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Popular Religion and the Turn to Everyday Authenticity: Reflections on the Contemporary Study of Philippine Catholicism

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Popular Religion and the Turn to Everyday Authenticity

Reflections on the Contemporary Study of Philippine Catholicism

The seminal works on everyday religion in the Philippines that appeared in the 1960s were motivated by pastoral concerns. Since the 1990s, however, there has been a growing interest in everyday religion as authentic expressions of what it means for individuals to be Catholic. This turn in the scholarship of social scientists and religious scholars has been driven less by the question of secularization than the demand for religion's local relevance. This article explores the conditions under which the turn to authenticity has emerged in Philippine studies: the socioeconomic contexts, the expansion of the social sciences, the changing attitudes to religious institutions, and the emergence of local theological reflections.

KEYWORDS: POPULAR RELIGION · EVERYDAY RELIGION · PHILIPPINE CATHOLICISM · AUTHENTICITY · SOCIAL SCIENCES

Writing in the early twentieth century, James A. Robertson (1918) took note of the presence of American Protestant missionaries that could potentially challenge the dominance of the Catholic Church in the Philippines. A century later, Catholicism has remained influential, and academic interest in it has remained compelling as both established and emerging scholars continue to ask new questions on religion engendered by a fast-changing society. Indeed scholarship on Catholicism in the Philippines has had a very long legacy, and it promises to be even more vibrant in the years ahead. This special issue of *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* is a testament to this claim.

The sustained interest in Catholicism in the Philippines is underpinned by the fact that 81 percent of its population professes the faith, which is expressed in various forms from the conservative to the charismatic and the crucified (Pangalangan 2010). Next only to Brazil and Mexico, the Philippines has the third largest number of Catholics in the world (Pew Research 2011). This trend is reflective of the general movement of Christianity to the global South, with ensuing modifications to its beliefs and practices (Jenkins 2002, 2006; Phan 2008). Indeed institutional Catholicism in the Philippines has played a key role in the expansion of Christianity in Asia (Francisco 2011). It has helped, for example, in forming the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and in setting up training centers like the Asian Social Institute and the East Asian Pastoral Institute. At the same time, we see local variations in terms of religious events such as the highly sensationalized crucifixion rituals and the procession of the Black Nazarene (Tremlett 2006; Zialcita 1986). Paralleling these developments are the ongoing negotiations between church and state in the Philippines, as spurred by recent controversies over the Reproductive Health Law, for example (Bautista 2010; Cornelio 2013b). These and other cases to be recounted below demonstrate the vibrancy of Philippine Catholicism in a way that renders all-encompassing categories such as "fundamentalist" or "conservative" unhelpful (Cornelio 2014b; Jenkins 2007).

Amid the ever-increasing scholarship on Philippine Catholicism, this article reflects on one discernible trend that has taken place in recent years: a growing interest in everyday religion as authentic expressions of what it means for individuals to be Catholic. This turn to everyday authenticity, as it were, tackles contemporary and everyday issues that matter to three broad

areas: the self, religious activism, and the conduct of ministry. I propose the concept of "everyday authenticity" as a way of encapsulating how scholars have begun to highlight the everyday experiences of being authentically Catholic, whether it involves being crucified, participating in socially engaged activities, or recognizing ordinary Catholics' changing attitudes toward their religious leaders.

A clarification is called for. Undeniably scholarship on Philippine Catholicism has had a longstanding interest in everyday or popular religion. Very important here are the historical writings of Vicente Rafael (1988) and John Schumacher (2009) that look at conversion and local receptions of Christianity during the Spanish period. My own interest, however, is in the scholarship that looks at popular religion from the postwar period to the present. During this period religious scholars and other social scientists began to look at contemporary expressions of everyday religion, and their works continue to inform emerging studies. For example, the Jesuit Jaime Bulatao's (1966) concept of split-level Christianity has remained salient today. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the rise of the social sciences has led to ethnographic case studies that have focused on the problem of conversion.

My view, however, is that in recent years a shift has taken place especially among emerging scholars who, drawing from empirical research, have given attention to the agency of contemporary Catholics themselves. In contrast to the pastoral concerns of Bulatao and other religious scholars, these observers have approached everyday Catholicism without the theological baggage of a coherent set of beliefs and practices or institutionally defined ideals. In this sense one can argue that scholarship on popular religion has also shifted to the social sciences. In fact, many of these scholars who have steered the turn to everyday authenticity problematize and move beyond the use of syncretism as a heuristic tool. The novel dimension of personal authenticity recognizes that popular Catholic practices are meaningful to their practitioners, a point that concepts like syncretism and split-level Christianity tend to overlook in the literature.

In this article I confront the questions: How and why did scholarship get to this point? Why has authenticity become a recent concern in the literature? In terms of wider scholarship the social scientific study of religion has been sympathetic generally to everyday authenticity. Key here are the groundbreaking works of Meredith McGuire (2008) and Nancy Ammerman

(2007), who contend that popular religion's apparent incoherence or inconsistency with the prescribed beliefs or practices of institutional Catholicism must not be taken as problematic given that popular religious practices have their own practical logic. I suggest that much of the interest in everyday forms of authenticity in the West has been driven by questions concerning secularization and the lingering presence of religion (Cornelio 2014a).

By contrast, the turn to everyday authenticity in the study of Philippine Catholicism is driven by concerns that have less to do with secularization than with the demand for religion to be relevant to local concerns. For Jenkins (2007), this relevance makes Christianity thoroughly endearing to many societies in the global South. In the context of the Philippines, several factors account for the turn to everyday authenticity: theological advancements in Asia articulated in terms of the Church of the Poor (Dionisio 2011b; Phan 2008), the tension between the Catholic Church and the social sciences (Barry 1996), changing attitudes of Filipinos to the Catholic institution as spurred by controversies such as the Reproductive Health Law (Bautista 2010), and the socioeconomic milieu in which religion becomes a navigational tool (Wiegele 2005). These conditions have informed recent scholarship and prodded scholars to consider how individuals express their Catholic faith in ways that they deem important, relevant, and authentic.

Everyday Religion in Philippine Studies

Popular religion arguably takes the lion's share in the literature on Philippine Catholicism. This section spells out how everyday religion has been generally approached by various scholars writing in the twentieth century. In the postwar period the seminal works on everyday religion sought mainly to document and explain the contradictions of popular Catholicism, many of which revolved around the question of conversion. These observations were driven by various motivations and informed by the historical moments within which these works were embedded. As argued in this article, however, recent works have advanced scholarship by foregrounding authenticity in the study of everyday Catholicism.

In its broadest sense popular (or lived, everyday) religion refers to the diverse experiences of religion among "nonexperts," in contrast to official promulgations or practices prescribed by the institution or by religious leaders (Ammerman 2007, 5). From this perspective everyday Catholicism

among the laity covers a wide range of religious experiences that include folk beliefs in local spirits and healing practices, crucifixion rituals, feasts dedicated to saints, Marian piety, and even charismatic Christianity. Already this list suggests that popular religious expressions within Catholicism may draw in fact from non-Catholic sources and thus contest official doctrine (McGuire 2008), which is the concern of theologians. In turn the latter's motivations for studying popular Catholicism have differed from those of historians and other social scientists.

The Problem of Conversion

At the core of much of the scholarship on everyday religion is the problem of conversion, which authors have approached with different motivations. Arguably Bulatao (1966) has been the most influential in this regard. A Jesuit psychologist, Bulatao brings his disciplinary training to bear upon his assessment of the state of everyday religion, which he characterizes as split-level Christianity. The concept can be applied to various conditions that range from sustained belief in superstition to the commitment of adultery. In essence split-level Christianity refers to the seemingly contradictory religiosities and lifestyles of Filipino Catholics. The image of a two-story house is evoked to suggest that church instruction or religious socialization received by a Catholic (upper level) does not influence the informal socialization (lower level) one receives from mainstream culture. Bulatao is convinced that many Filipino Catholics are able to carry on with the split because they either do not necessarily see the divergence or are compelled to meet social pressure.

Bulatao was not alone in his generation in making these assessments with a clear pastoral view. Vitaliano Gorospe (1966) called for a renewal of values among Catholics because he saw the Christian values of many Catholics as easily compromised by the sense of shame (*hiya*) among many Filipinos, especially when deciding in relation to peer or group pressure. In this sense he echoed Bulatao's (1965) view that the moral dilemmas of many Filipino Catholics were not simply derived from the theological concept of concupiscence. Earlier on John Doherty (1964) suggested that the average Filipino Catholic had yet to encounter religious maturity based on a prescribed understanding of faith and morality. To him the church must ensure that liturgy was "properly understood, effectively adopted, and practically loved" as it could be "a fruitful institutional means for

restructuring religiously mature attitudes” (ibid., 698). Indeed even Frank Lynch (2004) believed that folk Catholicism (in the form of the veneration of patron saints), if carried out with proper guidance, could be a source for the renewal of Catholics (cf. Francisco 1988). From this vantage point, everyday Catholicism was in effect “folk Catholicism,” a phrase employed by Gorospe (1966, 210) to describe how “pagan patterns of beliefs and practices” were simply substituted with saints and the Christian God from whom one simply asks for favors.

The concern for a comprehensive evangelization among Filipino Catholics was to be expected among these early scholars, who were clergy themselves. In this sense their writings echoed the compulsions of early missionaries to train Filipinos to fully embrace the Catholic faith (Schumacher 1968). But these scholars, many of them Jesuits trained in other countries, also differed from their Spanish predecessors in at least three respects.

First, they were religious scholars writing on the heels of American occupation in the Philippines, during which time Catholic leaders, such as Archbishop Michael O’Doherty, felt threatened by the secularist agenda of the government and the presence of Protestant missionaries (Barry 1996; Maggay 2011). In the 1950s the Philippine Congress passed the Rizal Law, which church leaders perceived then as anti-Catholic for requiring students to read *Noli me tangere* and *El filibusterismo*.

Second, these early scholars were also writing at a time when the call for the Filipinization of the clergy was being revived. In the nineteenth century Spanish friars doubted the pastoral readiness of Filipino priests (Schumacher 1984). In the early part of the twentieth century European and American priests and nuns dominated in the stewardship of religious orders and clerical training (Barry 1996). It is not surprising then that, in addressing the inadequacies of contemporary popular religiosity, Bulatao (1965, 121) suggested that priests ought to be native to the community so they could understand local contexts and help parishioners accordingly.

Finally, these religious scholars drew from their modern disciplinary training in the social sciences to assess everyday Catholicism. In fact their writings coincided with the openness of the Catholic Church to empirical research as the Second Vatican Council unfolded in the 1960s. Such openness stood in contrast to the fortress mentality of preconciliar Vatican against the rise of scientific thought in the nineteenth century, when it declared the doctrine of Papal infallibility. As Barry (1996) has spelled

out, psychology gained an expanding role in assessing the readiness and in planning the formation of priests and nuns.¹ Accompanying this openness was an early version of pastoral sociology, the application of social research to missiological needs, which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s in the US, where these early scholars were trained (Froehle 2007). Schumacher (1968, 535) could then claim that “sociological and anthropological research” had underscored “the predominant role . . . of folk Catholicism, permeated with an abiding consciousness of a spirit-world in need of propitiation, and abounding in superstitious beliefs quite in contradiction with orthodox Catholicism.” Also, in a very novel way during his time, Bulatao (1966, 17) called on the clergy to have a “listening attitude” toward their parishioners by being willing to abandon their privileges and status. In a way, this disposition had set the precedent for later religious scholars reflecting on the conduct of ministry (see below).

These early scholars’ pastoral motivation was underpinned by an ideology as to what the church should be like in the postwar period—increasingly Filipinized and informed by empirical research. In this sense their writings could not simply be described as documentations of syncretism, “that even after 400 years of proselytization and parish life under Spanish missionaries and Filipino priests, Filipinos still cling to many of their indigenous beliefs and practices” (Go 1980, 151).²

The Analytical Break

Even around this time a tension could already be discerned between the social sciences and religious scholarship. As F. Landa Jocano (1965, 97) put it, social scientists, when dealing with conversion as a phenomenon, were to “provoke thought and not to provide answers for the problem of conversion” that may be more appropriate for ministers to address. In this sense Jocano (ibid., 101) made a clear break from the pastoral sociology of his contemporaries: “I . . . leave to the churchmen, who are more competent in religious matters than I, the decision to either disregard this study or to make use of it for whatever it is worth.” This tension was not an isolated moment in Philippine studies. Reflecting on the uneasy relationship between sociology and theology in the West in the twentieth century, Kieran Flanagan (2001, 432) noted that “those who can affirm a religious faith and an affiliation with sociology are likely to be treated with suspicion by all parties.” In this light the analytical underpinnings and objectives of pastoral sociology had become suspect.

Driven by secular scholars, anthropological writings from the 1960s to the 1980s approached religion from an arguably more holistic perspective. Some of the scholarship in the wake of this analytical break commonly viewed everyday religion as a coherent system of beliefs and practices. But this point must be qualified. On one level, beliefs and practices were not autonomous on their own. They were taken to reflect and reinforce the wider social structure of which they were a part (Pertierra 1988). From a folklorist's perspective, Harriett Hart (1980, 73) for one argued that folktales that are imbued with Christian narratives "can supplement ethnographies of Christian Filipino society" by identifying salient values. There is, for example, a body of tales that describe how the faithful son who takes care of ageing parents wins the hand of the beautiful princess. For Hart (ibid.) these tales illustrated the "Filipino values of respecting and obeying one's parents (and elders), sometimes at the cost of personal sacrifices."

On another level, studies of everyday religion as a coherent system of beliefs and practices, while mindful of theological contradictions within Catholicism, did not dismiss them as religiously inadequate. In other words the anthropological question was concerned with how locals could effectively inhabit the two (or more) seemingly separate worlds of Catholicism and folk beliefs. From his fieldwork in Ilocos Sur in the 1970s, Raul Pertierra's (1988, 14) account of popular religion, for example, showed that the idea of evil did not derive from human nature's trappings but was simply an "existential feature of the world." Moreover, in his early work on Panay, Jocano (1965) documented how locals were ready to seek help from the priest and the *baylan* (shaman). Individuals could easily straddle the two worlds of institutional religion and local beliefs to avail of the benefits of one or the other. Although theologically contradictory, locals deemed the priest and the *baylan* as effectively on par because of their intermediary role in seeking supernatural intervention. In spite of this seeming contradiction, Jocano (ibid., 101) was quick to point out that when a Catholic "is asked what his religion is he replies that he is a Roman Catholic." This assertion arguably set the tone for the turn to everyday authenticity in later scholarship.

Accepting this break must not have been easy for the clergy because it would have implications on public policy in the Philippines. For instance, as mentioned above, the Rizal Law, which took shape in the 1950s, preempted the contestations between religion and secular education. In response influential clergy modified their rhetoric to also employ scientific ideas to

argue their case. Although the Reproductive Health Law was passed only recently (see Buckley 2014), the controversies surrounding it can be traced back to Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. In a paper read at a religious conference in Baguio in 1973, the Jesuit Gerald Healy (1974) tackled the population policy of Ferdinand Marcos by simultaneously highlighting its moral implications and the uncertainty of artificial contraceptives. But he also conceded that, in view of the increasing use of artificial contraceptives, "the influence of the Church on people's attitudes towards family planning here in the Philippines has been shown to be less than that exerted by folk tradition and cultural attitudes and behavioral patterns" (ibid., 268).

Revisiting Conversion

Because the writings discussed above pursued a holistic perspective, many of them ultimately touched on local rationalities to explain popular religion. They employed instrumental or subjective values to account for the coherence or internal logic of everyday religion. As such, although they were not influenced by a particular idea of official Catholicism, these scholars were driven to identify local values. This angle arguably paved the way for later anthropologists to revisit conversion not as a pastoral concern but as a moment in the local reception and interpretation of Catholicism.

Writing in the 1980s, Fernando Zialcita (1986) discussed the Lenten rituals of voluntary crucifixion and flagellation as local practices of *penitensiya* (penance) that downplayed a sense of sin, which in official Catholic understanding would be crucial in disciplining the body. Locals were shown to be driven by various reasons: to fulfill a vow for an answered prayer, share in Christ's ordeal, or seek healing for oneself or a family member. Often one's decision to practice penance would be made in relation to the need and desire of a family member. A gendered dimension also buttressed much of their ritual participation, with male devotees being given "an opportunity to prove their manliness" (ibid., 60).

The reception of Christianity has been a recurring theme in much of succeeding scholarship on everyday Catholicism in the Philippines. For Charles Macdonald (2004), Catholicism as devotees practice it today is merely an extension of the structure of polytheistic religion in the Philippines. Saints to whom feasts are dedicated and the prehispanic deities they replaced are effectively the same insofar as they have specific roles in the life of the community. A narrative of continuity has also been evident in

some anthropological analyses of informal modes of religious socialization, such as the origin stories surrounding icons like the Virgin of Guadalupe in Cebu and discourses on the ideal woman as submissive, modest, and religious (Brewer 2004; Mojares 2002). Effectively these narratives have replaced and sacralized prehispanic beliefs about certain local spaces, deities, and practices, which weakened the highly influential baylan (*catalonan*) and established the authoritative presence of the Catholic Church since the early Spanish period (Brewer 2004). One may also refer to *Cuaresma*, an important documentation of the events of Lent around the Philippines, which shows how prehispanic beliefs continue to inform popular piety (Cordero-Fernando and Zialcita 2000).

Other anthropologists have enriched the theme of continuity by giving attention to the subjective experience of receiving Christianity. At this point scholarship on popular religion began to deal with the self. Zialcita (2008, 54), for example, mapped out the indigenous habitus or the “native ways of thinking and doing” to argue how Christianity has come to be Filipinized. For instance, individuals perform *panata* or religious vows out of concern for a relative, and here the operative value is *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) for saving the person. Along similar lines, Cannell (1999), in her landmark study, brings in intimacy as the filter through which locals have received Catholicism. She points out that Bicolanos’ relationship with the dead—expressed in funeral rituals, for example—is reflected in the veneration accorded to the dead Christ (*Amang Hinulid*) during Lent.

Other anthropologists have also seen intimacy in other expressions of popular Catholicism in which Christ is treated as brother, Mary as mother, and the Santo Niño as “an orphaned saint” (Ness 1992, 74). In this sense Niels Mulder (1992, 252) was right in his claim that Catholicism in the Philippines is “not really concerned with great ideas, such as the relationship between man and universe, cosmology, metaphysics, or even the afterlife.” In the contemporary period intimacy has also informed social scientists’ view of the success of many lay charismatic groups such as El Shaddai and Couples for Christ (Wiegele 2005, 2013). On top of their ability to offer meaning and encounter Christ in a personal way, charismatic communities also provide “a solid base for solidarity,” which is important for overseas Filipinos and residents of expansive Metro Manila (Kessler and Rüland 2008, 151).

Toward Everyday Authenticity

Although still pursuing everyday expressions of piety, recent scholarship on Philippine Catholicism has welcomed novel dimensions in the self’s expression of religiosity, the Catholic response to the suffering of the community, and the changing pastoral needs of individuals if the institution is to be effective in ministering to them. The emergence of scholarship on everyday religion that tackles the self, religious activism, and the conduct of ministry demonstrates what I argue as the turn to everyday authenticity. Broadly speaking, everyday authenticity refers to the local contexts and experiences of being Catholic in which individuals are able to express themselves in ways that do not necessarily align with institutional prescriptions of religiosity or orthodoxy. In other words authenticity here is understood in relation to the beliefs, practices, and contexts of Filipino Catholics.

This point must be qualified at the onset. The notion of authenticity has been characterized in the literature in individualistic terms, with “self-fulfillment” or “self-realization” as the main goal of the modern life (Taylor 1992, 29). Although the self plays a central role in the discussion of everyday authenticity in this section, we also need to be mindful of its context. In their study of Christian youth in the United Kingdom, Giselle Vincett and Sylvia Collins-Mayo (2010, 239) articulate a “discourse of authenticity” in terms of communities “rather than through doctrine or tradition.”

The turn to everyday authenticity stands in contrast to early scholarship of a clearly normative character, such as Joseph Roche’s (2007, 41) call to foster the “authentic Filipino Catholic believing in Christ,” and drawn from a prescribed understanding of Scripture, liturgy, and catechism. The turn to everyday authenticity also goes beyond the anthropological interest in popular religion, which interrogates conversion or the reception of Christianity. Foregrounding the authenticity of one’s piety and context renders such recent scholarship distinct.

The Self

In recent years, writings on everyday Catholicism have noticeably veered away from discourses that problematize its theological roots or incoherence. Driven by ethnographically oriented researchers, such writings critique the view that popular religion’s folk elements render it “inauthentic.” Peter Bräunlein (2012, 385) notes that many Catholics—including those who crucify themselves—assert that they are “100 percent Catholic.” This

observation to an extent coincides with Jocano's (1965, 101) early claim about locals in Panay, only that Jocano had also suggested that they had "overtly accepted the doctrine, ritual and administrative organization, proposed, approved, or maintained as normative by officially designated authority of the Roman Catholic Church." In contrast the turn to everyday authenticity underscores the reflexive character of individuals to reinterpret (and not simply receive) religion.

Bräunlein's assertion contests the assumptions that there is one genuine form of Christianity as a world religion and that popular Christianity in non-European contexts simply mirrors the backward state of their societies. These assumptions could very well underlie the theological and anthropological material discussed in the previous sections. For example, the very notion of split-level Christianity may have reinforced a bias against indigenous beliefs and practices and by extension popular interpretations of received religion like Christianity. Along similar lines, Julius Bautista (2011, 136) stresses that using syncretism as a heuristic device to assess popular religion devalues "the agency of its practitioners." Indeed the early perception of popular Catholicism was informed not just by theological biases but also by classed moralities (see De la Cruz 2014).

The common denominator among these recent studies is their empirical attention to the religious actor and that actor's identity. As such, the approach surfaces personal sincerity as a key nuance for many Catholics who participate in rituals such as flagellation, crucifixion, and faith healing. In many crucifixion rituals, as in Bulacan and Pampanga, participation is driven by different (and possibly simultaneous) desires such as seeking assistance from God, expressing one's gratitude for a miracle, appeasing one's guilt, or even obeying a divine calling (Bräunlein 2009; Tiatco and Bonifacio-Ramolete 2008). Participating in these events entails volition that is less socially coerced than personally chosen. Thus, for Francisco (2011, 104), people's devotion to a Passion ritual, for example, embodies "an intimate way of making the Christ story their own."³

Viewed in this manner, popular religion is also not just a transactional act that one does to receive favor or power (cf. Zialcita 1986). The transactional character of everyday religion is what media commentators easily dismiss as the fanaticism of Filipino Catholics (and needing adequate religious education, as the early writings mentioned above also suggest). These commentaries imply that participation in popular rituals is simply

the poor's means of religious consolation, a view that in effect disregards their agency. Drawing from his fieldwork on the Black Nazarene procession and the use of amulets and talismans, Paul Tremlett (2006, 15, 17) argues that everyday religion allows devotees to "demonstrate their physical prowess" and "experience their bodies as invulnerable." Tremlett calls into question claims of religious fanaticism by foregrounding the experience of being authentically masculine (as his study is about male power). In other words it is through everyday religion that Catholics are able to express or articulate the manner in which they navigate or even contest their own social conditions. This point is what Chuan Yean Soon (2008) argues in his study that contests typical assessments of local politics in the Philippines in terms of patron-client relationship. In his ethnographic work on Batangas, Soon (*ibid.*, 433) claims that locals draw from religious values in a way that surfaces their religious convictions in order to appraise their own politicians: "To ordinary people, a good politician is someone who has the quality of a saint, who is approachable, willing to make a sacrifice, and sincere."

In the same spirit Wiegele (2005, 14), in her landmark work on El Shaddai, criticizes the reductionist interpretations of El Shaddai members as sheer "cargo culting" as if they were only in the religious services for the blessing or miracles. To her, El Shaddai members "are people with choices, people who fashion and transform ideologies, religiosities, and situations for their own purposes, people who are not mindless at all" (*ibid.*, 15). Her study recounts various personal-transformation narratives that reimagine suffering and poverty as evils that must be overcome by El Shaddai as "the God who is more than enough" (*ibid.*, 4). Prayer requests, tithes, and personal testimonies are articulated in view of transformation. Although he is looking at narratives of conversion to charismatic Christianity, Filomeno Aguilar (2006) makes the observation that individuals undergo a transition from a taken-for-granted belief to conscious faith. In the narratives he analyzes, Aguilar shows that personal crises are usual markers of transformation.

In contrast to the motifs of incoherence, fanaticism, or religious inadequacy that had undergirded earlier scholarship, popular religion may be an expression of a deeper mode of being Catholic. Sir Anril Tiatco and Amihan Bonifacio-Remolate (2008) contest condescending stereotypes in their study of self-flagellation and rituals of crucifixion in Pampanga. They note that "most viewers . . . see the ritual as a leap of faith" or "barbarous and

backward. Nonetheless every pierce of the nail, on the part of the devotee, is a manifestation of a deep faith and sacrifice" (ibid., 72).

In these assertions religious actors themselves have downplayed seeming contradictions. For example, among young people who are often accused of not being as religious as their parents, new forms of "reflexive spirituality" are taking shape (Cornelio 2010, 4). Although not actively participating in church sacraments, young people assert themselves as being more Catholic than their peers who may be active at church by participating in what they consider as more meaningful expressions of faith such as community outreach activities. In another example Tay Augus, an elderly gay Catholic who annually performs a transgendering act as a chorus girl for the Ati-Atihan festival in Aklan, sees his participation as a form of religious devotion (Alcedo 2007). Alcedo (ibid., 131) notes that Augus has been successful in transforming his Ati-Atihan act into an act of faith by bringing "admiration and laughter to the public, but above all, . . . a smile of mischief and forgiveness to the Santo Niño's tender if not feminine face."

Religious Activism

The emphasis on personal authenticity can also be seen in recent studies that have tackled what Catholics are currently doing for their respective communities. Key here is what individuals perceive to be the contemporary and lingering social and political ills of the country. This idea must be qualified. In many cases the nation is imagined, articulated, and confronted through the lenses of their local communities that contend, for example, with poverty or human rights abuses. The nation, in other words, is suffering no longer from a colonial or an authoritarian regime, but from various immediate instances of social injustice (cf. Shirley 2004; Youngblood 1990).

Social and political engagements are therefore emotional and very real for these Catholics. Scholars have started highlighting these local and current forms of activism. In this sense the scholarship on religion and nation is having its turn to everyday authenticity as well. The continuity with Ileo's (1979) notion of a history from below is evident, only that these studies are contemporary and mostly ethnographic in character. Many of these scholars are theologians, sociologists, and anthropologists. Writings in this area have surfaced two qualities.

First is the very political character of everyday Catholic activism. This aspect is arguably inevitable. As Eleonor Dionisio (2011, 5) rightly points

out, to become a "Church of the Poor," as articulated by the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), has a political ring that calls for structural changes in society. Roberto Rivera (2011) also notes that, while PCP II may have been an attempt to calibrate the church's political involvement in view of its central role in the People Power Revolution, it did not fully close the door on any form of political engagement. Hence, like the historical studies mentioned above, some ethnographic studies have touched on the relationship between religion and the state. For example, Antonio Moreno's (2006, 260) work on the activism of basic Christian communities in Bukidnon and Bacolod demonstrates Catholicism's role "as an agent of citizenship formation and advocacy." Focused on upholding the democratic 1987 Constitution, advocating peace and human rights, and promoting electoral reform, these community-based forms of activism naturally have flourished in the postauthoritarian atmosphere of the Philippines (cf. Nadeau 2002). Catholic resistance to authority has now evolved into Catholic advocacy, which supports the process of democratization in the country today.

For the proponents of many other recent studies, religious activism is not necessarily tied to state institutions such as the electoral process and the Constitution. For them the suffering of the community is more palpable in other forms of everyday injustice involving poverty and human rights. Becoming a Church of the Poor is about meeting the needs of the marginalized, whether related to environmental degradation (Picardal 2012) or homelessness (Cagantas 2013). In opposing large-scale mining industries in Samar, for example, Catholics have taken note of the displaced poor who are dependent on subsistence agriculture. Holden's (2012) recent work shows that they have been drawing inspiration from PCP II to contest what they see as the recklessness of neoliberalism. Interestingly even lay charismatic groups are now capable of pursuing social engagement as in the case of Couples for Christ when it initiated Gawad Kalinga. Rivera's (2009) findings about the organization challenge the view that charismatic Christianity is inherently inward-looking.⁴ Even young people, often perceived to be socially and religiously apathetic, are expressing their Catholic faith in various forms of social outreaches. Cornelio (2014b, 1) suggests that these expressions are a form of "golden-rule Catholicism" in which right living has become more important than right believing. Thus, in contrast to the organized social engagements above, these young people are not necessarily driven by theological statements from PCP II or the Second Vatican Council.

The Conduct of Ministry

As noted above, the early scholars of everyday religion, the most prominent being Bulatao (1965), used social scientific language to assess the moral and spiritual condition of Filipino Catholics. Later pastoral reflections, however, have emphasized the importance of understanding the social conditions of the laity so that ministers can address them more effectively (cf. Nicolas et al. 2011). Whereas early scholarship was informed by theological assumptions to understand the laity, later studies have relied on social scientific findings to persuade a change in the conduct of ministry. Stated differently, the earlier studies saw the laity as the problem to be fixed whereas the later studies consider the ministry itself as needing fixing. This shift demonstrates the turn to everyday authenticity too in that the goal is to first understand the everyday situation and context of Catholics. These recent writings have two salient characteristics.

First is the willingness to be critical about the church's own activities. Dennis Gonzalez (2010) points out, for example, that while the Catholic Church in the Philippines encourages the political participation of the laity, its leadership and institutions are not necessarily democratic. He bravely underscores that church leaders and organizations have been accused of being secretive about their financial accounts and not offering just compensation to their own employees. He invites reflection on the extent to which "the hierarchical Church is a genuine democratizing force in society" especially in view of the Second Plenary Council's call for people empowerment (ibid., 56). Turning to Catholic universities, Dominador Bombongan (2008) challenges the accusation that these institutions are incapable of confronting and even entertaining ideas from secular disciplines. Catholic universities, he argues, should welcome cosmopolitanism as a virtue that seeks "not just what separates us from each other" but also "what binds humanity together" to address shared problems (ibid., 14). This idea is timely in the wake of the controversies engendered by the participation of Catholic university professors in the debates over the Reproductive Health Law (Fernandez 2012).

Another facet of these recent pastoral reflections is that they are grounded in systematic empirical research. Drawing from a series of representative surveys on religion by the International Social Science Program, Gerald Nicolas and his colleagues (2011), for example, rightly assert that Filipino Catholics express confidence in the church more than in any other

organization in the Philippines. They note however that such confidence is qualified in that majority of Filipino Catholics are wary of religious leaders influencing government decisions and the electoral process. They suggest that the church ought to "exercise discerning caution in how she makes pronouncements on sociopolitical issues" and focus instead on the moral guidance of its flock (ibid., 99). In terms of religious education, some observers have drawn from their experience and research to deal with the pressing issues confronting Catholic schools. Rito V. Baring (2011), for one, has noted the present condition of religious diversification in the classroom brought about by conversion and migration, while Merceditas Ang (2011, 153) deals with the challenges posed by "secularism, materialism and consumerism" to student formation. Catholic schools are to reimagine their relevance and confront even the economic hurdles of running schools in the Philippines today (cf. Gutiérrez 2012).

Pastorally driven, these recent writings show that the turn to the everyday and authentic realities of the laity is necessary if church leaders are to be effective in running their ministries. Understandably religious educators and church workers are driving this trend, but here generational and analytical shifts are discernible too. The turn, so to speak, is from primarily theological reflections on social conditions to primarily sociological reflections on the needs of the people and the challenges faced by the church as an institution.

Explaining Everyday Authenticity

The accounts foregrounding the religious self, religious activism, and transformations in the conduct of ministry underpin my contention that recent scholarship in the study of Philippine Catholicism has undergone a turn to everyday authenticity. Stimulating these discussions are sociologists and anthropologists interested in personal forms of piety that contest, for example, the assumptions of split-level Christianity. While the entire theme discussed so far has been admittedly on popular (or everyday) religion, the idea of personal authenticity among religious practitioners or devotees is a novel development in the literature.

To be sure the turn to everyday authenticity is not unique to Philippine studies. Some of the more theoretical works on everyday religion increasingly have problematized the assumption that religion is necessarily a unified and coherent set of beliefs and practices. Meredith McGuire (2008) recounts

how institutional religions like Catholicism are shaped by their contact with local cultures in Europe and around the world. Scholars should then give anthropological attention to the local practice of religion and allow individuals to articulate their religiosities.

Secularization has also triggered the empirical interest in everyday religion (Cornelio 2014a). The continuing salience of religion in modernity has compelled Nancy Ammerman (2007) to ask how in fact it is lived by ordinary folk. One main thread that runs through the well-rehearsed debates on secularization looks at the possibility of religion as a phenomenon either completely fading away or simply evolving into less visible privatized forms (Hunt 2005). Robert Wuthnow (1998) characterizes this evolution, which occurred in the latter half of the twentieth century in the US (cf. Bellah et al. 1985), as the shift from a spirituality of dwelling (in religious institutions) to a spirituality of seeking (located in the inner self). In the UK Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2005) have documented the formation of a distinct milieu of holistic centers in which religiously unaffiliated individuals have practiced alternative spiritualities such as meditation. In these studies the self (and not the religious institution) becomes the detraditionalized source and locus of authentic expressions of faith (Heelas 2002). Still other studies focus on how religious individuals maintain active identification with a particular faith amid pervasive nominalism. From his research in the West Coast, for example, Jerome Baggett (2009) shows how Catholics can be reflexive about their own faith and practices by engaging cultural diversity and scientific knowledge. At stake here is an understanding of religious identity that emphasizes agency, a dimension foregrounded too in studies of late modernity (Giddens 1991; Greil and Davidman 2007).

No doubt these trends have influenced many emerging scholars working on everyday religion in the Philippines. In their respective writings they have engaged wider theoretical developments. Contesting the secularization thesis, these studies show that being modern does not signal the decline of religion (Cornelio 2014a). Given the sustained religiosity of Philippine society, secularization does not sufficiently explain the turn to everyday authenticity in the study of Philippine Catholicism. There is a need to identify social conditions that can account for the growing interest in contemporary and everyday contexts of being Catholic. Doing so responds to Syed Farid Alatas's (2006) call for the social sciences in Asia to be reflexively autonomous and indigenized.

The first condition is the expanding (and autonomous) role of the social sciences in the study of religion in the country. This expansion has coincided naturally with the institutionalization of the social sciences in the postwar Philippines, which was driven by substantial international funding for empirical research (Porio 2010). Indeed qualitative sociologists and anthropologists, who are expectedly more interested in pursuing case studies, have dominated the recent writings discussed above. Even scholars in religious education and performance studies have also employed the case-study approach (cf. Tiatco and Bonifacio-Ramolete 2008). Paralleling this trend is the shift in the nature of publishing itself. In fact in their early years the *Philippine Sociological Review* (PSR), published by the Philippine Sociological Society, and *Philippine Studies* (PS), published by the Ateneo de Manila University, served as the primary outlets for pastoral reflections. The religious scholarships of Bulatao, Schumacher, Gorospe, and Healy, among others, were hosted by these academic journals in their earlier incarnations. In recent years, as clearly reflected in this special issue, PS has devoted itself to historiographic and ethnographic papers. To fill the void, such interdisciplinary journals as *Hapag*, established by the St. Vincent School of Theology and Adamson University only in the past decade, have become an outlet for pastoral sociology, alongside other international journals in religious education. But even these recent publications have focused on pastoral reflections based on empirically grounded observations (cf. Baring 2011). *Landas*, a theological journal established by the Loyola School of Theology in the wake of the People Power Revolution, also has been decidedly practical and contextual in its orientation.

In the twentieth century the Vatican has had to contend with the rise of the social sciences (psychology in particular) and its implications for the Catholic understanding of religious life and formation in which the denial of desires is central. The Second Vatican Council opened the doors for the greater role of psychology in assessing the readiness and training of clergy, and this openness has had a palpable effect in the Philippines as well (Barry 1996). The turn to everyday authenticity demonstrates that, while early pastoral sociology approached everyday religion with Catholic orthodoxy in mind, recent writings—autonomous from church obligations—have emphasized heteropraxy through which Catholics are believed to express their faith more fully. Now driven by sociologists and anthropologists, the concern has shifted from the syncretism of conversion to the authenticity of one's religious identity.

However, the implications of the Second Vatican Council have been more far-reaching than merely welcoming the contributions of the social sciences. Barry's (ibid.) seminal work on the postconciliar shifts in the religious lives of nuns in the Philippines shows the increasing importance given to personality (the self) that needs to be individually formed—with consequences on their public engagement. This new emphasis has altered the rigid subservience and collective conformity demanded in preconciliar convents. Drawing from written and oral history, Barry (ibid.) recounts the experiences of nuns who felt that religious experience could no longer be confined to the convent but had to engage real-life social injustices, which in psychological parlance had to be shared (see Barry 2014).

Indeed local theological reflections drawn from PCP II and the social justice thrust of the Second Vatican Council have had palpable impacts on the conduct of ministry in the Philippines (cf. Dionisio 2011b). One impact has been the vernacularization of liturgy, music, and catechism based on the needs of local communities (Francisco 2011). This localization is clearly reflected in the shift in the character of pastoral sociology from one that imposes a particular Catholic ideal to one that first understands the social conditions of the laity. So while the social sciences did expand and become more autonomous in the postwar period the discipline's usefulness has been profound—but in a more nuanced manner—for later clergy. Jesuit sociologist John Carroll's (2006, 24–25) writings in the 1970s stand in contrast to those of his predecessors:

a view of the large landowners' lifestyle compared with that of their workers; measures of the human consequences of the latter in such areas as illiteracy, infant mortality, and incidence of illnesses; visits to families of labor organizers who were imprisoned or had been murdered; visits to the courts in order to see what kind of "justice" the workers receive. After a period of experiences like these, arguments about the definition of structural injustice come to seem hopelessly academic. . . . [T]his type of experience must be complemented by a *religious* experience if it is to generate something other than anger and bitterness.

Furthermore the idea of the Church of the Poor has been compelling. In looking at Christianity in Asia as a whole, Phan (2008) claims that

theological discussions in the region have not been preoccupied with such traditional intellectual concerns as apostolic succession, hierarchy, and the magisterium. He argues that one facet of Christianity in Asia is that it sees poverty as a compelling reality that must first be dealt with. Ramon Reyes (1985, 210–11), in what could very well have been an early discernment of the turn to everyday authenticity, took note of the following changes within Philippine Catholicism by the 1980s:

a keener attention and a more positive view of folk Christianity as lived by the common people; the perception of the close relationship between the task of evangelization, of bearing witness to the Lord, and that of communal service and liberation within the present context of an underdeveloped country like the Philippines; a sense of community and participation as manifested in the formation of basic Christian communities in the rural areas; and the development of an indigenized theological reflection and laity.

The paradox, however, is that accompanying these theological developments are the changing attitudes of Filipino Catholics toward the religious institution. The ethos of the Second Vatican Council in favor of "contextually-derived, experientially-based ideals of spirituality" fostered not just a generation of priests and nuns who wanted a church that was relevant to the needs of the community (Barry 1996, 270), but also a generation of young Catholics for whom personal conscience was central. Consequently the opinions of Catholic leaders have been subjected increasingly to critical appreciation (Cornelio 2011).⁵ The result is that Filipino Catholics, as Terence Fay (2005, 201) puts it, have been taking responsibility "for their own lives and . . . their own spirituality."

Hence scholars need to regard the confidence of Catholics in the church as an institution as qualified since Catholics themselves disapprove the political interference of religious leaders (Nicolas et al. 2011). Other scholars have also noted the attitudes of Catholics toward such controversial matters as divorce and contraceptives (Bautista 2010). Young people have also expressed discontent over religious leaders who seem to be more preoccupied with moral matters than with poverty (Cornelio 2010, 2014b). Clearly these changing attitudes respond to how Christianity "has been used by some outside and within the churches to

legitimate cultural discrimination, social inequity, or political interests” (Francisco 2011, 121).

Finally socioeconomic conditions in the Philippines have framed much of the attention to contemporary everyday religion, a dimension that was not manifest in much of the early scholarship discussed above. Apart from how religion has responded to social injustice, scholars have also been intrigued by the various ways Catholics are negotiating their own economic situation. Personal narratives concerning participation in Lenten rituals (Bräunlein 2009), conversion to charismatic Christianity (Aguilar 2006), and advocacy for the rights of mining-displaced poor (Holden 2012) all relate one way or another to the economic hardship of Filipino Catholics. Manuel Sapitula (2014) in this volume shows too that writing letters to Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Baclaran affords devotees the space to articulate their aspirations for upward mobility and spiritual well-being. At the core of these discussions is the desire of many Catholics to find meaning, community, and a sense of triumph amid their hardships.

However this almost celebratory motif, to a great extent, is a counterpoint to the efforts at social justice as articulated through the theology of the Church of the Poor. These examples are arguably alternative innovations within Catholicism as the Philippines undergoes the challenges of modernization (Cornelio 2008). Hence Wiegele (2005) concludes that the members of El Shaddai are not mindless about their faith, which often has been dismissed as only about prosperity. Having listened to their testimonies and prayer requests, Wiegele (*ibid.*, 103) notes that for El Shaddai members “one is no longer a victim of alcoholism, for example, but a catalyst for change within the family. Their misfortune is no longer simple suffering but meaningful . . . It is not the story of ‘spiritual poverty’ or ‘carrying one’s cross.’ Nor is it a story of struggle against the powers-that-be in society. It is a story of personal faith and transformation.”

Conclusion

The turn to authenticity described in this article is more general than absolute, arguably discernible in several respects. Mainly driven by scholars interested in the ethnographic and case-study approach, the turn to everyday authenticity has dealt with the subjective experiences of Catholics who participate in Lenten rituals, Marian devotion, charismatic Christianity, and other religious communities where they might find meaning and belonging.

Other scholars have also given attention to the social engagement of Catholics in the form of Gawad Kalinga, for example, through which they exercise their golden-rule ethos. These have become avenues for them to articulate and respond to the call of the suffering community. Even pastoral sociology, which informed much of the scholarship on popular religion in the 1960s, has progressed from “fixing the laity” to making ministry more relevant with the aid of empirical research. Taken as a whole, it is the emphasis on contemporary, everyday, and subjective (personally authentic) dimensions of recent writings that set them apart from the theological predisposition of Bulatao (1966) or the anthropological interest in the localization of religion in works such as those of Cannell (2007) or Mulder (1992).

This turn has been driven by various factors, which have not been comprehensively accounted for by the development of interest in everyday religion in the West. The decline of religion, couched in theories of secularization, did not gain traction in Philippine studies, for example. In terms of social context the viable explanations for the turn to everyday authenticity include the economic condition of the Philippines, changing attitudes of Catholics to the institution, and the theological character of Asian Christianity. At the same time, this turn also parallels wider trends that have accompanied the emergence of the social sciences in the twentieth century. The relationship between the Catholic Church and the social sciences has become increasingly qualified in this period. Interestingly the professionalization of such disciplines as sociology, anthropology, and psychology in the country did not lead to the total separation of ministry and the social sciences. In recent years too, some pastoral works have begun to draw from empirical methodologies to first understand the contexts of Catholics (instead of using social scientific knowledge to assess their spiritual state as was done by early religious scholars). But the following needs to be asked: to what extent has such practice influenced the wider community of clergy and theologians?

Here a caveat is in order. Despite the apparent celebration of religion as a lived phenomenon in much of these writings, the turn to everyday authenticity also presents itself as a controversial development. On the one hand, scholars like Fay (2005, 201) celebrate the emergence of such “postmodern Filipino spirituality,” which in his view renders the Catholic faith more relevant. Roche (2007), on the other hand, is skeptical and instead calls for what he describes as authentic formation of the Catholic faith in the context of the

postmodernizing Philippines. It is interesting to note that although both Fay and Roche are priests their seemingly divergent conclusions reflect wider disciplinary tensions as to what authentic Catholicism means.

In the context of the social sciences a more fruitful way to advance the scholarship is the interrogation of the limits of the turn to everyday authenticity in the context of modernity. One area is commodification. For example, as mentioned above, religious feasts are in themselves avenues to express personal religiosity. At the same time, such events as the Ati-Atihan and Moriones festival can be manipulated easily for tourism purposes (Peterson 2007, 2011). Is the commodification of the everyday a threat to the authentic? Another area for interrogation is the nonconventional expressions of popular religion. The recent scholarly works discussed in this article have pursued to a great extent the anthropological interest in religious cases such as charismatic Christianity or Marian piety. But, by its very definition, everyday religion may take place outside the usual purview or category of institutional Catholicism. The privatized expressions of the Catholic faith especially among non-churchgoing youth is a methodological and analytical challenge (Cornelio 2013a).⁶ Finally, pursuing a comparative approach can further enrich scholarship on everyday authenticity. The turn to everyday experiences of authentic religiosity in fact may have variations according to generation, gender, and class (cf. Cornelio 2014b; Kessler 2006).

Notes

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- 1 Social scientific research on the motivations and satisfaction levels of priests remains important to this day in view of resignations, abuse scandals, and declining recruitment (Hoge 2002; Rosetti 2011; for the Philippine case, cf. Cornelio 2012).
- 2 It is ironic that Marcos used some of the findings of these early scholars to justify martial law as the means to revolutionize values that inhibit national development such as *hiya* and parochialism (Hunt 1980).
- 3 What is perhaps intriguing is that even Bulatao has softened his originally hard stance on popular religion. In a much later writing, Bulatao (1992, 72) recognizes that popular expressions of faith, such as devotion to the Santo Niño and the Nazareno, which could be dismissed easily as forms of folk Catholicism, are a "valid experience" of a personal God.
- 4 For a different take on Gawad Kalinga, see Kares 2014.

5 For the American context, see McNamara 1992.

6 For the concept of fuzzy fidelity in Europe, see Voas 2009.

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