

# The Infusion of Folk Catholicism to *Tambal Binisaya* as an Indigenous Healing System in Iligan City

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## **Abstract**

*For generations, folk medicines have been used to cure various diseases with supernatural and naturalistic causations. With ethnographic descriptive design, mananambals, Tambal Binisaya vendors, and loyal patrons served as key informants in this qualitative study. In obtaining the data, observations, field notes, and interviews were the main instruments used to investigate inculturation, which is the underlying phenomenon behind the folk Catholicism evident in Tambal Binisaya. As such, it was revealed that there are strong pieces of evidence of pre-Christian practices in Tambal Binisaya, such as belief in abyans, balance in natural elements in the body, and even animism, which are somehow divergent from Catholic beliefs that put a premium on God and the total healing of the mind, body, and spirit. Despite these differences, Tambal Binisaya somehow integrated these aspects of the two systems into a hybrid healing practice. The indigenous have indeed been married to Catholicism in Tambal Binisaya.*

*Keywords: folk Christianity, folk religion, folk healing, indigenous knowledge, Catholicism*

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## **1.0 Introduction**

Roman Catholicism is one of CHRISTIANITY'S major branches. The meaning of Catholic is universal. It is universal since it has a global reach and more importantly, it sees itself as the right bearer of the universal Christian doctrines. In 2004, around 1,098,000,000 or a sixth of the world's population was found to be Roman Catholic (Ellwood & Alles, 2007). Among these predominantly Christian populated nations, the Philippines boasts itself of having 79.5 percent of the country dominated by Christians as revealed in the 2015 Philippine census (Madrigal et al., 2020).

Interestingly though, researchers and scholars have noticed that the Philippines practices a certain brand of Catholicism. This is supported

by Flinn (2007), who mentioned that, ever since, Filipinos have always fostered their style of Catholicism. As posited by Mercado (1976, as cited in Macaranas, 2021) this brand of Filipino Religiosity is a manifestation of the phenomenon called inculturation or the symbiosis between culture and faith. Spirituality being a conduit of culture, the theory of inculturation suggests that the Filipino's spirituality is expected to be a reflection of Filipino culture and that Filipinos believe in God's immanence – he is indwelling among people and manifesting ubiquitously. Thus, pre-Christian ways are introduced in Catholicism, and the distinction between systems is blurred since the presence of a supreme deity can be felt even if this is recognized as *anito*, *diwata*, or Jesus

Christ. Among these blended practices, one that continues to persist is the practice of folk healing. It is a practice in which indigenous systems are married to Christian practices in the hopes that the healing brought forth would be more potent.

In the bigger picture, these folk healing practices which are a manifestation of Filipino religiosity are part of what is called as folk religion. According to Ellwood and Alles (2007), folk religion is the religious life of ordinary people who know and follow their religion as it is conveyed and done on a family, village, or popular level, rather than as it is presented through its historical record. This then coincides with the notion mentioned above as divine immanence, where the spiritual dominion and physical world converge. Consequently, folk religion is usually linked with peasant populations in traditional societies, although in modern societies, many of its qualities can be found among the working class and other regular people. It is also known as popular religion. Two main characteristics of folk religion are: (1) it is essentially "cosmic" rather than "historical," and (2) it is primarily passed down orally, through the words and examples of family, community members, and local spiritual leaders, whether priests, pastors, shamans, or others. The belief in miracles and instantaneous evidence of divine power, both good and undesirable, is common in folk religion. Healing miracles and divine safeguards are widely accepted, as is belief in witchcraft or other strange evil. Also, it is possible to accept omens, amulets, divination, visions, voices, signs, and magic seriously. Interestingly though, in today's society, folk religion and its modern popular religion variant, with all their color and celebration remain significant. In the context of Filipinos, since the indigenous is infused with Catholicism, this is then called folk Catholicism.

One particular example of a city in the Philippines where folk Catholicism and folk healing continue to thrive is Iligan. Residents of the City

most likely see stalls for *Tambal Binisaya* or folk medicines day in and day out, as they enter and exit, or pass by the St. Michael's Cathedral, the largest church building in the city, where the biggest Catholic congregation frequents. Herbal medicines, amulets, colored candles, incense, charms, and talismans, are sold here, alongside statues and pictures of saints, and of Jesus Christ, rosaries, scapulars, and the like. Animistic practices and indigenous beliefs are interwoven with the Catholic faith.

Although there is, most probably, an economic aspect in *Tambal Binisaya*, such as payments, donations, and transactions, this study limited its discussion only to the belief system of such folk healing practice. The reason for this is that this research intends to document a phenomenon, which is experienced and observed by many Filipinos, who are generally oblivious to its religious and cultural implications.

In view thereof, using ethnography, this study ventures into describing and analyzing the indigenous and Catholic practices, values, and beliefs embedded in *Tambal Binisaya*. In doing so, converging points between the two systems reveals the manifestation of inculturation which is the core phenomenon underlying folk Catholicism.

Such findings render significant since people, in general, most probably do not know which part of the customs these stalls peddle are based on authentic Catholic belief, and which parts are indigenous. Therefore, it is the task of the scholar and the researcher to clarify this phenomenon.

Along this line, this study also aims at having a better understanding of inculturation, which is the result of people integrating their belief systems into other belief systems.

Furthermore, the result of this paper helps inform and educate the *Tambal Binisaya* vendors and buyers to be more discerning of their mixed-up belief system since this allows for the proliferation of a certain brand of Catholicism that may not be

congruent with the intentions and the dogma of the Catholic faith.

As such, even though Christianity, particularly Catholicism, is the dominant religion in the country, it is still important to situate and find out if the practices of the religious followers are congruent with the religion to avoid practices that might not be acceptable in the eyes of the Church.

Lastly, recognizing the overarching problems that the phenomenon under investigation reveals, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the indigenous customs, beliefs, and value systems in *Tambal Binisaya* and how are they different from Catholicism?
2. What justification can be upheld to support the claim that the folk Catholicism in *Tambal Binisaya*, which is the convergence between the Catholic and indigenous systems, is a manifestation of inculturation?

## 2.0 Methodology

### Research Design

This qualitative research is ethnographic and descriptive in nature. The gathering of data is according to the researchers' observations on, immersions with, and interviews of the key informants. According to Sangasubana (2011), ethnography is the art and science used to describe a group or culture. In light of this study, this methodology is fitting because the results of the research provides significant insights into an aspect of culture at a more personal level. In doing this ethnographic research the following steps are followed: 1) coding for descriptive labels which involves grouping the materials into meaningful categories or descriptive labels, then organizing to compare, contrast, and identify patterns; 2) sorting of patterns which is concerned with sorting or grouping of the descriptive labels into smaller sets to develop themes and have a sense

of possible connections between information; and 3) generalizing constructs and theories in which the patterns or connected findings are related to theories to make sense of the rich and complex data collected. To be guided in arriving at justifications for folk Catholicism as a manifestation of inculturation, the results of this study, are related to the theory of inculturation by Mercado which suggests a blending of cultural systems.

Furthermore, the findings of the ethnographic method are used to uncover the customs, beliefs, and values behind *Tambal Binisaya* which are then contrasted with the customs, beliefs, and values in Catholicism. Thereby, showing aspects where the two systems diverge. After highlighting these differences, the analysis proceeds with probing how the two systems have somehow converged in the folk healing practice which reveals the manifestations of inculturation, as such, showing evidence of folk Catholicism.

### Research locale

Iligan City is situated in Northern Mindanao of the Philippines, with a land area of 81,337 hectares (813.37 sq. km.) and eleven major industries, which makes it highly urbanized. It is home to tripartite peoples – Christians, Lumads, and Muslims – having a population of 322,821 as of May 1, 2010 (Iligan City Government, n.d.). Among these tripartite people, Christians are the vast majority inhabiting the city. These Christians come from various denominations such as Protestants, Adventists, and Baptists, but among these groups, Catholics have the highest population.

The Catholics' biggest church building is St. Michael's Cathedral Parish which is surrounded by folk healing stalls or locally known as *Tambal Binisaya*. The presence of these stalls and the prevalence of indigenous items juxtaposed with Catholic sacramentals is the main reason for this academic inquiry.

### Key Informants and Sampling Design

This study uses purposive sampling in choosing the informants. It involves three sources of information. The first group is composed of the seven vendors or operators of twelve (12) identified *Tambal Binisaya* stalls surrounding Iligan City's St. Michael's Cathedral. These kinds of stalls have been in existence there for more than 30 years, based on the observation of the researchers. The first group of informants was chosen based on the condition that they have been selling *Tambal Binisaya* for at least 5 years. This is to ensure that they have ample background in folk healing practices and they have enough knowledge of the items they are selling.

The second group is composed of the *mananambals* who are recognized according to the *Tambal Binisaya* vendors' and operators' knowledge of and association with them. To guarantee that they have sufficient and genuine knowledge of folk healing, they have to be in practice for ten years or more. Based on the purposive sampling design, three *mananambals* were selected.

The customers who continually patronize their products and services belong to the third group. They are known and chosen for this study in the same manner as the *mananambals*. Ten customers were chosen.

These three sources of information serve as the key informants of the study (KIS) and are selected to get a holistic picture of *Tambal Binisaya*. The *mananambals* or folk healers serve as pseudo-doctors in the *Tambal Binisaya* trade. They perform healing acts and give "prescriptions" to the customers who patronize these folk medicines while the *Tambal Binisaya* vendors serve as pseudo-pharmacists who dispense the "prescription" of the *mananambal*. In this sense, these three sources of information hold significant roles in the continued existence and proliferation of *Tambal Binisaya*.

On the matter of population size, Creswell (2002) has recommended that qualitative

researchers should study one cultural-sharing group in ethnography. In this study, three cultural-sharing groups are involved which goes beyond the suggested sample size.

### Research Instrument

The data are acquired through observations on, immersions with, and interviews of the key informants. In terms of observations and immersions, field notes, which contain necessary queries, are prepared beforehand and used in the fieldwork. Documentations, such as taking pictures of the sites and the key informants are part of the field notes. These observations, immersions, and field notes are done to have a naturalistic account of the practice of folk healing in *Tambal Binisaya*. It helps the researchers document the informants in a less inhibited state. Through this, the outcomes is less controlled. Interviews are also done with the use of guide questions prepared by the researcher ahead of time. By way of questions and answers, the responses of the key informants are noted, followed up, and audio-recorded. The interviews are conducted in the vernacular or Cebuano for convenience and clarity on the part of the key informants. Their responses afterward are transcribed and translated to English for this study. These interviews are utilized to probe into the views and knowledge of the informants and to have a better understanding of the indigenous and Catholic practices, beliefs, and values present in *Tambal Binisaya* which are the main concerns of this study so that manifestations of inculturation-the phenomenon behind Folk Catholicism, would be ascertained.

### Ethical Consideration

In the conduct of the study, letters of consent were given to the informants to read and sign. Before giving the letters, they were informed about the nature of the study, and they were assured

that: 1) the data from the interviews will be used for research purposes only, 2) their responses will be confidential, and 3) they can stop at any point if they wanted to. Only those who gave their consent were included in the study.

### 3.0 Results and Discussions

#### A Thematic Comparison between the Catholic and Indigenous Customs, Beliefs, and Values behind Tambal Binisaya

In this study, the raw data are collected from the key informants and organized into meaningful categories. Thirteen (13) categories are generated in this stage. They are different features, properties, and dimensions within and among the beliefs in folk healing that are identified. Based on the 13 categories, the following points are the data analyzed in terms of thematic analysis. Here, identified beliefs in folk healing are summarized and synthesized, underscoring connections between the different identified categories. Examples are also given to demonstrate how the themes were displayed in actual scenarios:

#### *Diagnosis, Illness Causation, and Healing*

The theme on diagnosis is the combination of the 1st and 2nd formulated categories since these express ways of diagnosis, and the reasons behind them. It involves the diagnosis of illness which can be done either through the help of the *abyan* (spirit guide) of the *mananambal* (folk healer) or through the examination of bodily parts by the *mananambal* and assessing the imbalance of the natural elements in the body;

This is exemplified in an observation with one of the informants performing healing:

*During a healing session, the patient approaches the folk healer (an old lady) and sits in front of her. She brings a bottle of lana and a bottle of water. She inquires about how the patient feels and what is bothering him.*

*She listens to her abyan of what it has to say on the matter. She then asks her patient to sit on the chair and starts tapping her fingers on his head. Afterward, she blows air on the head of the patient which is then followed by the application of lana on the back, chest, stomach, and arms of the patient. Wherever she applies lana, she also blows air on. She then once again gets a bottle of water to make an oracion, and blows air on the water. Afterward, she tells the patient to drink the water. At times, she pours water on the eyes of the patient and at times, pours this on the patient's head. At certain points, she stops and makes her intercessory prayers for the patient, while laying her hand on the head. She instructs the patient to light a candle and to pray before he bids goodbye.*

Next is the theme of illness causation which is the representation of the 3rd and 4th formulated categories. The theme is identified since the two categories explain the different causes of illnesses. It reveals that illnesses are caused by either the *abyan* of the *mamarangay* (sorcerer), evil spirits, folk creatures, or by the disruption of the natural balance of the elements around and/or within the body;

To illustrate this theme, an ailment that according to one of the informants can cure is *giwakwak* (sickness inflicted by ghouls or bloodsuckers), the informant mentioned that:

*"Para ma-ulian, kinahanglan magpalina gamit ang ahus ug bulak sa kapayas. Pagkahuman, kinahanglan mag-oracion sa Latin kang San Agustin. Pwede pud mugamit ug hinagiban nga bronse."*

To be healed, the patient needs to burn incense made of garlic and papaya flower. Afterward, he/she needs to chant a Latin

prayer to Saint Agustin. Weapons made of Bronze may also be used to fight off the *wakwak*.

The ways of healing interventions is also an identified theme, wherein the 5th and 6th formulated categories are seen to be related. It was discovered that healing can be done by either the supernatural help of the *abyan* or the natural means of the *mananambal*;

Since the supernatural help of the *abyan* in terms of healing was already illustrated earlier, this section provides an example of healing intervention through natural means. In an interview with one of the informants, she provides details on how to cure relapse.

*"Para ma-ulian sa bughat, kinahanglan mu-inom ug talimughat. Pabukalan kini gamit ang tulo ka baso nga tubig. Balik-balika ug inom hangtod ma-ulian."*

To be cured of relapse, one must boil the roots of talimughat with three glasses of water. Repeat this process until you are relieved of your ailment.

Overall, it is quite apparent in these three themes that the indigenous practices and beliefs are being used in *Tambal Binisaya* because there are manifestations of pre-Christian ways such as animism/ belief in earthbound spirits and a strong inclination toward natural elements and resources found in nature. This goes to show that somehow indigenous practices have managed to survive even though foreign influences have dominated the country for hundreds of years.

However, although there are facets that coincide with Catholicism like the belief in the natural causation of illnesses and the entrustment of God to allow people to heal the sick, there are some significant aspects in which the Catholic church takes a different stand on the matters of

diagnosis, illness causation, and healing in *Tambal Binisaya*.

Based on the interview with two of the informants, it discloses that they have a belief in naturalistic and personalistic causes of illness which can be related to the two ways of addressing illnesses in the Catholic sense. The Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines (2016), in the Catechism for Filipino Catholics or CFC, makes a distinction between "curing" and "healing". Curing only pertains to removing the bodily sickness; while, healing is holistic in its meaning; that is, bringing wellness to the entire person – body, soul, and spirit. Similarly, in *Tambal Binisaya*, any illness with natural causation (e.g. cough, arthritis, relapse, among others) can only be related to curing, which mainly involves the natural processes of the body and elements in the physical world. Personalistic causes, which are both magical and religious, entail things not only of the physical domain but also of the immaterial soul and spirit; thus, this is related to healing.

Furthermore, according to New Catholic Encyclopedia (2003), the Christian doctrine of salvation links sickness to sin; if not, at the very least, it is linked to the original Fall. As a result, the notion of a religious approach to diagnosis, and treatment of illnesses arise. Christians have traditionally believed in the power of Christian healing, or religious blessings and prayer, in addition to diagnosis and medical treatment. In the Gospels, and even in the other New Testament writings of the Holy bible, illnesses are mentioned and discussed. Jesus cured bodily ailments, like blindness (The New American Bible, 2002, John 9), withered hand (The New American Bible, 2002, Mark 3:1-6), and leprosy (The New American Bible, 2002, Matthew 8:1-4). Peter, after the Pentecost, as he was filled with the Holy Spirit, cured the crippled beggar (The New American Bible, 2002, Acts 23:1-10). Paul, in his conversion to Christ, recovered his sight after Ananias baptized him into

the faith (The New American Bible, 2002, Acts 9:10-19). On the other hand, some sicknesses came in the form of spiritual oppression and sinfulness. All these, of course, concern the soul and the spirit only. Jesus exorcised individuals possessed by evil spirits (The New American Bible, 2002, Mark 1:21-28), and freed women from the slavery of sin (The New American Bible, 2002, Jn 4:4-42; cf. Jn 8:1-11). All these ideas of the naturalistic and personalistic nature of illnesses are similarly apparent in *Tambal Binisaya's* beliefs.

CFC 1830-1835 speaks of this healing ministry of Christ and his apostles as being entrusted to the whole community of followers from then until the present time. This flows to all the faithful in the form of the Sacraments of Healing, which is not exclusively concerned with curing bodily ailments, but the entire being of the individuals. In this sense, Catholics are not to understand the healing ministry of the Church as magical; yet, like the way a person rises his whole being to Christ. However, in the case of *Tambal Binisaya*, this Christ-centered vision of healing is not articulated in any way; thus, it is not manifest in this folk medicine. Rather, healing is recognized as magical, in the sense that it is all about the powers of the spiritual beings through natural and supernatural means (Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines, 2016).

In terms of mystical beliefs on illness causation, it appears that illnesses are identified as part of life, or that no one can escape them. This view falls under Tan's (2008) category of fate, somewhat bringing about a realization when it comes to the eventuality of life. They believe that illnesses are part of human existence, that is, everyone is predestined to it; and no matter how hard one tries to maintain health, he or she eventually gets sick and dies.

This is illustrated in one of the informants' responses:

*Dili malikayan magsakit kay usahay naay abusado sa lawas. Dili malikayan ang magsakit kay maski mag-amping sa lawas, mu-abot jud ang panahon nga magsakit jud. Kabahin jud sa kinabuhi ang sakit. Kay maski magsige ra ug higda, naa juy panahon nga maglain ang lawas.*

Getting sick can never be avoided because sometimes some abuse their bodies. Getting sick can never be avoided because even if the body is taken care of, the time will come when one gets sick. Sickness is part of life. There are indeed times when the body gets sick because even if you are always lying down.

Behind such conviction, one can more or less infer that there is a certain amount of wisdom and humility for accepting the one truth about life – it ends. With this, the ultimate choice of a good Christian is not to do everything in his or her power to assure immortality or avoid death. When one pursues this, it is bound to end in vain. Instead, the true follower of Christ does that which promotes anything that upholds the value of human life even if it means the end of one's own life. The idea is sacrificing one's life that others may live. Nevertheless, the Catholic teaching is contrary to the understanding that people are predestined to illnesses, or that God originally or directly willed these for the world. In Genesis 1 (The New American Bible, 2002), it is clear that everything God directly created, was good; and that sicknesses were not part of it all. The moment the first created people disobeyed God (The New American Bible, 2002, Genesis 3), sin, death, and illnesses, as the consequences of the disobedience (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994) seeped into the human condition.

### ***Illness Prevention and Wellness***

The theme of illness prevention is the association of the 7th and 8th identified categories because both of them convey preventive measures for illnesses and methods of promoting wellness. Based on the analysis, prevention of illness or the promotion of wellness can be done either by supernatural or natural means;

This is exemplified in the responses of the informants:

Using supernatural means

*"Para dili mabuyagan ang bata, kinahanglan kini pasu-utun ug pulseras sa bata kay mahadlok ang dili ingon ato."*

So that a child will not get sick due to nature spirits, he or she must wear a pulseras sa bata (literally, a child's bracelet), since evil spirits are afraid of this accessory.

Using natural means:

*"Para dili magdaot, maglikay sa mga pagkaon nga makadaot. Kung gikan sa init, dili mokaon ug bugnaw kay makapasmo. Kung gutom, kaon sa ug kan-on ayha mu-inom ug tubig, kung na-ulan ug kalit sa dalan, pag-uli sa balay, mu-inom sa ug tubig."*

To avoid getting sick, you should avoid unhealthy food. And when you just came outside during hot weather, never eat cold food because this causes pasmo. When you are hungry, eat rice first before drinking water. When suddenly you get soaked in rain when you are home-bound, drink water once you arrive.

The theme of wellness stands for the 9th, 10th, and 11th formulated categories because they provide the elucidation for the meaning of wellness or health, the ultimate cause of illnesses,

and the essential requirements for effective healing. Apparently, health or wellness is the natural balance of the elements around and/or within the body. Any disruption of this harmony leads to illness. Healing can only be assured when there is faith, cooperation, obedience, faithfulness, and prayer to the *abyan*;

For effective healing, two words that are frequently uttered by both *mananambal* and *Tambal Binisaya* vendors are "*mag-amping*" and "*mag-ampo*" which translates to "take care (of one's self)" and "pray."

Generally, the themes on illness prevention and wellness also reveal the prevalence of pre-Christian practices, values, and beliefs since there is a mention of the natural balance of the elements in the body and supernatural ways of promoting wellness. It is not a surprise to encounter these concepts on wellness and illness prevention in *Tambal Binisaya* since, by its very nature, this form of folk healing was what was practiced even before the arrival of modern technology and Christianity—it is the persistence of ancestral practices.

Furthermore, these themes are significant since the Catholic faith also supports the promotion of wellness, as it urges the faithful to treat the body as the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (The New American Bible, 2002, 1 Corinthians 6:19). It is considered both a blessing from God and something sacred. Thus, everyone has to look after it as its steward. CFC 341 states that this "is exercised in our daily activities which we can rightfully consider as a prolongation of God's continuing work of creating, and a service to our fellow men and women" (Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines, 2016).

However, wellness in the Catholic sense is not limited to the human body alone. Again, "the Sacrament's healing [such as the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick] is the total, personal healing, saving and raising of the whole person. No amount of sickness, pain, suffering – and death itself – can



shake out confident Faith that our ultimate healing is assured in Christ Jesus" (CFC 1835). Simply put, well-being or healing implies the entire body, soul, and spirit united in Christ Jesus. The problem enters when people dichotomize the body from the soul and spirit. It may then be thought that one could have a very healthy body, but has a very sick soul. At any rate, it is worthy to note that the mindset of separating the physical body from the spiritual is not noticeable in *Tambal Binisaya*. In fact, unfortunate conditions, like being cursed as a way of revenge or incidence of theft, are still considered illnesses and are not limited to bodily ailments only. The only thing that is missing in this folk healing is the emphasis on the unity of the entire being of the person – body, soul, and spirit – with the person of Jesus Christ (Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines, 2016).

### ***Spiritual Companions, and the Vocation and Mission in Tambal Binisaya***

Revelation on the nature of the spiritual companions, as sources of supernatural powers, and of the vocation of the folk healers is also an identified theme, wherein the 12th and 13th formulated categories can be connected. It reveals that *abyans* are supernatural creatures that may be identified as God, or as angels, earth-bound spirits, human souls, demons, or evil entities that are understood to be the elements themselves, or forces that have the power to influence the elements. *Mananambals* are called by their *abyans* with the mission to serve through folk healing.

On acquiring spiritual companions, one of the informants mentioned that:

*Gidamgo lang ko usa ka adlaw. Pahilutun ko sa akong anak anha maghilot sa uban. Naay babaye nga tiguwang. Itumun siya, puti ug taas ang iyang buhok. Basta tiguwang na. natural ang iyang bisti. Wala ko kaila niya. Nakita nako siya nga nagduyan sa bagon.*

*Ni-ingon siya sa koa, "hiluta sah imong anak anha ka manghilut sa uban." Atong tungura, napiang ang tiil sa akong anak, napandol. Paghilot nako niya, na-ulian man.*

I just dreamt of this one day. I had to massage and heal my child before I would heal others. There was this old woman who had a dark complexion. She had long white hair. She was really old. Her clothing was just natural. I did not exactly know who she was. I saw her swinging on some tree vines. She said to me, "massage and heal your child before you do that to others." That time, my child sprained his foot because he stumbled. When I massaged it, it was healed.

On the mission of *Tambal Binisaya*, one of the informants said that:

*"Nakita nako ang akong pagpanambal nga importante kay makatabang kini sa pobre ug masakiton."*

I see my healing as important because it helps the poor and the sick.

Based on the findings of this theme, it can be said that at the core of folk healing and *Tambal Binisaya*, is the good intention to be of service to others and to help. The fact that these folk healers want to cure others of their ailments and maladies, goes to show that there is goodness in this practice. Interestingly though, the sources of these healing abilities, such as spiritual companions, can be questionable to many Catholic believers. Nevertheless, this is already evidence of indigenous values and belief systems.

In connection with this, the Catholic Church's teachings do not discount the belief in spiritual companions. One belief in spiritual companions is

in the guardian angels. According to Ellwood and Alles (2007), angels are believed to be pure spirits created directly by God to praise and honor him in HEAVEN and to serve as his messengers on Earth.

Throughout the Sacred Scriptures, the presence of angels, who act as peoples' helpers and guides can be observed. To mention a few, there are the story of Tobiah and the angel Raphael on the road to Media (The New American Bible, 2002, Tobias 5:4-7); the mention of angel Michael in the vision of Daniel (The New American Bible, 2002, Daniel 10:13-21); and the angels ministering to Jesus in several occasions (The New American Bible, 2002, Mt 4:11; Lk 22:43-44). CFC 337 says, "God's absolutely 'individualized' and 'personal' love for every human being is manifested also in his assigning to each of us an angel to be our guardian and mentor".

Another is the belief in God Himself. Many scriptural narratives show mere human beings performing some amazing feat due to God's hand on their backs, such as prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus' apostles and disciples. These extraordinary feats are called miracles. According to Flinn (2007), a miracle is, in the most conventional definition, a divine intervention by GOD for a specific religious purpose, an act that defies natural rules. The possibility and reality of miracles have long been recognized in Catholicism. If God is the Prime Mover and First Cause, it is logical to infer that God can move in the world since, while responsible for natural laws, God is not bound by them. Through divine intervention, God can work miracles. If certain conditions are met, humans can also achieve miracles. Some examples are the incredible miracles performed by the apostles during and after Jesus' earthly life. In their case, the Spirit of the Risen Christ was their spiritual companion, who made all their miraculous deeds possible. This work of miracles is believed by the Catholic Church to have continued

with all of the faithful then and now, by Baptism, being adopted sons and daughters of God (The New American Bible, 2002, Romans 8:16-17). Thus, whatever spiritual gifts that the apostles received may also be received by all the other baptized followers. However, it is not necessarily true in all cases of *Tambal Binisaya*. It has to be made sure that miraculous events caused by individuals are valid and acceptable according to the mind and heart of the Church. One very common example of this one is the healing that occurred to a multitude of people during the Marian apparitions in Lourdes and Fatima.

All this explains the existence of Catholic sacramentals (e.g. crucifix, rosary, bible, etc.) and prayers in the method of healing of *mananambals*, and the *Tambal Binisaya* stalls.

Moreover, in terms of the vocation and mission in *Tambal Binisaya*, it is clear that there is a congruence in terms of the Indigenous and Catholic values and beliefs. Service, love, unity, and solidarity are convictions and values that are apparent in *Tambal Binisaya* practices. The *mananambals* believe that they are called by their *abyans* for such goals. The stall vendors saw that their work pointed in the same direction. Although these are noble aspirations that are also affirmed in the Catholic faith as virtues, the faithful are to be watchful that their acts that seem to be propelled by them are not self-serving. Knowing and loving Christ have to be accompanied by "loving service of others in living faith" (CFC 473), which is called in the early times as *Diakonia*. Unity and solidarity, or fellowship (*koinonia*), do not mean uniformity according to CFC 1387. Even if there are many differences among the members of the community, they become united because of the one Lord who brings them all together. On the same note, everyone can be a steward in the mission of healing. As New Catholic Encyclopedia (2003) posited, most healing is a process involving

a time and sequence known only to God. It calls for a community of persons, professional and lay, willing to spend time with those who suffer and love them into wholeness, using the best medical and spiritual means available.

#### Synthesis:

As such, these themes can be summarized into the following: diagnosis, causes of illnesses, ways of healing, ailment prevention, the meaning of wellness and requirements for effective healing, and spiritual companions and the vocation of healing. All of which show pieces of evidence of indigenous values, practices, and beliefs. Although some aspects are congruent with the Catholic faith, there are still some various points in which both diverge. Although this paper aims to see the differences between the Phenomenon related to Indigenous and Catholic customs, values, and beliefs, it is quite apparent that there are overarching points in which the two systems converge. At these convergent points thrive the practice of folk Catholicism which will be discussed in the next section.

#### **The Manifestations of Inculturation in *Tambal Binisaya*: Marks of Folk Catholicism**

As mentioned by Flinn (2007), ever since, Filipinos have always fostered their brand of Catholicism. Many pre-Christian faiths, such as ancestor worship, have survived. Today, they are now very open to faith healing, they enjoy processions, religious fiestas, and saint devotion, particularly to the Santo Nino, or Christ Child. They also revere relics, use holy water, and wear medals.

In addition, the use of *Tambal Binisaya* is among these practices which marries pre-Christian beliefs with Christian ones. As such, practices from both systems have somehow overlapped with each other and have been accepted and followed by many believers for generations. Since this paper

has already distinguished the differences between what is Catholic and what is indigenous in the customs, beliefs, and values in *Tambal Binisaya*, it will now delve into the ways these two systems have converged which demonstrates inculturation—the phenomenon behind folk Catholicism.

First, curing and healing are both practiced in *Tambal Binisaya*. As mentioned previously, curing mostly focuses on removing physical ailments but healing resonates with the totality of a person—mind, heart, body, soul. In the case of *Tambal Binisaya*, the line is drawn in terms of healing since people see it as a supernatural or magical process (i.e. the use of *abyans* or spirit guides to dispel witchcraft, remove afflictions from malevolent spirits, clairvoyance to identify theft, etc.), rather than the hand of God working and rekindling their faith in him. Despite this contradiction to the Catholic teachings, many Iliganons, and Filipinos in general, continue to patronize *Tambal Binisaya* or folk medicine because they are heavily influenced by their religious beliefs (Rondilla et al., 2021). Simply put, they are more concerned with being cured of diseases than putting greater priority on understanding healing, which is about wellness in terms of all the aspects of a person and having a rekindled faith in God.

Second, both the Catholic faith and the *mananambals* and *Tambal Binisaya* vendors uphold the value of vocation and mission. The *mananambals* believe that they have been chosen or called by their *abyans* or spiritual companions to accomplish a mission. Furthermore, both *mananambal* and *Tambal Binisaya* vendors, believe that curing and healing the ill is an answer to their calling and that they are doing this in service of others, to some, even to God. As mentioned by Berdon et al. (2016), although they have differences, all of them share similarities which are healing the sick, because they consider curing their patients a legacy to their communities. Incidentally, this

call for mission and service coincides with a major mandate in the Catholic faith – “Love one another” (The New American Bible, 2002, Jn. 13:34-35).

Third, it is believed that to maintain the power to heal, folk healers or *mananambals* are said to have an exceptional link with the spiritual realm, which is obtained from his or her supernatural patron (Lieban, 1967, as cited in Berdon et al., 2016). In the Catholic faith, they are encouraged to be in communion with “good spirits”— angels, saints, and God himself. However, in *Tambal Binisaya*, spiritual companions could also include mythical beings such as dwarves, fairies, earth-bound spirits, apparitions, and their ancestors. As such, this encompassing connection with lower beings aside from God and angels blurs the line between Catholicism and folk. Filipino Catholics have to know the distinction between believing in spiritual beings and serving them. The latter is considered idolatry in the Catholic teaching and has to be avoided by the faithful.

Moreover, both the Church and *Tambal Binisaya* inherently believe in miracles. Unfortunately, the claims of miraculous cases in *Tambal Binisaya* are not explicitly recognized by the Catholic authorities. Still, as posited by McCormick and White (2011), within numerous major Christian groups, believing in miraculous, divine healing is both a folk medical belief and an official theological belief. Simply put, the folk-official distinction is complicated and context-dependent. This complex dynamics between folk and Catholic miracle, however, is something that practitioners do not see, which is why they continue to use and patronize *Tambal Binisaya* in the hopes that they would be healed, even if, unknowingly, it is not following the Christian dogma.

Lastly, in the case of *Tambal Binisaya*, Catholic sacramentals (e.g. crucifix, rosary, religious icons, etc.) and prayer guides or novenas are being sold together with folk medicines, amulets, and

charms, in the belief that by merging the two belief systems, the healing brought forth by the *Tambal Binisaya* will become more potent. As forwarded by Jocano (1966), prayers to the Christian deities and chants to the environmental spirits are explored for the cure of illnesses that are caused by the angered supernatural beings or diagnosed due to the oversight in their relationship with humans. However, the Catholic faithful still have to be reminded or educated about the Church doctrines concerning such, and about the vital role of discernment in where and how to draw the line between the two blended belief systems and practices.

Based on all of the premises above, including the evidence and examples that substantiate each of them, the researchers can now safely conclude that indeed inculturation between indigenous folk healing beliefs and practices and Catholic Faith are evident in Iligan City's *Tambal Binisaya*.

#### 4.0 Conclusions

Based on the findings, despite their conversion to Roman Catholicism, many residents of Iligan City adhere to local customs and pre-colonial beliefs which they have superimposed on the practices of the Catholic religion. They, have not given up the old practices, and have instead fitted the external practices of Christianity to suit old patterns as reflected in the *Tambal Binisaya* (Panopio & Raymundo, 2004). This only reaffirms the view of international scholars, that indeed there is a certain brand of Catholicism in the Philippines and *Tambal Binisaya* is concrete evidence of this claim.

Even more, for something that is considered a well-established religious tradition for thousands of years (i.e. Catholicism), this study supports the notion that a belief system does not exist in a vacuum. The possibility of being merged with other belief systems remains inevitable, especially when the culture it comes in contact with already has

an established belief system as well. Faith and folk belief exemplify belief systems that endure cultural contact and thrive in the cultures where they are merged, proving that such systems are dynamic—the impetus of a living tradition. More importantly, these traditional or folk medicines continue to exist and will continue to exist because as mentioned by Robles et al. (2012, as cited in Miranda, 2016) traditional medicine is the totality of knowledge, skills, and practice in health care that cannot be explicitly explained by a scientific framework, but its impact in maintaining health and wellness has been recognized by the society to be reflective of their culture, history and social consciousness.

Moreover, by delving into the folk and Catholic customs, beliefs, and values in Iligan City's *Tambal Binisaya*, an aspect of the Iliganon psyche is brought to light. It can be deduced that Iliganons tend to: aspire for what is good as reflected in the *mananambals* and the *Tambal Binisaya* vendors' aspiration to heal others, not be critical of what they practice and believe in as long as these serve their purposes, and have strong inclinations with the spiritual world rather than having an empirical mindset. These three tendencies have implications since these not only give people a better understanding of how Iliganons view the world but could also reflect the Filipinos in general since the practice of folk medicine is still prevalent in many parts of the country.

Finally, it is important to note that, although this paper has significantly discussed the spiritual and cultural aspects of *Tambal Binisaya*, other aspects of this folk healing practice must also be explored, such as its scientific, social, and economic aspects, so that a more holistic understanding would be achieved in studying and documenting this age-old practice.

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