Makaammo'n ti Apo:
Exploring a Facet of Ilokano Spirituality

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ABSTRACT

Makaamo'n ti Apo is best defined as the Ilokano equivalent of the Filipino-Tagalog saying "bahala na". While this is seen in a similar lens, makaamo'n ti Apo provides a glimpse of how Ilokanos, another major ethno-linguistic group in the Philippines, have faith in God and also in how they manifest their spirituality. This study looks into the experiences of Ilokanos in relation to the divine through their knowledge and usage of the said statement and the results would open to a discourse on Ilokano culture and spirituality. This study aims to explicate how Ilokanos manifest makaamo'n ti Apo as a facet of their spirituality. It utilizes a qualitative method with a hermeneutical phenomenological design, which is targeted at the data collected through interviews among Ilokano educators in the secondary and tertiary levels. The results of the study provide the circumstances in which Ilokanos use the statement. It is often used during checkmate situations, decision-making uncertainties, and pacifist conflict settlements. The reasons/source of their usage are the following: Family and cultural upbringing, faith expression, and automatic response mechanism. Key themes also surfaced as to

how makammo'n ti Apo manifests as a pertinent part of the participants' spirituality. Makaaammo'n ti Apo manifests as spirituality among the Ilokanos with their acknowledgement of human limitations, amplified confidence in living, and recognition of the divine.

Keywords: *Amianan, Ilokano identity, Filipino theology, ordinary theology, religiosity*

1. Introduction

Uncertainties elicit different responses, such as coping mechanisms. When individuals face uncertainty and risk, they tend to manifest proactive attitudes. Even in the most dire situations, individuals step forward rather than give up (Pe-pua et al. 2000, p. 49). While humanity's highly evolved sense of self helps cope with the world's uncertainties (Landau et al. 2010, 195), others accede to other options. Uncertainty management perspective believes that cultural worldviews may provide a means to cope with personal uncertainty (Van den Bos 2009, 197-217). Cultural perspectives have been shown to benefit individuals who subscribe to them, and vice versa, by reinforcing the norms and values associated with them (Van den Bos, 2009, 197). The old-age practice of subscribing to cultural perspectives and traditions, particularly in cases of dealing with life uncertainties and setbacks, is still embraced to deal with contemporary problems despite the availability of scientific and professional solutions. Cultural values, traditions, and practices hold relevance regardless of time, even though they can be traced back to antiquity.

Furthermore, the tendency to draw out cultural solutions to problems can be observed in people whose primary worldview emanates from their culture, like people from ethnolinguistic groups and indigenous peoples. For example, the ethnolinguistic group Kankanaeys in the Philippines utilized *"Tengaw"*[1] successfully to adapt to the different uncertainties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic (Cadingpal 2021, 287-89). Also, the Kankanaeys elevated their cultural expression *"Kasiyana"*[2] into a form of religious communication, which significantly played an essential role in assisting the sick experiencing hopelessness, doubts, and uncertainties (Cadingpal 2024, 444-69). Other ethnolinguistic groups also have different ways of dealing with the challenges of the contemporary era.

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[1] "Tengaw" is a traditional practice among the Kankanaeys staying at home in observance of a ritual ongoing in the community. Such practice is usually prescribed by the elders. Non-observance of such will make one despicable.

[2] "Kasiyana" is a Kankanaey term expressing hopefulness that everything will be alright after going through adversities.

Therefore, there is no difficulty establishing that ethnolinguistic groups' contemporary spirituality is shaped by their culture. The worldviews ingrained in the culture shape one's spirituality. Spirituality, in turn, shapes human consciousness and behavior (Ubale 2015, 1-2). However, it is important to note that culture is not the only defining and shaping factor of spirituality.

Culture, spirituality, and religion are deeply intertwined (Platovnjak 2017, 117). Therefore, religion is also a significant shaping factor of spirituality. Religion or participation in religious activities shapes identities and, eventually, spirituality (Zinnbauer et al. 1997). Therefore, the study of spirituality, its shaping factors, and the circumstances that come with it is a search for its constant change, particularly those brought about by the changing landscape of culture, relationship dynamics, and power. Religion and culture are not the only factors shaping spirituality. It would be inimical to claim those are the only shaping factors. However, they are the highlighted factors in this introduction for consistency with the explored idea of *makaammo'n ti Apo* as a form of spirituality among the Ilokanos, shaped by the fusion of Ilokano culture and the Christian religion. Therefore, the objective of this study is to make explicit how *makaammo'n ti Apo* constitutes a form of Ilokano spirituality.

1.1. A Glimpse of the Ilokanos and Their Spirituality

Ilokanos are found in the northern part of the Philippines and are considered one of the major cultural groups in the Philippines. They are praised for their resourcefulness and industriousness, probably due to their location and extreme weather patterns (Pacris 2024). Pacris added that Ilokanos are thrifty but misunderstood as tightwads (Pacris 2024). Furthermore, aside from the mentioned thrifty trait, the Ilokanos are also religious (Tagay and Ballesteros 2016, 27-40). The Ilokanos believe that the universe is a creation of God (Tagay and Ballesteros 2016, 29). Like any other cultural group, they take pride in their cultural heritage. Tagay and Ballesteros also mentioned that they have a rich cultural heritage, as shown in the festivities in each town or municipality to honor their patron saints (Tagay and Ballesteros 2016, 30).

The richness of the Ilokano cultural heritage is observed to have a deep intertwinement with religiosity and spirituality. In particular, they also believe in "atang," which has been studied to be compatible with the Catholic doctrine on Communication of Saints (Corpuz 2020, 113-126). Such practice is cultural and religious by nature. The cultural heritage of the Ilokanos traces a profound relevance to Christianity, which can be traced back to the Spanish colonization of the Philippines. Also, the procession during Holy Week is practiced by the Ilokanos (Queddeng et al. 2021). It is a culturally assimilated practice from the Spanish influence of practicing Christianity. In the present, the Ilokanos, with the deep entanglement of their culture and religiosity, developed expressions that eventually turned into a mentality shaping their spirituality and worldviews. *Makaammo'n*

ti Apo is one of such. In this study, the researchers will make explicit the relationships between *makaammo'n ti Apo* and spirituality. The limitations in the availability of published works about Ilokano spirituality serve as an inspiration for the conduct of the study. Despite the many claims of the Ilokano's religiosity and spirituality in the cited literature, there is a need to provide evidence. While some Ilokano claims of religiosity can be shared with other Filipino ethnolinguistic groups like the Tagalogs, literature in this area is still limited. Therefore, conducting the study is necessary to start discourses on Ilokano religiosity and spirituality.

1.2. Critical Dialogue between Ilokano Spirituality and Western Notions of Spirituality

Ilokano spirituality is syncretic in nature, which is an integration of Roman Catholicism and the folk spirituality (Farinas 2024). This is a product of the Christianization of the Ilokandia, and the Ilokanos integrated Christianity, particularly Roman Catholicism, into their beliefs. The Ilokanos, with their animistic belief system, believe that everything in nature has spirits and it is interrelated to the *anitos,* soul, afterlife, and the transcendent *Apo* (Agcaoili 2001, 167-168). The interrelationality of the different spirits, with the transcendent *Apo,* with humanity, and the natural environment, is one of the defining characteristics of Ilokano and other Asian spiritualities. In contrast, the Western notion of spirituality leads to a dichotomized and separated view of spirituality, which is separated from religion/religiosity. The reason behind this dichotomy is explained by the need of "believers," which is connoted by spirituality, which reflects individualism, liberation, and maturity, whilst "belongingness", as connoted by religion, portrays institution, constraint, and even childishness (Overstreet 2010). Western culture plays a big factor contributing to the dichotomy in religion and spirituality, while in the East, religion and spirituality are intertwined with each other, and this affects every facet of human life.

Rooting from this distinction, it follows that Ilokano spirituality is communal-holistic-ecological, and Western spirituality is individual-psychological. The Ilokanos are grounded with the concept of *nakem,* which speaks of their totality/personhood (Alterado 2021). Since *nakem* talks of the totality and for it being non-dualistic, it shows that an Ilokano is connected to everything, including the transcendent *Apo* or God. In addition, one's *nakem* shapes how an Ilokano is thoughtful of his relationship and actions with people and surroundings, for they believe that deities are around with them and can intervene in humanity, which can affect the person (Alterado et al. 2023). This is evident when an Ilokano strives to do good to oneself, others, and the environment, for it resonates the *kinaimbag ti nakem* (goodwill) that one has. Western spirituality revolves around logos or reason, which can be understood as the divine reason/intelligence that organizes the cosmos based on God's will and/or the incarnation of Christ

himself. *Logos* sets a dualism from the human world, for this is transcendent, and from God's mind, which focuses on the salvation of man through the mediation of Jesus Christ.[3] The transcendent characteristic of the *logos* means that it is external to man, and it is only revealed and understood through revelation and faith. Therefore, from the contrast of the Ilokano spirituality and Western spirituality, it can be said that both differ in context, manifestations, and applications to the human person. Despite the difference, both of them strive towards a good life.

1.3. Acquainting with *Makaammo'n ti Apo*

Cultural perspectives are valid sources of theological reflections. One relevant example is how the *Kasiyana* served as a source of reflection among the Kankanaeys, an ethnolinguistic group from Northern Luzon in the Philippines (Cadingpal 2024, 444-69). Ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines take pride in their culturally created terms emanating from centuries of tradition and practices, which eventually hold significant value and relevance. Among the Ilokanos,*makaammo ti Apo* exhibits immense spiritual relevance due to their subscription to it in times of uncertainty, danger, and fear.

Makaammo'n ti Apo, translated as "God will take care of it," shares similarities with the Filipino *"Bahala Na."* Both terms refer to surrendering to a divine being, whatever circumstances one is going through. The mindset or expression can be perceived as either fatalistic or not, depending on the individual subscribing to it. *"Bahala na"* tends to be used positively, believing in God rather than destiny (Hong 2020, 135). However, one can also view the portrayed mentality in a different light. Other people use it as a total surrender of everything to God; hence, a display of a fatalistic attitude (Gripaldo 2005, 203-20). Therefore, *Bahala na* can be used responsibly and irresponsibly depending on the person manifesting it. The same goes for *makaammo'n ti Apo*—it can be used responsibly and irresponsibly. However, despite the choices for its usage, *makaammo'n ti Apo* evidences a mentality affecting and shaping the Ilokano spirituality. Even though *makammo'n ti Apo* seems to be a phrase, its utterance and the Ilokanos' subscription to it radiates a deep significance of the value of religion and culture shaping the Ilokano spirituality, which eventually affects the way they live their lives. This expression can be found in almost every aspect of the Ilokano way of life. Its pervasive characteristic and potential in the life of the Ilokanos make it a significant, relevant, and sufficient ground for surfacing a facet of Ilokano spirituality.

1.4. Research Questions

The study will be fulfilled by answering the specific questions below. The answers to the questions will ensure the fulfillment of the study's primary

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[3] See John 1:14.

objective—to make explicit how the *makaammo'n ti Apo* manifests a facet of Ilo-kano spirituality.

1. What instances elicit the Ilokano professional's subscription to the *makaamo'n ti Apo* mentality?

2. Why is *makaammo'n ti Apo* a preferred mentality or expression when faced with these instances?

3. How is *makaammon ti Apo* a manifestation of Ilokano spirituality?

2. Methodology

The study used a qualitative method and a Hermeneutical Phenomenological De-sign. The hermeneutical phenomenological design best fits the study since it intends not only to understand the *makaammo'n ti Apo* manifestation but also to critically evaluate how the manifestation is a form of spirituality among the Ilo-kanos. Hermeneutical phenomenology is also a method of interpretive phenomenology (Sloan and Bowe 2014, 1291). The study applied reading and re-reading transcript texts from participants as a significant activity in hermeneutical phenomenology (Sloan and Bowe 2014, 1292). The critical reading ensures the derivation and interpretation of the phenomenon.

The participants of the study are chosen through the following inclusion/ex-clusion criteria: a) must be Ilokano from the Ilocos Region (Region 1) of the Philippines, b) currently working professional educators in college or senior high school, c) currently living in an Ilokano community, d) proficient with the Ilokano language, e) practicing Christian, and f) have been using of familiar with the state-ment *makaammo'n ti Apo*. The criteria for selecting participants are meant to ensure that they are Ilokanos and have been manifesting *makaammo'n ti Apo* pro-ficiently using the Ilokano language. The researchers also chose the group of currently employed professionals since they are one of the groups experiencing the complexity and uncertainties of life, and the manifestation of the studied ex-pression and mentality (*makaammo'n ti Apo*) is common. The participants were also asked if they were practicing Christians, since referring to *"Apo"* commonly refers to the Christian God, which historically is due to the influence of Christi-anity on the Ilokano culture. The researchers gathered eight Ilokano professionals as participants for the study. The number of participants is based on the concep-tual saturation of data. Data saturation occurs when no new themes appear in the data (Saunders et al. 2018, 1894). After the interview and transcription of the in-terview from the eighth participant, it was observed that the same themes were recurrent.

The study gathered the data from the participants through one-on-one in-person interviews with open-ended questions. Every interview is immediately

transcribed to look into the codes and themes for possible saturation. When the researchers validated the occurrence of data saturation, the transcription underwent the procedures of Hermeneutical Phenomenological Analysis by Lindseth and Norberg (2004, 145-53). It followed the steps of Naive Reading, Structural Analysis, and Comprehensive Understanding. The researchers could process the data and arrive at codes and themes by following the process. The findings were then presented, and the topic will be discussed thematically in the next section of the paper. In the thematic presentation of the results and their discussion, the researchers used the code P1 to refer to Participant 1, P2 to refer to Participant 2, and so on. Such is in the interest of the participant's privacy.

The researchers employed the highest ethical standards in ensuring data integrity, participants' protection of dignity and identity, and other aspects and processes for the project's accomplishment. We also adhered to Creswell's (2013) ethical standards for qualitative inquiry. An informed consent form was also used to ensure the voluntary participation of participants with full knowledge of what they are engaging with.

3. Results and Discussion

In this section, the findings are thematized based on the themes created by the data. Afterward, a thorough discussion of each theme is provided regarding its significance to the Ilokano and its implications for one's way of life.

3.1. *Makaammo'n ti Apo* manifesting Circumstances

The manifestation of *makaammo'n ti Apo* does not come in a form like any other street expression. With the attachment of "*Apo*" in the expression of *makaammo'n ti Apo* comes a different form of valuing. The Ilokano participants have chosen specific manifestation scenarios, as evidenced by the themes below.

3.1.1. *Checkmate situations*

The first manifestation of *makaammo'n ti Apo* is when an Ilokano faces a "checkmate situation." Such a situation prompts the difficulty of continuing or accomplishing something due to exhaustion, hopelessness, and the futility of circumstances. The responses of the participants showing this circumstance are as follows:

> *I use it to surrender my difficulty to God when all human efforts are in vain (P2). ... Circumstances that you are about to surrender or give up something… you say makaammo'n ti Apo."* *Those things that I cannot do, those that have deadlines. I would say makaammo'n ti Apo. It depends on the futile circumstances (P4).*

The responses portray struggles that are irresolvable or futile. Lagmay (1993, 32) mentioned that the usage of *Bahala na* is evoked in moments of uncertainty, struggles, or suffering. His statement resonates with the participants' experiences, highlighting experiences of desperation, limitation, and incomprehensibility. In connection with their statements, Ilokanos are known to be industrious and hard-working. Their industriousness and seriousness of work are rooted in the Ilokanos' lack of resources based on their geography, hence being *kuripot* (Reference 2015). Despite their industriousness, the participants acknowledge that there are limits to their hard work, thus resorting to their belief that God is still there to guide whatever checkmate situations they face. Alongside that, they are aware of the transcendental capability of God, which surpasses all human capability. Supporting this claim, **P8** mentioned that one utters *makaammo'n ti apo* when one cannot provide any solutions to their problem.

Given these experiences, unresolved dread is inevitable. Dread comes in many forms, but a certain thing about it is the feeling of anguish one might experience, like the loss of a loved one, uncontrollable circumstances, and sorrowful moments in general, as the participants stated:

> *Sometimes, I use it when I am going through sorrowful moments, and I cannot fully express my emotions and feelings. I rest it to God. Anyway, God is there* **(P1)**. *Sometimes, my faith is in question, so I utter it, for it is a powerful expression of faith, trust, and surrender* **(P5)**.

Dread is closely related to fear, yet in their belief that someone they know can make things work despite the difficulty/impossibility, the dread people feel is empowering (DeVita 2012). The respondents' claims reflected this, particularly regarding their feelings of hope despite their adverse situation. As Filipinos, one possesses inherent resiliency, which means one is flexible in facing these challenges and can learn to adapt to these conditions (Garcia 2024, 169). This is also evident in the Ilokano way of life, considering how they persevere through all life's adversities. All in all, these dreadful moments show that despite the situations that affect their view of life, they still hold onto God as someone who can guide them in the right direction.

3.1.2. Decision-making uncertainties

The second manifestation of *makaammo'n ti Apo* is decision-making uncertainty. This manifestation focuses on the Ilokanos' way of dealing with dilemmas, especially when making decisions that conflict with one's ideals and the needs of the circumstance. The respondents also referred to such situations in their responses.

> *I say it when I cannot decide well whether to do one thing or not, but the situation calls for an immediate final decision. After making my decision, I say to entrust it to God* **(P1)**. ... *I use it when there are things I am going through, and I am not confident in making decisions and*

actions about it. I say it to rest to God, whatever I cannot or fail to do due to my limitations as a human being ***(P3)***.

In ethics, a dilemma arises when an individual or moral agent encounters choices that do not result in a favorable outcome. In turn, an individual is challenged to make a morally sound decision. Matienzo mentioned the experience of uncertainty among people, but their unwavering faith in an "impersonal Providence" moves people to hold on despite the present risks (Matienzo 2015, 94). This is regarded as an act where people remain grounded in their beliefs about what is true, good, and beautiful; however, when faced with dilemmas, they turn to a divine figure for guidance. It might seem to be a defeatist outlook, but Gripaldo emphasizes that it brings forth the value of trust (Gripaldo 2005). The trust in God that an Ilokano manifests resonates with the *"kinanakem"*[4] of oneself with others. Alterado and Jaramilla pointed to the relationality of an Ilokano to others as seen in the statement *"tao a maipateg"* (a person to be valued), where it emanates *"kinaimbag ti nakem"* (goodwill) through its *"panakilangenlangen"* (relationships) (Alterado and Jaramilla 2019, 101-2). The relationship of an Ilokano to *"Apo Dios"* (God) is deeply rooted in their *"pammati"* (belief) that they can overcome whatever struggles they face.

3.1.3. Pacifist conflict settlements

The third circumstance is about pacifistic conflict settlement. This circumstance points to the use of *makaammo'n ti Apo* as a way for an individual to avoid escalating tensions. When an Ilokano faces conflicts or checkmate situations, tensions may arise, and as an expression of one's *nakem*, an Ilokano might not resort to an aggressive or direct approach to these situations. From the participant's perspective, their responses are as follows:

I use it when I have a conflict with someone, and instead of escalating the conflict by engaging more with the problem, I say "makaammo'n ti Apo kanyana" (Let God be the one to deal with it) ***(P1)***. *... When I cannot understand why people are reacting to me differently, I do not spend effort dealing with such, I entrust them to God. "Makaammo ti Apo kanya dan" (Let God deal with them)* ***(P3)***.

The responses portray the non-direct/non-aggressive approach of an Ilokano towards conflict. Situations manifest a person's *"kina-anus"* (patience) and *"kinatibker iti pakinakem"* (resoluteness). These attributes arise from the

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[4] *Kinanakem* is derived from the word "*nakem*" which could mean one's thoughts, feelings, intellect, essence, and morality. For Alterado, it would also mean one's interiority. In the context of this statement, it dwells on the interiority (pagkatao) of an Ilokano. Danilo S. Alterado, Godofredo P.G. Nebrija, and Raul Leandro D. Villanueva, "Nakem and Virtue Ethics: Framing the Ilokano and Amianan Sense of Good Life," *Humanities Diliman* 20, no. 1 (2023).

experiences of Ilokanos with the *"sanut ti biag"* (whip of life's challenges and hardships) that are influenced by their unfortunate geographical location (Alterado et al. 2023, 31). The responses include *"kinaanus and kinatibker ti kainakem"* because the challenges must be overcome, but one must turn to God for the courage and knowledge to do so. This pacifist approach to conflict settlement is not a cowardly or avoidant means but rather a manifestation of hope where there is still a positive thing or a response that would happen despite the tenacity of the problem (Garcia 2024, 168). Aside from this, the *kinanakem* of an Ilokano is also grounded in their *pakilinangenlangen*; hence, their relationship with others is not strained when facing conflicts.

3.2. Reasons for *Makaammo'n ti Apo* Preference

3.2.1. Family and cultural upbringing

The first theme that surfaced in answering the second question is the participants' family and cultural upbringing, which is why *makaammo'n ti Apo* is their go-to statement. Upbringing conserves the ancestors' values/practices, and opinions (Panov 2013, 1). It carries on learned values and traditions from people one has directly interacted with and grown up with in the previous chapters of their life. It can be seen in the statements below how it held significance among the participants when asked why *makaammo'n ti Apo* is their default phrase when confronted with the different situations they mentioned in the previous section of the paper.

> *It is part of the culture and tradition I grew up with. If there are difficulties, it is God whom we should ask for help. (P1). ... I was raised in a religious family and community where it is part of the culture to recognize the help of God (P3).*

The participants explicitly mentioned that the practice of asking for God's help in times of difficulty and uncertainty is from their family and culture. The religious background of their families was also mentioned. It can be implied from their statements that if they talk about culture, it is the collective Ilokano culture they are referring to, which is constituted by their communal values, traditions, and practices. Supporting literature has already pointed out how religious the Ilokanos are. The Ilokanos' rich culture and religiosity can be observed in the celebrations of their festivities (Tagay and Ballesteros 2016, 27-40). Part of the Ilokano cultural upbringing is also the practice of *"atang,"* even in the present (Corpuz 2020, 113-26). The current liturgical celebrations in the Ilokano communities can also be observed with their fusion of cultural aspects, which is still part of carrying on the tradition of the Ilokano community from before (Almazan 2023, 7-33). In addition to what has been discussed, this study also found that asking for God's help in times of need, expressed through *makaammo'n ti Apo*, is

a cultural upbringing among the Ilokanos. Just like any Filipino, asking for the help of someone transcendent is a culturally embedded practice.

3.2.2. Faith expression

Despite having many aspects and paradoxical qualities, faith is commonly personal, subjective, and more profound than organized religion and relates to the relationship with God (Victor et al. 2020, 107-13). The participants' statement below depicts how their relationship with God inspires their expression of *makaammo'n ti Apo.*

> *It is part of my faith that God can make things matter when our efforts do not matter. As an Ilokano Christian, it is part of my belief – to always have faith in God* **(P1).** *... It is a convenient expression because, for someone who has faith, everything may fail except God, and trusting in Him and His ways will always be the way to go* **(P2).**

What was portrayed in the participants' statements is religious faith—the recognition of God and entrusting one's endeavor to Him. The participants show confidence in their relationship with God, and this is why every time they are in a state of uncertainty, despair, or doubt, they immediately implore the help of God. It is done through their expression of *makaammo'n ti Apo.* An Ilokano saying, "*makaammo'n ti Apo*," expresses how they value their relationship with God. They confidently express such faith by entrusting that God is with them no matter what they go through. Just like any human relationship, the focal point of calling something a relationship is the presence of trust and commitment. Trust in a relationship also involves the simultaneous existence of positive and negative elements (Pratt and Dirks 2017, 117-36). Additionally, trust in the Lord leads towards *pannakapnek,* which translates to *pannakaisalakan* (Alterado 2023). [5] Therefore, the kind of faith the Ilokanos express is a relationship grounded on trust and confidence in God.

3.3.3. Automatic response mechanism

While the other participants heavily value the culture they grew up with and their religious faith as the main reason for their preference for *makaammo'n ti Apo*, other participants also highlighted a common yet personal reason for such. The participants' statements below feature *makaammo'n ti Apo,* likened to other common expressions and mindsets that do not necessarily reflect one's upbringing or faith, but a default expression emanating from daily language usage or common speech response.

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[5] *Pannakpnek* is an Iloko term which translates to "fullness/satisfaction". *Pannakaisalakan* is an Iloko term which translates to "salvation". Alterado, citing Valdez, stated that "*Pannakapnek* is preconditioned by the practice of *naimbag a nakem* in each person and the community" This leads to the the experience of *naimbag a biag* (good life).

"I did what I did, and I have decided already." Whenever I am in that situation, I say makaammo'n ti Apo as a default expression (P1). ... It easily comes out of my mouth when I realize how serious a situation is. Especially when all things were decided upon, I later realized that there was a deficiency in how I decided. I cannot ask for time to move backward (P3).

The statements depict the recognition of time's irreversibility. The participants mentioned situations where *makaammo'n ti Apo* suddenly surfaces out of one's lack of other choice but to wait for what will happen next. It is seen that God's plan differs from one's own, which can be a source of complacency in life (Dean 2023). Although the statements reflect one's religious and cultural background, how they utilize and express *makaammo'n ti Apo* varies randomly compared to other participants. It appears that anyone, even not an Ilokano, but constantly hearing it from a colleague, will be able to spout it to fit one's situation.

Nevertheless, despite the randomness of the participants portrayed in the statements, the purpose of its usage still aligns. Mashal posits the role of randomness, which makes God emerge into us in an unexpected moment or situation through spirit-to-spirit communication and prayer (Mashal 2019). Therefore, it still accounts for the capacity of *makaammo'n ti Apo* to resonate spiritual, religious, and cultural values among those who patronize it.

3.4. *Makaammo'n ti Apo* as Ilokano Spirituality

Spirituality is a commonly used concept, but it has never had a universal definition. Establishing a universal definition of spirituality is elusive (Jastrzębski 2022, 113-31). Therefore, this study does not claim a universal or all-encompassing view of spirituality. Instead, it will discuss spirituality in how the Ilokanos make sense of their actions and the world, considering their relationship with themselves, others, and God.

3.4.1. *Acknowledging human limitations*

The primary theme from the interviews is the acknowledgment by the participants of their human limitations. The participants' recognition of their limitations affects how they relate to themselves, others, and God. It also affects how they see life in general and how they perform to achieve something personally and professionally. The statements below show the acknowledgment of their usage of *makaammo'n ti Apo*.

It makes me realize that our human ways are limited, imperfect, and insufficient. However, in realizing my human limitations, God's omnipotence, providence, and wisdom are more appreciated (P2). … It is humbling to know that I cannot do everything independently (P3).

Self-differentiation, self-awareness, and other awareness are integral to spirituality (Gordon 2009, 5163). Self-awareness includes recognizing one's finitude

and limitations. One will know where to ground oneself regarding capacity, capability, expectations, and relationships by knowing one's limitations. People who acknowledge their limitations do not elevate themselves to a god-like status, believing they can possess everything. Recognizing one's limitations is important for relating to oneself, others, God, and the environment. The same case applies to how the participants' statements depict humbled Ilokano people as a result of limitations. By recognizing they cannot do all things, they have to ask fellow human beings and God for help, the more they entrust themselves to someone more than human: God.

3.4.2. Amplifying confidence in living

Their utterance of *makaammo'n ti Apo* assures them of a better life. Despite recognizing that they are imperfect, limited, and fully aware of their finitude, the Ilokano participants are not living in fear. Instead, they exemplify a typical Ilokano who enjoys life no matter what life brings. Alterado (2023, 176), in support, claims that Ilokanos are willing to invest time, effort, and all possible resources to acquire *pannakapnek* in life through the traits of *anus, gaget,* and *kired*.[6] The spirituality shaped and influenced by the *makaammo'n ti Apo* expression positively develops their relationship with others, performance, and trust in life and God. It confirms the idea that spirituality helps positively develop people and humanity (Lerner et al. 2005, 60).

First, the Ilokano's confidence in living is manifested through enhanced conflict resolution. Other awareness is a significant aspect of spirituality (Gordon 2009, 51). Awareness of others' existence and needs substantially affects one's dispositions, perspectives, and actions. The participants are fully aware of the differences between them and others. With differences come conflicts and misunderstandings. Though these are threats to relationships, they are also part of the thrills of human relations. For the participants, when dealing with conflicts with other people, *makaammo'n ti Apo* played a significant role in the peaceful and amicable settlement of conflicts. Below are the participants' statements evidencing such.

> *Furthermore, in relating to others, I am kinder to them, for God operates in our lives. Without God, everything would be in chaos. If anything happens, makaammo'n ti Apo anyway.* **(P4)**.
> *... I do not like arguments. I do not like to use it against a person because it affects me as a person. When I take things to heart, it really affects my life – it causes me stress. So, I surrender it to Him so that my feelings will lighten* **(P8)**.

The participants choosing a pacifist stance in dealing with problems may seem to tolerate negativity. The participants call it being kind to avoid conflicts. However, as pointed out multiple times by Participant 8, it is for the benefit of

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[6] *Anus* is an Iloko term for "patience", *gaget* is "industry", and *kired* is "courage".

both parties involved in the conflict. Neither party will be harmed in the situation; they can let time and God do their thing to resolve the conflicts. Such a pacifist stance comes when they entrust God to deal with the conflict by saying *makaammo'n ti Apo*. Distancing from conflict instead of aggravating it reflects the Ilokanos being peace lovers and motivated to live positively. This reflects the importance of *ulimek* (silence) in leading towards genuine listening to one's *nakem* as it fosters interconnectedness with oneself, the world, and the greater cosmos (Alterado 2015). In this case, spirituality is not only knowing how to deal with other people but also pursuing positivity amidst all the expected chaos of the world.

Second, the Ilokano's secured future engagements manifest their confidence in living. Aside from dealing with conflicts positively that constitute the Ilokanos' confidence in living their lives, their hopefulness for the future is also notable in the interviews. The Ilokanos' hopefulness and their trust in God make them feel secure in the future. Hope has been proven to predict positive well-being (Ciarrocchi and Deneke 2005, 161-83). Hope is also an essential aspect of spirituality. The higher the level of spirituality, the lower the chances of feeling helplessness (Tsitsigkou 2024). Hope is evident among the Ilokano participants, making them confident in living their lives and letting them know that things will still be fine, whatever comes their way. This can be seen in the statements below.

> *I am also confident that God is there anyway when things go wrong with my decisions. That is part of resilience* **(P3)**. ... *At the same time, the positive outlook affects me because it removes what we worry about.* **(P4)**.

The sense of confidence among the participants surfaced as being attached to happiness. The confidence they acquire through their patronage of *makaammo'n ti Apo* or the entrusting of one's future endeavors to God is a facet of spirituality being lived by the participants. The way they live out their spirituality contributes to their claims of happiness. It has long been established that spirituality, or how one relates to someone bigger than oneself, directly correlates to happiness (Özgenel and Yılmaz 2020, 287-300). The participants' happiness is being free from fear of what might happen in the future. They live their lives enjoying the present moment and, at the same time, not worrying about tomorrow. Anyway, if tomorrow comes, *makaammo'n ti Apo*—God is there.

Third, the Ilokano's heightened sense of responsibility manifests their confidence in living. *Makaammo'n ti Apo* serves as a reminder and source of inspiration to fulfill obligations when times get rough and seemingly impossible to get things done due to struggles. This particular aspect of the *makaammo'n ti Apo* expression elucidates the seeming loophole in the participants' subscription to *makaammo'n ti Apo*. The loophole in *makaammo'n ti Apo* is the same as in *"Bahala Na"* spirituality, where there seems to be total surrender. However, this theme emphasizes that an Ilokano's subscription to *makaammo'n ti Apo* is not a mere

surrender. Instead, it is doing one's part and surrendering things beyond human control to God. The statements below will provide evidence for the claim.

> *Yes, in silence, it makes me think/reflect… There are realizations that maybe this choice is not for me, and I need to do something about it* **(P6)**. *... As a professional, it motivates me to continue and persevere even if it is complicated. As a human being, it is not being lax, but it makes me optimistic* **(P7)**. *It invites our initiative to do something no matter what* **(P5)**.

The participants pointed out that action and efforts are part of entrusting to God. It confirms that faith comes with action. Otherwise, it would be a dead one or merely optimism without accompanying efforts. The responses also depict the earlier-mentioned characteristics of Ilokanos. Ilokanos are hardworking and thrifty (Pacris 2024). Therefore, an implication can be drawn from the participants' statements that work is part of the Ilokano spirituality manifested through their *makaammo'n ti Apo* mindset. The said spirituality is similar to the "*Ora et Labora*" spirituality, where work and prayer come into fusion (Hoffman 2007).

3.4.3. Recognition of the divine

Spirituality has many definitions and facets, and can be easily recognized if it is attached to or in recognition of someone more than human (Sharma and Sharma 2016, 2-6). The very utterance of the word is in recognition of the existence of a supreme, divine, or transcendent being, who, for the Ilokano participants, is the Christian God. Therefore, the summation of *makaammo'n ti Apo* as spirituality is in the Ilokanos' recognition of the divine.

First, the recognition of the divine among the Ilokano participants comes with entrusting themselves to God. It has been pointed out in the earlier sections that efforts accompany their expression of faith in God when they say *makaammo'n ti Apo*. In this section, the statements below show that the participants express a sense of surrender. However, it is important to note that surrender happens with what they cannot control, like what will happen in the following hours or with an already done event.

> *I surrender to God my human limits. For whatever I fail to do, may God take charge* **(P5)**. *... life is unpredictable; thus, I pray every time I wake up, "makaammo kan Apo, please guide me"* **(P6)**.

Entrusting one's future, works, and efforts to God are common patterns of spirituality observed among religious groups whose founders exemplified such a kind of life—a total surrender of everything to God. The participants' statements resemble such spirituality. Surrender is not about being callous and lazy to expect someone to do the work for them. Instead, it is an act of faith, hopefulness, and worship marked with respect for the one whom they owe and share the life they live.

Second, fortifying one's faith is strengthening one's relationship with God. One is responsible for growing in the relationship one commits to, especially with God. Cultivation of one's faith in God is not for His benefit. Instead, it is more beneficial to people since the act leads to their betterment and capacity to transcend their humanity (Davids and Waghid, 2018). The use of *makaammo'n ti Apo* among the participants, as evidenced by the statements below, helped strengthen their faith as Christians.

> *I do not use it as a mere word but instead act on this faith wholeheartedly. When I say makaammo'n ti Apo, I need to help myself to do what I can do and have the courage to face the things that I am facing (**P5**). ... It is not just saying the word, but there is a need to help oneself to pray, go to church, to worship, where it would grow that faith (**P5**).*

The participants' statements highlight that having and strengthening one's faith is not to elate and appease God. Instead, strengthening one's faith is recognizing the guidance and help God is offering them. The Ilokanos recognize that it is not God who needs the people but the people needing God. Alterado and Barayuga (2025), in their readings on Isabelo Delos Reyes, noted that *"nakem"* unites the innermost core of Ilokanos, including one's faith, culture, ecology, and relationships. With this, one's faith is fortified in God and how one relates to each other, the world, and the greater cosmos. Thus, fortifying one's faith, through *makaammo'n ti Apo*, leads one to recognize the divine and further affirm his divinity.

Makaammo'n ti Apo, as portrayed in this descriptive study, lays the foundation for recognizing Ilokano spirituality. While descriptive, the paper opened the directions and possibilities of Ilokano cultural contributions to contemporary religious and theological studies. The significance and relevance it holds among the Ilokanos are equally important for recognition, as any other cultural group holds a place in the identified body of knowledge. The study also affirmed and supported existing studies on the topic. The topic examined was woven into other Ilokano expressions and terminologies. The versatility of *makaammo'n ti Apo*, as a mindset and an expression, to be talked hand-in-hand with other Ilokano and Filipino concepts, proves its pervasiveness and deep cultural and religious significance among the Ilokanos. This landmark study can ignite more studies to feature and examine the richness of the Ilokano and Filipino culture and traditions intertwined with religiosity, from which their spirituality emanates.

4. Conclusion

The study confirmed once again that spirituality emanates from culture and religion. *Makaammo'n ti Apo*, as an expression and prayer emanating from the Ilokano culture and tradition, proved its worth and relevance as an Ilokano spirituality. *Makaammo'n ti Apo*, as an Ilokano spirituality, dwells in the innermost self

of an Ilokano, grasping for its interconnectedness to everything, from natural to the supernatural. Such spirituality radiates the unique communal identity of the Ilokanos, where community is everything. Though the study surfaced a facet only of the Ilokano spirituality, significant realizations surfaced that the way they think and relate with others (including God, other creations, and the environment) are always in consideration of other people.

However, the study's result cannot be claimed universally, as there are limitations in the representation of the whole Ilokano community. This is just an attempt to discover a facet of how Ilokanos are, particularly their dealings with life and belief in the supernatural. Considering the findings and discussions, this study is also an invitation among the different fields to excavate the richness of Ilokano culture, provided through their different lenses. Future studies might want to delve into this phenomenon's philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and linguistic facets, which were focused on in this study. Nevertheless, this study's ideas, thoughts, and knowledge are relevant to understanding contemporary faith and spirituality, particularly of the Ilokanos.

Statements and Declarations

The intellectual content of this paper, including its conceptualization, problematization, argumentation, and drafting, was produced exclusively by the authors. Grammarly was the only AI tool used, solely for grammar checking and linguistic correction. No other generative artificial intelligence tools were used.

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