing or sighted” (WordReference.com, 2014). A *bediente* according to the HCSC, is a person gifted with seeing things that the naked eye could not ordinarily discern, such as spirits. The *bediente* is a clairvoyant, a psychic, popularly referred to by many as having a “third eye.” *Bedientes* would reveal to the assembly what they have witnessed. One of the things some clairvoyants see is that when the Bible is lifted, a white-colored web or cage-like material (likened to chicken wire) descends from above, envelopes the soul, and eventually the soul disappears from the sight of the clairvoyant. Other clairvoyants claim to see a bright light or a cloud-like thing that envelops the soul, which would disappear, together with the soul at the end of the ritual.

The last advice that the ritual leader who conducted the *ragpat* would intone is:

Nalpas daytoy nga ragpat, ngem saan koma nga ibaga iti nagpa-kararag nga, ‘Uston ta nairagpat metten ti minatay mi’. Itultuloy yo koma nga ikar-kararagan dagiti minatay yo. [This ragpat has been concluded, but you who have requested for this prayer should not think and say, ‘It is done, our relative’s soul has already been lifted up’. Continue praying for the soul of your dead kin.]

The ritual leader’s advice to the departed’s family points out to the need of continually praying for the soul of the dead beyond the conduct of *ragpat*. For the HCSC, praying for the soul of the departed is a manifestation of one’s charity for everyone, for both the living and the dead. It is an act of compassion for the suffering soul. It is a fulfillment of the commandment: Love one another. Indeed, such act of love for the departed is in conformity with Jesus Christ’s teachings as “Jesus prayed for the sheep that have gone astray, thereby showing you that you cannot, without guilt, neglect to do the same for those who have the greatest need of your prayers” (Kardec, 1893).

HCSC members and non-members who sought for *ragpat* testify how they were greatly relieved from their mental and emotional distresses and/or physical ailments. *Pidio*, my paternal uncle is an example. A few years ago, *Pidio* suffered an unexplainable illness which rendered him bedridden. He became too frail that he could not sit nor stand without assistance. He would remain in such deplorable condition for about a month. His wife and children were so worried that he would die. Eventually, with the help of a medium, it was revealed that *Pidio*’s sickness was caused by the spirit of his dead brother. The disincarnated spirit wanted to be *mairagpat*, lifted. Immediately, *ragpat* was performed and in a few days, *Pidio* regained his health. *Pidio* and his family were very thankful. Some of *Pidio*’s non-Spiritist relatives were wondering how *Pidio* was able to recover fast from his illness. One of *Pidio*’s cousins even thought that *Pidio* died of the illness, so that when *Pidio* visited him at his house, he was startled, thinking that it was *Pidio*’s ghost he was seeing.

Even the *nairagpat*, lifted spirits, express their joy and gratitude, too. Through a medium, for example, a spirit of an old woman expressed her gratitude because she is now in a place where there is light. Moreover, a few weeks after the *ragpat* of our grandmother’s spirit, she influenced a medium and told us that she is now at peace in a place where the Holy Spirit brought her.

Certainly, while *ragpat* may appear too ordinary

to an observer, the relief a successful *ragpat* brings to the suffering spirit and to the concerned relatives is something the suffering soul and his/her affected relatives can truly appreciate. Indeed, the power of prayer should not be undermined for “prayer elevates the human spirit to God. It frees [the spirit] from all earthly concerns, transporting [the spirit] to a state of tranquility and peace that the world could not offer. The more confident and fervent the prayer, the better it will be heard and the more pleasing it will be to God” (Kardec, 1863, in *The Spiritist Magazine*, 2013, p. 10).

What would then become of the *nairagpat nga minatay* on the lifted soul? Communications with the *nairagpat* souls reveal that these spirits are brought and gathered in a spiritual place filled with light, peace and comfort. One soul claimed that in such spiritual place, they continue listening to and learning the words of God just like what happens in church. Moreover, some spirits reveal that they would be *mabaduan ti puraw*, (clothed in white) once they are accepted in that better transcendent world. “White” in this context is taken to mean purification—the result of having repented and gaining forgiveness for one’s misdeeds.

In a conversation with the spirit of an old woman that I was able to record on a mobile phone, the spirit said, “*Sahey too nan-iyang shi apil a kuwarto*” [Each person (soul) occupies a different room]. When asked about the room where she was placed, the soul replied, “*No baley koma, two storey a baley, shi ma tattapew to*” [If it were a house, a two-storey house, (I am) in the upper level]. Narrating further, the spirit said, “*Man-iyang kamid man; no kuwan sha ey, ‘en-awas kayo, jo asen e tinaynan jon pamilja yo, ikwan jo ey mansingsigpet ira,’ en-awas kami nem aliwen kanajon*” [We stay there; if we are told, ‘go out, go see your family you left (on earth), tell them to behave well,’ we leave the room].

From the foregoing paragraph, it could be inferred that once suffering souls are lifted, they are brought to a place which they (the spirits) describe as better than the dark place where they came from. It is also apparent that they may have a dwelling place (a house) in which a room is assigned for each of them. Some spirits inhabit

the lower levels and some stay in the upper levels. Could this be the truth behind John 14: 2 about the many mansions or rooms Jesus would prepare for his disciples? I imagine. Moreover, the spirits are said to occupy different places because, according to the same spirit of the old woman, “*sahey tan sahey, dag-en toy baley to*” [each of us will build his own house]. Such statement, I would assume, could be pointing to the biblical phrases: “work out your own salvation” (Philippians 2:12. KJV) and “the Son of man... shall reward every man according to his works” (Matthew 16: 27, KJV).

At this juncture, it should be noted that not all *ragpat* are successful. In some instances, there is also a need to repeat the ritual for a number of times. Clairvoyants say that there are occasions when the suffering soul would not go on top of the Bible when summoned to do so or jump out of the Bible while the book is being lifted. This is attributed to several reasons, one of which is that the soul still clings to worldly passions or has other earthly problems to deal with. According to a member of the HCSC, for example, the soul of his dead father hesitated to be *mairagpat*, because the departed’s spirit thought that some members of his family were harboring some grudges against him (the dead). Apparently, the spirit wanted his family to forgive him first of his shortcomings while incarnated. Thus, it was only when the disincarnated spirit’s children expressed forgiveness of their father that the earthbound soul allowed itself to be *mairagpat*.

The failure of the *ragpat* could be confirmed because the disincarnated spirits themselves would reveal of their whereabouts after the *ragpat* through trances and possession of mediums. Clairvoyants could also see where these spirits are. Spirit manifestations (dreams, visual apparitions) revealing the predicament of the earthbound soul would persist if the *ragpat* was unsuccessful.

Why a soul of the dead remains in the physical plane is due to several reasons. Leadbeater (1952), in *The Life After Death and How Theosophy Unveils It*, explains that some souls cling to the earth where their thoughts and interests are fixed, so that they suffer when they realize they are losing hold and sight of it. Other souls remain earthbound

by the thoughts of regret or guilt due to crimes they have committed or duties they have not completed. Others worry about the condition of persons they have left behind. Believing then that wayward spirits need help, Leadbeater urges that it is the charitable duty of the living to help these errant beings.

In this regard, Kardec (1893), in *The Spirits' Book*, quotes a spirit who said that “prayer is only efficacious in the case of spirits who repent” in that, spirits who persist with wrong-doings cannot be acted upon by prayer. Thus, prayer for the dead may shorten the soul’s suffering only when the soul, “on his side, seconds the [relatives’] action [of praying] by that of his (the spirit’s) own will.”

In one conversation I had with Gloria, a medium, I was told that the souls of people who have known and learned the words of God are easier to be *mairagpat* unlike the souls of the *napeklan nga pagano* (hardcore pagans). The medium further said that it would take several *ragpat* just so a pagan’s soul would be brought to a better spiritual realm. This is so because even if the pagan’s soul was brought to a better place than earth, it is easy for the pagan’s soul to be tempted by earthly or material matters, which would cause the soul to return to earth and burden itself with earthly pleasures and passions. It is these earthly desires that would cause the soul to be rejected from being lifted up to a better spiritual world.

There is also the case of one earthbound spirit of an old man who declined to be *mairagpat*. Through a medium, the disincarnated spirit informed his relatives that even if he wanted to be lifted, he said the Lord would not accept him yet because he was unable to guide and discipline his children while he was still alive. In a conversation with the departed’s brother-in-law, I was told that the spirit remarked: “*Din adi-ak nangurnosan si pamilyak say isingsingir da en sak-en* [I am being questioned for not having done my obligations to my family well]. Thus, the old man’s spirit urged his relatives to take good care of their family and advised the latter to hold on to their faith in God.

Indeed, *ragpat* is an important ritual that members of the HCSC must understand and

learn to conduct. As one HCSC preacher shared: *Masapul nga ikarkararagan ti minatay ken masapul nga isuro kadagiti ubing ti wagas ti ragpat ta isudanto met ti mangitungpal iti ragpat kadatayo into nu datayo ket matay* [We should keep on praying for the souls of our dead relatives and we should teach our children the actions of *ragpat* for they will be the ones to perform *ragpat* for us when we are already dead].

Ragpat, Quest for Transcendence and Cultural Change

For the HCSC, the ultimate goal of becoming and being a Christian is for one’s soul to be *maisalakan*, to be saved (from eternal punishment). Being saved would mean having a rightful place *iti pagarian ti Dios*, in God’s kingdom in heaven. I would say that for a HCSC devotee, being in heaven would be the highest form of transcendence a soul could achieve. Consequently, this Christianity’s promise of a happier, more peaceful state of afterlife places a member of HCSC in a situation where he/she has to endeavor negotiating with the material and spiritual requirements of being a Christian. Thus, to attain such transcendence, a devout member of the HCSC has to have faith in Jesus Christ and live an earthly life in conformity with Jesus Christ’s teachings. In this context, *ragpat* is one ritual in which a devout HCSC member obeys and lives by Christ’s commandment to love one another. *Ragpat* gives a chance for a Christian to exercise his charity, his concern for his fellow beings, for both the living and the dead.

While *ragpat* promises a better place for the soul, the condition of the soul or the place where the soul would spend its spiritual life is still open to questions among the HCSC members. The exact location of the transcendental place where the spirit of the dead would go after a successful *ragpat* is not clearly known. Some HCSC members would guess that it could still be on earth in another dimension unseen by the naked eye. Others would think that it is a spiritual place above the earth. Interestingly though, no one would categorically mention of heaven. As the General President of the HCSC remarked: *Adi takkun ammo no ento di kusto ay emeyan*

di nairagpat. Ngem ipulang tako en Jesu Cristo, et namnamaen tako ay i-ey na din minatay sin mayat ay pante-an na.[We do not exactly know where lifted souls go, but we leave the soul to Jesus Christ with the hope that He would bring the soul to a better dwelling place]. Thus, a devout HCSC member has to strive knowing and learning about what the spiritual life might be like if only to do the necessary actions and precautions of living a good Christian life and preparing himself/ herself for life after death.

As a HCSC member strives for transcendence, he emphasizes that all prayers must be addressed to God in the name of Jesus Christ. All rituals (including *ragpat*) must be sanctioned by the *Nasantuan nga Espirito*, the Holy Spirit. For the HCSC, just like other Christian Spiritists, the Holy Spirit is regularly invoked during masses and whenever prayer services and rituals are conducted. Invoking the Holy Spirit gives an assurance that the performance of rituals and other religious activities would be effectively accomplished. Thus, prior to the conduct of *ragpat*, the HCSC sees to it that the Holy Spirit is invoked to guide all those who will participate in the ritual.

For the concerned family of the *nairagpat nga minatay*, they have to avoid or discontinue practices construed by HCSC mediums and ritual leaders as *pinapagano* (paganistic) or *ugali di nankakay* (traditions of the elders)—acts and prayers depicting worship or reverence for ancestral spirits, spirit of the dead, and worldly spirits—that might cause the lifted soul to be burdened and become earthbound again. This is the element of Christianity that requires rupture from or discontinuity of traditional beliefs and practices in favor of Christian tenets as emphasized by Robbins (2012). This call for rupture has to be made clear and understandable to the relatives of the *minatay*, especially if the *minatay*'s relatives are familiar with the traditional (non-Christian) practices of dealing with the dead. To illustrate, let us consider the traditional *Kankanaey* ritual called *kedaw* and the *Ibaloi* ritual called *tabwak*.

Sacla (1987) explains that in administering rituals meant for the well-being of persons,

Kankanaey and *Ibaloi* call upon various spirits, which include the *kabunyan* (deities of the sky world), *ap-apo/kaapuan* (ancestral spirits), and the *kakkading/kedaring* (spirits of the dead). To these spirits, animals, wine, food and other materials are offered for the restoration of health. Beyond asking these spirits to cure sickness, prescribed rituals are also performed for protection, purification, sanity, normal birth, and safe journey. Sacla further explains that the *kakkading* has needs for “blankets, clothes, food, and animals” so that this request is made known to its relatives. This is called *kedaw* or *kechaw* (literally translated as ‘request’). The *kakkading* would communicate with its relatives through dreams, omens, a medium, or by causing sickness among its living kin. If the requesting spirit is a parent, it may ask its living children to be honored by a *tayaw* (dance accompanied by gongs and drums). Thus, in a situation where a living kin has been afflicted with sickness by a *kakkading*, the sick is referred to a *mansip-ok* (one who discerns the sickness-causing spirit), then the *manbunong* (traditional priest who conducts ritualistic prayers) communicates with the requesting spirit by chanting the prescribed ritual prayer that would eventually heal the person’s ailment.

Related to the *kedaw* is an *Ibaloi* ritual termed *tabwak*. According to Moss (1920), when the soul of the dead is not satisfied with the sacrifices offered him for his journey to the spirit world, he may cause his relatives to dream that he needs clothing or food, or he may cause his relatives to become sick. This situation necessitates the performance of *tabwak*, in which a hog is killed, rice is cooked and *tapuy* (rice wine) is produced. Sometimes, blankets and clothing may be placed in the coffin. Then, the *manbunong* offers a prayer, asks the dead to eat and drink with the people but not to cause sickness, and to cure the sickness he may have caused. The blankets, clothing, and food were believed to have souls, which are taken by the spirits of the dead when ceremonies are properly done (Moss, 1920).

In *ragpat*, the HCSC deals with the same cases of souls or *kedaring* who make requests or inform their living relatives about their needs

and predicaments. Similarly associated with *ragpat* are materials (such as animals to be butchered, blankets and clothes for the secondary burial or *okat* and *linis* and non-material (*tayaw* or dance) which the *minatay* may request for his/her family), requirements that are necessary prior to the conduct of the *ragpat*. The call of Christianity for cultural discontinuity, however, requires the HCSC members to: (1) discontinue praying to and worshipping *kabunyan* and the *ap-apo/kaapuan*, and rather to pray to Jesus Christ;

(2) stop offering food and wine to the *kedaring*, since butchered animals and wine are only for the living for physical sustenance; (3) stop consulting *mansip-ok* and *manbunong*, and consult the Holy Spirit through the HCSC mediums; and (4) discontinue asking the *minatay* for *swerte*, or fortune/luck or stop praying to the *minatay* to help gain material wealth. Thus, to the relatives of the *nairagpat nga minatay*, lifted soul, it is important for them to discern the difference between “pagan” beliefs and practices from the HCSC *ragpat* and its associated rituals. Moreover, it has to be made clear to the *minatay*’s relatives to remain Christians and live a Christian life. What would count, however, as pagan beliefs and being un-Christian?

I have discussed the aforementioned question with some members of the HCSC but I have not arrived at a clear-cut definition or criteria of what could be construed as paganistic or un-Christian. It would suffice for the time being to emphasize that pagan beliefs would refer to those actions that show worship and devotion for the spirit of the dead as practiced by traditional *Igorot Kankanaeys* and *Ibalois*, instead of offering such acts of reverence to God. In some occasions, there have been reports that some members of the HCSC continue to offer *atang*, (food for the dead), because it has been an Igorot tradition to “feed” the dead) and at the same time offer intercessory Christian prayers for the dead. *Atang*, of course, has been denounced by the HCSC officials. Some HCSC members have also suggested that playing of gongs and drums (*solibao*) should be stopped, even if requested by the soul of the dead, because this is a pagan ritual according to such members. The practice still persists, however. This is so because according to

other HCSC members, the Holy Spirit (through trance mediums) does not forbid the inclusion of such re-appropriated traditional *Igorot* practice, so members of the HCSC continue to perform them.

Indeed, the inclusion of elements of some traditional Igorot rituals is one reason, among others, why the HCSC has been criticized as not really distinct from paganism or animism. When confronted with this issue, a respected member of the HCSC remarked, “*Say nandeperensya-an tako si pagano yan din kararag. Din dawdawat tako yan ipulang tako en Jesu Cristo; da din pagano, ikararag da sin an-anito*“. [What distinguishes us from the pagans is our prayer. For us, we submit our supplications to Jesus Christ; for the pagans, they pray to worldly spirits].

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The beginnings of *ragpat* emanate from the pleadings of earthbound souls who ask to be comforted of their sufferings. Communications between the spirits of the dead and of the living have, through mediums, revealed the need to pray for the departed’s souls. Rituals coupled with prayers had to be developed to ensure the successful transition of the soul from the physical plane or from a dark place to a better spiritual plane. Thus, a ritualistic prayer, the *ragpat ti minatay*, had to be performed to effect the said transition.

There are diverse ways by which burdened souls could manifest themselves to the living. In this regard, mediums become important channels of spirit manifestations, for through them, conditions and requests of spirits are clarified and confirmed. Through mediums, with the help of ritual leaders, solutions to problems caused by the suffering soul/s are sought.

When *ragpat* is properly performed, the concerned soul/s to which the ritual was done for is ensured of a better spiritual life and place. The departed’s affected living relatives are equally

comforted and cured of the ailments caused by the burdened soul. Care is therefore observed in the conduct of each of the key elements of the *ragpat*. Moreover, the success of the ritual also lies on the soul's willingness to dispel itself of earthly attachments and go to the spiritual realm. Ultimately, the success of *ragpat* rests on God's forgiveness and abundant grace to repentant souls. Indeed, *ragpat* reflects the fervent hope of the HCSC faithful for every soul to enter the heavenly transcendental realm where peace and happiness reign.

Recommendations

This study focused on the prayer for the dead and its link to the quest for transcendence. There are other religious rituals that Christian Spiritists are performing in their continuing quest for transcendence. Exploring these rituals could be a wellspring of practical knowledge for interested researchers. A comparative study of the prayer for the dead as practiced by several religious organizations is also worth exploring.

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