



Dungaw: Re-imagined Religious Expression in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Expressions of religious piety have been practiced in the Catholic Church as a response to plagues and pandemics. The faithful seek comfort in prayer and appeal to God and the saints for mercy and protection from illness and loss of life. In the Philippines, the veneration of sacred images and placing them outside the window of a house or a church is a religious expression known as "dungaw" (to look out). This paper discusses "dungaw" as a faith-response of Filipino Catholics during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study is an empirical phenomenology that consists of a literary review and interviews. This paper analyzed the significance of the religious expression "dungaw." Four areas of inquiry were identified: (1) Views on the COVID-19 pandemic, (2) "Dungaw" and prayer life during the pandemic, (3) "Dungaw" as a religious expression, and (4) "Dungaw" and communal life. Results showed that Filipino Catholics utilized religion as a coping resource during turbulent times. Filipino Catholics also embodied traditional values to help repair the frayed social fabric during COVID-19.

Keywords Religious coping · Culture · Spirituality · Health · Religion · Popular devotions · Sacred images · COVID-19

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Introduction

Religion, conceptualized as “beliefs, practices, and rituals related to the transcendent or ultimate truth/reality is a multidimensional construct that may be held or practiced in private or public settings” (Koenig, 2012, pp. 2–3). As a system of significance that is grounded in a person’s belief in the sacred and realized within a broader religious context (Talik, 2013, p. 146), religion is significant to many people, and many fascinating behaviors are performed in its name (Hood et al., 2009, p. 1). The religious commitment of people and the influence of religion on a person’s subjective experience and behavior are demonstrated in the various dimensions of religion such as intellect, ideology, public practice, private practice, and religious experiences (Huber & Huber, 2012). Moreover, numerous empirical studies show that for many people, religion is an integral part of human existence (Koenig, 2012). It can play a crucial role in people’s search for meaning and a sense of life (Nakoncz & Shik, 2009). Also, some religious people find comfort in the abiding presence of the divine or sacred during difficult moments (Rilveria, 2018). Moreover, many religious people ask for help from the transcendent or divine (Rilveria, 2018) and collaborate with God in solving major stressors (del Castillo & Alino, 2020; Pargament et al., 2000).

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), which infected more than 62 million people and claimed over 1 million lives, is a threat to global health (Fauci et al., 2020; World Health Organization [WHO], 2020a). For many religious people, the COVID-19 pandemic has also become a test of faith (Baker et al., 2020; Singh, 2020). To mitigate the spread of the novel coronavirus disease, the World Health Organization (2020b) advised people to practice social distancing, wear face masks, avoid spaces that are closed, crowded, or involve close contact, and observe good hygiene. While social distancing may have prevented people from COVID-19 infection, the public health measure also significantly reduced the available supply of religion in the form it was expected (Baker et al., 2020). Catholic priests who succumbed to COVID-19 exacerbated the need for religious ministers and made some people find alternative spiritual measures (Bramstedt, 2020). The imposition of community quarantine led to the cancelation of numerous religious services, pilgrimages, and religious festivals (Dein et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic also forced the privatization of religious practices, wherein religious services and rituals were consumed via asynchronous communication (Baker et al., 2020). Reeling from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the specter of uncertainty, many religious people realized that “the only certainty is their religious faith, which is a rock that they are now needing to hold onto” (Hart & Koenig, 2020, p. 1141).

Poverty, limited health care resources, and densely populated slums make the Philippines susceptible to a viral pandemic. Out of the 106 million Filipinos, around 431,630 have been infected with COVID-19 resulting in 8392 fatalities (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2020). The public health emergency compelled the Philippine government to implement community quarantine procedures to reduce the doubling time of COVID-19 infections, prevent hospitals

from being overwhelmed, create emergency facilities for sick and convalescing people, and reduce deaths (Vallejo & Ong, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic strained the social fabric, threatened the health care capacity of the country, and put the faith of numerous Filipino Catholics to the test. Since many Filipino Catholics approach God with other people when they participate in Eucharistic celebrations, processions, and large trans-parochial crowds (Alejo, 2004), they felt anxious and isolated when their connection with spiritual leaders and church peers was curtailed (Buenaventura et al., 2020).

Interestingly, the COVID-19 pandemic did not only usher a collective memory of traumatic events among religious people. It also provided many Filipino Catholics with a generational consciousness to facilitate a coordinated response and practice social solidarity. There are Catholic religious congregations that served the spiritual needs of the people through online-based Church masses (Pabillo, 2020; Rosales, 2021). Moreover, the Catholic Church opened its doors to the homeless population, provided protective equipment to health workers, initiated feeding programs, and extended holistic care to the people.

Objectives of the Study

Dungaw is a Filipino term that means “to look out.” It is a lived religious experience, wherein some Filipino Catholics placed iconographical representations of Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or Catholic saints near the window or door of a house. Dungaw, an act of popular religiosity, embodies the Catholic Church’s teaching on sacred signs that refer to Jesus Christ (Congregation for Divine Worship & the Discipline of the Sacraments, 2001).

This paper examines the religious expression dungaw and its role as a coping resource for selected Filipino Catholics during the COVID-19 pandemic. To the best of our knowledge, the contribution of dungaw to individuals’ positive psychological state has not been dealt with in-depth. The researchers aim to verify if the “belief in the sacred or divine and the consequent spiritual experience leads to positive psychological states such as peace, hope, and joy” (del Castillo, 2020). Moreover, the researchers aim to contribute to the literature on the interaction of Catholic lived experiences, Filipino culture, and religious coping.

Within the empirical phenomenology framework, the researchers aim to answer the following: (1) What are the views of selected Filipino Catholics regarding the COVID-19 pandemic? (2) What is the relationship between dungaw and the private practice dimension of religion among selected Filipino Catholics? (3) Why is dungaw a genuine form of Filipino Catholic popular piety? (4) What are the implications of dungaw to the communal life of selected Filipino Catholics?

Review of Related Literature

There is a considerable amount of literature on Filipino Catholic popular religiosity. For reasons of space, this section focuses on religion as a coping resource to deal with difficult circumstances, the importance of Catholic sacred images and belief in their power to protect and heal, and the re-imagination of religious expressions as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Religion as a Coping Resource

Many empirical studies revealed that religion could help a person handle daily life problems (Koenig, 2012; Pargament et al., 1988). However, Hood et al. (2009) assert that “the real test of faith comes when common hassles are supplemented by the major trials of human existence” (p. 472). Some of these ordeals are the danger of death, the death of one’s children, scorn of the one who suffers, loneliness, and abandonment (John Paul II, 1984). Since religion can foster positive psychological states such as joy or hope, it can help buffer stress and protect against adverse psychological conditions such as fear, sadness, or anger (Hood et al., 2009). Moreover, a person’s relationship with the divine or sacred can serve as a coping resource in dealing not just with minor stressors, but also during major trials in life (Belavich, 1995; del Castillo & Alino, 2020; Pargament et al., 2011). Thus, religious coping is demonstrated by persons who exert “effort to understand and deal with life stressors in ways related to the sacred” (Pargament et al., 2011, p. 52).

In a predominantly Catholic country like the Philippines, the salience of religion during a global health crisis is manifested by numerous Filipinos who declared that “faith is very important” in the fight against COVID-19 (Patinio, 2020). The importance of religion to many Filipinos is also demonstrated by their participation in religious services every week (Social Weather Stations, 2019, p. 1). These align with the findings of Del Castillo et al. (2020) that there are a significant number of religiously committed Filipinos. Also, many Filipino Catholics utilize religion as a coping resource to deal with the major challenges in life (del Castillo & Alino, 2020).

Catholic Religious Icons: Reminders of God’s Presence and Saving Help

The Catholic Church teaches that sacred images “facilitate supplication and prompts the believers to give glory to God for the marvels done by his grace” (Congregation for Divine Worship & the Discipline of the Sacraments, 2001, para. 240). Hence, religious images serve as devotional aids that remind Catholics of the sacred personages whom they address in prayers (Abogado, 2006). The period from the fifth century onwards marked the formative stage in the growth of cult and veneration of Catholic religious icons, most especially during a plague (Cameron, 2016). Such religious piety has been documented during the Justinianic Plague in AD 541–544 (Meier, 2016), and the Bubonic Plague (Black Death), wherein “the predominant response of Catholics was to seek solace in prayers and direct their religious appeals

to God and saints known for their mercy or power” (Aberth, 2005). As a religious response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Pope Francis led a prayer service at the Vatican, beseeching God to protect the people from the virulent disease. With the “Miraculous Crucifix” prominently displayed on the sagrato of St. Peter’s Basilica, the Roman Pontiff prayed and gave his papal address and apostolic blessing to the world (Vizzi, 2020).

The veneration of sacred images to express gratitude to God and implore the help of the divine during difficult moments is also demonstrated by many Filipino Catholics in the Philippines. Although the Philippine Constitution specifies that people have the freedom to choose and practice their religion, around 80% of the 101 million Filipinos are Roman Catholics (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2017). The Catholic religion was introduced to the country at the onset of the Spanish conquest in 1521 and became embedded into Filipino culture (del Castillo, 2015; Goh, 2005). John Paul II (1981) described Filipino Catholicism as the product of “the rich geographical and human diversity, various cultural traditions, people’s spirit of joy and sharing, and missionary efforts” (para. 2). Noteworthy examples of the close link between Catholic ideology and the public practice dimension of religion among many Filipinos are their attendance to Eucharistic celebrations and active participation in religious feasts. For a significant number of older Filipino Catholics, faith serves as a source of strength and protective buffer from stress and suffering. As such, they go to Mass regularly (Buenaventura et al., 2020).

The salience of religion to a significant number of Filipino Catholics is also manifested in popular forms of religiosity wherein religious icons serve as the object of devotion. An example is a devotion to *Nuestro Padre Jesus Nazareno de Quiapo* in Metro Manila (a city in the National Capital Region). Popularly known as *Señor Nazareno* or the *Black Nazarene*, the 17th-century life-sized image of a dark-colored kneeling Jesus Christ has a huge number of devotees. Every Friday, hundreds of Filipino Catholics attend the Eucharistic celebrations at the Minor Basilica of the *Black Nazarene*. After the Mass, the devotees “wipe the image of the *Black Nazarene* with their handkerchief and put the cloth to an ailing part of their body as a sign of faith and supplication for a physical cure” (Deguma et al., 2019, p.4).

Moreover, numerous devotees demonstrate their religious zeal to *Señor Nazareno* in the *traslación*, a barefoot procession along the streets that lasts for almost 20 h, an integral part of the *Black Nazarene*’s feast day celebrations. In the *traslación*, it is common to see some devotees pushing each other to reach and touch the *Black Nazarene*. Despite some people getting injured, the spiritual fervor of the devotees remains (Espiritu, 2016).

Another unique Catholic religious festival is held in the Bicol region (some 400 km southeast of Manila), wherein numerous Filipino Catholics venerate the images of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Face of Jesus Christ. Known as the *Peñafrancia Festival*, devotion to the Lady of *Peñafrancia* began in 1712 when a sick seminarian named Miguel Robles de Covarrubias attributed his healing to the image. In 1882, a cholera epidemic infected the city. However, people claimed that those who prayed to the image of *Divino Rostro* (the face of Christ) were spared from illness and death. The *Peñafrancia Festival* also includes a *traslación*, wherein the Lady of *Peñafrancia* and the *Divino Rostro* are paraded from Basilica Minore

to the Metropolitan Cathedral. The highlight of the festival is the fluvial procession, wherein the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary is transferred from the streets onto a pontoon-like boat. Accompanied by a multitude of devotees on smaller boats, the Lady of Peñafrancia traverses the river until it reaches the Cathedral (Peterson, 2020).

In Cebu (an island in the Visayas region), a statue of the Christ child believed to be the same image brought by Ferdinand Magellan in 1521 (del Castillo, 2015) serves as the object of devotion for numerous Filipinos. Every day, hundreds of devotees visit the Basilica Minore del Santo Niño de Cebu to queue and wait for hours just to touch the image of the Santo Niño and pray for a cure from sickness and request for other blessings (Bautista, 2010). The feast of the Santo Niño is celebrated during the Sinulog festival, wherein numerous people attend the liturgical celebrations and then participate in dancing the *sug* (a native term referring to the movement of a river current). Accompanied by drum beats, the dancers also carry an image of the Santo Niño while performing on the streets (Ortiz et al., 2017). Through music and *sug*, the individual body rhythms of many devotees are synchronized, which culminates in a dance and worship spectacle.

Dungaw: A Catholic Religious Expression Re-imagined

To cope with anxiety and fear and gain a sense of control over the uncertainties brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, many Filipino Catholics have turned to their religion and faith. However, due to community quarantine restrictions, the public religious practices of Catholics had to be re-imagined. Since Catholic Churches were closed, many Filipino Catholics opted to pray the rosary at home, viewed online Masses (Pabillo, 2020; Rosales, 2021), and devoted more time to personal prayers. Also, there are Filipino Catholics who practiced *dungaw* as a religious response to the health crisis.

The Catholic religious expression *dungaw* involves placing iconographical representations of Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or Catholic saints at the window or door of a house at 6 o'clock in the evening. The religious images are positioned in such a way that they are looking outside or facing the street. Some Filipino Catholics place the sacred images on a *la mesita* (small table) and illumine the makeshift altar with candles. Integral to the practice of *dungaw* is the gathering of the family to sing a liturgical song and then praying the Holy Rosary as well as the *Oratio Imperata* (Obligatory Prayer). The *Oratio Imperata* implores God's protection, blesses health workers, and calls upon the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Catholic saints. *Dungaw* draws inspiration from Filipino Catholic devotions to religious icons and feasts that celebrate the belief in the healing power of God, the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the intercession of Catholic saints (Pabillo, 2020). Hence, those who practice *dungaw* hope that God will protect them from the virulent disease, console the suffering, cure the sick, foster hope during the health crisis, and miraculously end the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a religious expression, “*dungaw*” may seem unsophisticated, superstitious, and emotional. However, it is an important form of popular piety during the

COVID-19 pandemic when public practices of religion are restricted. Also, the Catholic Church proclaims that “authentic expressions of popular piety are not at odds with the centrality of the Sacred Liturgy.” Instead, in promoting the faith of the people who regard popular piety as a natural religious expression, they predispose the people to celebrate the Sacred Mysteries (Congregation for Divine Worship & the Discipline of the Sacraments, 2001, para. 4).

Methodology

This study employed empirical phenomenology to discover the significance of dungaw and its connection to the meaning structure of selected Filipino Catholics during the COVID-19 pandemic. The term phenomenology emerged as early as 1765 in the writings of Emmanuel Kant. However, only with Hegel was that a well-defined technical meaning was constructed (Kockelmans, 1967). Hegel referred to phenomenology as knowledge as it appears to consciousness. It is the science of describing what one perceives and the process that leads to the unfolding of phenomenal experiences toward the absolute knowledge of the Absolute (Kockelmans, 1967, p. 24). This is supported by Aspers (2009) by pointing that empirical phenomenology is an approach to define the focus of phenomenology “that which appears.” It means that the participants’ perspective is central in the analysis, and phenomenology comes from the assumption that a scientific explanation is grounded in the meaning structure of those being studied. Hence, empirical phenomenology recognizes the significant role of theory in research and the role of the participants’ perspectives.

Table 1 Demographics of the respondents

Variables	Total	
	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	12	54
Female	10	46
Total	22	100
Location		
Rural	15	70
Urban	7%	30
Total	22	
Religion		
Catholic	22	100
Other religion	0	0
Total	22	100

Demographics

For phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) recommends 5–25 participants. Hence, this study has a good sampling size. Table 1 shows that there are twenty-two (22) Filipino Catholics participants whose age ranges from 22 to 40 years of age. There are ten (10) females and twelve (12) males. All respondents have practiced or experienced dungaw. They have experienced placing either an image of Mary or the saints on the window or outside their homes. Seventy percent (70%) of the respondents live in rural areas, and thirty percent (30%) live in urban settings. The study was conducted following the guidelines of the ethical principles for research. Informed consent was given, and utmost confidentiality was observed in the conduct of this research.

Procedure and Instrument

Informed by the research theories on lived religious experiences and grounded on the perspectives of people who had knowledge or practiced dungaw, the researchers created open-ended survey questions to unpack the salience of religion and its utility as a coping resource for a group of Filipino Catholics. The survey questions solicited information regarding (1) The perspectives of selected Filipino Catholics on the COVID-19 pandemic (2) The relationship between dungaw and Catholic prayers according to a group of Filipino Catholics (3) The practice of dungaw as a genuine form of religious piety as demonstrated by selected Filipino Catholics and (4) The salience of dungaw to the communal life of some Filipino Catholics. Data were collected using an online survey where the researchers determined the subjects purposively to answer the research questions.

Data Analysis

The information provided by the respondents (first-order construction) was analyzed and categorized by the researchers into themes (second-order constructions). The researchers then synthesized the information and made conclusions. Table 2 summarizes the empirical phenomenological process. Seven steps were utilized by the researchers. These steps were done by maintaining a scientific attitude to present a solid grasp of the meaning of dungaw and its connection to the meaning structure of the selected Filipino Catholics.

Results and Discussion

This section shows the results of the analyzed survey. Table 3 indicates that there are respondents who consider the COVID-19 pandemic as a major trial in life. The first-order constructs “hunger,” “death,” “human limitations and powerlessness,” and “ruined jobs, relationships, and opportunities” indicate a disruption in

Table 2 Empirical phenomenological approach

Steps	Empirical phenomenological approaches
First	The research questions were defined. Within the framework of empirical phenomenology, the researchers aimed to answer the research questions posed
Second	The researchers conducted a preliminary study about religious practice. In this process, gathering related literature, informal interview, and participant observations were done to gain an overview of the research
Third	Choosing the theories for the study. Theories on religious expressions and religious coping during the time of pandemic were identified to ground the perspectives of the participants of the study. These were also used as a scheme of reference
Fourth	Defining the first-order constructs. It is where the researchers analyze the participants' perspectives to reveal their meaning. The first-order constructs gathered information about what the participants mean from their religious experiences and how these experiences relate to each other. The researchers analyzed the data by organizing the meanings, patterns, and themes based on their answers. It is grounded in the understanding of the participants, and the phenomena studied
Fifth	Developing the second-order constructs. This step consists of generating the central theme from the first-order constructs. This is understanding the deeper meaning of the first-order constructs by exploring the patterns and connecting them with existing theories
Sixth	The researchers evaluated the first-order constructs and related them to the theoretical notions of the theories on religious expressions
Seventh	The last steps are checking for unintended effects and relating the evidence to the scientific literature and empirical study field. The researchers then synthesized the information and made conclusions

their usual way of life. Moreover, the constructs “fear,” “anxiety,” “uncertainty,” and “sadness” signify a negative psychological state. Despite the distressing situation, some respondents saw a silver lining. Some believed that the community quarantine provided them with the opportunity to be with loved ones. This reflects the family-centeredness of many Filipinos and the human need for belonging, stability, and security (Catholic Church Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, 1997, para. 34). Utilizing the Catholic religion as a coping resource, some respondents believed that “God is working and He is in control” during the COVID-19 pandemic and that during difficult moments “a person is living a new life in Christ.” These cognitive strategies show that there are Filipino Catholics who evaluate a major life stressor by collaborating with God. Also, despite the limitations imposed by the Philippine government on the movement of people, some respondents continued to trust the government authorities and deemed essential workers or “authorized persons outside of residence” as modern-day heroes.

Table 4 shows the relationship between *dungaw* and the private practice dimension of religion among selected Filipino Catholics. Since *dungaw* includes praying the rosary and the *Oratio Imperata* as well as personal requests, the respondents devoted themselves to God in the private space. A prayer which may refer to “thoughts, attitudes, and actions designed to express or experience a connection to the sacred” (McCullough & Larson, 1999, p. 86), was described by some of the respondents using the first-order constructs “more active,” “consistent,” “passionate,” “deeper,” “sincere and selfless,” and “frequent.” These indicate that there are

Table 3 Perspectives of selected Filipino Catholics on the COVID-19 pandemic

Area of inquiry	First-order constructs	Second-order constructs
Perspectives on COVID-19 pandemic of selected Filipino Catholics	<p>Some respondents reported that the COVID-19 pandemic brought fear, anxiety, hunger, uncertainty, challenges, death, panic, sadness, poverty, destruction in the world, financial hardships, and restrictions to the community</p> <p>Some Filipino Catholics believed that the COVID-19 pandemic revealed our human limitations and powerlessness</p> <p>Others claimed that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted their plans in life, ruined jobs, and damaged relationships</p> <p>Some Filipino Catholics claimed that the COVID-19 pandemic reminded humans to value life and good health</p> <p>Others believe that the COVID-19 pandemic forced families to gather and pray with the community</p> <p>Some respondents reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic they became close to each other and felt joy in togetherness</p> <p>Some Filipino Catholics asked God to deliver them from the COVID-19 pandemic</p> <p>Others believed that they experienced a new life with Christ during the COVID-19 pandemic</p> <p>Some respondents believed that God is working during the COVID-19 pandemic and that He is in control</p> <p>Some Filipino Catholics reported that they still trusted the government leaders despite the community quarantine</p> <p>Some respondents expressed their admiration and respect for the essential workers such as medical doctors, nurses, and the military</p>	<p>The COVID-19 disrupted and brought uncertainties according to selected Filipino Catholics</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for some Filipino Catholics to nurture their relationships</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic deepened the faith of some Filipino Catholics</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic made some Filipino Catholics respect authorities and value modern-day heroes</p>

Table 4 “Dungaw” and the private practice of religion of selected Filipino Catholics

Area of inquiry	First-order constructs	Second-order constructs
Dungaw and its impact on the prayer life of selected Filipino Catholics during the COVID-19 pandemic	<p data-bbox="221 331 270 635">During the pandemic, some Filipino Catholics described their prayer life as more active, consistent, passionate, deeper, sincere, selfless, and frequent</p> <p data-bbox="270 331 319 635">Some respondents admitted that they prayed for a longer life</p> <p data-bbox="319 331 369 635">Some Filipino Catholics participated in liturgical celebrations through video streaming and social media since worshipping in churches was restricted</p> <p data-bbox="369 331 423 635">Some of the respondents reported that the practice of dungaw reminded them to pray to God and reflect upon the importance of faith during the COVID-19 pandemic</p>	<p data-bbox="221 670 270 1541">The importance of prayer to selected Filipino Catholics during the COVID-19 pandemic</p> <p data-bbox="446 331 496 1541">The belief of selected Filipino Catholics in God’s presence and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary during the COVID-19 pandemic</p>
	<p data-bbox="552 331 602 635">By practicing dungaw, some people felt the presence of Jesus through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary</p> <p data-bbox="602 331 651 635">Some respondents claimed that the religious icon of Jesus represents the divine</p> <p data-bbox="651 331 700 635">For some Filipino Catholics, dungaw is a reminder that God will not abandon His people</p> <p data-bbox="700 331 750 635">Others believed that the Blessed Virgin Mary protects people against evil</p> <p data-bbox="750 331 799 635">Some Filipino Catholics felt that they became close to God and the Blessed Virgin Mary during the COVID-19 pandemic</p> <p data-bbox="799 331 849 635">Some respondents believed that they became close to each other during the COVID-19 pandemic</p> <p data-bbox="849 331 898 635">Some of the Filipino Catholics frequently prayed the rosary, developed stronger devotions, and prayed the oratio imperata</p>	<p data-bbox="552 670 602 1541">The effects of prayer on some Filipino Catholics during the COVID-19 pandemic</p>

Table 4 (continued)

Area of inquiry	First-order constructs	Second-order constructs
	Some of the respondents found courage and hope in prayer	
	Some respondents entirely placed their trust in god's power to heal people during the COVID-19 pandemic	
	Some respondents reported that they experienced "spiritual dryness" due to the lack of sacraments and physical worship in Church	The re-imagination of religious expression among selected Filipino catholics during the COVID-19 pandemic
	Some Filipino Catholics believed that dungaw, as a religious expression, is timely because people cannot go to church. They also reported that the images of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the catholic saints made them feel good	
	Some respondents believed that dungaw is a weapon that can be used to fight the COVID-19 pandemic	

Filipino Catholics who valued and benefitted from prayer during the COVID-19 pandemic. Revealing their fear of getting infected with COVID-19 and the possibility of death, some respondents mentioned that they “prayed for a longer life”. This aligns with the assertion of Parks-Stamm et al. (2019) that “prayer buffers individuals from negative stressors and facilitates emotional adjustment” (p. 1).

Some respondents mentioned that dungaw and praying helped them to “feel the presence of Jesus through the intercession of Mary” and were reminded of God’s protection. This brings to mind the assertion of James (1917) that prayer is “the very movement of the soul which puts itself in a personal relation of contact with a mysterious power” (p. 350). Through the sacred images and prayer, some Filipino Catholics invoked God’s presence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also, some informants revealed that they became close to their family members through dungaw. This affirms the positive influence of religion on physical health through the social pathway. Koenig (2012) asserts, “if religion boosts supportive social interactions and increases community trust and involvement, then it should ultimately influence physical health as well” (p. 12).

Among selected Filipino Catholics, dungaw and Catholic prayers facilitated the deepening of their faith, improved their interpersonal relationships, gave them courage, and made them look forward to better days. This aligns with the observation of Koenig (2012) that people pray to God because they have powerful cognitions of a transcendent being who can positively change a dire situation. Moreover, people who have feelings of God-mediated control become optimistic and less depressed (Jeppsen et al., 2015).

There are some Filipino Catholics who shared that they opted to pray through video streaming and social media. However, they struggled with “spiritual dryness” due to the lack of participation in liturgical celebrations. Others affirmed the importance of dungaw and prayers in the fight against COVID-19. Since many religious Filipino Catholics cannot go to Church, they found consolation in praying with the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Catholic saints. These first-order constructs show the necessity of prayer. Prayer is important because it helps a religious person feel interpersonally close to God, especially when he/she needs support in difficult times (Jeppsen et al., 2015).

Table 5 shows that the practice of dungaw is rooted in Filipino Catholic culture. Some of the respondents claimed that the practice of dungaw is inspired by the religious procession of Catholic religious icons. Invoking the power of God and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Catholic saints, selected Filipino Catholics brought sacred images to the window or door at 6:00 PM (which is usually the time for the Angelus prayer), lighted candles, and prayed the Holy Rosary and Oratio Imperata.

Interestingly, some Filipino Catholics claimed that the practice of dungaw was taught to them by their elders. This seems to indicate that the practice of dungaw was learned through socially mediated reinforcement. In the Philippines where the majority of adults are Catholics, parents and elders are powerful models of religious beliefs and behavior. As such, children imitate them after receiving reinforcements like verbal praise and social acceptance (Strand, 2009).

Table 5 Dungaw as an authentic form of religious piety

Area of inquiry	First-order constructs	Second-order constructs
The practice of dungaw as a genuine form of religious piety among selected Filipino Catholics during the COVID-19 pandemic	<p>Dungaw is inspired by the religious procession of Catholic religious icons</p> <p>Dungaw is a form of popular religiosity</p> <p>Dungaw means to expose a religious image</p> <p>Some people learned the practice of dungaw from their elders, while others discovered it through social media</p> <p>During the pandemic, some families bring the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary or the catholic saints to the window or near the door every 6:00 PM</p> <p>Dungaw entails lighting a candle, praying the rosary, and reading from a prayer book</p> <p>Some people practice dungaw to ask God to watch over the community and the Blessed Virgin Mary to protect her children</p> <p>Dungaw is practiced when there is a calamity or the danger of death in the community</p> <p>Dungaw reminds people of the importance of prayer during calamities & pandemic</p> <p>Dungaw assures people that God is with them through the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Catholic saints</p> <p>Sacred images foster hope and inspire people to trust God during calamities and pandemic</p> <p>Sacred images make present the unseen god</p>	<p>The origin and practice of dungaw as a religious expression of selected Filipino Catholics</p> <p>The purpose of dungaw for selected Filipino Catholics</p>

Table 5 (continued)

Area of inquiry	First-order constructs	Second-order constructs
	Sacred images remind people of the saving help of God	
	Sacred images are symbols of hope and blessing	
	Sacred images remind people to put their faith in God and surrender their worries to Him during calamities	
	Sacred images remind people that Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and catholic saints suffered too	

There are some Filipino Catholics who claimed that they felt God's presence through dungaw. The sacred images reminded them that the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Catholic saints watch over them and protect them from harm. For some of the respondents, the sacred images made present the unseen God. This belief fosters hope and keeps them at ease. This aligns with the assertion of Hood et al. (2009) that "sacred objects not only provide comfort and solace but a sense of identity and cohesion. They also arouse religious and spiritual thoughts and feelings that calm, refresh, and strengthen distressed individuals" (p. 465).

Dungaw is an authentic form of Filipino Catholic popular piety. It is anchored upon the teachings of the Catholic Church, wherein "popular piety can refer to multiple and varied expressions of simple and fervent faith in God, of love for Christ the Redeemer, of invocations of the Holy Spirit, of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, of the veneration of the Saints of commitment to conversion and fraternal charity" (Congregation for Divine Worship & the Discipline of the Sacraments, 2001, para. 6). Also, it draws inspiration from Filipino Catholic culture, wherein sacred images were paraded to bless a town or protect people from calamities. More importantly, dungaw is an innovative way of communing with the Church. It is also an act that shows strong cognitions of the reality of God. In sharp contrast to some people who wondered about the reality of God and the purpose of religion in the face of real human suffering (Abellanosa, 2020), the Filipino Catholics who practiced dungaw claimed that they felt God's presence and benefitted from divine help.

Table 6 shows the implications of dungaw to the communal life of selected Filipino Catholics during the COVID-19 pandemic. The practice of dungaw helped some Filipino Catholics to be in communion with the Church. This communion refers to the "personal union of each human being with the divine Trinity and with the rest of mankind, initiated with the faith" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1992, para. 3). To cope with the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the selected Filipino Catholics utilized their religion and prayed. However, dungaw is not meant to be a private ritual. The sacred images are placed near the window or door so that other people will see it and be reminded to pray. Some of the respondents hope that people suffering from anxiety and stress will experience emotional relief after seeing the sacred images. Also, some respondents claimed that they were able to show concern for the well-being of their neighbors through dungaw since they cannot personally tell them to "take care."

Dungaw is also an embodiment of the traditional Filipino value called "pagdadamayan" or empathy and concern for others. Such Filipino value is deeply consonant with the Catholic vision and helps build a community (Catholic Church Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 1997). Moreover, through dungaw, the selected Filipino Catholics were able to practice other traditional Filipino values of "pagkalinga" (to care for others) and "bayanihan" (a spirit of communal unity and cooperation) which are crucial in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 6 Dungaw and its implications to the communal life of selected Filipino Catholics

Area of inquiry	First-order constructs	Second-order constructs
<p>“Dungaw” and its impact on the communal life of selected Filipino Catholics</p>	<p>Some Filipino claimed that dungaw moved them and their neighbors to pray</p> <p>The Filipino expression “Ingat ka!” (“Please take care!”) became a sincere sign of care and affection to friends and neighbors during the COVID-19 pandemic</p> <p>Others believed that dungaw is a demonstration of one’s concern for the well-being of his/her neighbors</p> <p>Some Filipino Catholics reported that they felt the need to inspire others and catechize the laity through the practice of dungaw</p> <p>Some Filipino Catholics were pleased to discover that there were people who made the sign of the cross and pray after seeing sacred images displayed on the window</p>	<p>Selected Filipino Catholics believe that dungaw is a religious practice in communion with the church</p>

Limitations and Strengths

This study of a popular form of Catholic religiosity provides a critical look at the contribution of a re-imagined Catholic religious expression to the well-being of some Filipino Catholics during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the moment, there is a dearth of studies on popular forms of Catholic religiosity as a coping resource to deal with the global health crisis. Nevertheless, we are aware that we have a small number of respondents and that the study focused on the psychological state of selected Filipino Catholics. A study can be pursued by other researchers using a larger sample and investigate how religious piety supports the mental, physical, and spiritual health of people struggling with a major life stressor.

Conclusion

Regardless of time or place, religion is omnipresent and affects people's lives (Hood et al., 2009, p. 2). However, the importance of religion as a coping resource is highlighted during major trials of human existence such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Philippines, where most people profess the Catholic faith, the salience of religion, popular piety, and adaptive coping strategies were demonstrated in the practice of *dungaw* among selected Filipino Catholics. The COVID-19 significantly disrupted the lives of many Filipinos. The pandemic may also have contributed to the negative psychological states of some people. However, the popular form of religious piety, such as *dungaw* mediated feelings of joy and facilitated togetherness. Catholic prayers, which are integral to the practice of *dungaw*, fostered hope among selected Filipino Catholics. Believing that the transcendent has control over life-threatening situations, some Filipino Catholics felt good, optimistic, and less depressed.

To non-believers, statues of deities placed near the window or door of a house during the COVID-19 pandemic may seem unsophisticated and superstitious. However, for selected Filipino Catholics, *dungaw* is a genuine act of faith deeply rooted in Filipino culture. By collaborating with God, some Filipino Catholics were able to navigate the uncharted waters of COVID-19. The empirical phenomenology of *dungaw* revealed that popular piety and prayers help people feel God's presence. Despite being sheltered-in-place, *dungaw* connected the selected Filipino Catholics with other members of the Catholic Church. Also, some Filipino Catholics embraced *dungaw* as a "weapon against the pandemic." Since COVID-19 infects not just the body but can also harm the mind, *dungaw* and prayers helped foster a positive psychological state among selected Filipino Catholics. Indeed, religion served as a haven for distressed individuals. More importantly, *dungaw* contributed to the repair of the frayed social fabric when the selected Filipino Catholics practiced the traditional Filipino values of "*pagdadamayán*," "*pagkalinga*", and "*bayanihan*".

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no Conflict of interest.

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