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Re-Imagining the Religious Beliefs and Cultural Practices of Indigenous Christian Youth

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Abstract: This paper aims to understand better the religious beliefs and cultural practices of Cordilleran Christian youth in the Philippines. By zooming in on the notions of God and practices of select Cordilleran Christian youth, this study endeavors to make the voices of indigenous Christian youth heard. Using the framework of *Laylayan* theology, this study explores the perspectives of the indigenous Christian youth on God, traditional practices, and lived experience, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results show the interconnectedness of faith and culture among select indigenous youth during this contemporary period. Their lived religious context informs society on the dialogue of life and experience.

Keywords: religion; indigenous beliefs; culture; COVID-19 pandemic; Philippines; laylayan theology; contextual; empirical theology

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1. Introduction

The Philippines is a relatively young nation. It was colonized for 333 years by Spain and for 48 years by the United States of America. During World War II, it was also briefly occupied by Japan. It was only in 1946 that the Philippines became an independent country. The Christian faith was brought to the Philippines and was embedded among Filipinos during the Spanish and American colonial eras. Although five centuries have passed since the first Christian missionaries reached the Philippine Islands, the Christian faith continues to thrive. Currently, the Philippines is considered the numerically largest Christian nation in Asia (Bautista 2014) and has the third-highest Catholic population after Brazil and Mexico (World Population Review 2022).

Although there are claims that Christianity destabilized the traditional worldviews and religions of the Cordilleran peoples (Kibiten 2019), this researcher argues that the indigenous people possess human agency. Thus, to be a Cordilleran Christian is a conscious decision and a continual choice. It is shown most strikingly by the Cordilleran youth who navigate the traditional and modern social systems (Kibiten 2019). The numerous indigenous people who have accepted, lived out, and proclaimed the Christian faith to date are a testament to Christianity's enduring value to believers and society (Del Castillo and Alino 2020).

In one of his pastoral visits to the Philippines, John Paul (1981) declared, "through its people, traditions, and the fruits of the missionary efforts, [many of the Filipinos] were able to shape a clear national identity that is truly Christian. The post-quincentenary question is, "Filipino Christians, *quo vadis*?" (Where are you going?) If Filipino Christian youth are considered "one of the most significant resources for evangelization" (Catholic Church Bishop's Conference of the Philippines 1992), we should then turn our attention to their notions of God and practice of the Christian faith.

This study privileges the voices of select Cordilleran Christian youth. It intends to make the notions on faith of young people in the margins (*laylayan*) heard (Del Castillo 2022). Scapp (2020) argues that there are many voices in the society that are struggling and

need to be heard. In this regard, Del Castillo (2022) asserts the need for *Laylayan* theology that amplifies the voices of the people from the margins which reveal the face of Jesus and proclaim the missional way of living the gospel. *Laylayan* theology also promotes reflections and discourse towards prophetic dialogue between the marginalized and the other members of society. Hence, by intently listening to the voices of select Cordilleran Christian youth and "opening our hearts" (Walker 1998) to them, we can discern Christ's presence among the youth and the marginalized. The Cordilleran Christian youth also represent the intersectionality of the Christian youth in the modern age. They are conscious of the threat posed by globalization to their culture (Anacin 2015), yet modernity offers them more significant opportunities for self-actualization (Adonis and Couch 2017). They are called to practice the Christian faith amidst growing secularism. Also, they are challenged to find value and meaning in the Christian faith while navigating the trials of life. More importantly, as baptized Christians, they are called to proclaim the Good News.

Indigenous Peoples, Religious Challenges, and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The indigenous peoples face various challenges and threats. They are considered one of the most marginalized and disenfranchised people in their society (First Peoples Worldwide n.d.). Some of them face discrimination, exploitation, exclusion, abuse, and injustice in their own lands. Pope Francis (2017) recognized these prevailing struggles of the indigenous people and believed that the central issue is determining how to reconcile their right to development with the protection of the particular characteristics of indigenous peoples and their communities.

In the Philippine context, many Cordilleran peoples—especially those still practicing indigenous rituals—are exoticized and deemed less civilized (Peterson 2010). Interestingly, while many of the Cordilleran peoples continue to practice their autochthonous rituals, a good number of them simultaneously profess the Christian faith. There are Cordilleran peoples living in the upland who identify with forms of Protestant Christianity, while many who have settled in the Hispanicized lowlands adhere to Roman Catholicism (Howell 2009).

Many Cordilleran peoples are rice farmers (Hilhorst 2001), and an essential practice during the agricultural cycle is the *tengaw* (days of rest). During the COVID-19, many *Igorot*, or Cordilleran peoples, a small indigenous tribe living in the Cordilleran Mountain Province, embraced the quarantine measures. Before the planting season and after a harvest, the council of elders usually declares *tengaw*, and villagers are prohibited from passing through the rice terraces because they might upset the "spirits" (Jones 2002). Since most people are resting at home, the critical rice planting rituals to appease the "spirits" can continue uninterrupted (Docot 2016). Thus, the concept of "staying at home" for a specific time is a part of the Cordilleran's life.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, some *ili*, or Cordilleran villages, also declared *tengaw* to cleanse, protect, and heal the community. Cordilleran elders, or *ama*, performed a *manengtey* (a ritual that divined omens from a chicken's internal organs). Moreover, at the entrance of certain towns, a *sagubay* (knotted grass or arched bamboo shoots) is placed at the opening of the village to fend off "outsiders" (non-residents) and the "bad spirits" that bring diseases (Lapniten 2020).

By zooming in on the notions of God and religious practices of select Cordilleran Christian youth, the author hopes to contribute to the healing of division among Filipino Christians so "that they may all be one" (New American Bible 2002, John 17:21). They have something important to say about the presence of Jesus Christ among the indigenous youth in these trying times. Their lived religious experience can also inform the universal Church about how to model the inclusivity of Jesus (Ross and Bevans 2015).

2. Methodology

Analyzing the Lived Experience of Select Indigenous Youth

In this study, the researcher employed qualitative research and analyzed the data using an empirical phenomenological process. This is the framework used in *Laylayan*

theology which unravels the perspectives and voices of the people from the margins. The paper examines the contemporary understanding and praxis of faith among Cordilleran Christian youth. It aims to provide a "renewed shape to the scientific character of theology and speaks from its theological critical consciousness to the university" (Boeve 2014, p. 315).

An open-ended questionnaire was administered to select Cordilleran Christian youth in the Mountain Provinces as part of this study. The participants were made aware of the aims of the research. After filling out the informed consent and the required demographics, the respondents answered the following survey questions:

(1) Who is God for you?
(2) What traditional religious practices do you participate in?
(3) How did you practice your religious beliefs during the COVID-19 pandemic?

To analyze the data, the common elements among the respondents' faith articulations and praxis of religious beliefs were identified and organized as first-order constructs. Next, the researcher synthesized the first-order constructs into themes or second-order constructs. Finally, the information was synthesized and conclusions were made. In developing the second-order constructs, the researcher generates a central theme from the first-order constructs by exploring patterns and connecting them with existing theories. Aspers (2009) pointed out that empirical phenomenology is an approach that is used to define the focus of phenomenology. It comes from the assumption that a scientific explanation is grounded in the meaning structure of those being studied. To validate the results of the unfolding of phenomenal experiences, subject matter experts were consulted to check its reliability.

A total of 106 Cordilleran people (74 females and 32 males) participated in this research. Convenient sampling was employed in the study. The respondents are between 24 and 34 years old. The informants were evenly distributed between the rural (upland) and urban (lowland) areas. The majority of the respondents are Roman Catholics, while the rest affirmed that they are Christians. More than half of the informants belong to the *Kankana-ey* tribe. Some respondents belong to the *Ibaloi*, *Ifugao*, *Balangao*, *Bontoc*, *Kalinga*, and *Isneg* tribes. A few of the informants come from lesser-known tribes such as *Ilongot* and *Kalanguya*.

3. Results of the Study

3.1. Kabunyan Is Father, Creator and Provider, and Savior

Table 1 below shows the first-order and second-order constructs of the select Cordilleran Christian youth on the inquiry, "Who is God for you?" 37% of the youth perceive God as a father who guides, strengthens, and helps them. They believe that God is present all the time because he is "an ever-powerful divine being". A total of 35% of the informants view God as the Creator and Provider. They perceive that God is the ultimate source of everything that exists. He is the Creator and sustainer of the universe. He is *Kabunyan*, a powerful God over nature, to whom they pray. A total of 28% of the respondents see God as Savior. To them, God deserves all the glory and praise because He lifts humankind in times of pain and suffering.

Table 1. God according to select Cordilleran Christian youth.

Inquiry: Who Is God for You?	
First-Order Constructs	Second-Order Constructs
"God guides, strengthens, and helps us like a father." "God is an ever-powerful divine being. He is present everywhere."	God is the Almighty Father
"God is the ultimate source of everything that exists." "God is the creator and sustainer of the universe." "God is *Kabunyan*, a powerful God over nature, to whom we pray."	God is the Creator and Provider
"God is our savior and redeemer who deserves all glory and praise." "God lifts us in times of hardship and pain."	God as Savior

3.2. Some Cordilleran Religious Rituals Are Comparable to Christianity

Table 2 below shows the autochthonous rituals practiced by select Cordilleran Christian youth. Among Cordilleran people, "the ritual life is reflected in both the life cycle and the annual round of community activities, which includes a fixed sequence of ceremonies" (Eggan and Scott 1965). Critical reflection on how some indigenous youth practice their religious traditions will shed light on the value of culture. It will also unravel the presence of the "dialogue of life" and "dialogue of religious experience" (Burrows 2009) from the perspective of some Cordilleran Christian youth. More importantly, the insights gleaned from the voices of select indigenous Christian youth can inform the universal Church on how to engage in a compelling Christian mission.

Table 2. Autochthonous rituals practiced by select Cordilleran Christian youth.

Inquiry: What Folk/Traditional Religious Practices Do You Participate in? Why?	
First-Order Constructs	Second-Order Constructs
"The practices here in our place that I participated in was the offering of something such as pigs to *Kabunyan*/God." "I participate in the religious rituals of Bontoc people, such as presenting a gift with a chant to *Kabunyan* (God). I participate in these religious rituals because I grew up in a community where rituals are very important."	Some indigenous religious rituals are forms of adoration to the divine.
"*Begnas* because it is a way of thanking God." "*Lang-ay* and other practices that show gratitude to God for a good harvest. I participated for me to express my gratitude to Him for everything that He had done for me."	Some indigenous religious rituals are forms of thanksgiving to the divine.
"*Mangmang*." "Saying '*kayo-kayo*' whenever you throw something on the river because you might disturb a spirit." "Every time we enter a forest, we need to ask permission from the guardian."	Some indigenous religious rituals are supplications to the divine.
"After burials, we always have '*kopokop*' where we butcher a chicken and offer some to the dead. I always participate because dad was doing it in our house." "We only do '*atang*' (offering for the dead) at home for our dead loved ones for them not to feel unwelcomed or forgotten." "Ifugaos practice a tradition called "*bagwa*", which is the washing of the bones of our dead relatives. We do this to remind us that even in the afterlife, they are still important to us."	Human persons are embodied spirits.
"Participating in cultural dance during the entrance, offering, and conclusion of Mass." "I participate in Masses, novenas, and traditional dances, mostly for the practice of my faith." "I join cultural dances at weddings and other celebrations. I join because I wouldn't want to forget my tribal and cultural roots."	Inculturated forms of Christian worship, Catholic sacraments, and popular religiosity are perceived as "traditional religious rituals".

In response to the question, "What traditional religious practices do you participate in?", 22% of the informants mentioned that they do not participate in any of the Cordilleran religious rituals. Interestingly, 48% of the Cordilleran Christian youth considered participation in Christian worship, Catholic sacraments, and other forms of popular Catholic religiosity as "traditional religious practice". One of the respondents answered, "I participate in inculturated Masses. I just love to participate in Eucharistic celebrations with the integration of cultures". Another Cordilleran Christian youth mentioned that she participates in "Cordilleran dance during the entrance, offering, and conclusion of Mass". A total of 31% of the respondents affirmed the practice of traditional rituals with religious significance. They mentioned specific rituals such as offering gifts and chanting prayers to *Kabunyan* (supreme deity). Some also practice "*begnas*" and "*lang-ay*" (thanksgiving to the supreme deity for a good harvest) and "*mangmang*" (imploring the supreme deity to preserve the rice terraces). There are a few who utter "*kayo kayo*" to show respect to the

guardians of nature and engage in "*kopokop*" as well as "*atang*" (offering of food to the spirits of dead kin). Some claim to practice "*bagwa*" (washing the bones of the dead) and *tengaw* (days of rest).

The select Cordilleran Christian youth appreciate the traditional rituals because their families have been practicing them ever since. "*Nakasanayan na!*" ("They got used to it!"), as one respondent puts it. Also, autochthonous rituals are very important to the community because they unite the village's people. Many of the traditional rituals show the appreciation of the Cordilleran for the blessings bestowed upon them by *Kabunyan*. One informant said, "I participate in traditional rituals to express my gratitude to Him for everything that He has done for me". Another informant also declared, "Through the rituals, we pay respect to our indigenous roots and remember who we are". Some rituals for relatives who have passed on demonstrate the love and respect of the Cordilleran for the deceased. A Cordilleran Christian youth shared, "The rituals make the spirit of the dead feel welcomed and never forgotten". Another youth adds, "We do this to remind us that even though they are in the afterlife, they are still important to us". Easing the assumed tension between autochthonous religion and Christianity (as well as other forms of religion), one Cordilleran Christian youth boldly claimed, "*Atang*, *sumang*, *sida*, and *daw-es* are traditions that we perform which are not offensive to other religious traditions. In other words, they are good traditions!" It is also noteworthy that Cordilleran Christian youth understand the term "*Kabunyan*" as God.

3.3. The Practices of Faith among Select Cordilleran Christian Youth Are Palpably Christian

Table 3 below shows the responses of the indigenous Christian youth to the query, "How did you practice your religious beliefs during the pandemic?" It unveils the Christian praxis of select Cordilleran Christian youth in the time of COVID-19. While many researchers have investigated the practice of the Christian faith during the pandemic, there are no studies (to the best of the author's knowledge) on how indigenous Christian youth access, live out, and appreciate the Christian faith in this time of social distancing. More importantly, this area of inquiry unveils God's saving presence in this period of unexpected adversity.

Among the respondents, 7% admitted that they did not practice their religious beliefs during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, 56% of the select Cordilleran Christian youth mentioned praying during the global health crisis. However, most of the supplication was for the safety and health of their families. Some informants said that they prayed for the front-liners and those in need of prayers, particularly the sick and dead affected by the virus. They also prayed for God's protection, healing, and forgiveness for His people and healing of the world. During the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), the public practice of religion in the Philippines was either prohibited or restricted. As a result, only 14% of the respondents claimed that they could go to church and attend other church services.

Around 28% of the select indigenous Christian youth attest that they practiced their religious beliefs (and somehow were still part of their faith communities) through technology. One informant mentioned, "Despite this pandemic, we can continue our Eucharist celebrations, so I still attend Masses every Sunday. Virtually, I also attend Eucharist celebrations, rosary, divine mercy". Another one said, "I was able to practice my religious beliefs by listening to live worship on *YouTube* and reading the teachings of God". *Facebook* and *YouTube* were the most common social media platforms for virtual Masses, online devotions, watching sermons, and listening to Christian songs. The Holy Scriptures were also an essential resource for 5% of the select Cordilleran Christian youth. One informant mentioned, "During this pandemic, my religious beliefs were strengthened more because I have more time to stay at home, read my Bible". Another one reported, "We also do Bible studies, then share our thoughts or problems, then give advice". Some of the select Cordilleran Christian youth shared their reflections during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also mentioned that they have complete faith in God. One said, "I believe that God has a

purpose for everything, so I trusted Him", while another youth declared, "I trust God no matter what happens".

Some Cordilleran Christian youth also professed their faith through good works. Despite the threat of the COVID-19 virus and the various restrictions on the movement of people, they performed services for the poor, worked in the church, and helped others. An informant mentioned, "I joined my fellow youth in other activities like visiting of the sick and prayer services following the health protocols so that our church will not be closed, and we can continue in serving God". Another one wrote, "I was able to practice my beliefs through service for the poor, online teaching of the faith to children, and serving during Masses".

Table 3. Practice of religious beliefs during the COVID-19 pandemic among select Cordilleran Christian youth.

Inquiry: "How Did You Practice Your Religious Beliefs during the Pandemic?"	
First-Order Constructs	Second-Order Constructs
"I pray every day to keep my family safe." "I usually pray, and I always ask healing for the whole world." "Pray for the front-liners and those in need of prayers, particularly the sick and dead affected by the said virus." "I pray daily to thank God that my family and I are safe and for every blessing and circumstances overcome." "I often pray for God's protection, healing, and forgiveness for His people."	The youth raise their minds and hearts to God through Christian prayer.
"Watching sermons in YT and listening to Christian songs." "I just participate during virtual celebrations of the Eucharist." "Despite this pandemic, we can continue our Eucharist celebrations, so I still attend masses every Sunday. Virtually, I also attend Eucharist celebrations, rosary, divine mercy, etc." "Online platforms like Facebook live, Zoom, and YouTube."	The digital space also provides the youth with a platform to participate in Christian gatherings, services, and rituals.
"Reading the Bible." "During this pandemic, my religious beliefs were strengthened more because I have more time to stay at home, read my Bible." "We also do Bible studies, then share our thoughts or problems, then give advice."	Scripture-engaged youth receive spiritual strength and comfort from the written Word of God.
"Having a full faith in God." "Trusting in God no matter what happens." "I believed that God has a purpose for everything, so I trusted in Him." "Seek the divine plan of God and will of God in these trying times."	The youth turn to God to find meaning and order amidst the pandemic.
"Being kind, generous, and thankful." "Service for the poor, online Teaching of the faith to children, serve during Masses." "Helping others, sharing my talent." "Serving in the church." "Join my fellow youth in other activities like visiting of the sick and prayer services following the health protocols so that our church will not be closed, and we can continue in serving God." Helping others	The man or woman of faith shows to the world the love and justice of God, the heart of Christ that cares, and the power of the Holy Spirit that blesses and glorifies.
"Even before the pandemic, I rarely visited the church to attend Mass. Now, my mother watches the Mass broadcasted in the living room, and sometimes I listen." "I admit I had been less active, but I still participated in person whenever I could." "I also started to pray at night before I sleep and in the morning after I wake, and that's something I don't usually do before the pandemic hit."	The youth turn to their Christian faith to help them face unexpected adversity.

The COVID-19 pandemic also made some "lukewarm" Christian youth somewhat active in their practice of faith. One respondent confessed, "Before the pandemic, I rarely visited the church to attend Mass. Now, my mother watches the mass broadcast in the living room, and sometimes I listen". Another Cordilleran Christian youth said, "I admit I had been less active, but I still participated in-person [i.e., religious services] whenever I could".

Additionally, one informant wrote, "I also started to pray at night before I sleep and in the morning after I wake, and that's something I don't usually do before the pandemic hit".

4. Discussion of the Results

4.1. Cordilleran Christian Youth Theology

Christians believe in the Trinitarian God—one God in three divine Persons—Creator, Savior, and Sanctifier of the world. Every Christian is baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Apostles' Creed exposed the threefold work of God using the traditional pattern: "*I believe in God, the Father Creator of Heaven and earth*"; "*I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord*"; "*I believe in the Holy Spirit*". Christians believe that God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are distinct, yet they are one—a theology that St. Augustine developed. Karl Rahner (2001) explained that one cannot fully understand and believe in God as Father and Creator unless one understands and believes in Christ as Savior and the Spirit as Sanctifier. The Trinitarian doctrine is a central mystery in the Christian faith and life of the church. As the World Council of Churches pointed out, "the Church, through the Holy Spirit, are united with Jesus Christ and thereby share a living relationship with the Father, who speaks to them and calls forth their trustful response" (World Council of Churches 2013).

These proclamations on God are the foundations of the Christian faith. In the Old Testament, the primary focus is Yahweh's covenant with his people. God is the Father who created the world. God is the Creator who creates and sustains everything. He is the magnificent and powerful God who provides for his people. We read that God sent his Son, the Promised Messiah, to save the world from the New Testament. Jesus is the Son of God who became man to deliver us from the bondage of sin. Also, the Father sent the advocate, the Holy Spirit—who is Lord and giver of life.

The indigenous Filipinos had worldviews and beliefs of their own before the Christian missionaries came to the Philippines (Fernandez 1979). Catholic theologian José De Mesa (2007) notes that in the Philippines, one finds a fundamental but not total agreement between the Christian faith and the indigenous culture. As observed by the researcher, there is no significant tension between Christians and members of indigenous groups in the country. People who believe in the Christian faith seem to also subscribe to the traditional culture and practices. Hence, the indigenous Filipinos have similar religious constructs compared to Christianity. They both have a Supreme Being and believe that God is the Almighty who created the cosmos.

The Cordilleran Christian youth have a strong connection with their cultural tradition, beliefs, and practices. In Stephan Bevans' models of contextual theology, this relationship is descriptive of the synthetic model. It is a "middle-of-the-road" model which emphasizes the experience of the present context (culture, experience, social location, social change) and the experience of the past (scripture and tradition) (Bevans 2002). As Christian missionaries set foot in the archipelago, the Christian faith translated into the native culture. The subsequent acceptance of the faith made the mutual enrichment of cultures and integration of indigenous beliefs and Christian views manifest. Thus, *Kabunyan*—the Father, Creator, and Savior, is the Cordilleran equivalent of God.

4.2. We Are the Body of Christ and Individually Members of It

Many people are in search of God. They attempt to discover the mystery of God in all facets of life, including their religion. Since God revealed himself to humans in various ways, people try to encounter God through religious practices, worship, and prayers. Through religious rituals and worship, people can express their emotions to the divine and establish a deeper relationship with God.

Encountering God through religious rituals and practices is an experience that affirms the relationship of humans with God. In the encounter, God takes the initiative as humans respond to this holy invitation through the profession of faith and worship.

In the Christian community, the Holy Spirit continues to grace us with the strength to open ourselves to God and pray. The Spirit of the Lord inspires us to remember God's presence and encounter Him in daily life. The church members fulfill their vocation through the inner life of worship, thanksgiving, prayer, and mission. In the church tradition, formulations and expressions of our relationship with God can be seen in the different types of prayer: blessings and adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise. However, one must bear in mind that worship is both personal and communal. The expressions of faith through religious practices are dynamic and must be contextual.

Efforts to create an interplay between worship and culture have been made in many indigenous communities, including the Philippines. Filipino Benedictine monk Anscar Chupungco (1992), among others, has worked to incorporate Filipino culture into the predominantly Western forms of Christian practices in the country by integrating Filipino texts, rites, and symbols, into Christian worship.

Looking back at the religious practices of select Cordilleran Christian youth, one can notice that many religious rituals are important to them. Most of the indigenous rituals are learned in the family and believed to have efficacy still. Since most of the Cordilleran rituals entail the consent and cooperation of people from the village, they contribute to the social cohesion of the people. Moreover, they demonstrate that Christianity can thrive alongside traditional spiritual practices.

Many Cordilleran Christian youth are religious. They believe that the source of all that is good is *Kabunyan*, or God. Moreover, the rice terraces, rivers, and forests, among others, are sacred and looked after by spirits or guardians. Also, some find very little tension between their autochthonous religion and Christianity. They feel more or less equally at home in the community of Christian believers and culture. Thus, "the gospel is understood with the resources of the culture, and the culture is interpreted through the gospel" (De Mesa 2007, p. 59).

There are also Cordilleran religious rituals similar to types of Christian prayer—adoration, thanksgiving, and supplication. Moreover, some indigenous Christian youth demonstrate a practical understanding of the human soul. They also believe in the divine and consider *Kabunyan* God. Furthermore, they engage in public indigenous and Christian religious practices such as "*begnas*", "*lang-ay*", "*mangmang*", Christian fellowship, Catholic Masses, novena, and others. They also practice religion in private by praying to God and asking permission from the guardians of nature. Hence, many Cordilleran Christian youth engage in the "dialogue of religious experience".

It is also important to note that almost half of the respondents perceive inculturated Christianity as the "traditional religious practices" and not *begnas*, *lang-ay*, *kopokop*, *atang*, and the like. Hence, many Cordilleran Christians demonstrate what Phan (2008) describes as the appropriation, and to a certain extent, transformation of Christianity. Such a form of "indigenous Christianity" allows them to be Cordilleran and, at the same time, Christian.

4.3. Christian Faith Is Active

Globally, many people are suffering from distress and anxiety due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous people lost family members, while others suffered extended lockdowns, which aggravated their personal difficulties. Some people turn to prayer and appeal to God for mercy and protection from illness and loss as a form of comfort. Also, a variety of forms of religious piety have been practiced in the church in response to the global health crisis (Del Castillo et al. 2021). During difficult moments, many Christians continue to believe in the gospel and practice their faith.

In our current health crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic led many religious adherents to display their devotion to God through prayer and love to their brethren through service. Many religious congregations, churches, and Christian members provided religious interventions and assistance to people in dire need. Some provided online spiritual guidance, initiated feeding programs, and offered protective gear for health care workers (Del Castillo et al. 2020). This commitment and initiative are inspired by the three-fold mission of Christ

as king, prophet, and priest. It also personified the witnessing of the early Christians in their missionary activity as a pilgrim church.

Looking back on the articulations and praxis of faith of select Cordilleran Christian youth during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is noteworthy that many of their religious lived experiences were Christian. Most of them communicated to God through Christian prayer. Some were encouraged and found consolation in the written Word of God. Inspired by their Christian faith, there were some who helped the poor and suffering. Also, some of the indigenous Christian youth turned to God to find meaning amidst the global health crisis. A few others considered their Christian faith as an important resource in facing the challenges brought by COVID-19.

Moreover, many Cordilleran Christian youth utilized available technological innovations to fill the void left by in-person religious gatherings. They were able to take part in Catholic Masses, Christian worship, and other religious rituals. Thus, the select Cordilleran Christian youth have demonstrated that "the Christian faith and its practices are useful and necessary for many, for those who invoke the name of God [. . .] and seek salvation, help, and hope, or even inspiration to engage in risky caring activities" (Oviedo 2021). Thus, the select Cordilleran Christian youth affirm that during the COVID-19 pandemic, God is present and active in their lives.

5. Conclusions

This study hopes to be one of the many sounds in the myriad of voices on *Laylayan* theology (Del Castillo 2022). This study also offers evidence to the universal Church on the immense value of inculturation in Christian missions. Like the Cordilleran *kalaleng* (traditional nose flute), which needs life-giving air to make music, the Cordilleran Christian youth need the vivifying Spirit of God to be "fully alive" (Word on Fire 2021). The vibrant Christian life of the select indigenous youth is seen in their practice of traditional culture, unwavering faith in God, selfless acts of charity, and active Christian worship.

Stephen Bevans and Cathy Ross describe "mission as Christians' participation in God's joyful, life-giving and healing dance through the world" wherein prophetic dialogue might be imaged as the 'rhythm' of that dance. They add, "[. . .] how and when Christ is to be witnessed to and proclaimed is a matter of theological wisdom and discernment" (Ross and Bevans 2015). In the Philippine context, the select Cordilleran Christian youth revealed the leitmotif that can help the universal Church model the inclusivity of Jesus:

1. Inculturation (such as the use of the vernacular in teaching about God and the Christian faith, use of traditional musical instruments and indigenous dances, a deep appreciation for the people's tribal and cultural roots, and others) is key to the appropriation, transformation, and proclamation of the Christian faith.
2. Many of the indigenous youth value their cultural heritage. However, it does not diminish Christian identity. On the contrary, culture enriches Christianity.
3. Christianity develops in its context. Thus, Christians with deep cultural ties are "self-conscious and active transformers of Christianity who shape [the Christian faith] to meet their own cultural and spiritual needs" (Phan 2018).

The manifestations of God in indigenous cultures are the "seeds of the Word" (Barron 2015). Thus, the Christian mission necessitates dialogue. Through the dialogue of life and religious experience (and the dialogue of action and theological exchange), the gospel is shared with others.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted per the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki. Data were collected within an accepted educational setting. More importantly, the information obtained is encoded in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data for the current study is available upon written request to the corresponding author.

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