



## Traslación: From *Mythos* to *Kairos*

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### Article History:

Received: January 31, 2025

Accepted: May 9, 2025

Revised: May 10, 2025

### How to Cite this paper:

Andrada, Johanne Randolph, and Dominic Bautista Gonzales.  
“Traslación: From *Mythos* to *Kairos*.” *Mabini Review* 15, no. 2  
(2025): 67–92. Accessed [Month Day, Year]. <https://doi.org>.


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# Traslación: From Mythos to Kairos

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## Abstract

The pre-colonial Philippines was a vibrant archipelago filled with diverse faiths, ethnicities, and cultures, reflecting a rich blend of indigenous beliefs and practices. When Spanish colonization arrived, it dramatically transformed the religious landscape, introducing Christianity. Yet, remnants of pre-colonial spiritual traditions persisted, often merging with Catholic practices to create a distinct form of faith. This paper aims to explore the *Traslación* through various scholars. The focal point of this exploration is the *Traslación*, an annual event held every January 9 at Quiapo Church, which highlights the deep devotion many Filipinos have for the Black Nazarene. By drawing on both Western and Filipino philosophical traditions, this leads to the sacred aspects of the *Traslación*, where the divine manifests through communal rituals and passionate involvement. It looks at how participants experience sacred time, moving from *mythos* (the stories of sacred history) to *kairos* (opportune sacred moments), creating a place where the eternal and the momentary come together. At its essence, this paper seeks to answer a fundamental question: *How do we perceive and engage with the sacred in the context of the Traslación and Filipino folk Christianity?* By placing this popular devotion within the broader fabric of Filipino spirituality, the study hopes to shed light on the ongoing interaction between indigenous roots and colonial impact, illustrating how Filipinos continue to shape their identity through dynamic and sacred practices. In the end, the dialectical link between the hierophanic nature of the *Traslación* and Filipino *bayanihan* shall be explored and will later on reveal a more serious societal issue.

**Keywords:** Bayanihan, Hierophany, (Black) Nazarene, Sacred, *Traslación*

## INTRODUCTION

Bodies collide and weave through the throngs, hands desperately reaching out to touch the carroza in a fervent hope for healing and strength. The air is thick with the scent of incense mingling with sweat, while shouts of devotion intertwine with the rhythm of drums, creating a cacophony that swells like a living heartbeat. At first glance, the scene appears tumultuous—an ocean

of maroon and gold, cries of *Salía!* Rising above the din as order emerges from chaos. Yet beneath the raucous surface lies a profound choreography of community, where individuals relinquish their identities, allowing themselves to be swept into a collective spirit of bayanihan, lifting one another in acts of compassion. Yet beneath the raucous surface lies a profound choreography of community, where individuals relinquish their separate identities, allowing themselves to be swept into a collective spirit of *bayanihan*. This spirit—rooted in indigenous notions of kinship, reciprocity, and ritual—animates the crowd, lifting one another in acts of compassion. In this sacred frenzy, pain is shared, hope is ignited, and a deep-rooted sense of belonging flourishes, transcending the tumult and revealing the beauty of devotion that binds the faithful together in a unified expression of faith.

In the weak state of the Philippines, one where institutions that could provide meaning or solace often find themselves faltering, the devotion to the Black Nazarene becomes a point of resilience. While political and social instability mar any promise of healing and justice, the image of the Nazarene strongly proclaims persistence and shared identity. This devotion - a wonderful amalgamation of indigenous practice with Catholic belief - tells us about the fluidity of Filipino culture through which religion is not static but a dynamic set of ideas alive and active in shaping these people's very hopes, fears, and aspirations.

To explore this sacred phenomenon, the study intends to describe and interpret the lived experiences of devotees engaging with the sacred or 'phenomenological methodology.' This method combines a distinct emphasis on conscious experience and embodied meaning-making as dimensions of religious significance, which makes it suitable to approach the intensity and texture of particular religious practices that transcend doctrinal parameterizations. The attending to individuals' experiences, articulation, and sense-making in their devotion through gesture, suffering, and ritual shows how their faith can be understood not just as something believed but also as something lived, felt, and acted upon in a very communal and culturally embedded way.

The paper intends to present how a person views something sacred in *Traslación* and folk Christianity. This ethnographic narrative and theological-philosophical reflection study of the lived religiosity of devotees demonstrates that their faith is expressed in ways that go beyond ritual participation to touch upon deeper grounds of personal and communal identity. Beginning with an account of one particular parish mission in Gen. T. de Leon, Valenzuela, and ending with the annual devotion to the Black Nazarene, the key argument will show how the sacred emerges not simply through dogmatic articulation but in lived practice and cultural memory.

The inquiry is significant because it focuses on faith as a point of interplay between suffering, hope, and transformation in a Filipino socio-religious context characterized by poverty, resilience, and spiritual yearning. To come to grips with how Filipinos experience the sacred, from touching, carrying, wiping, and walking beside the image of the Nazarene, helps us to appreciate a quite intimate yet publicly performative spirituality. Hence, the paper shall trace a logical flow from a concrete narrative occasioned in a local parish, carrying critical theological and phenomenological reflections with thinkers such as Mircea Eliade, Andrew van Gennep, Dionisio Miranda, Søren Kierkegaard, and Rudolf Otto.

This approach hopes to enrich the understanding of Filipino religiosity—not as an irrational display, but as a genuinely human response rooted in meaning-making—toward divine presence and social reality. The *Traslación* becomes a border, both in a worldly and in a sacred sense, where the sacred meets human agony, yearning, and communal identity. To see and comprehend this intersection means to better understand not just the essence of Filipino folk Christianity but also the essence of the sacred in this contemporary world.

The *Traslación* in Filipino popular Christianity offers multiple perspectives with which to explore the intersection of the profane and the sacred, especially within the context of a politically volatile and socially conflicted nation. This essay examines the way the worship of the Black Nazarene, through somatic rituals such as the procession and the somatic release of the believers, demonstrates an intense ontology with the sacred. Although earlier works have discussed folk religious practice in the Philippines, not much has investigated how these practices might be interpreted as a type of ontological encounter with the divine. By emphasizing the *panata* as a personal and communal act of resistance and spiritual transcendence, this paper presents a new interpretation of how religion and devotion can be both a mode of political salvation and a spiritual sanctuary for those struggling to cope with a world frequently apathetic to their plight. In this respect, the article contributes to current debates in the philosophy of religion, specifically regarding the character of embodied belief and the existential aspects of religious practice in today's society.

## The Sacred at the Crossroads

In the year 2018, three seminarians were assigned to the parish of Gen. T. de Leon, Valenzuela, under the guidance of Father Danny Bermudo. In preparation for the *Kristong Hari*, part of their apostolic mission was conducting a census in a squatter community located at the outskirts of the metropolitan barangay. The area was known for its severe poverty and precarious conditions, and was a haven for drug activity; people there were suspicious of outsiders. Fr. Bermudo

impressed the deeper purpose of their mission on the seminarians, reminding them that they were not only doing administrative work but spiritual as well. He told them to be a reminder of the presence of the Church, *“Do not focus solely on the data,”* he advised them. *“Let them see that they are not forgotten.”*

Led by a local elder from the community, the seminarians ventured into the settlement. They were cautioned to avoid direct eye contact with the residents as a reminder of the tense situation in the area. The narrow alleyways wound through houses made of scraps of wood and metal, a stark reality of the struggles of its occupants.

During the census, they met an old woman who lived alone in a small room with only a bed, a few pillows, and an altar. She had long been abandoned by her children, who now live quite comfortably; her husband had died even earlier. However, despite isolation and her weakness, the faith she had did not waver. She gripped the worn, green Bible neighbors said was never away from her hands.

*“Ito na lang ang meron ako,”* she told them, her voice unwavering despite the heaviness in her words. *“This is all I have.”*

The seminarians observed how strong that woman was. Her prayer and the word of God made their faith stand out, something which would stand firm into eternity. To her, the Bible was not so much a possession but something she turned to for comfort and strength, reminding her that she is not forsaken even when they hurt her.

The account of this mission stands as a vivid reminder for those who undertook the work that their effort meant more than the literal, physical act of documentation. It represented an encounter with faith at its best, persevering into the very depths of despair in a quiet but powerful testament of strength found in the sacred.

Such faith, rooted in the sacred and resilient even when lonely, bears a mirror image of the deeper, collective spirituality that defines the devotion to the Black Nazarene. Like the quiet strength of the elderly woman, the *Traslación* is a powerful expression of resilience not only in individual perseverance but also as a shared experience among the Filipino people. This annual procession, full of fervor, unites thousands who carry their burdens as one, echoing the unspoken solidarity found in faith. The Black Nazarene becomes not just a symbol of personal struggle but a mirror of the struggles faced by a people, transcending individual pain to connect the faithful in a profound, communal journey of suffering and redemption.

The *Traslación* is a vibrant embodiment of the Filipino spirit, steeped in collective history and shared experience. For many devotees, the Black Nazarene—darkened by the wood from which he is carved—symbolizes *kapwa-tao*, reflecting their struggles and resilience. As they carry the statue through the streets, they connect not only with their hardships but also with the elaborate narrative of suffering and redemption that has shaped the Filipino identity throughout centuries of colonial history. This devotion transforms the act of worship into a communal journey, echoing their collective pain and unity in faith.<sup>1</sup>

In this sacred relationship, the Black Nazarene becomes more than a statue; he becomes a tangible representation of the shared human experience. Devotees look to him not only for intercession but also for validation of their experiences as they navigate through life's trials. The act of carrying and honoring the Nazarene symbolizes a collective lifting of burdens, a shared journey of faith that acknowledges both individual and communal suffering. In doing so, Filipinos reaffirm their resilience and sense of belonging, finding comfort in the knowledge that their struggles are understood and recognized.

The *Traslación*, held every January 9, is a religious annual rite for the Black Nazarene in which the idea of “transfer” can refer to both the physical and the spiritual sense of the word. As a form of historical migration, the feast of the Black Nazarene, now celebrated annually through a procession that used to commemorate the Black Nazarene transferred from Intramuros to Quiapo in the mid-eighteenth century, has grown to become the largest congregation of devotees in the Philippines.<sup>2</sup> It is not just an old tradition but indicates the concern of today's generation to shift from material things to non-material or spiritual things, as hundreds of millions of people come out in Manila to undertake this lively transfer. Every movement made during the procession makes the faith journey possible, and the devotees' primary purpose is not only to venerate the image but also to experience a ‘transformation.’<sup>3</sup>

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1 See Michael Charleston “Xiao” Chua and Lars Raymund Ubaldo, *Limandaang Taon ng Paglakad ng Bayan Kasama ang Poong Hesus Nazareno* (plenary lecture, National Research Forum on the Black Nazarene, De La Salle University, March 16, 2022)

2 Rev. Fr. Rufino C. Secson Jr., Rev. Fr. Robert B. Arellano, LRMS, Rev. Fr. Christopher S. Crucero, LRMS, and Rev. Fr. Jonathan M. Mojica, *Jesus Nazareno: A Pastoral Homiletic Primer* (Quiapo, Manila: Minor Basilica and National Shrine of Jesus Nazareno, 2024), 9.

3 Rhochie Avelino E. Matienzo, “The Quiapo Leap: A Kierkegaardian Reading of the Religious Experience of the Black Nazarene Popular Devotion,” *KRITIKE: An Online Journal of Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (December 2016): 39, [http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue\\_19/matienzo\\_december2016.pdf](http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_19/matienzo_december2016.pdf).

These devotees go through the streets rolling with intense prayers interrelated to their problems; this exercise makes the *Traslación* a threshold where one leaves reality and floats from the concrete world of reality. Catholic Pilgrimage is the means through which believers touch God and embrace their desire to be healed, released, and spiritually renewed by carrying the statue of the Nazarene. Such ballots are described by the pilgrims as a “letting go,” assuming not only the cross of the statue but also of the trials and dreams that people face. This religious devotion is what transforms the Black Nazarene into a light of hope that ushers people from the sufferings of life to a spiritual realm that will heal and bring them closer to a divinity. Calano described this faith through Andrew Van Gennep’s theory of liminality: “*pilgrims experience distance and release from mundane structures and institutions where they are placed with their assigned roles and statuses in society.*”<sup>4</sup> This transformative journey aligns with Mircea Eliade’s notion of *hierophany*, wherein common objects acquire sacred significance and participate in a reality that transcends the ordinary. Just as Eliade suggests that neither objects nor human acts possess inherent value, the Black Nazarene, through the ritual of the *Traslación*, becomes a profound symbol of spiritual meaning for the devotees.

If we observe the general behavior of archaic man, we are struck by the following fact: neither the objects of the external world nor human acts, properly speaking, have any autonomous intrinsic value. Objects or acts acquire a value, and in so doing become real, because they participate, after one fashion or another, in a reality that transcends them. Among countless stones, one stone becomes sacred and hence instantly becomes saturated with being because it constitutes a hierophany, or possesses mana, or again because it commemorates a mythical act, and so on. The object appears as the receptacle of an exterior force that differentiates it from its milieu and gives it meaning and value. This force may reside in the substance of the object or its form; a rock reveals itself to be sacred because its very existence is a hierophany: incompressible, invulnerable, it is that which man is not. It resists time; its reality is coupled with perennality. Take the commonest of stones; it will be raised to the rank of “precious,” that is, impregnated with a magical or religious power by its symbolic shape or its origin: thunderstone, held

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4 Mark Joseph Calano, “The Black Nazarene, Quiapo, and the Weak Philippine State,” *Kritika Kultura* 25 (2015): 168, accessed December 9, 2024, <https://archium.ateneo.edu/kk/vol1/iss25/11/>; see also Jose Clemente F. Ignacio, “The Black Nazarene of Quiapo: Understanding the Devotion,” *Tinig Loyola: A Student Publication of the Loyola School of Theology* 15, no. 1–2 (2013–2014): 37–38. N.B.: Calano further explains: The “limen” is a temporary release and suspension of the threshold in and out of time. It is here that they receive “liberation,” undergoing a direct experience of the sacred, either in the material aspect of cure and healing or in the immaterial aspect of transformation of personality or conversion...

to have fallen from the sky; pearl, because it comes from the depths of the sea.<sup>5</sup>

Hence, here the statue does not act as a mere symbol of Christ; the statue becomes an instrument that enables the devotees to come into contact with the divine and divine intercessions. Eliade also pointed out that the sacred starts in objects that reveal the presence of a force that gives them meaning and value. What is more interesting here is that despite the sacred status of the Black Nazarene, the devotees see him as also entirely human, someone that can be kissed and wiped using their towels and handkerchiefs.<sup>6</sup>

But these expressions of *pamamanata* (such as “pahalik,” “pagpupunas,” “pagyayapak,” “paglalakad nang paluhod”) have both logical and illogical roots; by saying illogical here, it implies that faith of interiority (*kaloob-looban*) transcends the boundaries of reason, *a la* Søren Kierkegaard. It is a paradoxical “leap of faith” as devotees place their trust in the hope of aligning their *kalooban* with the *kalooban* of God despite limitations, echoing Dionisio Miranda’s philosophical perspective. This act goes beyond reason, momentarily setting aside the ethical norms of everyday life. In this context, we witness devotees stepping over one another and engaging in actions that, at first glance, may seem irrational—but are far from it. Kierkegaard calls this the “*faith of the absurd*.”<sup>7</sup> In a homily delivered by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle during the 2012 Traslación Eucharistic celebration, he remarked on these elements, stating, “*To understand it, you need to be a devotee, because outsiders do not understand.*”<sup>8</sup> No rational schema can be used to encapsulate such a movement.

Such sweeping of the image and taking it home is an effective rite that defines the process of transferring sacredness from the holy onto the devotee. Stemming from this belief, this practice can be observed in the act of *pagpupunas*, where objects believed to be of supernatural origin become

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5 Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 3-4.

6 Mark Joseph T. Calano, “Interiority, Traslación, and the Devotion to the Black Nazarene,” *Kritika Kultura* 35 (2020): 5-020, <https://archium.ateneo.edu/kk/vol35/iss1/3/>, 7.

7 Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, ed. and trans. By Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: University Press, 2009), 514.

8 Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle (Archbishop of Manila), as quoted in Jeannette I. Andrade, Jocelyn R. Uy, and Philip Tubeza, “Millions Defy Terror Alert,” in *Inquirer.net* (January 10, 2012), 28 November 2013; See also Rhochie Avelino E. Matienzo, “The Quiapo Leap: A Kierkegaardian Reading of the Religious Experience of the Black Nazarene Popular Devotion,” *Kritike* 10, no. 2 (December 2016): 29-43, accessed December 9, 2024, [http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue\\_19/matienzo\\_december2016.pdf](http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_19/matienzo_december2016.pdf). 36.



sanctified. The devotees actually suppose that by making contact with the image, they take a lamp from it, enhancing their own religious experience. It is akin to indigenous and ancestral desires to attain *ginhawa*, or well-being.<sup>9</sup> They are such practices which are similar to the notion that people who interact with the sacralized objects and space not only improve their spiritual state but also strengthen the corporate group identity of people linked by the worship of the saint, by the common tradition.

When connecting these thoughts to the considerations of Rudolf Otto, it is possible to gain a better insight into the degree of devotion that is expressed by 'seemingly absurd' practices, which are achievements of how faith goes beyond mere human words. According to Otto, the holy, or *Das Heilige*, respectively, is not simply that which retains metaphorical value or is beyond metaphor; it is beyond language and therefore of a different order to metaphor; it uses terms that are derived from other spheres of experience just as 'erotic' cannot be described in language. As with lovers who use gestures that transcend the verbal to express passion and reach out to each other, so too do the devotees use their bodies to communicate their worship, as well as trying to reach out to the divine. Sweeping the image, the touching and wiping motions can also be seen as responses to an inner spiritual desire – this is what Otto meant when describing that the religious thing is defined not by what it is, but how people act around it and towards it, if that religious thing is an image of Christ.<sup>10</sup> The "leap of faith" prompted by Kierkegaard and stated on the background of *pamamanata* can be connected to Otto's perception of the holy as something that inspires a response which is beyond rational comprehension. This connection is not merely intuitive but has been explored in recent scholarship that bridges phenomenology and Filipino religious practices. Scholars have noted that *pamamanata* often entails a surrender that cannot be fully rationalized, echoing Otto's emphasis on the non-rational core of the sacred.<sup>11</sup> This combined action-belief-identity account demonstrates how devotees practice faith, transform their faith into a shared world, and do so with the knowledge that some aspects cannot be fully comprehended by the secular mind. Kervy Cristobal's passionate remarks deeply corroborate with Otto's explanation:

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9 Zeus A. Salazar, "Faith Healing in the Philippines: An Historical Perspective," in *Asian Studies vol. XVIII* (Quezon City: UP Asian Center, 1980), 35.

10 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, reprinted May 1936), 48.

11 Mark Joseph Calano, "The Black Nazarene, Quiapo, and the Weak Philippine State," *Kritika Kultura* 25 (2015): 167, accessed May 05, 2025, <https://archium.ateneo.edu/kk/vol1/iss25/11/>.

*“Once makahawak ka na sa lubid napakasarap ng pakiramdam. Para kang...sabihin na nating umangat ang iyong personalidad... kasi, bilang tao napakarami mong problema... pero once makahawak ka na sa lubid o kahet anung parte ng Mahal na Poong Nazareno, nawawala lahat na ‘yon’.”<sup>12</sup>*

## The Sacred creating or creating the Sacred?

The question of how we perceive the sacred—whether it’s something we create or that creates us—is fundamental to a greater understanding of the dynamics of religious belief and practice. At its core, it challenges our assumptions about what we believe the divine nature to be and how it correlates with human agency. If the sacred is made, then it is what we create; it falls within the realms of human consciousness, created by our culture, history, or individual experience. But strangely, this very process of producing the sacred presumes some transcendence, some that requires us to realize it must be so: sacred, in the first place. This tension speaks to the heart of religious syncretism, where different belief systems intertwine, not necessarily by design but through the fluid exchange of ideas, symbols, and rituals. The fusion of indigenous practices with Catholic teachings forms a unique expression of faith in the case of the Black Nazarene devotion, which cannot be reduced to the influence of one culture or the other. Xiao Chua noted in his lecture:

Tinanggap natin ang Kristiyanismo hindi dahil uto-uto tayo pero dahil nakita natin na ang ating sinaunang paniniwala ay may hawig sa bagong pananampalataya tulad ng paniniwala sa “kaluluwa,” pagpapakita ng kabutihang-loob at kapatiran, na may paggaling na maaaring mag-“emanate” mula sa mga bagay at patay na tao kaya pinupunasan natin ito, at ang ating mga rituwal at pagsayaw bilang pasasalamat sa magandang ani. We made Christianity our own, inangkin natin ang Kristiyanismo at ginawa na natin itong sariling atin. At ang isa sa pinakamatibay na ebidensya ng pag-aangkin na ito liban sa debosyon sa Santo Niño na

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12 Translation: “Once you get hold of the rope, the feeling is good.. It’s like... let’s say your personality is lifted...since, as a human person, you are filled with problems... But once you have already touched the rope, or any part of the beloved Nazarene, all those are gone.” See Kervy Cristobal. “Pistang Itim na Nazareno Coverage,” PTV 4, January 9, 2012. 49; see also Rhochie Aveli Matienzo, “Kierkegaard in Quiapo!: An Existential Look at the Quiapo Black Nazarene Popular Religious Experience,” *Scientia - The International Journal on the Liberal Arts* 3, no. 1 (June 30, 2014), accessed December 9, 2024, <https://scientia-sanbeda.org/index.php/scientia/article/view/32>.

ibinigay ni Magellan kay Reyna Juana ay ang debosyon sa Mahal na Poong Hesus Nazareno ng Quiapo.<sup>13</sup>

It is this tension of creation and transcendence, of human agency and divine presence, that comes to inform the depth of syncretism. The dark and revered image of the Black Nazarene forms a central point for the dialogue: a glimpse into how the sacred is negotiated, reshaped, and ultimately lived out in the complex interplay of history, faith, and identity.

The Venetian Scholar Antonio Pigafetta recounted in his observations of the early encounters with Raja Humabon's wife Hara Humamay (baptized as Juana):

While the priest was dressing, I showed her an image of Our Lady, a very beautiful child Jesus made of wood, and a cross; thereupon, she was seized with contrition, and, weeping, asked for baptism... She asked us to give her the little child Jesus to keep in place of her idols, and then she went away.<sup>14</sup>

The journal illustrates how rapidly the image of the Child Jesus was embraced and woven into local devotional life, signaling not just adoption but *adaptation*. This swift integration reflects a deeper phenomenon of 'religious syncretism,' wherein indigenous belief systems and ritual sensibilities did not disappear under colonial Christianity but instead coexisted, merged, and reshaped it. Pre-colonial notions of sacredness—such as the belief in anting-anting (amulets), ritual healing, and embodied worship—found new expression in the veneration of the Nazarene, whose physical image became a tangible conduit for divine power. This syncretic process reveals that in the

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13 See Michael Charleston "Xiao" Chua and Lars Raymund Ubaldo, *Limandaang Taon ng Paglakad ng Bayan Kasama ang Poong Hesus Nazareno* (plenary lecture, National Research Forum on the Black Nazarene, De La Salle University, March 16, 2022), accessed May 5, 2025, 9:00 a.m., <https://www.academia.edu/113455421/Limandaang-Taon-ng-Paglakad-ng-Bayan-Kasama-ang-Poong-Hesus-Nazareno>. Translation: We did not accept Christianity because we were gullible, but because we saw that our ancient beliefs bore similarities to the new faith—such as belief in the *kaluluwa* (soul), the showing of goodwill and brotherhood, the idea that healing could emanate from objects and even the dead (which is why we touch or wipe them), and our rituals and dances as expressions of gratitude for a bountiful harvest. We made Christianity our own—we claimed it and shaped it into something distinctly ours. And one of the strongest pieces of evidence of this appropriation, aside from the devotion to the *Santo Niño* given by Magellan to Queen Juana, is the devotion to the *Mahal na Poong Hesus Nazareno* of Quiapo.

14 Antonio Pigafetta, *The Voyage Round the World (1519–1522) An Account of Magellan's Expedition*, edited and introduced by Theodore J. Cachey Jr. (London; The Hakluyt Society, 2011), 50.

Philippine context, religion is not a fixed set of doctrines imposed from above but a dynamic, lived experience shaped by the cultural imagination of the people. It suggests that Filipino identity, far from being static, is fluid, capable of negotiating between imposed structures and indigenous memory, adapting to changing historical conditions while preserving its core sensibilities. This liquidity of religion and culture opened and expanded the possibility of altering the indigenous religions. This syncretic process, in turn, raises the central question of whether the *sacred* is merely a cultural construct shaped by human consciousness or whether it possesses an objective existence that transcends human understanding. Engaging with the ideas of Émile Durkheim and Alfred North Whitehead can help us understand how the sacred functions within Filipino religiosity, offering insights into the complex negotiations between human consciousness and the divine.

Émile Durkheim conceptualized the sacred and the profane to lay a critical framework to show how religious symbols and practices in society serve to meet human needs. The conception of the sacred, in Durkheim's thoughts, is not merely personal or cultural but a deeply rooted social reality that configures collective consciousness. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim writes that sacred things are "*protected and isolated by prohibitions*," and that religious beliefs express the nature of these sacred things and the relations they maintain with the profane.<sup>15</sup> This is the distinction between the sacred and the profane that is central to Durkheim's analysis of religion as a social phenomenon. This dynamic is observable in the blending of Catholic and indigenous elements in Filipino religiosity. The child Jesus' imagery as described by Pigafetta was not just an individual conversion to Christianity but rather a collective incorporation into the social fabric of Filipino life. The sacred symbol of the Catholic Christ took on new meaning, resonating with the pre-existing spiritual beliefs of the indigenous people. This implies that what is sacred for the Filipinos is not an import or foreign concept but may be something that can transform, change, and interact with pre-existing cultural values.

Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy offers another perspective on the question of whether the sacred is only a cultural aspect or an objective reality. Whitehead's notion of God and eternal objects provides a metaphysical framework that can be applied to understand the fluidity of the sacred in Filipino religiosity. In his *Process and Reality*, Whitehead discussed the "*primordial nature*" of God, which he considers as "*complete valuation*" of all eternal objects. For Whitehead, these eternal objects, including the divine, are not things in the fixed sense but are in constant evolution and contingent on the "concrecence"

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15 Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 38.

of actual entities in the world.<sup>16</sup> Thus, God's being is not static or withdrawn from the world but intimate and connected with the very process of creation of the universe.

Applying Whitehead's framework to Filipino religiosity brings to mind that the holy is not a fixed anthropological or cultural product, but rather a fluid process in constant evolution out of human experience. In other words, the syncretic nature of Filipino faith may be considered part of this process, where indigenous beliefs and Catholic symbols somehow come together to create new manifestations of religious expression. The *Black Nazarene*, for example, would symbolize the 'suffering' and 'redemption' in itself, reminiscent of the Filipinos' struggles from centuries past. For Whitehead, the sacred is not an imposed force upon the human consciousness but rather a relational reality that is continuously negotiated in the living experiences of persons and communities.

Both Durkheim and Whitehead can contribute richly to the elaboration of the nature of the sacred in Filipino religiosity. Durkheim's concern with the social dimensions of religion brings out how the sacred integrates communities and holds society together through common beliefs and practices. Whitehead's process philosophy, however, reveals that the sacred is not a fixed cultural artifact but an evolving reality that is in a constant state of becoming from human experience. These various perspectives suggest that the sacred in Filipino religiosity cannot be defined as a product of cultural or anthropological human consciousness but rather one that evolves and is nurtured with the collective experiences of individuals in the lives of Filipinos. This dynamic understanding of the sacred is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of Filipino faith, which continuously negotiates between the past and the present, the indigenous and the foreign, and the human and the divine.

## Choreographed Chaos

The devotion to the Black Nazarene in Quiapo, Manila, is often characterized as chaotic, frenetic, unruly, and maddening. Journalists and critics alike have characterized the event as "*a masterpiece in madness*," "*a canvas of immeasurable chaos*," and "*the most rambunctious and unruly observance on*

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16 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Edinburgh during the Session 1927-28, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 31.

*the local liturgical calendar.*”<sup>17</sup> This chaotic portrayal, however, conceals the underlying structure that governs the procession. Despite its appearance, which would seem to be very chaotic, the annual *Traslación* of the Black Nazarene is a ritual that holds much history and spiritual power, most interestingly, a sense of community thrives at the heart of apparent turmoil. When viewed through the optic of social coordination, devotion, and communal care, all this shows is how the spectacle of this religion is a complex, choreographed performance deeply rooted in collective faith and mutual support.<sup>18</sup>

At least at first glance, the flow of the Black Nazarene procession appears to be an unstoppable tide of bodies, all desperate to reach out and touch the blessed icon or merely to be as close to it as possible, sometimes to the extent of becoming dangerous chaos. But beneath the surface of that tumult, the devotion develops into a delicate, if rarely seen, dance of coordination. It is a “*simulated choreographed craze*,” where the apparent disorder is mitigated by a shared understanding of movement, signals, and community engagement.<sup>19</sup> The coordination is not always readily visible to external observers, especially those who are unaware of the practices of the devotees. However, for participants in the procession, a system of mutual care and cooperation has been developed to ensure the safety and continuation of the event.

Use collective signaling and communication—the major thing that maintains order even with the crowd’s fever, for example, should one of the ropes tying to the andas becomes loosened or dangerous, or if a participant touches some part of the carroza, the procession comes to a stop. This was the signal from one of the “hijos” (male devotees in charge) for the crowd to raise the rope above their heads to avoid further injury or loss of life. This level of awareness and responsiveness speaks to an underlying order and shared responsibility that operates beneath the chaos. The devotees are not just acting

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17 See Recah Trinidad, “Nazarene Devotion: Portrait of a Nation,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, January 8, 2012, [newsinfo.inquirer.net/124169/nazarene-devotion-portrait-of-a-nation](https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/124169/nazarene-devotion-portrait-of-a-nation); Rina Jimenes-David, “Batya’t Palu-palo’ Christianity,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, January 9, 2012, [opinion.inquirer.net/20827/batya-t-palu-palo-christianity](https://opinion.inquirer.net/20827/batya-t-palu-palo-christianity); cited also in Mark Joseph T. Calano, “Interiority, Traslación, and the Devotion to the Black Nazarene,” *Kritika Kultura* 35 (2020): 5–20, <https://archium.ateneo.edu/kk/vol35/iss1/3/>, 6.

18 Mark Joseph Calano, “The Black Nazarene, Quiapo, and the Weak Philippine State,” *Kritika Kultura* 25 (2015): 176, accessed May 06, 2025, <https://archium.ateneo.edu/kk/voll/iss25/11/>.

19 Agatha Guidaben, “March of the Multitudes: Nazarene Procession Grows Every Year,” *GMA News Online*, January 9, 2014, [www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/343106/news/nation/march-of-the-multitudes-nazarene-procession-grows-every-year](http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/343106/news/nation/march-of-the-multitudes-nazarene-procession-grows-every-year).

on individual impulses, but are part of a form of collective responsibility where every participant contributes to safe operation.

The devotion seen in the *Traslación* procession is deeply resonant with the Filipino concept of *bayanihan*, which finds its roots in the concept of *bayani*—a hero who works selflessly for the common good. Just as with the *mamamasán*, devotees, who may carry or pull the carroza, show their commitment not just to the Black Nazarene, but also for the sake of the experience of this communal responsibility that *bayanihan* embodies—the collective efforts of people that unite into carrying out one task, benefitting the whole community. The very procession is a form of *bayanihan*, communal in nature, as the individual devotion converges with the spirit of heroism that defines *bayani*—people willing to devote their efforts for the good of others without personal gain.

*“Base sa mga sinaunang diccionario, ang salitang ‘bayan’ ay cognate o kaangkan ng ‘bayani’ at ‘bayanihan’... Ang ‘bayani’ ay isang mandirigmang hindi naghihintay ng gantimpala sa kanyang paglilingkod bayan, maliban na lamang sa pagtanggap sa kanya ng kanyang mga kababayan bilang isang marangal na indibidwal... May kaugnayan din ang salitang ‘bayan’ sa ‘pagbayani,’ o sa tinatawag natin ngayong ‘bayanihan,’ na nangangahulugang pagtulong sa kapwa ng walang hinihinging bayad... Ang bayanihan ay ang pagtutulong-tulong ng mga magkakapit-bahay upang sa pamamagitan ng kanilang pinagsama-samang lakas ay mairaos kaagad ang isang gawain tulad halimbawa ng paglilipat ng bahay...”<sup>20</sup>*

In both the *Traslación* and the *bayanihan*, there is a deep connection between individual sacrifice and communal unity. The *mamamasán*, like the Filipino heroes or *bayani*, surpasses personal desire to take on a shared, often burdensome, responsibility for the well-being of others. This reflects the core principle of *bayanihan*, which is not just communal work but a heroic act propelled by solidarity and the pursuit of the collective good. This is what devotion, as part of the procession, would do—not just be an individual form of faith but also carry the essence of *bayani*, one whose action moves beyond mere self-interest, bringing better welfare to all members of society. With this view, devotion during the procession represents the spirit of *bayanihan* in actuality,

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20 Praksis Miranda, “Konsepto Ng ‘Bayan’ Sa Mga Tagalog Na Awiting Liturhikal,” *Philippine Sociological Review* 64, no. 1 (2016): 45–78, 51, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44211751>. Translation: Based on ancient dictionaries, the word ‘bayan’ is cognate or related to ‘bayani’ and ‘bayanihan’. The term ‘bayani’ refers to a warrior who does not expect a reward for their service to the community, except for being recognized by their fellow citizens as a noble individual. The word ‘bayan’ is also connected to ‘pagbayani,’ or what we now call ‘bayanihan,’ which means helping others without expecting payment. Bayanihan involves neighbors working together so that, through their combined efforts, a task—such as moving a house—can be completed quickly.

where *bayani* shows heroism through a concerted effort towards good for other people.

This communal spirit can be exemplified by the practice of *pinga*, where the symbolic act of letting oneself be stepped on or carried in the crowd takes place. According to one of the informants, for instance, the *mamamasán* willingly gives up personal space and physical comfort in favor of others, particularly when there is extreme pressure or exhaustion.<sup>21</sup> This is an act of selflessness not only in the form of penitence or mortification of the body but in a deeper sense of engagement with the community. Devotion transcends personal salvation and incorporates the larger body of believers into it. The very gesture of allowing oneself to be “stepped on” proclaims allegiance to shared suffering and a transcendence of individualism.

In many ways, the *mamamasán*’s act of letting themselves be “stepped on” as a form of penitence becomes a sacrifice for the collective well-being. It reinforces that all participants in the procession are connected to one another. This resonates in the larger theme of *bayanihan*, where personal sacrifice becomes an expression of solidarity. It is not merely the act of lifting the rope or pushing through the crowd that counts, but the ethos behind helping each other in difficult times.

Yet another essential practice of the procession’s choreography is *pagsuko*, or surrender—a practice that provides even greater insight into the profound community dynamics at play. Amidst the overwhelming tide of the crowd, some devotees signal their inability to continue by raising their right hands. This gesture of resignation is not weakness, but a recognition of the bounds of one’s physical stamina in the face of a communal, larger-than-life experience. One of the *mamamasán*(s), usually a *namiminga* (an attendant), will then “surf over the crowd” of the devotee to a nearby first aid station, seeing to it that she is tended to and rested before making her way back into the procession, should she so decide.

The symbolism of *pagsuko* reflects the popular and transcendent wisdom embedded in the devotion: not all participants will touch the *poón* (the statue of the Black Nazarene), and not all will finish the procession. This notion speaks to the humility and surrender required to participate fully in the devotion. It also reminds one that the spiritual journey is not always linear or successful in the way that one might expect. There is wisdom in knowing one’s limitations and

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21 Mark Joseph T. Calano, “Ginhawa as Ethic of Panatà: Body Politics and the Devotion to the Black Nazarene,” *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* 22, no. 2 (2018): 66, <https://archium.ateneo.edu/budhi/vol22/iss2/3>.



when to surrender for the good of the community. Thus, *pagsuko* becomes the expression of faith's paradox: one has to surrender oneself in true devotion to the collective, but a higher and deeper life, somehow larger than the individual's will.<sup>22</sup>

This act is symbolic of greater wisdom, one that professes faith in something more profound than the will of an individual, reminding the world that the spiritual journey is not a linear one nor even assured. It is not about goal attainment but dynamic, communal participation, where surrender is the very expression of faith's paradox.

Søren Kierkegaard, in his writing, gives the concept of truth as very subjective yet unreal in the living experience of human beings. He indicates that the "truth" being sought is not understood by ready-made concepts but only by the lens of personal, lived experience. The leap of faith, as Kierkegaard suggests, is really a commitment to embrace a more sublime, often irrational truth existing beyond our everyday, reasoned lives. It involves stepping into the unknown, which is where the self, with its doubts, fears, and the limitations it carries, is surrendered to something greater—even God, a cause, or an existential commitment to an idea or practice. For Kierkegaard, this leap is not one of reason but of will, that is, a surrender to a truth more elevated than humanity can comprehend and yet surpasses the subjective foundation of the human experience. There is no rational basis for faith. Rather, we have to jump, to take a leap! That's why the book on Abraham is called *Fear and Trembling*—because this is exactly what happens in an act of faith. It is a crisis of earthquake proportions, a choice that cannot be made.

In the evening, he smokes his pipe... he knows the blessedness of infinity, he has felt the pain of renouncing everything, the most precious thing in the world, and yet the finite tastes just as good to him as to one who never knew anything higher.... He resigned everything infinitely, and then grasped everything again by virtue of the absurd.<sup>23</sup>

Both *pagsuko* and Kierkegaard's leap share an understanding of life as absurd. In devotion to the Black Nazarene, just as with Kierkegaardian philosophy, there is this acceptance that truth cannot be grasped or comprehended in any

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22 Mark Joseph T. Calano, "Ginhawa as Ethic of Panatà: Body Politics and the Devotion to the Black Nazarene," *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* 22, no. 2 (2018): 61, <https://archium.ateneo.edu/budhi/vol22/iss2/3>.

23 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 39.

human sense. For the devotees, *pagsuko* is not just about physical exhaustion or a passive resignation but a conscious and active participation in the absurdity of the world, knowing that the goal may never be fully realized. Just as Kierkegaard says, the leap of faith requires an acceptance of the absurd—something that transcends reason—*pagsuko* embodies a similar process of surrendering to a higher truth that is shaped by collective experience and faith rather than individual understanding.

Additionally, the notion of subjective truths is consistent with Kierkegaard, which is always becoming; in this case, *pagsuko* practice points out that each devotee's experience in the procession is a lived, personal truth—subjective, ongoing, and not necessarily aimed at a final, attainable goal. *Pagsuko* represents not the failure of the individual to reach some sort of definitive endpoint, but rather that the journey itself is valid. It reflects Kierkegaard's argument that truth cannot be determined once and for all; rather, it is a process developed based on individual commitment to some kind of greater, however impossible, reality.

It means that *pagsuko* and the leap of faith speak well about the tension between humanity and the transcendence to which it aspires, although it is inapproachable. In both cases, surrender is not an abandonment of self but a deeper affirmation of one's place in the larger, collective, and often irrational flow of existence. This paradox—submission as an individual act, yet at the same time necessary for a community—resonates in Kierkegaard's philosophical paradox: in the leap of faith, one has to embrace the absurd and unknown while still knowing that during this leap, one isn't defeated but rather affirmatively placed in human fragility and the desire to transcend.

### *Salia!* Reaching the Sacred

The *salia*—the collective forward motion of devotees during the procession of the Black Nazarene—mirrors not only the devotion of the participants but also the fluidity of their emotions, much like a dance. This “dance” becomes a visceral manifestation of faith, an ontological yearning that transcends the profane world in search of something sacred, much like Mircea Eliade's concept of political salvation. This way, the movement of *salia*, which is facilitated by an *hijo* who commands the *indayog*, is symbolic as well as pragmatic. It helps maintain harmony and prevent chaos among the crowds of devotees, not harming one another. This dynamic reveals not only the communal nature of devotion but also the tension between the sacred and the profane, a tension that is deeply felt in a society struggling under the weight of a weak state.

The *salia* is more than a physical act; it symbolizes the emotional, collective, and spiritual movement of the people, a journey of both individual surrender and communal effort. The devotion to the Black Nazarene, as exemplified in the Traslación (the annual procession), reflects the emotional capacity of the Filipino people to reconcile their daily struggles with their spiritual aspirations. A good example of how this reconciliation manifests itself is in the *pagsuko*, or act of surrender. When a devotee signals *pagsuko*, it means one has recognized one's limits and that the journey—just like life itself—is not linear and sometimes does not lead to the destination imagined. However, it is this surrender that is the very essence of faith. It is a pag-suko to a power higher than the self, relinquishing personal desires for the good of all, an embodiment of “political salvation” in the writings of Eliade.

According to Eliade, the profane world represents the “unrealities” that rupture the contact that humanity shares with the sacred. In traditional societies, he described this as “a desperate effort not to lose contact with being.”<sup>24</sup> For Filipinos, the thought of this kind of tension strikes a deep sense in their *panata*—an obligation, or vow, a promise imbued with sensuality and danger.<sup>25</sup> This is the physical devotion of the mamamasan, or devotees who carry the *andas*, the platform bearing the statue of the Black Nazarene. It is rooted in the materiality of the body, but for a higher purpose, a spiritual one. The *pagsuko* was neither a surrender in full, but rather an embrace to be communal and consecrated; it was thus one movement that echoes some concepts by Eliade wherein he stated that ritual acts relate this earthly realm of action with the divine.

The annual Traslación of the Black Nazarene in Quiapo, Manila, is not merely a procession, nor can it be explained by the psychological conditions of its believers. Instead, it is a deeply symbolic and socially constructed ritual that provides rich soil for the application of Herbert Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism. In determining the religious significance of rituals like Traslación, one should avoid seeing the image of the Black Nazarene as an inanimate object with inherent religious meaning or as a stimulus that provokes individual psychological reactions. Symbolic interactionism instead forces us to think about how meaning is created, negotiated, and maintained within the public sphere of social interaction.

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24 Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 91-92.

25 Mark Joseph T. Calano, “Ginhawa as Ethic of Panatà: Body Politics and the Devotion to the Black Nazarene,” *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* 22, no. 2 (2018): 68, <https://archium.ateneo.edu/budhi/vol22/iss2/3>.

Blumer condemns the classical and psychological schools' tendency to place the meaning of something either in its intrinsic properties or in individuals' private mental states. As he puts it, "The meaning of a thing is but the expression of the given psychological elements that are brought into play in connection with the perception of the thing."<sup>26</sup>—a view he eventually rejects. He observes that such opinions constrain meaning to procedures such as perception or the' association. This constraint does not account for the collective veneration of the Black Nazarene and how it is developed, sustained, and shaped over time. Why, for example, is the image going to be inspiring acts of crawling barefoot, or is it triggering tears and delirious adoration? Psychological feeling is insufficient to account for this.

Symbolic interactionism, on the other hand, "sees meaning as arising in the process of interaction between people."<sup>27</sup> In the *Traslación*, the wooden image of the Black Nazarene is meaningful due to how devotees, organizers, clergy, and observers act towards it. It is not merely a carved figure; it is *buena mano*, *panata*, miracle-maker, and suffering Christ—all social definitions that are ascribed to it in and through interaction. These movements, tearing the image, waving towels, screaming supplications—establish what the image means for the community. The Black Nazarene becomes a storehouse of common suffering, hope, and healing, not through individual reflection, but through the rich, bodied communion of the devotees.

Blumer's first assumption—that "human beings act toward things based on the meanings that the things have for them"<sup>28</sup>—is readily seen in the passionate involvement of devotees. The Black Nazarene is more than an art object or a theological abstraction. It is an intercessor, a shield, and, for others, a living presence. The meanings are not fixed; they are results of historical and ongoing interaction. The second assumption—that meaning emerges from social interaction—is demonstrated by how new converts are frequently brought to the Black Nazarene by family members, neighbors, or community ceremonies. The meaning is discovered, passed down, and collectively shared. The third assumption—that meaning is worked on and changed through interpretation—accounts for the fact that some consider the procession as penance, others as petition, and others still as cultural identity. The person does not simply receive meaning but interprets and re-interprets it in the flow of social life.

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26 Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 4.

27 Ibid.

28 Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 2.

From this perspective, Traslación is not just an expression of belief but rather an enactment of shared meaning-making. Every movement, every chant, and every gesture revalidates the Nazarene's meaning for people. The ritual, therefore, is not symbolic but constitutive. By the exchange of defining actions by the devotees, the image and its procession acquire moral power, spiritual potency, and even national identity.

By using Blumer's symbolic interactionism, one might view Traslación not as some inexplicable outburst of religious fervor, but as a sense-making practice repeatedly constructed and reconstructed through social interaction. It is in this intersubjective arena that the sacred is made manifest, and the divine made palpable—not in the object only, nor the mind only, but in the relation among self, other, and symbol.

Though plenty has been spoken regarding Traslación from theological, anthropological, and even political angles, another angle—perhaps discomfiting but profoundly enlightening—presents itself through the prism of Jean Baudrillard's theory of *simulacra* and *hyperreality*. This is not necessarily an effort to detract from the spiritual passion or cultural weight of the phenomenon, but to question the character of its representation and the terms upon which meaning is created, consumed, and perhaps annulled. Through Baudrillard, we can think about whether Traslación still exists in the sphere of true religious expression, or if it has been integrated into a closed system of simulation, where symbols move around separated from their referents, and the real is made indistinguishable from its representation. To the millions of Filipino faithful, it is an act of penance, supplication, and adoration. But to the critical gaze, and particularly that informed by Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and hyperreality, Traslación is not just a religious spectacle but a simulated space, in which the divine is indistinguishable from its image. This essay seeks to read the Traslación anew through Baudrillard's third-order simulacrum: the deconstruction of the line between reality and its signs, and the absorption of the 'real' by a media-driven spectacle.

Originally a Spanish carved image of Christ, the Black Nazarene has long since stopped operating as an icon that "stands for" the divine. It is now treated as divine in itself, touched, kissed, or climbed upon for miraculous intercession. In Baudrillardian terms, the image of the Nazarene has traversed all three orders of simulacra. Initially, it was a faithful image (a good appearance)—a symbol pointing to Christ's suffering. In the second phase, it became an unfaithful copy—one that masked and idealized the divine. But in the modern-day procession, we see the third order: the simulacrum no longer represents any exterior reality.

The Nazarene is now the real, and at the same time more real than the real—a *hyperreal*.<sup>29</sup>

This is not so much a theological observation but a semiotic one. The Nazarene no longer ‘represents’ suffering. Instead, it is suffering, it is a miracle in itself, it is holy in itself. And in this breakdown of reference—where symbol and referent break down—we reach Baudrillard’s implosion of meaning, where the image, the ritual, and the media coverage collectively create a closed circuit of belief.<sup>30</sup>

Baudrillard observes that the media no longer convey but simulate. Likewise, the Traslación does not merely declare faith—it performs faith. The procession is carefully covered by news anchors, drone shots, and spiritual commentary; the vision of a perspiring crowd moving as one body in pain becomes the ‘evidence’ of a faith that may otherwise be overlooked. But what is being said? The instant is not monopolized by its practitioners alone. It is taken up by the screen, the camera, the repost, and the caption. The ritual is turned into a spectacle, the spectacle is turned into content, and content is turned into data—passed on, scrolled through, and lost. “Information devours its content,” Baudrillard writes. “Rather than creating communication, it exhausts itself in the act of staging communication.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the ritual tires itself out in staging devotion.

Thus, the Traslación is not a religious act per se—it is a Baudrillardian antitheater: a performance that feeds upon itself, where performer, observer, and observed lose their distinctions.<sup>32</sup>

Here, one wonders: *Does such a hyperreality destroy faith?* Not necessarily. Baudrillard himself cautions against attributing the ‘naivete of the masses’ to them. Believers both believe and do not believe. They are aware that the Nazarene is a wooden image, but also sense in their bones that it is Christ. The crowd becomes the medium, and the procession, its message. But according to Baudrillard’s conclusion, we have already crossed the horizon beyond which the ‘medium is the message.’ We are now where the medium is volatilized too, and the procession becomes part of a fuzzy social reality wherein the real, the symbolic, and the hyperreal become one.

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29 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 82.

30 Ibid., 31.

31 Ibid., 80.

32 Ibid.

Faith, therefore, is no longer inward or theological. It is mediated by repetition, images, circulation, and most of all, presence. One is faithful because one is present. The social body does not think or reflect—it moves, sweats, touches, pushes. This is the implosion of the social: a mass no longer made up of individuals, but of pulses and flows. The real is abolished not by disbelief, but by the gravity of collective simulation.

## CONCLUSION

In a very weak Philippine state, when institutions and social structures seem sometimes fragile or just insufficient, devotion to the Black Nazarene may provide the strength and unification that are needed. Translating itself, which has in it some movements like dance and, in a sense of collective energy, can be one form of political salvation, and the sacred would reconcile with the everyday strife of the Filipino people. Thus, the *panata* is at once a personal and collective act of resistance against the meaninglessness of existence. It affirms a belief in a sacred reality, one that transcends the chaos of the profane world. It's a faith that finds its grounding neither in large political philosophies nor state-led constructs, but in a deep, deeply felt realization that the holy—dramatized through veneration of the Black Nazarene—can soothe and redeem a world that is apparently apathetic to humanity's fate.

The very idea of “ontological thirst,” then, in which Eliade wrote of this need to be touched by a reality higher and further out of grasp than that available, finds itself tapped within this Black Nazarene veneration. For the Filipino, then *pananampalataya* will be a living, active sense experience. Faith would then not be something to imagine but an action, felt and embodied.<sup>33</sup> For there is sensuality even when touching and wiping the *poón*, or participating in the procession, shows just how much there was longing for communion with God. As one informant would say, the act of surrender or “raising the right hand” to signal *pagsuko* is a moment of grace, symbolizing not just physical exhaustion but also a surrender to the higher will of the divine. In this sense, the *salia* is as much an emotional and spiritual drive toward communion with the sacred as it is a physical movement.

Therefore, in attempting to respond to the question, “How do we experience and interact with the sacred in the case of the Traslación and Filipino folk Christianity?” One must understand that the sacred is not reached solely through doctrinal precision or ecclesiastical hierarchy. It is experienced

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33 Daniel Franklin Pilario, “Praying Bodies, Dying Bodies: Reflection on the Nazareno and Santo Niño,” *Philippine Sociological Review* 65 (2017): 139-40, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45014303>.

and interacted with in the flesh, in movement, in tears, and in dust. It is faith that walks, dances, surrenders, and endures.

In this holy-profane syncretism, the Traslación is not just a ritual but a recreation of divine encounter in a world that provides little guarantee. For future research, it could be productive to explore further the political aspects of Traslación, not just as a resistance but as a possible model for alternative civic cohesion in a postcolonial world. Ethnographic scrutiny of how younger generations reinterpret the devotion in online and diasporic contexts can also provide insights into the changing character of Filipino folk religiosity.

The devotion to the Black Nazarene, therefore, is not just a religious act but a profound engagement with the sacred and the profane— a *binary point of reconciliation*. Faith, surrender, and communal effort are interplayed in this manner, mirroring the deeper, existential struggle described by Eliade, where the individual seeks to transcend the limitations of everyday existence in search of the divine. In the weak Philippine state, where institutions that could provide meaning or solace are often failing, this devotion becomes a space for the Filipino people to reclaim purpose and connection to something bigger than themselves. The *salia*—the dancing motion that propels the procession—becomes an epitome of both faith and political salvation, bridging the gap between the sacred and the profane with a momentary reconciliation between the two.

The authorships of this essay reach beyond the domain of philosophy of religion, that of religious embodiment, and that between the sacred and the profane. The juncture here of folk religiosity and existential philosophy, viewing the situation under the guise of Traslación, brings new light to prior assumptions of a religious experience to be exclusively either spiritual or sociopolitical. It proposes that religious devotion in situations of adversity can be both a transcendental act of the spirit and a bodily, collective act of resistance. Future research could go on to explore how these body rituals can feed into wider arguments about the function of religious ritual in postcolonial society, especially about identity formation and collective memory. In addition, how those practices develop in diasporic, globalized communities might also shed more light on why folk Christianity remains as relevant today as it ever was in religious discussion.

The *pagsuko* and the *salia* for the Black Nazarene become, therefore, a dance of faith, an ontological pursuit of the sacred amid the profane. This collective movement reaches toward the sacred, not by escaping the material reality but by engaging with it through an embodied, communal, and emotional experience, thus bringing heaven on earth. The *traslación* becomes not only a



physical journey but a spiritual pilgrimage in which one navigates the tensions between the sacred and the profane in a world that often feels out of control.

“For ordinary people, these everyday practices, which are deeply intertwined with one’s cultural memories and religious history, are the only wells from which they can draw the strength needed in their daily struggle for survival.”

Fr. Daniel Franklin Pilario, CM, 2017.

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