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# Examining Filipino Popular Piety in the light of Vatican II's *Directory of Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*

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## Abstract

Celebrating popular piety in different regions reflects the vibrant, diverse, and festive culture of the Philippines. The innumerable religious practices through rites and ceremonies show the intensity and vibrance of Filipino Catholic spirituality. It is part of the heritage and unique identity of the Filipino Catholic Church to the extent that it also impacts the local liturgical calendar. Given this distinctive characteristic of popular piety, finding its harmony with the liturgy is challenging. The focus on the ritual aspect of popular piety diverges from orthodoxy, raising conflict between its praxis and Church teachings, which allows for misinterpretation and syncretism. This paper will employ a descriptive research design to assess the reception of Vatican II's *Directory of Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines* (DPPL), using the method of critical reflection. It comprehensively analyzes the reception of DPPL and its profound impact on Catholicism in the Philippines. This study aims to establish an understanding of popular piety as a valid form of worship through analysis and evaluation of the process of inculturation to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of these practices. It enriches theological discourse on the realm of inculturation, which leads to the preservation of cultural heritage and the understanding that popular piety is an encounter of evangelization and culture that should be treated with profound respect and mutual understanding.

**Keywords:** popular piety, liturgy, inculturation, popular religiosity, devotion

## 1 Introduction

The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) *aggiornamento* aimed to renew the Church in response to the contemporary world. One of the council's documents, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, called for a reform of the liturgy and necessitated the recognition of popular piety. In response, Vatican II issued the

DPPL in 2001. This document offered guidance on integrating popular piety, the religious practices of people from local culture, with the liturgy. In order to enhance comprehension of the study of popular piety in the Philippine setting, it is important to establish clear definitions of relevant terms. Within various regions of the country, there is a tendency to conflate the concepts of popular piety, popular religiosity, and devotion, resulting in frequent interchangeability.

The document with the authority to define these terms is the 2001 DPPL. It defines popular piety as “diverse cultic expressions of a private or community nature ... in the context of the Christian faith” (DPPL, 9). while popular religiosity is a “universal experience ... of people, nations, and their collective expressions but does not always necessarily refer to Christian revelation” (DPPL, 10). On the other hand, devotion refers to “various external practices (e.g. prayers, hymns, observances attached to particular times or places, insignia, medals, habits or customs) animated by the attitude of faith” (DPPL, 8). The prevalence of misconceptions regarding these terms can be attributed to a deficiency in catechesis. In this regard, the author will employ the phrase “popular piety” in this study following the official title of the magisterial document.

## 2 Research Methodology

The study examines the theological foundation of popular piety as an expression of faith that finds its harmony with the liturgy, focusing on how these practices coexist and influence each other. It uses the method of critical reflection on the DPPL to frame the analysis, providing principles and guidelines for evaluating the validity of popular piety. The method also integrates historical, cultural and anthropological aspects of popular piety, providing a comprehensive view of the lived experiences of the faithful and the cultural context in which these religious practices occur. The study also evaluates the process of inculturation, balancing the need for cultural expressions in worship while maintaining fidelity to Catholic doctrine. It also discusses potential challenges, such as syncretism, which may arise when popular piety diverges from liturgical norms. The goal is to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of popular piety as a valid form of worship, emphasizing respect and mutual understanding between popular piety and the liturgy. This multifaceted approach provides insights to guide future practices and pastoral strategies within the Filipino Catholic context.

### 3 Significance of the Study

Catholicism in the Philippines is amplified by popular piety as a profound reservoir of sustaining faith among the Filipinos. The interactions between the two separate domains challenge the complicated correlation between Filipino popular piety and the liturgy. The task, therefore, involves the ability to discern how to handle this relationship and ensure that these expressions do not overshadow the fundamental principles and tenets of Catholicism. This research aims to understand the reception of the DPPL that encompasses not just academic growth but also personal enrichment of how faith is assimilated in the Philippines. The study can also shed light on the tensions between formal liturgy and cultural expressions of faith in the Catholic practices in the country, in the light of Vatican II's liturgical reforms that intended to strike unity amid diversity among the local churches around the globe.

### 4 Popular Piety and the Liturgy

The liturgy is "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed and the fount from which all her power flows" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10; henceforth SC). It requires acknowledging and valuing various expressions of popular religiosity within the Christian community. It possesses an inherent predisposition to establish a connection with the divine, leading to the emergence of popular piety aimed at fulfilling the desire for active participation.

Popular piety is an expression of Christian faith in the culture of the people. It is critical not to dismiss these types of piety and to recognize their relevance in building a sense of communion with God and within the ecclesial community. Hence, the theological foundation of inculturation is the incarnation of Jesus in time and space. Anscar Chupungco (cited by Mark Francis 2014b) asserts that the embodiment of Christ, continued by the Church as the physical representation of Christ in many human cultures, forms the foundation for both the identity and the variety of the liturgy as the Church's way of expressing itself. Nevertheless, due to challenges with inculturation, popular piety can lead to an inevitable distortion of Christian doctrine, resulting in a negative impact on liturgical practices. It can lead to the primacy of the people's devotion, and liturgy becomes secondary. The celebration does not centre on the Paschal mystery of Christ as its focal point. The prayers lack reflection of the trinitarian formula due to their spontaneous nature. Additionally, the absence of scriptural text diminishes its significance, and the pneumatological dimension is disregarded. These challenges arise from disregarding the process of inculturation to address the questions faced by the encounter of evangelization and colonization.

Mark Francis (2014a) asserts that Vatican II emphasizes the role of culture as the heart of the liturgical renewal. However, it seems that the formalization of the liturgy is seen as a hindrance to the cultural and ritual expression of the faithful. The publication of *Liturgiam Authenticam* promulgated by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 2001 has the main objective of offering instructions for translating liturgical texts into vernacular languages. Translations must adhere to precise phrasing and remain unaffected by ideological bias. The original Latin text should be accurately translated into the local language. This document ended the discussions on liturgical inculturation, mandating a literal translation of the text from Latin to vernacular without any omissions, additions, or paraphrases. It loses the soul of the text that touches the heart of the locals. The culture expressed in the language of the prayers hinders the intelligent participation of the faithful. Popular piety, on the other hand, allows authentic and spontaneous expression of faith to be received in the culture of the people. It involves the body, heart, and mind, whereas, in comparison, the liturgy is perceived as formal, repetitive, rubric- and formula-driven. This distinguishing feature of popular piety provides a divergence from the liturgy.

However, popular piety serves as a channel for the people of God to engage in spiritual expression, foster a profound relationship with God and facilitate the enrichment of faith experiences and understanding, for “no one who loves God’s holy people will view these actions as the expression of a purely human search for the divine” (*Evangeli Gaudium*, 125, henceforth EG).

## 5 Popular Piety in the Philippines

Filipinos are known for being religious and pious and are even described as spirit-oriented, which denotes their active search for the divine and relating themselves to the supreme being (Catechism for the Filipino Catholics, 469; henceforth CFC). This identity is expressed in popular piety, which includes a wide range of cultic practices within the Christian faith that are driven by the assimilation of the beliefs and culture of the people and can be done alone or with a group. In the interplay between evangelization and culture, Jose De Mesa, cited by Josefina Tondo (2010), discusses whether Filipinos have actually been Christianized or if Christianity has just been adapted to fit the Filipino culture. Perhaps history will provide an insightful answer to this assertion. Christianity touched the Philippines’ soil in the year 1521 with the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan. The arrival of Spanish colonizers in the Philippines imported the Western canons and introduced the Catholic faith, which has since become an integral component of the Filipino identity. Chupungco (2014) asserts that the missionaries introduced Western spirituality to Filipino culture, incorporating the

Baroque style in the liturgy. Hence, the pre-colonial practices in the archipelago bear a resemblance to the celebratory characteristics of the Baroque period, which are characterized by opulent displays in festivals, extravagant visual elements, elaborate sacred artwork and images, expressive dances, theatrical presentations and musical performances. Macaranas (2021) argues that because of the length of time that the Philippines has been under Spanish colonization, the native pre-colonial culture and Indigenous worship have assimilated Christian doctrines and teachings. In this regard, Foley (2024) asserts the importance of inculturation, citing that gaining control over language, ritual, and music will direct liturgical movement as a form of decolonization.

Furthermore, human beings have an innate desire to relate with the supreme being. Filipinos inherently gravitate towards tangible and practical manifestations of their faith and religious encounters (CFC, 1534). This faith is expressed in popular piety as the treasure of the Church and a form of spirituality that reflects the experiences of the Filipino people. The image of the crucified Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary as intercessor, and the paschal mystery of Christ achieved in the lives of the Saints is a tangible reality that we have a God who can sympathize with our everyday problems and who is with us to celebrate our joy. This may explain why people find this form of worship fulfilling in pursuing a spiritual connection with God. Tondo (2010) affirms that in decision-making, Filipino cultural values and notions such as *bahala na* (Whatever events occur are within the realm of God's permission) are closely connected to faith. It is not an act of surrender but a manifestation of hope that God is in control of everything. In this, we can see that faith does not only interplay with culture, but their devotion also amplifies trust in the grace and mercy of God.

Faith exerts a substantial impact on society through the assimilation of Christian doctrines into the culture, having an impact on both personal and socio-political realities. The expression of religious devotion in the Philippines is commonly observed through various forms of "popular devotions, processions, altar and shrines, religious drama ... and dance ... these expressions of faith are festive, felt, spontaneous ... expressive, immediate, communitarian, collective, joyful, symbolic, traditional, alive" (Chupungco 2014: 329). It is demonstrated by the act of visiting well-known churches that are associated with specific devotions, embarking on a pilgrimage to express gratitude to God or seek blessings, touching sacred images of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and saints, participating in religious processions, engaging in extended periods of prayer known as novenas, and undertaking long journeys to see various religious celebrations. The prevalent acceptance of religious beliefs among the general populace can be comprehended as the extensive transmission and embodiment of the religion inherited and assimilated into the cultural fabric of the Philippines.

The profound prevalence of the spirituality of popular piety within the Philippine setting significantly influences the local liturgical calendar. The commemoration of the Nativity of Jesus Christ takes place on December 25. It will be presided over by a major procession in commemoration of the *Traslacion ng Poong Itim na Nazareno* (Feast of the Transfer of Image of the Black Nazarene from its original Shrine in Intramuros to the Quiapo Church, now declared as The National Shrine of the Black Nazarene) on January 9, followed by the commemoration of the feast of the child Jesus, Santo Niño, in the subsequent week since this feast falls in the third week of January. These three Christocentric festivities are observed and enormously celebrated by a large number of people in the Philippine archipelago. The celebration of Christmas reflects the culture of festivity, even in the difficulty of life brought about by various forms of economic oppression. The resilience of Filipinos is shown in their attendance during the *Traslacion*, which they relate to the image of the suffering Christ, and lastly, the love for children is evident during the feast of the Santo Niño as the epicentre of the Catholic faith. Utilizing the “baby-adult-child” pattern of celebration, while possessing a comical quality, enhances the religious conviction of the people, fortifies their sense of belief, and expresses their unwavering devotion, which moulds the hearts of Filipinos. Chupungco (2014) affirmed that this phenomenon under consideration exhibits a profound connection to societal issues and human emotions while embodying a celebratory, heartfelt, spontaneous and expressive nature.

## 6 Gestures and Language of Popular Piety in the Philippines

Philippine culture is embedded in the celebration of different forms of popular piety across the country. It is evident in the gestures and language of the ritual acts that engage a Filipino Christian.

### 6.1 Gestures

The gestural characteristic of popular piety in the Philippines is distinguished by the presence of extravagant and exaggerated bodily motions, which extend beyond the mere acts of kissing or caressing religious images and objects, serving as symbolic actions as reflected in DPPL, 15:

*Popular piety is characterized by a great variety and richness of bodily, gestural, and symbolic expressions: kissing or touching images, places, relics, and sacred objects; pilgrimages, processions; going bare-footed or on one's knees; kneeling and prostrating; wearing medals and badges ... These and similar expressions, handed down from father to son, are direct and simple ways of giving external expression to the heart and to one's commitment to live the Christian life. Without this interior aspect, symbolic gesture runs the risk of degenerating into empty customs or mere superstitions, in the worst cases.*

The rich cultural diversity of the Philippines has contributed to the emergence of various symbolic gestures within the context of Christian liturgy. The gestural acts performed during the Lenten season in the country, like the actual crucifixion in Cutud, Pampanga, walking pilgrimages going to Antipolo Cathedral (*Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage*), and flagellation as a form of penance are identities of Filipino religiosity. It is crucial to recognize the beauty and charism of popular piety while appreciating its anthropological and cultural aspects. However, it is important to use moderation in these displays of Filipino devotion to ensure they align with sound theological principles and can feasibly harmonize with the liturgical celebration.

Furthermore, gestures are not only limited to actions but are evident in dance. The music of the people “is instinctively linked with hand-clapping, rhythmic corporeal movements, and even dance. Such are external forms of interior sentiment and are part of popular traditions, especially on occasions such as patronal feasts” (DPPL, 17). The surrounding environment undeniably influences the manifestation of an individual’s emotions through dance. In the country, a known dance ritual for fertility is celebrated in Obando, Bulacan, under the Patronage of St Paschal of Baylon, St Claire and Our Lady of Salambao. In addition, street dances are performed in different parts of the country during the celebration of *Santo Niño*, particularly in Cebu and Tondo. From this, we can understand that the language of the body is the language of piety.

However, can we consider dancing a meaningful form and expression of Christian faith because the liturgy, in its strict sense, does not have provision for dancing during liturgical celebrations? In biblical times, we can see dancing as a form of worship: “Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the *Lord* with all his might, while he and all Israel were bringing up the ark of the *Lord* with shouts and the sound of trumpets” (2 Sam. 6.14-22).

In this biblical text, we can see the encounter of faith and local culture. The convergence of beautiful, pleasing bodily movements, coupled with the supplications and devotions of individuals, presents an intriguing manifestation of faith that fosters a profound connection with the divine. Dancing processions are a distinctive embodiment of the convergence between evangelization and cultural expressions.

Historical and cultural factors naturally mark popular piety. For this reason, it needs to be considered in assimilating the Christian faith in language and gestures. It is vital to acknowledge that the process of inculturation places significance on preserving fundamental aspects of a particular cultural viewpoint, especially how Filipinos understand Christianity as influenced by “personal and national historical experiences of pain and struggle, of victory and celebration” (CFC, 31).

## 6.2 Language

It is imperative for the Church to embody the essence of Christ in all linguistic contexts because the theological principles of the Christian faith are conveyed through language that is influenced by cultural perspectives. The prayer used in popular piety incorporates the notions of “*pamilya*” (pertaining to family), “*kahirapan*” (referring to poverty), “*pagsamo*” (signifying supplication), “*pangako*” (representing promise) and “*pagmamahal*” (indicating love) (all translations by the author).

The perfect example is the novena prayer to Our Lady of Perpetual Help enshrined in Baclaran Church:

*We, too, have our crosses and trials.  
Sometimes they almost crush us to the ground.  
Dearest Mother,  
share with us your abundant faith and confidence in God.  
Make us aware that God never ceases to love us;  
that he answers all our prayers  
in the way that is best for us.  
Strengthen our hearts to carry the cross  
in the footsteps of your divine Son.  
Help us to realize  
that he who shares the cross of Christ  
will certainly share his resurrection.  
(Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer  
Baclaran, Metro Manila, Philippines, May 1994)*

The prayers associated with popular piety have a socio-political dimension and are connected to societal problems: poverty, health, education and food in the Philippines are indicative of several concepts that hold significance in the daily lives of its populace. In this context, “we have a fact of fundamental theological and pastoral significance: it is the poor, the object of God’s special love, who understand best” (Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, 22).

However, because the prayers are from the cultural perspective of a particular community, they may lose their inspiration from “Sacred Scripture, the Liturgy, the Fathers of the Church and the Magisterium, and concord with the Church’s faith” (DPPL, 16).

The theological aspect of popular piety is made apparent by including scriptural readings. Paul VI emphasizes the significance of incorporating biblical elements into



popular piety, stating, “today it is recognized as a general need of Christian piety that every form of worship should have a biblical imprint” (Marialis Cultus, 30). The celebration of popular piety must be accompanied by scriptural text because “sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation” (Dei Verbum, 24). It is noteworthy to observe that the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy includes a provision for conducting a Bible service prior to the commencement of the liturgical celebration given that the solemnities and festivities are widely observed in the archipelago:

*Bible services should be encouraged, especially on the vigils of the more solemn feasts, on some weekdays in Advent and Lent, and on Sundays and feast days. They are particularly to be commended in places where no priest is available; when this is so, a deacon or some other person authorized by the bishop should preside over the celebration. (SC, 35)*

The conscience of the people “is gradually formed through Scripture and the Church’s living Tradition” (CFC, 99). Given that the Word of God is the bedrock of our Catholic faith, “it encourages popular piety to discover the harmony between the Old and New Testaments and to interpret one in the light of the other ... in choosing biblical texts, it is always desirable to take short texts that are easily memorized, incisive, and easily understood, even if difficult to actualize” (DPPL, 89). Through this, the Church commemorates the manifestation of redemption in the present day through the proclamation of the Word of God and the observance of ritual practices. Hence, popular piety supplements the thirst for biblical text.

Moreover, the aesthetic appeal of language extends beyond its usage in religious prayers, encompassing the lyrical compositions found within sacred music as well. The music of the Philippine Catholic Church has a distinct characteristic: it is festive and romantic. In fact, it has been explicitly explained that “Filipinos are kundiman-oriented. The *kundiman* is a sad Filipino song about wounded love. Filipinos are naturally attracted to heroes sacrificing everything for love. They are patient and forgiving to a fault” (CFC, 39). The devotional, religious and even liturgical songs in the country acquire a *kundiman* dimension. For example, here is an excerpt of the Marian song “*Stella Maris*” by Bukas Palad Music Ministry in 1997:

*Maria sa puso ninuman (Mary in the heart of all)  
Ika’y tala ng kalangitan. (You shine brighter like a star in the sky.)  
Ningning mo ay walang pagmamaliw (There are no words to describe your light)  
Inang sinta inang ginigiliw (My dear beloved Mother)  
(translation by the author)*

The Filipino terms “*Sinta*” (Dear) and “*Ginigiliw*” (Beloved) could serve as expressions that capture the deep-seated Marian devotion observed among the Filipino populace. It is not surprising that Marian devotions hold significant popularity within the archipelago. Kroeger (2015) states that the role of Filipino popular religiosity, particularly its devotion to the Virgin Mary, has been acknowledged for its substantial impact on the preservation and advancement of the spiritual lives of local Christians. Pope John Paul II’s remarks on Filipino devotion to Mary as a *pueblo amante de Maria*, a people with a special love and devotion to Mary, indeed reinforced this assertion.

The integration of music in popular piety is an inherent and essential aspect since it facilitates “the conservation of the received corpus of traditional songs ... linked with a biblical and ecclesial spirit which is open to the possibility, where necessary, of their revision or to the composition of new songs” (DPPL, 17). This experience can be perceived as a preliminary encounter with liturgical practices. The ethos of the Vatican II emphasizes the necessity of active participation and an understanding of the musical content. The purpose of sacred music is to evoke a profound sense of connection and communion with the divine. During singing, the faithful connect profoundly with the Trinitarian God, Mary, and the Saints. Kroeger (2015) concurred that these are the circumstances in which popular piety is suitable due to its assurance of veracity and authenticity. Popular piety serves to deepen the faith and strengthen the bond of the People of God. However, it does not escape from misuse, abuse and misinterpretation.

The issue of syncretism has been subject of discussion for the longest time, although some theologians seem to view this terminology in a very positive manner and an inevitable stage of inculturation. Hence, since any evangelization will be incarnated in a specific culture, Pope Paul VI emphasizes that popular piety ‘is subject to penetration by many distortions of religion and superstition and might endanger the ecclesial community’ (Evangeliis Nuntiandis, 48). Syncretism is the process of amalgamating one or more religious systems to form a novel system by incorporating beliefs and unconnected traditions. Religious syncretism is prominently observed, as seen by the presence of many religious symbols, such as the image of *Santo Niño*, Buddha, and lucky charms, which are commonly displayed in commercial establishments. Furthermore, the practices of baptism, weddings, and funerals are often accompanied by the incorporation of superstitious beliefs. In this context, numerous misunderstandings regarding Christian concepts may emerge, distorting the teachings and principles that are upheld. In light of the proselytizing nature of prevalent religious practices, it is imperative to delineate the boundaries that separate the incorporation of faith, culture, and individual inclinations inside our spiritual beliefs so that “it may never incorporate rites permeated by magic, superstition, animism, vendettas or sexual connotations” (Varietates Legitimae, 48)

## 7 Reflection

Popular piety enriches the liturgical celebration. It must maintain a discernible identity while aligning harmoniously with the liturgy because “the spiritual life, however, is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy” (SC, 12). However, popular piety must find its culmination in the liturgical celebration. Given its significance in the lives of the faithful, it is imperative that it remains intact and not be eliminated. It is the very mind of the Constitution when it states:

*Popular devotions of the Christian people are to be highly commended, provided they accord with the laws and norms of the Church, above all when they are ordered by the Apostolic See. But these devotions should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some fashion derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them. (SC, 13)*

What is said of the “Christian liturgy is also true of popular piety” (DPPL, 12). Hence, it is suggestive that the prayers of popular piety exhibit a trinitarian dimension in the sense that “faithful require instruction on the character of Christian prayer, which is directed to the Father, through the mediation of the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit” (DPPL, 80). Its celebration assumes a centrality on the Paschal mystery of Christ while duly recognizing the integral role played by the Holy Spirit in guiding the faithful throughout worship, and the observance must foster an ecclesial dimension. In the pursuit of achieving harmony, “it is important that the question of the relationship between popular piety and the liturgy not be posed in terms of contradiction, equality, or, indeed, of substitution” (DPPL, 50). Since popular piety arises from the faith of the people, it must be taken care of with profound respect and mutual understanding. The harmonization must radiate the principle of sound tradition and legitimate progress.

The DPPL provided a framework for assessing and revitalizing popular piety that can be adopted in the Philippine setting. It serves as a foundation for developing pastoral suggestions and local principles and guidelines for the renewal of popular piety in the country. The harmonization of popular piety is governed by several key principles, namely the “biblical, liturgical, ecumenical, and anthropological spirit” (DPPL, 12).

However, it is interesting to note that the principle for renewal of popular piety is only enshrined in DPPL 12, with a vague description and subject for interpretation. There is no specific mention of whether the four criteria must be met or how they should be applied in a specific context. In this regard, there are aspects that need

consultation and discussion of local theologians. For example, several manifestations of popular piety have no biblical basis. One instance is the widely known Easter procession, *Encuentro* or *Salubong*, which occurs at dawn after the Easter Vigil Mass. *Salubong* is a procession that portrays the encounter between Jesus and Mary, his mother following his resurrection. Curiously, there is no biblical evidence to support this practice, but the Filipino people firmly believe that Jesus initially appeared to his mother. This obstacle hinders the process of renewing and aligning different expressions of popular piety with the liturgy. It will present a dilemma since one of the principles presented by the DPPL is for popular piety to be guided by a biblical spirit. It is now the task of theologians and liturgists to establish the biblical foundation of the respected popular piety in their place.

Perhaps the *Salubong* is the world in front of the text for the faithful. This faith is grounded in the resurrection account amplified by the matristic culture of Filipinos.

In this sense, perhaps it is best to look at the case of the *Sabuaga* festival. Cunanan (2021) examines the relationship between liturgy and popular piety in the context of the *Sabuaga* Festival, an Easter Sunday celebration in Sto Tomas, Pampanga, Philippines. The article discusses how harmony between liturgy and popular piety is achieved in the *Sabuaga* festival.

The author examined how the festival integrates the personal experiences and cultural traditions of the locals with the Paschal mystery of Christ through the ceremonies of *Santa Misa* and *Misa Concelebranda*. In the Philippines, the Holy Week celebration culminates on Easter Sunday and is regarded as a weeklong vacation. This is the period when Catholic individuals studying and working in the capital return to their provinces to reunite with their families and celebrate the Holy Eucharist collectively. The anthropological aspect of Filipino culture, characterized by its familial orientation, is exemplified in the liturgical celebration. Since culture has a vital role in the faith of the people, it is essential to discern its connection with the religious dimension of these practices while giving importance to their anthropological aspects. Bevans (2018) affirms this assertion, citing that it is crucial for the church to communicate the gospel and educate effectively and in an attractive manner, and failing to include the cultural and contextual aspects of faith would be a betrayal of the Church's purpose.

Interestingly, the celebration also became a centre for tourism because of its numerous activities:

*As the Thomasians pray and worship the Risen Christ in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, they unite their lives and history as a people to the mystery of Christ's resurrection. This is evident in the cultural events, which encourage participants to creatively portray the Paschal Mysteries. For example, in the free-interpretation dances, some participants portray the Stabat Mater, wherein the Blessed Mother stood at the foot of the cross in sorrow over her beloved Son's suffering and death. Moreover, the street dancing festivities reenact the believer's courageous anticipation of Christ's resurrection, which they believe is the source of their own future resurrection. (Cunanan 2021: 75)*

As these activities are orchestrated by the parish church and the local government unit, they attract tourists, including Catholics and non-Catholics, providing an excellent opportunity for a dialogue and evangelization that is ecumenical by nature. Since a multitude of devout people gather in these religious events, united within purpose and prayers while manifesting their beliefs, such practices serve as a "*locus theologicus* which demands our attention, especially at a time when we are looking to the new evangelization" (Directory of Catechesis, 338; henceforth DC). The church is an inclusive place because "her nature is a dialogical reality" (DC, 334). It endeavours to facilitate popular piety as a valid form of Christian worship for the contemporary human person, particularly those who have limited religious education and catechetical formation.

Finally, the custom of *Sagalas* involves the scattering of flower petals and the performance of *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*, which is derived from the scriptural verse in Luke 2.35. This practice suggests that the scriptural basis of *Salubong* is not centred on the encounter between Jesus and Mary, but rather on the Resurrection of Christ and an appreciation on the role of the Blessed Mother in the economy of redemption. It lies within the genius of local theologians and liturgists to establish the biblical foundation in renewing popular piety in accordance to the principle of biblical spirit. The author also establishes the biblical roots of the procession by giving evidence from biblical occurrences, such as the Crossing of the Red Sea and the Procession of Death at Golgotha. This contains a concise yet impactful depiction of biblical verse and stories that is easily memorized by the faithful.

The *Sabuaga* festival exemplifies the real integration of Catholic faith into indigenous customs. The incorporation of indigenous symbolism, music and dance displays profound reverence for heritage while preserving a distinct Catholic doctrine. It demonstrates a model that satisfies the four key principles of DPPL and also emphasizes its role in directing believers toward the appropriate practice of popular piety, resulting in a more profound sense of liturgical worship. It is an expression

of Christian faith in the culture, and Christians may explore its profound spiritual aspects in its expression as a “joyous encounter of the work of evangelization and culture” (Pope John Paul II 1979).

The liturgy serves as a formal and institutionalized framework for worship, but popular piety enriches the experience with fervent manifestations of faith that arise from the sincere devotion of faithful. The connection between popular piety and the liturgy can establish a dynamic and harmonious relationship that enhances the lived experiences of the People of God. The participation of the faithful in these forms of popular piety enriches their spirituality and finds its culmination in the liturgical celebration.

## 8 Conclusion

This study has examined the complex connection between popular piety and the liturgy, highlighting the significance of adapting these practices to the local culture to promote a more profound comprehension and active participation. It demonstrates that popular piety not only enhances the spiritual lives of Filipino Catholics but also acts as a crucial manifestation of their cultural identity and communal history. Through a careful examination of the reception of Vatican II's DPPL, it is clear that popular piety represents genuine worship and a direct encounter with the divine, effectively connecting personal experiences of faith with the communal aspect of the liturgical celebration.

Although popular piety has a significant role in the lives of the faithful, the possible risks of misinterpretations, syncretism and departures from orthodoxy provide barriers to the smooth integration of popular piety into the liturgical. Hence, any endeavour towards harmonization should exhibit reverence towards the authentic manifestations of popular piety while firmly rooted in the theological tenets of the Catholic Church. The results of this research affirm the idea that popular piety should not be seen only as a departure or hindrance to liturgical norms but rather as a productive means for evangelization and a catalyst for more profound involvement in the faith.

The renewed interest in popular piety necessitates thoughtful contemplation, assessment and rejuvenation in alignment with the directives established by the DPPL, guaranteeing that these practices consistently guide the faithful toward the core of Catholic worship – the commemoration of the Paschal mystery. The presence of popular piety in Filipino culture offers the Church a distinct chance to embrace diversity and foster unity in religion.

In the future, it is essential that pastoral initiatives give priority to theological education that clarify misunderstandings about popular piety and emphasizes their proper role within the liturgy. This study supports the idea that popular piety should be recognized as a legitimate form of worship. This would lead to a lively and inclusive Church that respects the cultural practices of its members while staying dedicated to the fundamental Catholic teachings.

## About the Author

Kevin Maicom is a faculty member of De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines. Over the years he has nurtured the faith and understanding of students in different academic institutions. His passion for Christian Living Education extends beyond the classroom. He actively contributes to the field as a Developmental Editor and Content and Language Editor for Christian Living and Values Education Books at Rex Bookstore. This experience allows him to ensure the quality and accessibility of religious education materials. Driven by a deep curiosity in the intersection of faith and culture, his research interest lies in Liturgy, Inculturation, and Theological Anthropology. This focus on the lived experience of faith informs both his teaching and his editorial work. Contact: kevin.maicom@dlsu.edu.ph

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