

Cosmic anthropological perspective and panentheism on the peripheral pious exercises within popular Filipino religiosity

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Abstract

Within various expressions of Filipino popular religiosity are found different peripheral pious exercises. Specifically, they are acts of the piety of the people rendered commonly on religious images, such as touching, caressing, wiping, embracing, and kissing them. These pious actions of the people elicited great objection and even condemnation from other people with different religious orientations. From this context, this research was conducted. It intended to present a different perspective on the peripheral pious exercises of the people within popular religiosity expressions. By applying Ferdinand de Saussure's dyadic model of sign analysis on collected digital images, layers of meaning about the acts of piety were formed. The semiotic results were translated into deeper but relevant meaning using as a lens cosmic anthropological principle. The peripheral pious exercises were recognized as the unconscious expressions of the panentheistic view of the people. They are expressions of wayless way spirituality that is considered beneficial for progress in the spiritual life of Filipino Catholics. They affirm the very idea that God is found in one's ordinary life of the believers. They are behavioral symbols identified with and shared by the common people within the Catholic tradition and made Catholic culture more vibrant, colorful, and transformational which affects the inner and outer lives of the ordinary Catholics. They too are expressions of the concept of *hiyang* that creates some sort of harmony and integration between humans and the divine, which led people to acknowledge their place in the cosmic social order, and that they need to express something to someone whom they can have complete harmony with, God. Finally, they can be regarded as behavioral affirmations of what is naturally true at the quantum level, the interconnectedness of the physical and the metaphysical.

Keywords: Cosmic Anthropology, popular religiosity, Pious actions, religious images, Panentheism

Background of the Study

The life of the Church is animated by various liturgical celebrations. These are public acts of worship of the universal Church for the people or members of the local churches. They are what we, Catholics usually participate in. They are the celebrations or administrations of the seven sacraments of the Church, most especially the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist which is known to be the highest form of an act of worship. As Christians, it is our fundamental duty to direct the whole of our life and activity toward God as Creator, Savior, and Paraclete. We have liturgical celebrations to provide us occasions to publicly give honor and praise due to God.

Worshipping God has been a great deal to some people. They question the authenticity of how people do their worship. Something that Catholic Christians had experienced from other people was probably caused by ignorance of the official teachings of the Church or by religious partiality. Catholics are somewhat persecuted and even maligned their dignity with the way they worship and venerate the sacred. Most negative accusations thrown upon Catholics in their worship of God are related to the use of religious icons and the manner they relate to them. Some people had accused Catholic Christians as idol worshippers because of the many religious icons they keep in their places of worship and homes, and the things that they do with them like touching, caressing, wiping, embracing, and kissing which are commonly observed in most Filipino popular religiosity expressions. These actions are peripheral pious exercises.

Some religions are iconoclastic. They condemn the worship and veneration of religious icons. In Islam, Muslims are usually forbidden to depict the image of the great prophet Muhammad. Dr. Azzam Tamimi, former head of the Institute of Islamic Political Thought once said in an interview,

The Koran itself does not say anything about it, but it is accepted by all Islamic authorities that the Prophet Muhammad and all the other prophets cannot be drawn and cannot be produced in pictures because they are, according to the Islamic faith, infallible individuals, role models and therefore should not be presented in any manner that might cause disrespect for them. (McManus, 2015)

Protestant churches condemned and decreed the destruction of many statues and pictures present in Catholic churches (Holyart, 2017). They accused Catholic Christians of making idols and often quoted Exodus 20:3-5 which says,

You shall have no other gods before me. “You shall not make for yourself a graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me. (Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition)

What they failed to do is understand the above text in its context. The truth is, the universal Church never had as part of her basic teachings the worship of any graven images or idols. In the Catholic scripture, God is not condemning the making of images, just images that one would worship as a false god. In Exodus 25:18-20, God commands Moses to make graven images of two cherubs (angels) to be part of the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. It says,

And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end; of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. (RSV Catholic Edition)

God condemns the practice of making false idols to be proclaimed and worshiped as gods as in the case of the golden calf, not images that are used to aid in the worship of God as in the case of the cherub on the Ark of the Covenant, and the bronze serpent story in Numbers 21:8-9 where God is working his life-saving grace through a graven image,

And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten when he sees it, shall live.” So, Moses made a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. (RSV Catholic Edition)

I Kings 6:23-35 (RSV Catholic Edition) depicted how the inner walls and doors of the Temple in Jerusalem had graven images of a cherub, palm trees, man's faces, and lion's faces as decorations. These graven images were used to aid in the worship of God and adorn the Holiest place in the Jewish world, and not for idolatry (Diocese of Brooklyn, 2022).

In today's Catholic tradition, the religious icons (from the Greek word *eikon* which means image) are most often a painting, carved wood, cast in metal or mosaic. They usually portray the Holy Trinity, Mary, angels, and saints. They are intended to be visual scripture (Armstrong, 2011). Pope Benedict XVI in his writing *The Spirit of the Liturgy* asserted that religious icons are "images of beauty, in which the mystery of the invisible God becomes visible, and an essential part of Christian worship." In *God Without Being*, Jean Luc Marion remarked that the icon is "a visible mirror of the invisible", that leads the people into a true encounter with the divine. Others claimed that religious icons become a subtle tool in Catholic Catechetics (Mixa, 2020). They are sacred art because they bring the people closest to the sacred (Loyola Press, 2001). The Catholic Church approves the worship of images of Christ. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

The Christian veneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment which proscribes idols. Indeed, "the honor rendered to an image passes to its prototype," and "whoever venerates an image venerates the person portrayed in it." The honor paid to sacred images is a "respectful veneration," not the adoration due to God alone: Religious worship is not directed to images in themselves, considered as mere things, but under their distinctive aspect as images leading us on to God incarnate. The movement toward the image does not terminate in it as an image but tends toward that whose image it is. (CCC, 2132)

On the issues of worship and veneration, the Catholic Church has the following teachings propounded as early as during the time of Augustine of Hippo and St Jerome and was detailed more explicitly by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*, A.D. 1270 (New Advent Encyclopedia, 2004). Accordingly, the act of adoration or worship due to God the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, alone is called *Latria*. The act of giving respect and veneration to the Blessed Virgin Mary is *Hyperdulia*. If Saint Joseph, the foster father of Jesus and spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary was given respect and veneration it is known as *Protodulia*. Whereas

if saints in heaven are the ones given respect and veneration it is called simply *Dulia* (Pace, 1909).

No matter how clear the Church is with her teachings on these issues, still, it remained ambiguous to some people, Catholics, and non-Catholics alike. From what they see in the pious actions of the ordinary members of the church like touching, caressing, wiping, embracing, and kissing the religious articles, they are more resolved to believe Catholics are doing religious immorality. These peripheral pious exercises are of the people and are not necessarily derived from the sacred liturgy. Indeed, they have been the focus of intrigue and criticism on various occasions. At a certain point, it led even to the mockery of the Catholic faith.

It is from this context that this research was conducted. It intended to explore and help clarify the issue of worship and veneration as observed by ordinary members of the Catholic Church. The aspect of how the faithful relate to the religious articles expressed through their different peripheral pious exercises or actions committed in some forms of Filipino popular religiosity is given more focus in this case. And with the use of some cosmic anthropological principles as a lens, it is sought that there will be a deeper appreciation of Filipino pious exercises.

Statement of Research Problem:

The proponent of this research would like to answer the relevant question: How are the peripheral external ritual expressions among Filipino popular religiosity seen from a cosmic anthropological perspective? This research has the following specific objectives:

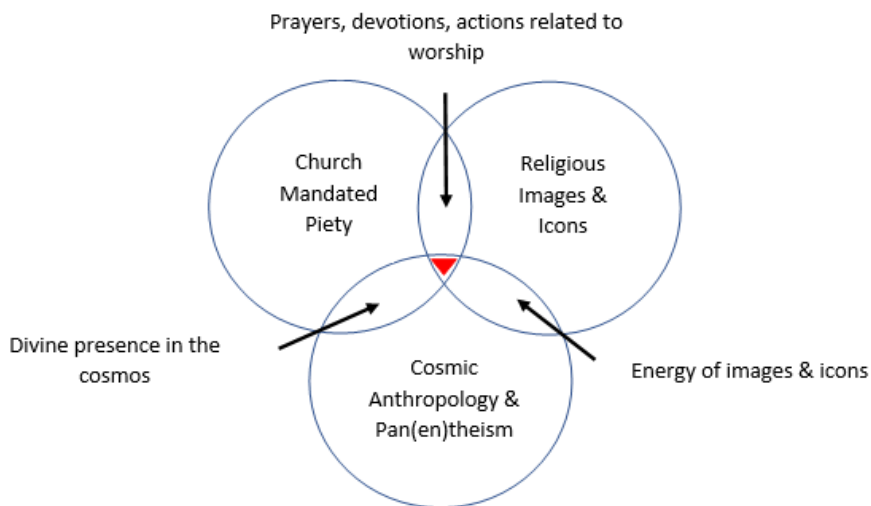
1. Explore the existing different popular Filipino religiosity as provided by online resources, from different social media applications and digital videos.
2. Examine and identify the common peripheral religious ritual or pious exercises, as an act of worship of the people, their value, and importance in deepening one's religious faith.
3. Assess these pious exercises done by and of the local church using as a lens some cosmic anthropological principles to find new meaning and help fortify the embraced faith.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of Popular Filipino Religiosity consists of Church piety, Religious images and Icons, and Cosmic anthropology as shown by the Venn diagram.

Figure 1.

Conceptual Framework: Religious Piety, Religious Images, and Icons, and Cosmic Anthropology and Paentheism.



Legend: ▼ = Popular Filipino Religiosity

On Church-Mandated Religious Piety

The Catholic Church has mandated protocols based on defined dogmas and teachings on how the faithful should worship God. The *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* (Congregation for Divine Worship, 2001) quite distinguished one from the other. It is said that popular religiosity is perceived as a universal experience of the religious dimension of any people through which they give expression, through religious cult, to their understanding of the transcendent and its relationship to nature, society, and history. It is not exclusively Catholic for it is found in other faith traditions. Popular piety refers to those diverse cultic expressions or

pious exercises of a private or community in nature which are inspired predominantly by the forms deriving from a particular nation or people or their culture" (DPPL 9).

Popular piety to Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, is a fruit of the Holy Spirit working in a particular segment of the People of God. For Pope Francis it is considered *locus theologicus* (an authoritative source for doing speculative theology), saying that it has much to teach us (EG 126). He describes the nature of popular piety as "the people's mysticism," the content of which is discovered and expressed using symbols. It emphasizes the act of faith over the intellectual understanding of the content of faith. Furthermore, he says, "It is a legitimate way of living the faith, a way of feeling part of the Church and a manner of being missionaries..." (EG 124).

Pope Benedict XVI describes popular piety as the venue of interculturality. He explained that the primary place where interculturality occurs is in popular piety because this is the location in which authentic culture and cultural development occur (Spirit of the Liturgy, 201). It is in popular piety that begins an exchange of cultural treasures between Christianity and the newly evangelized culture. In his 2007 opening address to the Fifth General Council of the Bishops of CELAM at Aparecida, Brazil, Pope Benedict XVI even called it "a precious treasure of the Catholic Church." Through the *Aparecida Document*, specific examples of popular piety were identified. It includes "patronal saint celebrations, novenas, rosaries, the Way of the Cross, processions, dances, and songs of religious folklore, affection for the saints and angels, solemn promises, and family prayer" (AD 258).

Popular piety is perceived to be intermixed with aboriginal distortions and superstitions, and so it is frequently in need of purification. Pope Paul VI in his post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in 1975 identifies a particular distortion being an overriding concern over the form the piety takes, rather than on a real assent of faith. Moreover, as with all human endeavors, it can be a cause of fragmentation of a group from the community and the forming of sects which can endanger ecclesial communion (EN 48). Pope Francis commented that certain forms of popular piety can be taken advantage of by people who are not interested in the good of society and the person but see in it the opportunity for economic gain or exercising power over people (EG, 70). While Pope Paul VI specified that pastoral charity must rule the hearts of pastors regarding

popular piety. The pastor must recognize that popular piety is both rich and vulnerable. He said, one needs to be “sensitive to it, know how to perceive its interior dimensions and undeniable values, be ready to help it to overcome its risks of deviation” (EN 48).

On Religious Icons and Holy Images

Visiting the Catholic churches in the Philippines and many private homes of the Catholics, a common observation is the presence of many religious icons or sacred images. Are they allowed to possess and use them in their divine worship? Here are some principles and thoughts that may shed light on this issue.

Loyola Press (2022) from its published article on the web, *Icons as Religious Arts*, discussed that religious icons are symbols or representations usually of a greater “object,” a sacred person: Christ or one of the saints in heaven. Icons are like quick links in that they give us a kind of symbolic snapshot of holy persons who are in heaven. Religious icons can be regarded as a form of prayer. When someone looks at an icon, it is meant to make someone aware that he or she is in the presence of the sacred. Religious icons, then, are arts that bring to a counter the sacred. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* had a striking revelation regarding sacred images and their use of them. First, on the liturgical icon that principally represents Christ, the Church is clear in saying that it cannot represent the invisible and incomprehensible God, but the incarnation of the Son of God has ushered in a new “economy” of images (CCC, 1159). Quoting Saint John Damascene from his writings *De Imag*, it says,

Previously God, who has neither a body nor a face, absolutely could not be represented by an image. But now that he has made himself visible in the flesh and has lived with men, I can make an image of what I have seen of God . . . and contemplate the glory of the Lord, his face unveiled.

Second, the use of religious icons or sacred images (CCC 1161), reiterated the pronouncement made in the second Council of Nicaea. It says,

Following the divinely inspired teaching of our holy Fathers and the tradition of the Catholic Church (for we know that this tradition comes from the Holy Spirit who dwells in her) we rightly define

with full certainty and correctness that, like the figure of the precious and life-giving cross, venerable and holy images of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ, our inviolate Lady, the holy Mother of God, and the venerated angels, all the saints and the just, whether painted or made of mosaic or another suitable material, are to be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on sacred vessels and vestments, walls, and panels, in houses and on streets.

And again, quoting Saint John Damascene, “The beauty of the images moves me to contemplation, as a meadow delights the eyes and subtly infuses the soul with the glory of God.”

On Cosmic Anthropology and Pan(en)theistic Perspectives

Cosmic Anthropology. The cosmic anthropological perspective is closely linked with pan(en)theism and quantum physics. It is a discipline pushed far and wide, which is a study of the *Anthropos* or human beings and their cultures in the broadest sense (anthropology) by viewing human beings from a cosmic angle or cosmic perspective. Dr. Mina Ramirez, president of the Asian Social Institute, mentioned in her insightful YouTube interview in 2020, that cosmic anthropology, or viewing man from a cosmic perspective is a view that is very much along the line of Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si* as far as issues of human life and the divine are concerned. Aside from this, cosmic anthropology is grounded in the insights or principles of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest, scientist, paleontologist, theologian, philosopher, and teacher. These principles are claimed to be universal principles for social order. Accordingly, the cosmic anthropological perspective sees humans believing in the transcendent that is also immanent, a transcendent that is living and dwelling in human bodies, and that every human must translate the transcendent into human life. It recognized that life is a celebration of vital elements that are related to the transcendent. It acknowledged the idea that human life requires unity of body, mind, and spirit to avoid division in life. Sharing time, talent, and treasures with others is essential in life coz it will lead to more productivity. It also believed in the principle that life is energy and that energy is everywhere. Humans project energy, positive and negative, and must only choose to think positively to transform people. The cosmic anthropological perspective sees the world as evolving toward more and more spiritual. Paul Dejillas (2010) in his YouTube video entitled *Cosmic Anthropology-Part 1-The cosmic perspective*, explained what cosmic perspective is in viewing humanity. It entails knowing one’s story (history or herstory) to appreciate

one's set of values, beliefs, and the important role to play in this cosmic world. Neil deGrasse Tyson (2012), in his article entitled *Cosmic Perspective* posted in Natural History Magazine.com, propounded what cosmic perspective means. It flows from fundamental knowledge. It's also about having the wisdom and insight to apply that knowledge to assess our place in the universe. It is not solely the provenance of the scientist because it belongs to everyone. It is humbling, spiritual, and redemptive but not limited to religious. It opens our minds to extraordinary ideas but does not leave them so open that our brains spill out, making us susceptible to believing anything we're told. It finds beauty in the images of planets, moons, stars, and nebulae but also celebrates the laws of physics that shape them. And it does not only embrace our genetic kinship with all life on Earth but also values our chemical kinship with any yet-to-be-discovered life in the universe, as well as our atomic kinship with the universe itself.

Pan(en)theism and New Spirituality. Pan(en)theism is coined to distinguish it from pantheism which is connected to the worship of nature in ancient tradition. Pan(en)theism is "all in God" from the Greek *pân*, 'all', *en*, 'in' and *theós*, 'God' is the belief that the divine intersects every part of the universe and extends beyond space and time. According to Gordon (2007), "This view of the divine is often held in conjunction with an emphasis on the value of mystical union with the grounding source of life." (Gordon 2007, p. 11). He continues, "God is not a separate entity, far removed from the cosmos, but deeply bound up with its fabric. The divine is that in which all things live and move and have their being." (Gordon, 2007, p. 48).

Quantum Physics: God as Energy. According to O'Murchu in Quantum Theology, all life in the cosmos and all creation is sustained by energy. He says, "Life is sustained by creative energy, fundamentally benign in nature, with a tendency to manifest and express itself in movement, rhythm, and pattern. Creation is sustained by a superhuman, pulsating restlessness, a type of resonance vibrating throughout time and eternity." (O'Murchu, 2004, p. 197). Lastly, Bloom (2004) asserts that "everything that exists is sacred...every rock, wave, cloud, petal, flame, breeze, animal, mountain, tree, planet, star, galaxy". (Bloom, 2004 p.55). James Ray (2006) Most people define themselves as a finite body, but you're not. Under a microscope, you're in an energy field. You're a spiritual being. You're an energy field operating in a larger energy field. Deepak Chopra (2006), The unified energy field of pure consciousness says we are connected to our Source and one another. Neale Donald Walsch (2019),

Your interior energy can generate events and conditions in your exterior reality. James Ray (2006) bridges God and energy; he says, “You go to a quantum physicist, and you say, What creates the world? He answers Energy...which cannot be created or destroyed, it always was, always has been, everything that ever existed always exists, it’s moving into form, through form, and out of form. You go to a theologian and ask, “What created the universe?” And he or she will say, God...who always was and always has been, never can be created or destroyed, all that ever was, always will be, always moving into form, through form and out of form...the same description, just different terminology.” (Ray, 2006, p. 159; Lynch, 2007, Walsch, 2019).

On Popular Filipino Religiosity

The Delta core in the Venn diagram has the following interactive relationships and significance:

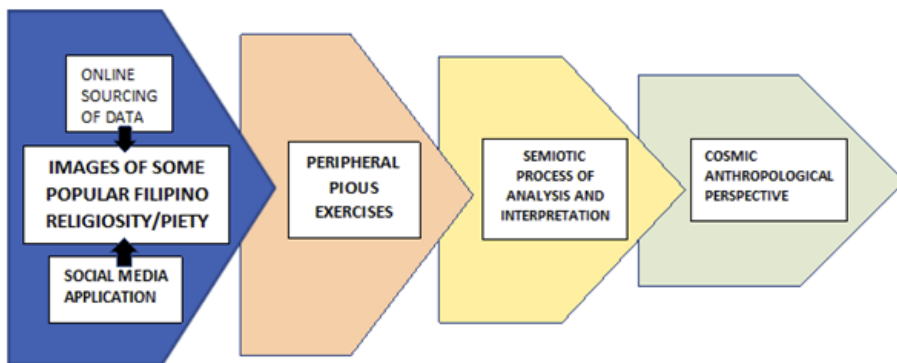
1. Mandated Catholic Piety and Images and Icons result in prayers, novena, devotion, and related actions. When the images and icons are blessed, they become sacramentals and therefore they are channels of God’s divine and sacred power. The sacrament's physical signs with divine significance are much more powerful because they exude sacred energy by *ex opera operato*.
2. Mandated Catholic Piety and Cosmic Anthropology, Pan(en)theism, and Quantum Physics view God specified in Church dogma, morals, and worship as Energy.
3. Cosmic Anthropology, Pan(en)theism, and Quantum Physics view religious images and icons as sources of God’s power from a faith relationship.

Operational Framework

The entire research endeavor will be guided by the operational framework presented below:

Figure 2.

Operational Framework for Popular Filipino Religiosity, Peripheral Pious Exercises Analysis through Semiotics and Cosmic Anthropological Perspective



The research will commence with the collected images of some popular Filipino religiosity or expressions of piety from online digital sources. From these images will be identified the so-called peripheral pious exercises which will be subjected to a semiotic process of analysis and interpretation. The results of the semiosis will be viewed from a cosmic anthropological perspective to gain new meaning and understanding.

Methodology

This research has a descriptive and qualitative design using a mixture of methods and processes in attaining its results. In securing the data necessary for this research, the researcher adopted a digital archival research approach where data were collected through "the use of digital tools, such as computers, tablets, smartphones, and video cameras, in scholarly research projects." (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016). The researcher looked specifically at images or video segments depicting some of the expressions of popular Filipino religiosity or piety, where peripheral pious exercises are vividly depicted, such as touching, caressing, wiping,

and kissing popularly known religious images. The data about the peripheral acts of the piety of the Filipinos collected from different data servers and social media applications such as Google, Facebook, and YouTube were subjected first to a semiotic process of analysis. Semiotics was the field of study that was concerned with signs and or signification. The meaning was built via the relationship between the representation of a concept (the signifier) and the concept itself (the signified). This is what Ferdinand de Saussure called a dyadic or two-part model of sign analysis. Each image was subjected to descriptive dyadic analysis to produce levels of meanings (Danesi, 1999). Furthermore, the semiotic results were translated into a deeper but relevant cosmic anthropological perspective. A cosmic anthropological perspective entails studying the Anthropos and their cultures in the broadest sense by viewing them from a cosmic angle or cosmic perspective (Asian Social Institute, 2012).

Results and Discussion

Using the digital data research collection approach, the researcher found out the extent of how Filipino piety was creatively expressed through popular religiosity. This is shown in the images or pictures being presented here, which were chosen because they signified the Catholic faith, they represented major personalities of the Catholic faith such as Jesus (second person in the Holy Trinity), Mary (*Theotokos* or the bearer of God), and the Saints (ardent followers of Christ and great exemplar of Catholic faith), they were popularly observed in the country, and lastly, they depicted certain peripheral acts of piety of the Filipinos. Through semiosis, a much closer analysis of the peripheral acts of piety captured in the images was achieved. The results of the analysis viewed from the cosmic anthropological perspective led to a deeper understanding of the peripheral acts of piety.

Existing different popular Filipino religiosity expressions

Exploring the existing different popular Filipino religiosity from online resources, the researcher was overwhelmed by the rich imagery of Filipino religiosity and piety. One can easily witness and experience popular Filipino religiosity and piety as they are observed and celebrated yearly in the country. Filipino religiosity and piety are undeniably alive, creative, meaningful, and increasingly affecting the lives of the faithful. In the online digital world through published video clips, images, blogs, or social media platforms, the brand of religious piety of Filipinos has been

exposed globally. The popular Filipino religiosity expressions, in the context of the Christian faith, manifested loosely in diverse forms such as **devotion** which is commonly directed towards Jesus, Mary, and the saints, a **procession** commonly seen during *Semana Santa* and the *Santa Cruzan*, **drama** that is watched during pre-easter, *Senakulo* and easter *Salubong*, **chanting** in a form of *Pabasa ng Pasyon*, **dances** like *Ati-atihan*, *Sinulog*, *Dinagyang*, *Sayaw sa Obando*, *Karakol*, and **pilgrimage** which is usually observed as *Alay lakad sa Antipolo*, *Visita Iglesia*, *Via Crucis*.

Devotion (see Image 1.) is an outward manifestation of ardent affection, zealous attachment, piety, dedication, reverence, faithfulness, respect, awe, attentiveness, loyalty, fidelity, or love for, or to God and a person deemed sacred, holy, or venerable. In the Philippine Catholic culture, popular devotion is usually directed to Jesus, Mary, and the saints who are major personalities of the faith. Devotion observed by Catholics is popularly expressed through a private and communitarian recitation of novenas, holy rosary, and some prayers being approved by the universal Church. Devotion may also be expressed by doing other things like joining a procession, street dancing, and singing.

Image 1.

Devotions to the Black Nazarene, Sto. Nino, Block Rosary, and Novena to St. Jude



(Photo Courtesy of Pintakasi, School of St. John Bosco, Ted Aljibe-AFP, Google Images)

Black Nazarene Devotion. The Black Nazarene is a life-sized, dark-colored statue of Jesus Christ that was brought to Manila, Philippines, from Mexico on May 31, 1606, by the first group of Augustinian Recollect friars sent by Spain. Accordingly, the image was charred black in a fire that broke

out on the ship during its trip to Manila from Mexico. It was the Recollect Fathers who started promoting the devotion to the suffering of our Lord in 1608. On April 21, 1621, a confraternity or *Cofradia de Jesus Nazareno* was established and received its papal blessing from His Holiness Pope Innocent X on April 20, 1650. In the 19th century, His Holiness Pope Pius VII granted an indulgence to those who prayed before the image of the Black Nazarene (Holy Family Catholic Church, 2023). The traditional Friday devotion to the Black Nazarene has become a popular Catholic religious festivity in the country, especially in the minor basilica of the Black Nazarene, parish of St. John the Baptist, Quiapo, Manila.

Santo. Niño Devotion. The Santo Niño devotion is a beautiful expression of a deep love of Jesus, the Christ Child, by the Filipinos and fittingly is celebrated shortly after the Christmas season. The celebrations usually involve novena prayers, dances, and processions. The devotion to the Santo Niño in the Philippines flourished spontaneously when the Spaniards led by Miguel Lopez de Legazpi promoted it in 1565 after they captured Cebu on 28 April 1565 when they discovered the image believed to be the one presented by Magellan in Cebu 44 years earlier (Chua, 2021). In Philippine culture, people had great affection towards children because of their innocence, honesty, cheerfulness, and vulnerability. These characteristics probably led to the acceptance and devotion to the Santo Niño. The Santo Niño also reminds us of our call to spread the reign of Christ throughout the world. Today a lot of festivities are being observed in the country honoring the Christ child.

Marian Devotion. The devotion to Mary began to manifest in the country when her statue was brought in 1587, under the title of Our Lady of the Rosary. Immediately after, a confraternity was established in 1588 consisting of people with a strong devotion to Mary, referred to as the Senora Grande de Filipinas. The recitation of the Rosary became a popular Marian devotional practice that can be compared with the popularity that the novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help enjoys today. The Block Rosary practiced in some parts of the country is a good example of a devotion that relates to the visit of images or statues of Mary from house to house and from one family to another, where special veneration is given to Mary during the term of the image's stay. This practice, along with other forms of Marian devotion speaks of how deeply rooted the veneration of Mary is in the socio-religious structure of the Filipino Christian family. (Rosales, 1975).

Devotion to Saints. Devotion is not only limited to Jesus and Mary but also to some people who were declared “saints” by the Universal Church. Filipinos had unique devotion to several saints. An example of this devotion to saints which is very popular is the devotion to St. Jude Thaddeus. The weekly novena to St. Jude started in June 1959 and has been held every Thursday since then. The devotion spread over the years and has become very popular in Metro Manila. Devotees come from far and wide including students, board examination reviewers, office workers, parish, and others with all kinds of requests and seemingly hopeless problems (National Shrine of St. Jude Thaddeus, 2023).

The procession (see Image 2) is another popular Filipino religiosity expression. It is a linear parade of various religious images, mostly personalities found in the bible and significant events in the life of Jesus Christ. The creativity of the Filipino Catholics developed many processions for special occasions to remind us that the Christian life is a constant movement toward God. Typical to most religious devotions include processions. Two processions are unique and equally loved by the Filipinos. They are the yearly procession during the Holy Week or *Semana Santa* and *Santa Cruzan*

Image 2.

Procession of different life-size biblical images and Santa Cruzan



(Photos courtesy of Agent Walker, the Manila Times, Fine Art America, YouTube)

Prusisyon ng Semana Santa. The procession done during the holy week usually on Good Friday is a local parish initiative. The procession is a parade mostly of life-size religious images on lighted and decorated floats. Religious images are usually depicting an important moment in the life of Christ, especially during His passion, death, and burial. Also included are images of other significant personalities found in the sacred scriptures. The

procession is done while there is a recitation of the holy rosary or playing a religious song. The procession of religious images is considered a re-evangelization tool for the Catholic faith. People watching the parade are either catechized or re-catechized on the fundamental teachings about Christ. People are given short sacramental moments to reflect on their faith. The owners of the religious images being displayed had considered it as a form of sacrifice and *panata* taking care of religious images and participating in the procession.

Santa Cruzan. A religious-historical beauty pageant held throughout the Philippines during May is the *Santa Cruzan*. It is one of the most colorful May-time festivals, or post-Lenten celebration, which depicts the finding of the Holy Cross by Queen Helena, mother of Constantine the Great. Included in the unique procession are some religious characters or personalities.

Religious Drama (see Image 3) is a manifestation of people's religiosity too. In the Philippines, they are often seen during the Lenten and Advent seasons on stage or on the street. They normally portray the important events in the life of Jesus Christ or something that is connected to it.

Image 3.

Various religious dramas held in the Philippines, Senakulo, Moriones, Salubong, and Panunuluyan



(Photo courtesy of Sanchez and Eballo, Krissha, Rappler, and Fortunado et al., Google Images)

Senakulo. The most popular religious drama is the *Senakulo*, a stage or street play about the life and Passion of Jesus that takes place in many communities, especially in the provinces. It is performed nightly during Holy Week for almost two hours and is participated in by people of different

ages and backgrounds, commonly called *senakulista* or *anak ng senakulista* (Sanchez and Eballo, 2022). It is a theatrical form of renewing the faith beliefs of the people.

Salubong. Another religious drama that is awaited by the people to see is *Salubong*. It is reenacting the two moments of the encounter between Jesus and Mary, held within the context of the Holy Week celebration of Christ's passion-death-resurrection. One is the pre-easter *pasalubong* which is the portrayal of that emotionally charged meeting between the suffering Jesus and his weeping mother on the road to Calvary. The other one is the easter *salubong* which is a portrayal of the jubilant encounter between the Risen Christ and Mary at the crack of Easter dawn (Dela Cruz, 2022).

Moriones Festival. An equally recognized by many as a unique religious drama held in the Philippines is *Moriones*. It is a folk-religious event held annually during Holy Week on the island of Marinduque. *Moriones* is a street theater which is a form of penitence for the locals. From Holy Monday to Easter Sunday, the masked and costumed *Moriones* march around town scaring children and making a ruckus in a reenactment of the search for Longinus, the Roman centurion who pierced the side of the crucified Christ. Longinus was converted to Christianity, but he was scorned by his fellow centurions who ended up murdering him. The locals' reenactment of the Biblical story climaxes on Easter Sunday, when Longinus is beheaded (Krissha, 2019).

Panunuluyan. The re-enactment of the events surrounding Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem in search of lodging on the eve of the birth of Jesus called *panunuluyan*, is a significant religious drama staged outside the Lenten season. It is a key part of most Filipino Catholics' Christmas Eve celebrations, whether in the streets or at Mass. The *Panunuluyan* is adapted to the local landscape. Often the actors (for Mary and Joseph) wear colorful biblical costumes (in some practices they bring images of Mary and Joseph). Mary and Joseph walk the neighborhoods and knock at the doorstep of these homes to beg for shelter, but each, in turn, rejects Joseph and Mary, until they find a stable where animals are being fed and where Mary finally gave birth to "baby Jesus" (Fortunado et al, 2022).

Poetry and chanting (see Image 4) are a form of expression as well of popular religiosity in the Philippines. This is true in the case of the *Pabasa ng Pasyon* which is usually held during the Holy Week celebration.

Image 4.

Pabasa ng Pasyon



(Photo courtesy of National Museum of the Philippines, Facebook)

Pabasa ng Pasyon. It is one of the activities done by Filipino Catholics to commemorate Christ's suffering and death during the holy week. Gaspar Aquino De Belen originally had written the text with 980 verses in 1704. The *pasyon* is verses chanted in a style called *tagulaylay*. It is the singing of each stanza in one breath in a distinct mournful melody marked by droning high and low tones. In recent times, tunes of pop music, modern ballads, and rap are utilized to entice the younger generation in continuing this tradition. The *mambabasa* carries out the continuous singing of the *Pasyon* in shifts. Each shift may have at least 10 to as many as 30 chanters of different ages. The *Pabasa ng Pasyon* always ends on Good Friday (National Museum of the Philippines, 2021).

Street Dance (see Image 5) for Filipinos has become an effective and creative form of expressing one's religiosity involving choreographed movements or dance steps held on the street. This is a very festive religious activity, loved and participated in by Filipino faithful and even by some tourists.

Images 5.

Street Dancing in Ati-atihan, Dinagyang, Sayaw sa Obando and Karakol



(Photo courtesy of Happy Trip, Jakjak's Kool Trip, and Pinoy Adventurista, Google Images)

Ati-atihan, Sinulog, and Dinagyang. *Ati-atihan* of Kalibo Aklan, the *Sinulog* of Cebu, and the *Dinagyang* of Ilo-ilo. are religious festivals that honor the Child Jesus and showcase the rich culture and history of the provinces through dances. Dancers wear colorful and unique costumes as they dance on the street with beautiful choreography. An image of the Sto. Nino is always at the center of the celebration held usually by the main dancer.

Sayaw sa Obando. A three-day religious celebration honoring the three saints, San Pascual Baylon (Saint Paschal Baylon), Santa Clara (Saint Clare of Assisi), and the Our Lady of Salambào. The Fertility dance is the main reason couples from different parts of the country come to Obando. The dance is held during the procession, following a simple choreography that has a silent prayer for each step. In the procession, some dancers lead the simple dancing which the couple can easily follow. Participants can add their prayers during the procession. It is believed that couples who are struggling to conceive a child will be blessed and finally have their prayers answered by joining in the feast (The Happy Trip 54, 2023).

Karakol. A religious dance procession is held on the eve of the feast day of the patron saint of a particular town. The provinces of Laguna, Cavite, Batangas, Bulacan, and Rizal are known to practice the tradition of holding a *Karakol* as part of the fiesta celebration. It is a slow-paced procession because of dancing (Jakjak's Kool Trip, 2019). It is

accompanied by folk music played by a live marching band or recorded music. As soon as the image of the patron saint was brought out of the Church, the people started to dance their hearts out showing their sincere devotion and love for the patron (Pinoy Adventurista. Com, 2012). The acknowledged purposes of *Karakol* are thanksgiving for blessings received and request for the continued provision of daily needs.

Local pilgrimage (see Image 6) also shares in the many forms of expressing Filipino religiosity. As a pilgrimage, Filipino Catholics are bound to visit religious sites such as churches and shrines either by walking or by use of any kind of transportation. The popular expression of this is the *Visita Iglesia*, *Via Crucis*, and *Alay lakad sa Antipolo*.

Image 6.

Local pilgrimages as Visita Iglesia, Via Crucis, and Alay Lakad



(Photo courtesy of Coronel, Tan, and Samson, Google Images)

Visita Iglesia. It is a Holy Week devotion that is done by visiting seven or fourteen churches to pray and meditate on the Passion of Jesus Christ. In the practice of *Visita Iglesia*, the faithful share in Jesus' sufferings. Usually, the pilgrims go with their prayers and intentions as they journey from one church to another. Some would accompany their visit with their prayers and meditation on the mysteries of the Holy Rosary. Others would pray the *Via Crucis*, a tradition taught by the Franciscans (Coronel, 2011).

Via Crucis. A devotional act in which devotees commemorate the passion and death of Jesus Christ in 14 "stations" or images that depict scenes of His crucifixion and death. Usually done in churches, devotees

walk to each of these stations in the order of Jesus' ordeal – His arrest, trial, suffering, and death. Devotees stop by each station to commemorate the scene it depicts and to offer a short prayer. As with the rest of the Catholic Church, Filipinos usually hold “Stations of the Cross” on Good Friday or any day within the Holy Week that commemorates Jesus' death (Tan, 2018).

Alay Lakad. It began as a commemoration of the *Nuestra Senora de la Paz y Buen Viaje*'s return to Antipolo from the Quiapo church in Manila in 1954. A trek beginning at the Quiapo church in Manila is a good 24 kilometers away, to be taken leisurely by the pilgrims even if it takes all night. Groups from out of town who will arrive in buses and jeeps, alight at an agreed point then walk the rest of the distance. Today the trek is done for a variety of reasons from gratitude for a favor bestowed, love for the Virgin, special requests, penance, and others (Samson, 2019).

Semiosis on Peripheral Acts of Piety of the Filipino

Peripheral acts of piety are the pious actions committed outside the liturgical celebrations by ordinary believers of the faith or the laity. Within the local popular religiosity, the Filipino peripheral acts of piety are touching, caressing, wiping, embracing, and kissing the religious articles. The images presented here were depicting peripheral acts of piety commonly exercised by the Filipino laity such as touching, caressing, wiping, embracing, and kissing some popularly known religious articles found within popular religiosity expressions in the country. These images, to draw out essential meanings were treated with de Saussure's dyadic or two-part model of sign analysis, the signifier and the signified.

Image 7.

Marian devotees touching the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help



(Photo courtesy of Molines, Google Images)

Signifier: The image presents five women with their arms and hands extended upward touching the visual representation of the image of the Our Lady of Perpetual Help also called Our Lady of Perpetual Succor mounted on the wall. The lady was the Blessed Virgin Mary holding by her left hand the child Jesus and her right hand the hands of her child. Both were covered with clothes and crown-like lights were on their heads. On both sides of the lady were small images of angels holding spears and crosses while their hands were covered with veils. There were some Greek letters over the heads of the figures which form the abbreviated words Mother of God, Jesus Christ, Archangel Michael, and Archangel Gabriel respectively. The image was lighted on the sides which emphasized the golden-yellow color background of the images. The image was quite big, and it enabled many people to have a chance to place their hands on it.

Signified: The image exudes an atmosphere of veneration for the Blessed Virgin Mary by Filipino Catholic women. With their arms outstretched and their hands touching the image suggest the idea of how much they recognized Mary as the mother of Jesus, that Mary is someone they can turn to and ask for some help. The touching of the image by the Filipino women also expressed the thought of reaching out to Mary who had experienced great sorrow and handled it with great humility and strength, something that gives inspiration to Filipino Marian devotees who were experiencing a lot of sorrows in life. In a way, the touching served as a conduit for Mary to share inspiration with the devotees and the devotees in turn would receive it. The touching signifies a meaningful relationship of Filipino women with the Blessed Virgin Mary. Touching becomes a language of humility, trust, confidence, and hope.

Image 8.

Parishioners caressing the crucifix



(Photo courtesy of Punzalan, ABS-CBN News, Google Images)

Signifier: The image depicted many churchgoers, male and female, young and old, entering and leaving the sacred place with two doors wide open. At the center was a life-size crucifix. People near the crucifix were caressing parts of the crucifix especially the lower part of the body of the crucified Jesus. Some people were looking in the direction of the crucifix.

Signified: The caressing would imply the quality of faith the Filipinos have. The image of the crucified Jesus is so strong as a theological truth about salvation for the believers. Their caressing of the image would speak about their acceptance of Jesus as their savior. Quite usual for churchgoers before leaving the place to caress a crucifix. This means that the believers would like to carry with them as they go back home the idea that Jesus their savior will guide, protect, and bless them. Caressing in this case would mean intense emotional, physical, and spiritual attachment to the divine.

Image 9.

Devotees wiping the religious statue of the dead body of Christ



(Photo courtesy of Catholics and Culture, Google Images)

Signifier: The image depicted a carved wooden icon of the lying naked dead body of Jesus on an elevated surface surrounded by many people. The icon was wearing gold-colored rays at the head. While the head was leaning on a purple cushion. The middle part of the naked body was covered with purple-colored linen. On both sides of the icon were women and a young man wiping the body parts of the icon, right foot, both thighs and left arm with a piece of cloth. As the people doing the wiping, their eyes were looking at the body parts more closely.

Signified: Wiping is usually done to dry up, polish, or clean something. But wiping in the religious context is more than just drying up, polishing, or cleaning a religious image. It signified the value of mercy, empathy, caring, compassion, and even well-being.

Image 10.

Devotee embracing a statue of Sto. Nino



(Photo courtesy of Catholics & Culture, Google Images)

Signifier: The image presents a typical Filipina, black-haired, brown-skinned, petite, and wearing a colored shirt, embracing a small icon of the Santo Nino in a public place where many people were walking around. The icon depicts the child Jesus wearing red colored clothes with a gold accent. A crown is noticeable on its head. A globe with a cross on top was held by the left hand, and a scepter on the other hand. The icon was standing on a small two-layered platform.

Signified: Embracing suggests a more personal attachment to someone or something. Embracing an icon of the child Jesus may imply having a much deeper personal relationship with Jesus. It could mean an expression of great love for the divine, a serious devotion, or taking responsibility.

Image 11.

Devotees kissing the cross of the Black Nazarene



(Photo courtesy of Uchi, Google Images)

Signifier: The image showcases male devotees of the Black Nazarene. With closed eyes, the two devotees were kissing the end part of the cross. They were wearing shirts that would identify them as devotees of the Black Nazarene.

Signified: Kissing a religious image would signify sharing or giving a part of oneself to someone. This act may lead to a deeper relationship, solidarity, unity, or oneness. It speaks about being a follower and having a special adoration and love for Christ. The very act of kissing would suggest acceptance of Christ's teachings and examples. It may also signify a sense of gratitude for all the care, protection, and blessings received from God.

A Cosmic Anthropological Perspective.

Cosmic anthropological perspective entails understanding humanity from a cosmic perspective. This would consider several underlying principles which make a perspective a cosmic one. Among these principles are creation spirituality, wayless way spiritual life, cultural symbols, *Hiyang* Concept, and quantum interconnectedness.

Creation spirituality

Mathew Fox in his book entitled *Original Blessing* published in 1983 discussed what a creation spirituality is all about. He pointed out that its core is the theological concept called "Panentheism" which is the idea that divinity permeates all things, and all things have the imprint of divinity, yet the sum of all things does not fully encompass the mystery of the divine (Hal, 2022). Accordingly, the creation-based spirituality also emphasizes

other principles or concepts such as *Jesus as a prophet, artist, parable-teller, wisdom figure, and Son of God who calls others to their divinity, spirituality of the powerless- the Anawim, faith is trust, Spirit, and matter form a “wonderful communion”, being hopeful, compassion, justice, creativity, Sensual, beauty, thanks, and praise* (Fox, 2023).

The peripheral acts of piety are committed with religious images usually of Jesus Christ, Blessed Virgin Mary. The religious images of Jesus Christ are in varying forms like the crucifix, the Black Nazarene, the *Santo Intiero* (the dead body of Jesus), and the *Santo Nino* (*Christ's child*). The laity's acknowledgment of who Jesus is not limited to the idea of being the “Son of God” but also to different identifications of Him that were very human which the laity can easily associate themselves with. The lay faithful who commit peripheral acts of piety with religious images can be identified mostly as belonging to the powerless people in society who are seriously in need of intervention from the divine. The very practice of the peripheral acts of piety exudes unconsciously a panentheistic principle held by the lay faithful, that divinity permeates all things, and all things have the imprint of divinity including those religious images. They loosely sensed the divinity with the religious icons. Their acts of piety committed had become a way for them to have a connection with the divine, and to express faith as trust, hope, justice, thanks, and praise.

Wayless way spiritual life

Meister Eckhart, a fourteenth-century German Catholic Dominican theologian, and mystic, had thought about a kind of spiritual life that is “wayless way.” His way less spiritual life seems to tolerate whatever might be beneficial for progress in the spiritual life. He was just less distinct and less prescriptive when it comes to things to do to animate spiritual life. Eckhart prescribes no special techniques, practices, penances, or pilgrimages. For him, whoever especially seeks God gets the way and misses God who lies hidden in it. The wayless spiritual life also emphasizes the “this-worldliness” orientation whereby the God whom we seek is apprehended ‘equally in all things and all places’, and God is in one's ordinary life and it is there that he must be found. (Knauf, 2014).

About the Filipino peripheral acts of piety, they are extensions of the syncretistic quality of existing popular religiosity expressions. Considering that popular religiosity expressions are the cultic expressions of the people. They provide people moments to freely express their religious

piety in a creative way, something that is not usually prescribed by religious tradition. The pious acts of touching, caressing, wiping, embracing, and kissing some popularly known religious images are considered beneficial for the growth of the spiritual life of Filipino Catholics. They affirm the very idea that God is found in one's ordinary life of the believers.

Cultural symbols

Cultural symbols are objects, words, or actions that hold meaning and understanding for a group. They are embedded in the behaviors, languages, beliefs, traditions, and shared meanings of the people. Many human organizations use symbols to express a concept of their culture. Symbols are used to identify people from others based on the experience of that symbol. A continued religious belief or experience can be transmitted through the cultural symbol.

As cultural symbols, the peripheral acts of piety are religious expressions significantly identified with Catholic believers. They are behavioral symbols shared by the common people within the Catholic tradition. Through these peripheral acts of piety, Catholic culture has become a vibrant, colorful, and transformational culture affecting the inner and outer lives of ordinary Catholics.

The magnanimity of the *Hiyang* concept

Hiyang is a creative harmony and integration with all the levels of being, involving humans, the cosmic elements of the Infinite Spirit of God. *Hiyang* also connotes a capacity to sense and identify one's place in the cosmic social order at all levels and to feel which objects, persons, and situations one can have complete harmony with (de Leon, 2007).

The pious expressions such as touching, caressing, wiping, embracing, and kissing some popularly known religious images found within popular religiosity expressions in the country can be cognized as praxis of the principle of *hiyang*. They suggest harmony and integration between humans, the saints, and the divine. They speak about the conscious knowledge of the people regarding their identity (as weak, sick, needing healing, protection, and guidance) in relation to the Divine (the creator, provider, protector, preserver, and healer).

Quantum Interconnectedness

Basic quantum principles say that anything and everything which exists in the entire cosmos, when broken down and analyzed into its purest and most basic form utilizing sophisticated scientific tools and instruments, is merely a vibrating frequency of energy. It also postulates that everything at its core consists of pure energy and everything, both the seen (physical) and the unseen (metaphysical) is intricately interconnected with everything else at this level of causation which is a continuously vibrating mass of pure energy.

The peripheral acts of piety can be seen as a behavioral affirmation of quantum interconnectedness. As people touch, caress, wipe, and kiss popularly known religious images, they simply affirmed something naturally true at the quantum level, the interconnectedness of the physical and the metaphysical. The peripheral act of piety is an expression of a quantum kind of spirituality, a way of life that is intricately influenced by a form of spirit-cosmic energy which is God.

Conclusion

Understanding the peripheral external ritual expressions among Filipino popular religiosity seen from a cosmic anthropological perspective led the researcher to the following conclusions:

1. Filipino religious piety is undeniably very alive in the country, creative, meaningful, and increasingly affecting the lives of the faithful through various popular religiosity expressions the Filipinos have. They manifest in many forms such as devotion, procession, drama, chanting, dance, and pilgrimage. They are observed by many Catholics, especially by the lay faithful, every year.
2. From the rich expression of Filipino religiosity, observed are the intriguing peripheral acts of piety such as touching, caressing, wiping, and kissing some popularly known religious articles. The peripheral acts of piety committed by the Filipino Catholics seemed simple religious exercises which attracted negative appreciation mostly from other people that do not belong to the catholic community. They are valid religious acts in as far as they are of the

faithful and by the faith. They come from the inner religious appetite of Filipino Catholics.

3. Analyzing them more closely one can see a lot of sense behind them. It is value-laden. Using cosmic anthropology as a lens, these peripheral acts of piety can be cognized as follows: It exudes a panentheistic view of God, the cosmos, and humanity; It shows the extent of appreciation the ordinary faithful have for Jesus, not only as Son of God but as human as well that people can easily identify themselves with; It is a way for people to have connection with the divine, to express faith as trust, hope, justice, thanks, and praise; They are expressions of wayless way spirituality that are considered beneficial for progress in the spiritual life of the Filipino Catholics. They affirm the very idea that God is found in one's ordinary life of the believers. They are behavioral symbols shared by the common people within the Catholic tradition, and made Catholic culture more vibrant, colorful, and transformational affecting the inner and outer lives of ordinary Catholics; It is also an expression of *hiyang* that creates some sort of harmony and integration between humans and the divine, which led people acknowledged their place in the cosmic social order, and that they need to express something to someone whom they can have complete harmony with, God; and finally, it can be seen as a behavioral affirmation of quantum interconnectedness, as people touch, caress, wipe, and kiss popularly known religious images, they simply affirmed what is naturally true in the quantum level, the interconnectedness of the physical (human and world) and the metaphysical (cosmic God).

Recommendations

As for the recommendations, the researcher encourages others to conduct the following research endeavors:

1. Conduct a similar study that may validate the outcome of this research by considering living or real people as participants and sources of data.
2. Explore further other expressions of Filipino piety at the local community level to discover deeply the richness and uniqueness of the religious experiences of the people.

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