

Exploring the religious beliefs and practices of Sagrado Corazon Senior in Isabel, Leyte

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on the religious beliefs of the Sagrado Corazon Senior (SCS) religious group on the island of Isabel in the province of Leyte. This particular religious sect integrates the purpose of Christianity, local spirituality, and Filipino nationalism. The study is constructed using a qualitative case study, with the help of interviews and observations, which allow for a detailed description of the emergence of SCS, its leadership system, fundamental doctrines, rituals, and symbolic procedures. It becomes apparent through these findings that members of the SCS deify Master Sagrado Sade Jr. as a Christ-like character with a different name, and the pattern of prayer is based on the notion of moral purity and ethical living, underlined by the power of sacred signs, including tattoos, medallions, and the Philippine flag. Ritual objects and practices that the group employed, such as symbolic consecration using a sword, consumption of written prayers during communion, and distinctive prayer timetables, are manifestations of the syncretic synthesis of Catholic tradition and spiritual interpretations in the local context. The study addresses a significant knowledge gap by filling the gap in documenting how SCS develops a specific religious identity, which represents the interplay of faith, culture and ideology in dynamic fashion. The study addresses a significant knowledge gap by filling the gap in documenting how SCS develops a specific religious identity, which represents the interplay of faith, culture and ideology in dynamic fashion. The study presents important lessons to scholars and advocate groups of preserving cultures, policy makers, and religious leaders on the complexity of religious manifestations in the Philippines.

Keywords: religious studies, Filipino spirituality, faith, religion, syncretism

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1. Introduction

Religion is an aspect that has been significant and universal throughout time and is evident in how it demarcates societies, cultures, and individuals. This has a profound impact on nearly everything, including social norms, art, literature, and everyday life. Each religious expression has its unique phenomena of religious beliefs and practices, which serve as guidelines for answering questions regarding the nature, purpose, and morals of life. All religions involve various beliefs, values, practices, and convictions (Pyae, 2018). Religious beliefs are the principles and attitudes which is the consequence of the fundamental faith doctrines of a religion. The beliefs usually involve belief in some supreme being or a significant connection with a supreme power. Religious practices refer to the acts and actions that members of a particular religion undertake as a means of expressing their faith. These practices are often discussed and systematized behaviors and activities like the set times of praying, worship services and even attending festivals and ceremonies, which bear a symbolism to that religion. This also entails the display of religious items, adherence to dietary restrictions, the wearing of religious attire, and the application of body adornments, as well as the avoidance of specific actions (Jocano, 1968). The world is experiencing a significant variation in religions and the ways people express themselves concerning religious issues across various cultures and geographical locations. There are numerous practiced religions in the world, and many adherents belong to each one of them, with the top five being Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism. These are the primary religious lines experienced in the world.

Religion in the Philippine Context - Through trade and colonization, the primary religions observed globally also established a presence in the Philippines, having a profound impact on almost all aspects of Filipinos' lives. Different denominations of Christianity and Islam religion are two of the dominant religions that can be distinguished in the country. Following the introduction of Christianity to the country by Western colonizers, it has become the primary faith of Filipinos. According to Aguilan (2024), the Philippines is the only predominantly Christian country in Asia, with an estimated 93% of the population identifying as Christian. In recently released data from the Philippine Statistics Authority regarding Religious Affiliation in the Philippines, nearly 78.8% are Roman Catholics, 2.6% are Iglesia ni Cristo, 0.8% each for Seventh Day Adventist and Aglipay, 0.6% for Iglesia Filipina Independiente, 0.5% for Bible Baptist Church, and 0.4% each for United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Jehovah's Witness, and Church of Christ. (Philippine Statistics Authority, n.d.). This gives the impression that Christianity is an essential aspect of Filipino culture. However, aside from Christianity, Islam is also one of the leading religions in the country. According to Ismail and Hasaruddin (2023), Islamic communities formed the majority of the religious groups in various regions of the Philippines before the influence of Western colonial rule. At present, it is the second-largest religion in the country, with 6.4% of followers (Philippine Statistics Authority, n.d.). Islam was brought following the trading practices of merchants and sailors in the Southern part of Mindanao. Muslims in the Philippines are primarily concentrated in the islands of Mindanao, Palawan, and Sulu. This religious landscape reveals the complex faith traditions that have shaped the nation's social and cultural identity.

Folk Religiosity and Syncretism in Filipino Culture - It is also noteworthy that even before these prominent religions arrived in the country, our ancient Filipinos already had a predominant belief system, which is animism, attributed to the belief that everything, including objects, places, and creatures, possesses spirits. This traditional religion can still be observed in some parts of the country and has shaped Filipino spirituality to some extent. Despite being a follower of a central belief system, practices and some rituals of the traditional religion are still observed and practiced. According to Macaranas (2021), the fusion of the Filipino religion with the Catholic faith is what can be referred to as Filipino folk religiosity. Over the years, Indigenous beliefs managed to continue existing by joining it with Catholic activities two new cultural objects: anting-anting

(amulets) and Grayson (sacred prayers). Anting-anting is a religious instrument taken as amulet or charm believed to connote luckiness, personal insurance and different others (Rosales, 2020). According to Rosales (2020), Orasyon is a mix of Latin prayers in written form and the vernacular prayers, which are considered to contain supernatural abilities. These traditional thoughts and action are part of the Filipino culture as they represent the thought that objects or artifacts can be made powerful through the divine.

Liamzon and Banzon-Librojo (2025) led an analysis of Filipino Catholic adolescent religious identity construction using personal narratives. It demonstrates that Filipino Catholic teenagers construct their religious identity forming personal narratives which are subject to influences by their family religious groups and the traditions of the society. The religious socialization events and the personal experiences of struggles and inner reflections ensure that the faith development of the Filipino Catholic adolescents is directed to maturing. The study through story-telling explains that the commitment of faith is both strengthens and the values of culture but religion directly links with identity of individuals and the build-up of the society. While, Mulzac (2008) claims that understanding religious expression in the Philippines involves taking into consideration both major Filipino psychosocial values and the process of religious syncretism. Anting-anting (amulets), pakikisama (social norms), utang-na-loob (gratitude), and hiya (shame) are values that are very much embedded in Filipino culture and also play a big role in their religious beliefs. The Philippines shows forth a remarkable syncretism of religion, whose indigenous beliefs got intertwined with Christian beliefs. Mulzac (2008) posits that although there is considerable Western and Christian presence, the old beliefs stand as efforts viewed in the persistent importance of anting-anting.

Arens (1959) studies religious practices common in Philippine culture to demonstrate that these manifestations establish social cohesion and collective support to things that are of utmost concern to the rural part of Eastern Visayas. Such events make the local economies prosperous as they can share their resources and do collaborative work, mostly during religious and community events. Culture is also preserved through religious rituals whereby a continuous blend of indigenous practices and catholic practices is conducted so as to preserve the cultural identity of the region.

Based on the data released by PSA, out of the 17 regions in the country, Region VIII has the second highest proportion of Roman Catholics with 92.3%. Isabel, which is located in the western part of Leyte province, is also highly influenced by Christianity, specifically Roman Catholicism. The town of Isabel is known for having Sto. Niño, as the titular patron saint housed in the Holy Child Parish. Aside from Roman Catholic, there are also some other Christian denominations found in the town of Isabel. As elaborated by DEI Toolkit: Religious Beliefs (2020), major religions are usually diversified through denominations and sects. Some of the many denominations of the Christian religion in Isabel are Iglesia ni Cristo, Seventh Day Adventist, Bible Baptist Church, Jehovah's Witness, Church of Christ, Born-Again Christian, UCCP, and other small religious groups, including Sagrado Corazon Senior (SCS).

Emerging Religious Movements - A religious community known as Sagrado Corazon Senior (SCS) established its base in Isabel Leyte, illustrating the development of localized religious expressions that assimilate Christian, nationalist, and indigenous spiritual components. The religion of Roman Catholicism dominates Isabel Leyte, along with other Christian sects, such as Iglesia ni Cristo and Seventh-Day Adventists, as well as born-again and diverse other Christian groups. Sagrado Corazon Senior (SCS) Religious Community is a traditionalist Christian organization with ties to radical Filipino nationalism. This community was founded in 1972 in Initao, Misamis Oriental, by Sagrado Sade Jr., whom they call Papa Sagrado. This is characterized as a cult known for its unique rituals and beliefs, including the supposed invulnerability of its members to bullets, which they attribute to their faith and amulets. Believers in this religious cult believe that they are strong and protected soldiers of Christ, and some members, despite being affiliated with Sagrado Corazon, are also Christians, specifically Roman Catholics, who would also observe their religious holidays like Holy Week. In addition, Sagrado Corazon members have special religious practices that are different from regular Catholic beliefs. The group's formal name is Sagrado Corazon, but they are more commonly known as Tadtad. The

nickname "Tadtad," a Cebuano term that means chopping, came from their unique way of determining their members through an initiation rite of striking the inner arm with a sharp sword or knife and their brutal method of killing their victims. In a meta-analysis conducted by Human Rights Watch (2010), Sagrado Corazon's primary purpose was to help the military fight against rebels.

Diverse religious groups like SCS illustrate the diversity of religious groups that prevail in the Philippine society, and though misunderstood by others, the groups in question are generally active. These organizations represent a comprehensive illustration of how the faith elements relate to the identity components with nationalism and traditional cultural practices in order to create extensive spiritual congregations. Although the professional knowledge about the mainstream religions has been increased, minimal or no study has been conducted to investigate the religious practices and the beliefs of religious groups such as Sagrado Corazon Senior. The appropriate context in which we see learning about Sagrado Corazon Senior is valuable due to the great variety of religious experiences and religious expressions beyond the mainstream denominational affiliation. They give us a sense of how religion beliefs and practices can be fit into, re-defined and synthesized with other ideologies. The study addresses the gap in knowledge of the diversity of religious experience and the factors contributing to the shaping of such groups.

Theoretical Framework - This paper was based on the sociological and anthropological theories to be able to determine the intricate connection between beliefs, practices and social life that are upheld in religious contexts. The functionalism of Emile Durkheim considers religion as the social institution that plays a positive role of stability and cohesiveness of the social group. This underlines the importance of religious belief system and practices in fostering common values and norms (Naikoo & Hajam, 2024). Sagrado Corazon is an important source of social support and networking among its senior members and gives them a sense of belonging and support to each other. Community cohesion and integration among the aged members would be achieved through a medium level of shared religious beliefs and practices which would lead to strong group identity.

The second theory that can be determined on the basis of this research is symbolic interactionism by George Herbert Mead because it is concerned with the meanings that are not fixed but always altered according to social interaction on the basis of an interpretative process (Kovačević et al., 2021). Such a theory would give more information on subjective experiences and the meaning that religious life means to the Sagrado Corazon members. It enables realization of the way members interpret their religious experiences and how the interpretations define and stabilize their religious beliefs as per the community of which they belong. Moreover, this will describe how religious beliefs and practices are a dynamic evolving entity in which they are negotiated and reinterpreted as the result of social interaction.

The theory of Weber on charismatic leadership would also contribute to the formation of some explanation on the role of Papa Sagrado in imparting beliefs to the group. According to Weber in his theory, there are three types of authority which he says can be differentiated such as the charisma. He established it as a certain character of the personality of an individual and this is seen as an exceptional thing that is beyond the normal being of other people. This implies that these leaders are highly believed to have gifts or attributes that go beyond normalcy which is commonly considered as supernatural or God-given (Epley, 2015). Papa Sagrado was a title, after which its members had practices of worship and deep veneration on Papa Sagrado and creating a special religious community, which indicates that Papa Sagrado must have been a person with some extraordinary things that attracted great devotion among his believers. Moreover, in case Papa Sagrado offered something novel in theology, or pushed in some new directions of faith, that would indicate something more revolutionary and could be charismatic in effect.

The theory of cultural interpretation propounded by Clifford Geertz offers a good model to explain the interplay of culture, symbols and the issue of religious identity. Geertz described culture as a system of conveyances, both inherited and acquired, of a sort of disputable conceptions that are issued in graphic forms with which people use in communication, maintenance, and enhancement of their knowledge regarding life and

its relevance. The fact that the study of explanations that members of Sagrado Corazon themselves give their religious actions, which the evolution of the theory is aimed at, is quite consistent with the necessity to learn about the lived experience of faith, inherent in this particular cultural context. All this rich symbolism, combined with the probable employment of communal rituals that are as deeply ingrained into the Catholic tradition as it was into Filipino culture implies a highly complex network of meaning that makes the members of it even stronger regarding their religious identity.

This study generally explored the religious beliefs and practices of Sagrado Corazon Senior in Isabel, Leyte. Specifically, it sought to answer:

- What is the Sagrado Corazon leadership and membership structure and its origin?
- What are the core beliefs, rituals, and symbolic practices of SCS, and how do they contribute to the members' religious identity?
- How does SCS reconcile its beliefs and practices with mainstream Catholicism and Filipino spiritual traditions?
- How are symbolic objects (e.g., anting-anting) used within SCS, and what meanings are attributed to them by members?

2. Methodology

Research design - This study utilized a case study research design to obtain a detailed understanding of the complexities of the Sagrado Corazon Senior religious community. According to Heale & Twycross (2018), case study research involves a thorough and detailed examination of a specific person, group, or situation to uncover the complexities of a real-world occurrence. This research design will be utilized since the study relies on multiple sources of evidence, such as interviews and observations, to fully understand the social phenomenon (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2024). While ethnography could provide rich insights, it typically requires a significant time commitment for immersive observation, which might not be necessary for the specific goals. Historical analysis might not be the primary focus since we are exploring their current beliefs and practices more than their historical development. A case study will allow us to acquire an in-depth examination of their origin, structure, beliefs, and practices for insightful information contributing to academic and practical knowledge.

Locale of the study - This study was conducted in Isabel, Leyte, where most of the respondents live and where their church is located for them to pray together.

Respondents/ Participants - The study's respondents were those who are active members of the Sagrado Corazon Senior (SCS) religious community in Isabel, Leyte. To be included in the study, participants had to be at least 18 years old, lived in the community at least one year, and agreed to take part in interviews and observations. The study excluded individuals who were not active members, those who could not give an informed consent as well as those with less than a year of engagement in the community.

Sampling Procedure - In identifying the research respondents, a purposeful sampling method was utilized. The researchers themselves selected and decided who were the respondents that they deemed would provide valuable responses and information to achieve the objectives of the study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling involving choosing specific individuals or groups because they possess the characteristics relevant to your research (Nikolopoulou, 2022).

Research Instrument - The instruments that were used in this study were interviews and observation to be able to gather and present a detailed understanding of the social phenomenon being studied. Through open-ended questions prepared by the researchers, they collected relevant information and story from the respondent's experiences as part of SCS. Interview is a verbal dialogue aimed at gathering relevant data for obtaining in-depth

accounts of participants' experiences, enabling the researcher to explore the topic thoroughly (Utibe Monday, 2020). In addition, observation will also be utilized to collect firsthand information by watching. Observation involves closely examining subjects or research situations through careful watching (Kumar & Sharma, 2023).

Data Gathering Procedure - The researchers visited the religious group leader and sought approval to conduct the study. After the approval, they were informed (religious group members) about the nature of the study and were reminded that their participation was highly voluntary and the data gathered were solely used for research purposes. The researchers scheduled the observation and interview with the members. The one-on-one interview was done by the researchers wherever they felt safe and secure. The observation happened for two Fridays, their scheduled meeting every week, for the researchers to immerse themselves and understand their practices.

Data Analysis Procedure - Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data that were collected. By applying thematic analysis, the researchers could group the similar ideas and patterns in data having knowledge of shared meanings and practices. Thematic analysis is a method of qualitative analysis that assists the researcher to organize and interpret a complex body of data by detecting common themes within the data that represent in the form of stories (Dawadi, 2020). The process the researchers followed when conducting their analysis was the thematic analysis of Braun & Clarke (2012), which consists of six phases. The researchers became more acquainted with the data, and then made some initial codes. The researchers reviewed possible themes after searching themes after generating initial codes. The previously reviewed potential themes were then determined and christened before carrying out the ultimate step of generating report. Themes will be manually coded and by cross-validation with the participants, accuracy, and representativeness of findings will be checked."

Credibility of Data - To ensure the validity of the data collected, the study employed investigator triangulation where the two researchers for this study conducted separate in-depth interviews with various SCS members. After conducting the interview, the transcribed interviews in verbatim was presented to the participants for checking and then independently reviewed by two researchers. Each identified themes from the data, discussed their findings, and thoroughly deliberated to resolve any inconsistencies in interpretation to refine categories and ensure that interpretations were not influenced by researcher's biases.

Ethical Considerations - This paper discusses the religious background and the practices of the senior religious community of Sagrado Corazon located in Isabel, Leyte. Because of the complicated history of the group, its relation to others in the past, cases of violence in certain regions, a strict ethical framework must be followed. Informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and sensitivity are the principles of this research. The participants will be given full details about the purpose of the study, the methodology and their rights in the study to ensure that they will participate in the research voluntarily and that they are free to leave the study. Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants will be given extra consideration through the methods used, which include pseudonyms. The research will not bother to refer to previous practices as such; it will only concentrate on the existing religious beliefs and practices of the community. Since there is always a chance of accidentally doing damage, especially with certain sensitive issues, a culturally neutral, yet respectful stance will be adhered throughout the work. Positionality of researchers, their safety and possible biasness should be important factors as well, with objectivity of research to be observed. In order to alleviate researcher biasness and reflexivity, debriefing of the peers will also be applicable, which will guarantee objective sense of data. There will also be provision to adequately store and maintain all the processed data with a clear disposal procedure in the future in an ethical manner. Lastly, the study aims to represent the beliefs and practices of the community accurately without stereotyping and give a balanced and modified view of their experiences of religion.

3. Results and discussions

3.1 Sagrado Corazon Leadership and Membership Structure and its Origin

Historical and Spiritual Origins - Sagrado Corazon Senior (SCS) originated in Misamis Oriental in the year 1972 and was founded by Master Sagrado Sade Jr., who is believed to be the lord but under a new name. This was also emphasized by two respondents.

P1: *"Sagrado Sade Jr. is now our master; he is now our god, through his new name we will be saved."*

P2: *"The only one who knew was looking for himself to be saved, looking for a new name to save people."*

This religious community spread across Visayas and Mindanao after the founder, Master Sagrado Sade Jr., appointed people to be leaders and disseminate the belief to different provinces in Visayas and Mindanao. In Leyte province, Sagrado Corazon Senior started in the year 1981 and was introduced by a native of Misamis Oriental who was chosen by Master Sagrado to lead in Leyte. SCS in Leyte started in Matag-ob as a small community and was moved to Isabel, Leyte, due to connection and fellowship.

P5: *"We started as a small group in Matag-ob until we moved here in Isabel since I met our leader, which is my husband."*

After the transfer to Isabel, it grew with numerous numbers of members until they were divided, which led to the extension of SCS in numerous neighboring towns and cities like Hilongos, and Matag-ob, among many others. One respondent shared

P1: *"Before we have a numerous member, until it came to a point where we were divided and it slowly became fewer and fewer, now it started increasing again."*

P1 also highlighted, *"I am the main leader here, and this the main church. There is also another church in Margen."*

Leadership and Membership Structure - They view Master Sagrado Sade Jr. as their divine authority who could bring them salvation and help them in times of need. Leaders in every chapter in Visayas and Mindanao are believed to be chosen and appointed through divine authority,

P1: *"The one who chose me was our founder, Sagrado Cade, who made me the leader of Leyte to lead the people."*

The leader will lead the whole province chapter and is responsible for managing the finances and everything that concerns their church. The leader will also lead in executing rituals in the initiation of the new members and receive anointment of sacred prayers intended for the members. Since there are some extensions of SCS in other towns and cities, a missionary is selected through appointment by Papa Sagrado to supervise the management of these local chapters and followers. They follow a centralized structure where the command or order comes from Mindanao and will be relayed through the leader/head of the community down to the officers and members. The community structure reflects the same appointment of officers composed of the Head of Community, Secretary, and Peace officer, which relies on the order from their "Pangulo," Sagrado Cade.

P6: *"It's still the same with the election of officers. We have a Secretary, a Peace officer, and our Head, Presencio Paradero. But everything we do will depend on our President who is in Mindanao. We will depend on the message that will be given from our superiors."*

For one to be a member and be converted into SCS, they undertake ritual initiation. Prospective members must undergo symbolic acts of confession and consecration. Confession through kneeling in front of the altar, directly talking to God, and confessing all their sins. Confessing all the sins is critical, for it is believed to affect the consecration that will come after confession.

P2: *"The rule here is that if you want to become a member and you are willing, you will undergo kneeling and confessing so that your sins will be forgiven."*

P1: *"There (at the altar), you will confess directly to God, talk to God personally so that your sins may be forgiven"*

P5: *" When choosing a member, we must first go through the process of kneeling and praying earnestly and asking for forgiveness for all our sins."*

After a long duration of kneeling and confessing their sins, they will then be consecrated by the leader and missionaries through anointing with a sword by trying to chop or cut their arms using a sword or bolo.

P1: *" After you kneel, you will be consecrated with the chalice of peace, you will be consecrated with the sword, so that you may change yourself and your sins will be forgiven."*

P1: *" We will use bolo, after that you will be given the teachings of the Father God, the teachings so that you may serve him, you will be given the wisdom to save yourself so that evil people will no longer be able to touch you."*

This ritual initiation of chopping or cutting will be the determining factor if you will be accepted or not as a member. Once there will be cuts and blood on the arm, it would mean that you are not yet deemed worthy because you still have sins that were not confessed, but when there are no cuts nor blood, they believed that the person was already forgiven and is deemed worthy to receive the blessings and wisdom of god. Those who failed during the consecration have to go back from kneeling and ask for forgiveness until they already confessed all their sins and are forgiven by Sagrado.

P1: *"People who really ask for forgiveness from God are rarely hurt, no matter how great is the sin it will be forgiven. If you will get hurt in the consecration you must really ask for forgiveness to God because you still have a lot of sins. But if you are not guilty, you repented your sin, naturally your arm will not be cut (tadtad) the bolo will just bounce and there will be no cuts as long as you ask for forgiveness from God."*

P2: *"We can identify if the member is ready to serve when there are not cuts made in the arm during the consecration (tadtad)."*

3.2 Core beliefs, Rituals, and Symbolic Practices of SCS

Core Beliefs - The core belief of Sagrado Corazon Senior centers on the belief in Master Sagrado Sade Jr. as Christ himself, the savior of humanity who is using a new name.

P1: *"Sagrado Cade Jr. is now our master, he is now our god, through his new name we will be saved."*

P3: *"In our community, our faith and trust in the true God has deepened even more, where we now believe that God now has a new name."*

Sagrado Sade is believed to be a powerful entity who gives its followers power (gahum) through chants (orasyon) that they memorize and is used in times of danger to protect them.

P1: *“This is real power. Because you will be given the power to speak, memorize it and go out and say it, and if a bad person shoots you, you will not be harmed because you have power, because God is always with you.”*

These supposed powers given to them are fundamentally used for protecting the country Philippines against those who try to colonize or, in other ways, enslave the country.

P5: *“You are a true Filipino who will stand up for the Philippines, and no matter what happens in our country against China, we will stand up for our Filipino flag, we will defend it, we will fight until the end.”*

It is also a central belief that in everything that they do, they should always follow the teachings of Papa Sagrado for them to be blessed and be safe and be saved in times of difficulty.

P1: *“We must follow the teachings of the spiritual god so that you will be saved in times of trouble, and you will be saved until your death.”*

They also follow their own version of 10 commandments which is reduced into 5 commandments to guide their everyday actions and life as SCS and be saved in the afterlife. The 5 commandments are the following; (1) Love god above all, (2) Respect your parents, (3) Help your neighbor, (4) You shall not speak evil, (5) You shall not do evil deeds.

P1: *“There are only five things that are easy to obey and will surely save you. People will not have a hard time obeying them because they are easy, but they are difficult to follow because there are many prohibitions.”*

3.3 Rituals and Practices

Worship Service or Mass - Sagrado Corazon Senior, as a religion, also practices weekly worship service or Mass. They do readings from Scripture, prayers, sharing of reflection on the readings, and the consecration and distribution of bread and wine (communion). Their Holy Scripture or Bible is the same with the Catholics, same with some of their songs. However, though they share the same liturgical practices with Catholics, they differ on the day that they conduct their Mass. For the Catholic Church, they do it on Sunday because it is considered the Lord's Day, commemorating Jesus' resurrection; Sagrado Corazon Senior does their Mass every Friday because it commemorates the day the Lord was crucified and died on the cross.

P1: *“It's Friday because it's the crucifixion of Christ, it's Friday”*

They also follow a strict dress code that they should wear in the mass. All of them wear white shirts, with pants for men and long skirts for women. With their seats, they separate women from men, with women on the left side of their church facing the altar while men are on the right.

Consecration and distribution of bread and wine (Communion) - Similar to other Christian practices, Sagrado Corazon Senior also practices consecration and distribution of bread and wine during communion. The only thing is they do not use bread, host, and wine for their ritual; they use paper and water to serve as their bread and wine. They prepare this paper and water individually before the mass starts. In the paper, they write some words in Latin, which they refer to as the Word of God; they crumple it and hold it in their hands. They then prepare a glass of water, which has already been consecrated by their leader. During the communion, they raise both of their hands horizontally sideways, holding the paper and a glass of water on each of their hands; after the celebrant's prayer, they drink the water and paper together. They believe that their prayers will go directly to god.

P1: *“That thing written in the paper which we’ll drink with water is more like our way of receiving the host. Their host (Catholics) is made up of flour; our is Latin words, words of God, direct to God.”*

P6: *“When we worship, if you see the water in front and the paper we hold, and we eat and drink it, that is our way of putting our prayer, which we wrote on the paper we held, into our body. So even if we forget our prayer, it is already in our body.”*

Praying - Sagrado Corazon Senior are obligated to pray three times a day. These are performed every 6:00 in the morning, 12:00 noon, and 6:00 in the evening. Aside from this time of the day, they also do what they call "pahinongod," which is done at 9:00 in the morning, 3:00 in the afternoon, 9:00 in the evening, and 3:00 midnight.

P1: *“We prayed three times, 6 o’clock. 12 noon, and in the evening. We also do pahinongod where we pray at 9 and 3 in the afternoon or dawn.”*

Anniversary Celebration - Sagrado Corazon Senior also celebrates Christmas not on December 25 but every June 22 during their anniversary celebration. They celebrate the birth of their proclaimed god Papa Sagrado whom they believe would save them. During this time of the year, June 22, all members of the Sagrado Corazon Senior in Leyte Chapter would gather in their main church in Isabel where they would celebrate a mass, pray, and share some food together (salo-salo).

P1: *“Our Christmas now is different, we celebrate the new name of the birth of our god who will save us, June 22 is our Christmas there. That anniversary is our Christmas here.”*

As much as they celebrate Christmas, they do not believe it to be in December because, for them, it's just an estimate and not accurate.

P1: *“December is just a guess. The first people didn't know if December was true. Because people say it's cold, December and March are both cold, so they're not sure if Christmas is in December, it's just a guess”*

Ethical Lifestyle - Being a member of Sagrado Corazon Senior must strictly follow an ethical lifestyle marked by abstention from vice and otherworldly needs. They are not allowed to curse, gamble, dance, and many others. They must focus on internal transformation over external life.

P1: *“We are not allowed to curse, gamble, many no’s.” Another added, P4: “dancing is also forbidden, speaking evil words and phrases.”*

3.4 Integration of Mainstream Catholicism and Indigenous Filipino Spiritual Traditions

Syncretism with Catholicism - Sagrado Corazon Senior members identify themselves as Catholics, specifically as "straight Catholics. They are a Catholic while rejecting mainstream Catholic clergy and sacraments. They believe that Catholics, despite being grounded by the rules and laws of the church, are free to act as they choose, and that's what makes them believe that mainstream Catholic clergy and sacraments are inadequate. They claim to be the straight Catholics because they strictly adhere and follow the rules, law, and the will of god.

P1: *“The straight Catholic, this is Sagrado Senior. Here, many things are forbidden because it is difficult to obey God's commands if your service to Him is not sincere, and if your service to God is not heartfelt, you will truly not handle because many things are forbidden.”*

Despite this perspective, Sagrado Corazon Senior shares the same Holy Scripture or Bible with the Catholics. They recognize and use this in their mass and prayer. The only thing that differentiates them is how they use and

interpret the words in the Holy Bible. SCS has their own lectionary that is different from Catholics, and the way they comprehend and interpret the words are believed to be guided by the power given to them by Papa Sagrado. They adhere to the teachings taught by the Apostles in the Holy Bible for them to be like the Apostles and be considered the children of God.

P1: *“Because priests have no power to use; it's just a story from the Bible. Because we have our Bible and what the apostles did, that's what we will follow, to do good so that we can also be like the apostles, that we are true children of God, who serve God.”*

3.5 Symbolic Objects within the Sagrado Corazon Senior

Bodily Adornment - Every Sagrado Corazon Senior member can be distinguished easily because of their unique tattoos in the body. These tattoos are found usually in their head, arms, hands, body, and feet. These tattoos are usually symbols with Latin words in it. This is believed to be a protection, since the words tattooed are Latin these are sacred words (orasyon) that are being chanted especially when asking Papa Sagrado directly for help or protection against the enemy. They believe that through their tattoos, God would hear them instantly because the words are in their body.

P2: *“These tattoos of ours are for self-defense; when you invoke, this word, which is engraved, truly makes God answer because this word is the path to God. Direct to God, you will be answered immediately because the word you invoked is here”*

Medallions/ Necklace - Aside from their tattoos, they also have 1 to 3 necklaces that they wear every time. They do not consider these necklaces as anting-anting but rather it is power itself. They wear this all the time to also serve as protection. Whenever one is in a dangerous situation, they will just touch their necklace and chant their memorized words (orasyon) and they will be protected and believe to not be struck by a bullet because they have power and their God with them.

P5: *“All of us also have large cross necklaces for our protection. We just hold it and pray to be protected from bad situations.”*

P1: *“This is true power. Because you will be given power, what you say, you memorize immediately, and when you walk, you speak it, and if there's an evil person who shoots you, you won't be harmed because you have power, because God is always with you.”*

P6: *“We have prayers that can heal illnesses. But those prayers are for our personal use and cannot heal others.”*

Philippine Flag - The Sagrado Corazon Senior members aside from their religiosity, they also embody Filipino nationalism. It is noticeable that they have a Philippine Flag necklace displayed hanging vertically, where the sun and the stars are on top. For them, the Philippine flag symbolizes that one is a true Filipino who is willing to stand and fight for the country against the enemies. The flag symbolizes a person, where the two stars above in a hanging vertically displayed flag means breast, the star below is the navel, the sun is the head, and the four corners of the flag is the shoulder and legs. Their put explanation is that we live through breastfeeding and when we were in womb it is through our navel or umbilical cord that we're able to survive, through our head we are able to learn and think, and through our shoulders and legs we were able to walk and move, this means that when one is born in the lands of the Philippines, one must be willing to act and do something in protecting the country where one is born.

P1: *“First, where you live, and that is also your life, this is the symbol of the star – this star is in your body, the navel and breast, this is the meaning of the star that God placed in our body. We breastfeed that is why we live, the navel is the owner of our life, and if you don't have a navel, you won't live. This sun, this is your head, the eye is the world that God placed on our head, you*

have eyes. These four corners, these are the shoulders and legs, we humans are devoted to the Father because he is a noble person who gave the Philippines”

P7: “In our religion, if our flag is damaged, we are ready to fight to the death. We are ready to fight even if our lives are at stake”

Iconography or Logo - In the logo that represents Sagrado Corazon Senior it can be seen that there is an eagle holding a sword. The eagle is believed to be “hari ng kilat” who will remind and command them when the great disaster that they have been preparing come. The sword represents the bolo that will be used during the initiation of anointing the prospected member with a sword by trying to chop or cut their arms. This sword symbolizes that those consecrated members are the true Christians. They believe that for one to be a true Christian they be must consecrated through the sword since the words Kristiyanos came from the Javanese word Kris which means dagger or sword that embodies concepts of power, authority, heroism, and refinement.

P2: “Because kris is the sword, because a true Christian must truly be consecrated, so that you become a complete Christian.”

4. Discussion

Sagrado Corazon Senior is a different religious group that started in the year 1972 in Misamis Oriental led by Master Sagrado Sade Jr. who members worship and think is the Lord with a different name. Its adherents are of opinion that through the realization of Papa Sagrado salvation would be accomplished. This is in line with the theory of charismatic leaders used by Weber as to understand why the audience is following Papa Sagrado due to having something extraordinary about them since they are regarded as something supernatural or divine (Epley, 2015). The religion expanded in Visayas and Mindanao with the Master Sagrado appointing local leaders and its Leyte branch starting in Matag-ob in 1981 only to migrate and grow in Isabel, Leyte with networks of fellowship and common faith supporting it.

At Sagrado Corazon Senior, leadership is founded on the aspect of divine appointment. Leaders of provincial chapters are assigned and Godly elected. Represented in the Sagrado Corazon Senior (SCS), the adult groups have a hierarchical and centralized system of leadership with decisions and spiritual guidelines coming down the line to all chapters established in various regions. The patterns of organization in this forum correspond to the Genato-Rebullida (1992) description of a given church and its character of hierarchical decision-making rules. Moreover, this organization of SCS has equalities to other faith group of Filipinos such as Iglesia ni Cristo (Ando, 1969). Sagrado Corazon Senior has one of the unique practices: the initiation process. By joining SCS, one must go through a difficult initiation, ruled by a true confession and prayer with a final broke consecration of a sword or bolo. Upon a successful initiation, the lack of wounds is taken to be a clear indication that the person was actually forgiven by God and that he/she was ready to be of spiritual service. This procedure is a strong indicator of this value system of spiritual purity and moral uprightness as the essential qualification of belonging to such a community. The purity is in agreement with the SCS initiation that resonates with Douglas and pollution. Having SCS focus on the spiritual cleanness and moral righteousness and sin forgiveness. Rituals tend to purify people or groups of any impurity and bring them to the level of purity, which is needed to achieve social and spiritual order (Douglas, 2021).

The center ideology of SCS focuses on the relationship of Master Sagrado Sade Jr., whom SCS admits that is the Christ-savior with a new name. This can also be viewed through the power which members believe they are given spiritual power (gahum) through the use of sacred chants (orasyon) to save them during a perilous time. They regard religion as a virtue towards Papa Sagrado and following a streamlined morality that considers five commandments that are devoted to loving God, respecting parents, helping the neighbors along with staying away of evils of words and actions. Their worship involves weekly Friday services and they are specific so as to remember the crucifixion of Christ. Communion is the act of the eating of consecrated paper containing written prayers and water, which is a direct form of communicating with God. It is also mandate that members pray a

number of times in a day. Discipline is very much maintained as the vices like gambling, cursing etc. are forbidden one. This is because the community does not celebrate Christmas on 25th day of December but rather on 22nd day of June when they celebrate the birth of Papa Sagrado who according to the community is the savior.

SCS members label themselves as that of straight Catholics but insist that they remain true as the continuation of Catholicism, without the clergy and other procedures of the institutional Church. They have the same Bible as mainline Catholics but assert that they are given divine directives in their interpretation. Such selective compliance reflects religious syncretism, that is, Catholic practices have been integrated with new doctrines and practices that are special to SCS. Members of SCS employ symbolic elements, which strengthen their faith and identity. Tattoos containing sacred Latin writings are like shields and a direct contact with God when they pray. The necklaces that have big crosses are made continuously as reminders of spiritual power and immunity. The Philippine flag also has some sacred meaning where the flag represents the responsibility of the believer to protect the country as part of his or her spiritual purpose. Lastly, the logo of the community, which is the picture of an eagle clutches a sword, play the part of divine vigilance and consecration of genuine Christians. Specifically, the sword is a symbol of spiritual change and willingness to protect the faith.

5. Conclusion

The study has greatly helped bridge the knowledge gap regarding the Sagrado Corazon Senior (SCS) religious community which remained as a poorly researched group considering that it is a religious community that is unique in terms of culture and spirituality in the Philippine religious systems. Offering a detailed description of the origins of SCS, its leadership model, its main ideologies, symbols, and rituals, the given study is of great value as it helps to see how this community successfully combines the ideas of Christianity, nationalism of the Filipinos, and local folk beliefs in order to create a distinctive religious movement. The results also show that SCS is an elaborate interaction of faith, culture and ideology that shows how religious affiliation could be redefined beyond the popular religious doctrines of its period through syncretism and localized creation of meaning. This can be demonstrated by the practices of the community concerning symbolic consecrations, using written prayers during the communion process, and referring Papa Sagrado as Christ but with a different name which shows how faith changes to suit the cultural setting and how it can adjust according to the sociopolitical aspects.

The study and its characteristics offer these distinctive practices and beliefs to both enrich the scholarly literature on Filipino religious movements and offer a critical understanding with which to view the relative success of marginalized groups in crafting identity, building unity, and joining the wider national narratives. Besides, the study highlights the value of religious diversity respect and appreciation in establishing dialogue, cultural protection, and comprehensive policymaking. In the field of education, this study may help in understanding diverse belief systems and being open to unique beliefs and practices that may foster a more inclusive and respectful environment. This may also be integrated in Araling Panlipunan or in any subjects that can integrate studies of local Filipino religious movements to promote pluralism and respect. Finally, this paper enhances our knowledge about the diversity and complexity of religious life in Philippines and challenges us to research on the roles that these entities stand to play in determining not only spiritual identity but also national identity.

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