

# Zambalataya: Where are the 21<sup>st</sup>-century faithful today? A narrative inquiry

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## **Abstract:**

Zambalataya is a blended phrase referring to the people of Zambales (Zambaleño) and Faith (Pananampalataya). This qualitative study seeks to investigate the evolving experiences of the faithful concerning their religiosity and spirituality. Employing narrative inquiry as the research design, the study engaged novena devotees and laypersons who served as church volunteers as its participants. Data were collected through the focus group discussions (FGD) method. The findings reveal that the 21<sup>st</sup>-century faithful in the Filipino society hold faith in high regard as integral to their lives and identity, acknowledge the evolving nature of faith traditions, and demonstrate a strengthened faith amidst societal changes. Religious faith is nurtured even through the evolution of showcasing faith. The material aspects of religion change, but its non-material aspect cultivates more from its origins, as exposed by the rising number of young faithful involved in rituals using different media to display modern religiosity. These findings significantly enhance our understanding of dynamic religiosity as reflected in personal spiritual expressions. Findings also foster ecumenism as they uncover the evolving religious and spiritual practices of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century faithful.

**Keywords:** 21<sup>st</sup>-century faithful, evolving religious traditions, religiosity, social change.

**Classification numbers:** 4.1, 4.4, 11

## **1. Introduction**

The term Zambalataya, a fusion of the people of Zambales (Zambaleño) and Faith (Pananampalataya), underscores the deeply intertwined connection between Zambaleños and their faith, a heritage passed down through generations. The province of Zambales, renowned for its rich culture, is more than just picturesque landscapes. Its culture is deeply rooted in religious beliefs that permeate its indigenised social life. The study of cultures cannot be complete without the inclusion of religion [1], highlighting the cultural significance of Zambales.

Over the centuries, Western faith was introduced, restructuring the pre-colonial social order of the Philippines. The mission resettlement known as Reduccion, named by T.A. Agoncillo (1990) [2],

profoundly seeded the Hispanic faith into the archipelago's soil, transforming the pre-colonial faithful. This resettlement programme uprooted the early people of Zambales not only from their places of birth but also from their traditional faith and practices, preserving the prominence of Hispanic faith and influence over the centuries.

Years have passed, and this religious faith was indigenised and made its own. Folk religiosity is "part of cultivating authentic faith expressions" [3]. As a result, although Filipinos have publicly acknowledged the influence of the Spanish on their behaviour, they have primarily maintained an orientalist worldview, giving rise to a type of Filipino Folk Christianity that refers to a religious movement indigenous to the area and maintains its identity as such, according to S. Stosic, et al. (2016) [4].

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With the advent of modernisation, sociocultural changes became inevitable in Filipino society. For J.M. Henslin, et al. (2006) [5], religion, as viewed from the conflict perspective, would change people when they have already grown out of life's difficulties. Changes among the faithful are caused by changes in their beliefs manifested in the rituals they practise and adopted by their community. For H. Spencer (1867) [6], social change occurs when society transitions from a state of homogeneity or simplicity to heterogeneity or complexity. Additionally, as society evolves, the functions of people become specialised. It is accepted that the evolution of society, where religion is an institution, depends on the level of conservation and adaptation of the community. This study intends to examine the religiosity and spirituality of the faithful in this day and age. The study's findings could be relevant to the in-depth understanding of the religious culture of the faithful, the preservation of religious culture, and the advocacy of ecumenism.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The evolutionary changes in society include changing social structures and institutions [7]. H. Spencer (1867) [6] created an analogy of society with a biological organism, where society progresses in size like an organism; thus, its structure becomes more complex. Over time, society evolves from simple societies to compound societies and from doubly compound societies to trebly compound societies. The faith demonstrated in the practice of religious rituals continues to adapt to social changes.

## 3. Scope and limitations

The study is limited to the qualitative exploration of the lived experiences, narratives, and perceptions of the faithful in a religious organisation, specifically the Roman Catholic Church, focusing on the novena devotees. The participants in the study do not include any clergy or academics but consist solely of parishioners. It is expected that their views and sentiments regarding the impact of their faith and religiosity might have similarities. Considering this limitation, the findings of the study only reflect the feelings and viewpoints of the devotees concerning their faith and religiosity.

## 4. Research methodology

The research adopts a qualitative approach, using narrative inquiry as its design. As a qualitative research design, narrative inquiry considers people's stories encompassing "culture, historical experiences, identity, and lifestyle" [8].

This study employed the FGD method to gather relevant data about the lived experiences and perceptions of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century faithful. These include both the old and young faithful who are actively engaged in church activities such as novena and other religious activities. Furthermore, thematic analysis was used to analyse and interpret the data gathered. The study was conducted in selected barangays in Castillejos, Zambales.

Eleven novena devotees were selected because the study focuses on describing and exploring the experiences and perceptions of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century faithful in a bicentennial town. There were nine female and two male participants aged from 30 to 81. All participants had been serving the church for at least two years in various capacities, they were chosen to serve as participants based on their depth of engagement in the religious activities.

The interview aimed to describe the religious rituals and explore the similarities and differences between these and traditional ones. Follow-up questions were also prepared to delve deeper into the effects of religious participation on the lives of the faithful. The open-ended questions were pilot-tested.

A series of empirical observations of the phenomenon was first conducted to gather predetermined data. Permission was then sought from the authorities to conduct the study. The FGD method was primarily used to gather data. After the devotees completed their novena in August 2015, they were invited for a group interview, guided by the prepared open-ended questions and conducted using the semi-structured interview method. They were asked about their religious practices and engagements, and their understanding of religious rituals. They were also asked to describe the differences between religious rituals performed in the past and current practices, as well as their lived experiences, including their spirituality

as 21<sup>st</sup>-century faithful. The responses during the FGD were recorded and transcribed on a smartphone then translated using Google Translate and validated by a language expert. The semi-structured group interview was held after the devotees completed their novena in the afternoon. They were invited to the FGD which lasted for 45 minutes. The interview was recorded via smartphone and transcribed for analysis.

For ethical considerations, informed consent was obtained from the participants through a consent form before the FGD method was conducted. The study did not reveal the participants' names; instead, the code "ND" for novena devotees was used to maintain the participants' confidentiality.

Thematic analysis was primarily used to process the data gathered. In this process, the direct responses of the participants from the group discussion were transcribed. Thematic analysis is a research method that identifies, describes, and interprets patterns from the data [9]. Key concepts from the thematic analysis were further analysed to identify the research themes, which served as the research outputs. Finally, the themes were discussed and interpreted. The verbatim responses of the participants were categorised, clustered, and interpreted to generate relevant themes.

## 5. Results and discussion

### 5.1. Faith as life and identity

The 21<sup>st</sup>-century faithful in a bicentennial pueblo have diverse stories where faith is exhibited as a product of tradition and doctrine. Additional research demonstrates a favourable correlation between a person's religious experience and their physical and mental health [10]. A participant specified that the faith indoctrinated by the Spaniards has been passed down through generations and transformed into their indigenised faith. He said "Sa akin oo kasi iyong faith natin ngayon dalawa ang pinanggalingan tradisyon at doctrine kaya di pwede mahiwalay ang tradition at doctrine, sa karamihan na ineenjoy natin base sa mga unang pinakita dati na unang tradisyon. Naabsorbed natin na tradisyon ng mga Kastila na naipasa pasa sa generation-to-generation kaya pag hindi sinunod iyon parang di mo rin naabsorbed iyong paniniwala. Pagpapasa ng bawat pamilya sa pamilya nagsimula,

bihira na iyong scenario na nahatak ka ng kaibigan mas malamang iyong lola ng lola mo ay napakareligious na naipasa sa pamilya, parang iyong values noon ay parang dumaan sa pamilya... influence ng family..." [ND6] (To me, yes, because our faith today comes from two sources, tradition and doctrine, so tradition and doctrine cannot be separated, for the most part we enjoy it based on what was first shown in the past, which is the first tradition. We have absorbed the tradition of the Spaniards that was passed down from generation to generation, so if you don't follow that, it's like you haven't absorbed your belief either. Passing on from family to family, it's rare that you are pulled by a friend, more likely your grandmother was very religious and passed it on to the family, it seems like your values were passed on to the family... influence of the family...). The other participant added "Iyon na po ang kinagisnan natin, para sa amin iyan na rin ang pananampalataya namin" [ND1] (That's what we've lived for, for us, that's our faith).

The majority of the participants pointed out that practising the tradition is proof of being faithful. By incorporating spiritually oriented viewpoints that involve recognising aspects of faith and human life, existing models of relational spirituality coping might be better understood [10]. "Though Catholicism kasi maraming ibat' ibang style may mga konserbatibo, meron mga katoliko dahil nabinyagan as Catholic siguro malaking rin ung effect nung part ka talaga... para pag may nagtanong sa iyo kung bakit may mga prusisyon na iyan pag active ka na nanakiisa may alam ka, may isasagot ka. Malaking bagay iyon kasi pag hindi mo alam iyong pinagmulan ng iyong tradisyon magkakaroon ng ideya ang iba na bakit katoliko siya pero hindi niya alam ang pinagmulan ng paniniwala. Mahalagang alam mo bakit mo ginagawa iyan, lalo na makikila ang paniniwala" [ND6] (Though Catholicism has many different styles, there are conservatives, and there are Catholics because they were baptised as Catholics, maybe the effect was big when you were really a part of it... so when someone asks you why there are processions when you are actively participating, someone knows. You, you have something to answer for. That's a big thing because if you don't know the origin of your tradition, others will have an idea why he is Catholic but he doesn't know the origin of the belief.

**Table 1. Religiosity and spirituality of the 21st-century faithful.** Source: Research results, derived from qualitative data analysis.

Sample direct statement	Theme	Description of the theme
"Kasi nga po ayon sa naranasan at karanasan ng tao huwag na tayo iiba sa atin na lamang may pagkakataon na humingi ako sa Kanya at talagang pinagkaloob Niya, iyan ay nagawa dahil sa pananampalataya ko sa Kanya" [ND3] (Because, according to human experiences and encounters, let us not stray away; I once had the opportunity to ask Him, and He truly granted it. This was made possible because of my faith in Him).	Faith as life and identity	The theme values the significance of faith in the lives of the faithful. Expression of faith reflects a person's identity and personality.
"Siguro noon napakaformal ng setting... ngayon animated na. Mas reachable ngayon kasi iyong mga Pari nakikipag usap ngayon hindi tulad ng mga pari noon reserved para mahirap abutin sila hindi mo sila maka bonding, di tulad ngayon mas open sila" [ND6] (Maybe in the past, the setting was very formal... but now, it's more animated. It's more reachable now because priests interact more; unlike before, when they were reserved and hard to approach, you couldn't bond with them. But now, they are more open).	Evolving traditions of faith	Religious practices and rituals continue to evolve in a more accommodating and practical manner.
"Nagkakaroon lang pagbabago sa klase ng tradisyon subalit ang paniniwala sa Panginoon ay andoon pa rin" [ND2] (There are just changes in the kind of traditions, but the faith in the Lord still remains).	Stronger faith amid social changes	Society continues to change. Socio-cultural components such as social values and attitudes waned, but faith continues to grow, as articulated in their enriched spirituality.

It's important that you know why you're doing that, especially to understand the belief). Religion directs life to better living. For Marx, religion serves as a getaway for those longing for ease from their life's burden [5]. Through religion, happiness becomes more realisable in most aspects of life. Living a healthy, productive, sound and content life is what religiosity promises [11]. This is also reflected in several participants' narratives, as illustrated in Table 1.

The Functionalist Perspective views religion as an institution that keeps language alive and preserves religious rituals and teachings to continue the past culture [5]. Religion influences and determines the quality of life. Studies show that religion has significantly affected our lives. It also provides information about how others view their religion and how closely they need to be connected in the future [11]. One of the participants pointed out that their involvement in various customary religious activities affected her life. "Malaki ang epekto lalo sa ispiritwal na aspeto ng buhay dahil sa ganyan na pagtalima lalo na iyong pagsamba sa ating Panginoon Diyos, kung бага napakalaking nagawa sa ating buhay lalo pag mayroon tayong suliranin iyong kahilingan natin sa Diyos nabibigyan ng katugunan" [ND2] (There is a big impact, especially in the spiritual aspect of life because of such obedience, especially your worship

of our Lord God, as if a great deal has been done in our lives, especially when we have a problem, our request to God is answered). Becoming "maka-Diyos" entails one's religiosity and spirituality. Every faithful expresses his/her religiosity through "public practices" and spirituality through his/her "personal ways". Moreover, these two expressions of "maka-Diyos" among Filipino faithful are encompassing [12].

## 5.2. Evolving traditions of faith

Religion as an institution creates a moral community through religious rituals [13]. According to J.M. Henslin, et al. (2006) [5], religion is not exempt from changing or waning. Most participants found that religious doctrine is as dynamic as society, as evidenced by evolving religious rituals or repetitive activities and ceremonies. Only a few of today's faithful are revitalising the religious rituals of olden times. "Mangilan-ilan na lang ang sumusunod sa lumang tradisyon. Siyempre andito na tayo sa makabagong panahon at ng teknolohiya. Pag-usad ng panahon... Sumasama sa daloy ng pag-unlad..." [ND2] (Only a few follow the old tradition. Of course, we are here in modern times and technology. Progress of time... Going with the development...).

One of the participants pointed out "May mga scenario na ginagawa ang mga tradisyon dahil gusto talaga ng faithful, siguro maliit lang ang percentage na gumagawa dahil gusto o voluntary, iyong iba



talaga parang mas malaki na iyong iba sumasama sa prusisyon lang dahil kailangan...” [ND6] (There are scenarios where the traditions are done because the faithful really want to, others join the procession just because they have to... it's rare if they want to...).

All participants specified that there are drastic changes in today's religious rituals compared to the spiritual rituals of the past. One of the participants said “Noon napaka traditional, talagang sinauna, makaluma sa pananamit pa lang eh nakabelo ang mga babae, ang mga lalaki at babae maayos ang damit... kasi feeling ko ngayon dadami lang ang tao pag may kailangan sila...” [ND6] (Back then, clothing was very traditional and old-fashioned; the women were veiled, and the men and women were well-dressed. Now I feel that more and more people pray when they need something). The ways the faithful express their religiosity vary from more conservative and traditional to progressive and novel means of manifestation.

Almost all participants agreed and pointed out that one of the major differences is in the manner of dressing when going to church. Previously, women wore long dresses with veils on their heads. One participant added that women even dressed according to the insignias of the saints they were honouring. “Noong unang panahon sa simbahan nagsusuot ng belo at mahahabang kasuotan, halimbawa kung ikaw ay nag iilaw kay Santa Maria sa prusisyon ikaw ay nagsusuot ng puti ganoon din kay Apo San Antonio ang kasuotan ay brown at dilaw. Gumagamit din sila ng tali sa baywang na kung ilang buhol iyon din ang bilang ng taon na susuotin mo ang nasabing damit” [ND3] (In the olden days, in the church, people wore veils and long clothes. For example, if you offered light to Santa Maria in the procession, you wore white, while for Apo San Antonio, the clothes were brown and yellow. They also used a tie around the waist, with how many knots that was also the number of years you would wear said dress). The display of faith and spirituality has also evolved, just like in clothing decorum.

One of the participants, in her story, stressed that during her time (her childhood) growing up in a “sarado Katoliko” (Active Catholic) family, Lent was observed sacredly, far different from today. There was a distinct time given for prayer and singing the Pasyong Mahal (Passion of Christ) to observe Christ's passion,

death, and resurrection. At a young age, the children were encouraged and taught to sing Pasyong Mahal (Passion of Christ) till late at night at the kubol (street altar) and the following day at the church. She said “Mula noong maliit pa ako dahil nga ako ay galing sa sarado Katolikong pamilya ibang-iba na ang Semana Santa. May oras sa pagdarasal at pagpapasyon sa pagsasariwa sa buhay ni Kristo. Hinihikayat kami noong mga bata pa kami na magpasyon at manatili sa kubol magdamag at kinaumagahan nasa simbahan naman kami” [ND4] (Since I was little, because I come from a closed Catholic family, Holy Week has been very different. There is time for prayer and singing the “Pasyon” for reliving the life of Christ. We were encouraged when we were kids to read the ‘Pasyong Mahal’ and stay in the hut overnight, and the next morning we were at church). The traditional faithful during their era had experienced practicing faith in a very structured and fundamentalistic way, far opposite to the practices of the modern-day faithful, which is less structured and spontaneous.

The religious rituals before were very formal and fundamentalist, as one of the youngest participants pointed out “...eh ngayon ini-invite ang lahat na makiisa, mas naging open iyong simbahan sa lahat... open to all ang pinto ng simbahan ngayon walang sinesclude...” [ND6] (Now everyone is invited to join in, your church has become more open to everyone... the church door is open to all, and no one is excluded...). This generation's religious rituals are different, evolving into more vibrant practices. As the centre of faith and tradition, the church becomes more open to all as it reaches out to the community. Moreover, as the church exists beyond borders, it reaches out to the public in a way that is more inclusive and accessible.

The participants agreed that with the advent of the technological advancement era, only a few remain fundamentalists. One participant pointed out that it is proper for religious traditions to conform to a dynamic society. Participants from different generations admitted that Filipinos have indigenised the religious rituals of indoctrinated faith. Most participants noted that Filipinos have become “over-acting” in their versions of these religious rituals. One of the participants indicated “...minsan nagiging over acting na ang mga Pilipino, nagiging over acting

ang bersyon ng mga Pilipino... anyway nabubuhay pa rin ang mga matatanda na nagpapaalala sa mga sinaunang gawain” [ND6] (...sometimes the Filipinos become over-acting, the Filipino version becomes over-acting... anyway the old people are still alive and remind us of the early practices). Nevertheless, as the other participant specified, the fear of totally uprooting the religious rituals from their foundation is monitored and even censored by the presence of the traditional faithful. Further, the rapid modernisation through technological advancement perhaps drastically and openly waned the socioeconomic aspects of life, which are tangible but not the spiritual aspect of life, the imperceptible element of life that remains sacred and personal.

As society becomes more complex, religion’s structures and rituals vary. According to Whitehouse, amid social changes, “rituals become more routinised... doctrine and narrative become more standardised, and beliefs become more universalistic” [1].

### 5.3. Stronger faith amid social changes

Traditional society has been transformed through significant social changes. Postmodernism has led the faithful to become more focused on “local narratives” and the reawakening of spirituality [5]. Participants pointed out that more influential technology changed the perception of the faithful when doing traditional religious rituals. It would be difficult to bring back the traditional religious rituals because everything now is being modernised as pointed out by one of the eldest participants, “Sa takbo ng teknolohiya nagkakaroon ng pagbabago sa paniniwala ng mga kabataan sa mga artists na ginagaya na ng mga kabataan. Mahihirapan na ibalik ang tradisyon ,minomoderno na ang interpretation na ginagawa ngayon” [ND5] (In the course of technology, there is a change in young people’s beliefs in the artists that the young people are imitating. It will be challenging to bring back the tradition; the interpretation that is being done today is being modernised). In addition, the trend today is that only the more senior people cling to the past, while the young have diversions as reasons for moving away from it [5]. Religion provides a concrete means to deal with uncertainty [14].

However, this does not mean social institutions such as religion are replaceable or comparable to scientific breakthroughs. The participants recognised

that faith has become more active in this generation of modernisation. While the ways the 21<sup>st</sup>-century faithful perform religious rituals and practices are modernised, faith has matured and is nurtured more effectively.

Science can never replace religion; the former cannot dictate the morals of any action [5]. Religion continues to exist as long as people search for acceptable roles and behaviours [5]. One participant pointed out that faith remains strong among the youth albeit expressed differently. Despite challenges and social changes, religion remains strong even among the youth [5]. The differences in 21st-century faith are often misinterpreted by the elderly. The majority of participants specified that today’s faithful have their unique way of professing faith but believe that faith continues to grow. “Ang nangyayari nawala iyong focus di nawala iyong Catholic faith... depende talaga sa time ang uri ng pagpapakita ng panampalataya... di nawala ang pananampalataya nagbago lang ng strategy at way kung paano siya ipapalaganap, katulad ng social media sa facebook paano ka makaka-*evangelize* kung iyong sinauna pa rin ang paraan. Lumago lalo di nawawala” [ND6] (What is happening is that you lost your focus, you did not lose your Catholic faith... the type of display of faith really depends on the time... the faith is not lost, it is just that the strategy and way of spreading it have changed, like social media on Facebook, how can you *evangelise* if you are still using the old way. Grow more, not disappear). Filipinos are known to be “Maka-Diyos” [12]. Even the youth, who are the 21<sup>st</sup>-century faithful (modern faithful) are considered equally religious as the traditional faithful, but express it in unique ways. The religiosity of Filipinos is shown beyond manifestation to oneself; but also in their relationship with others.

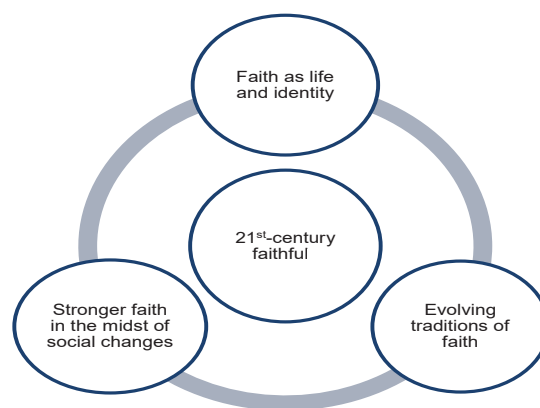


Fig. 1. Framework of the research findings.

Figure 1 shows the study's findings that centre on faith as life and identity, evolving traditions of faith, and stronger faith amid social changes.

## 6. Conclusions

The community of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century faithful consists of enculturated individuals who are old-style, traditional, and elderly and acculturated individuals who are active, dynamic, and young. The dominant faith recognised by the faithful is deeply rooted in the introduced Western faith, traced to the relentless practice of traditional religious rituals.

The 21<sup>st</sup>-century faithful vary in how they practise religious rituals; young faithful are non-traditional, shown in their more animated and less fundamentalist display of beliefs, which is quite the opposite of the rituals of the old-style faithful. However, both groups maintain a high level of understanding and appreciation of the original belief, as displayed in the lively practice of religious rituals. Religious faith continues to grow despite the vigorous evolution in the display of faith. The material aspects of religion (rituals and practices) evolve, but its immaterial aspect (spirituality) grows more from its roots. This is evidenced by the growing number of young faithful engaging in modern religious rituals using different media.

Relatively, the spirituality of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century faithful remains untainted despite the dynamic expression of both traditional and modern religiosity. The faith they embrace has uniquely transformed the lives of intergenerational faithful.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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