

RELIGIOUS RESILIENCE AND COMMUNITY ADAPTATION IN GUIMARAS ISLAND, PHILIPPINES: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF FAITH CONTINUITY

Lilian Diana B. Parreño,
Ethel P. Junco,
Khristian De La Rama,
Jo Ann Gerada
Guimaras State College

Abstract This study investigates Christian communities' resilience and adaptive strategies in Guimaras Island, Philippines, during periods of religious disruption. Using a qualitative historical research design, the study draws on oral histories from elderly informants and archival sources to analyze how local communities sustained religious practices despite institutional challenges. The findings reveal that periods of clergy absence, colonial transitions, and wartime destruction significantly disrupted formal religious structures. However, communities demonstrated resilience through lay leadership, informal worship practices, and the emergence of alternative religious groups such as the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, Seventh-day Adventists, and Baptist churches. The study further highlights that religious continuity was maintained through community-driven initiatives, such as bayanihan in church reconstruction and the use of temporary worship spaces. These adaptive responses underscore the role of faith as social capital and cohesion mechanism. The findings contribute to the understanding of lived religion and religious resilience in localized contexts.

Keywords: Community resilience, Lived religion, Religious pluralism, Adaptive strategies, Guimaras

Introduction

Religion serves not only as a system of beliefs but also as a social institution that shapes identity, cohesion, and cultural continuity. However, religious systems are not immune to disruption. In localized and island communities, the sustainability of religious life often depends less on formal institutional structures and more on the adaptive capacity of communities.

In the Philippine context, Christianity has historically been shaped through colonial encounters and local adaptations. Christianization, evolved through what Reynaldo Ileto describes as a *longue durée* process, where faith is co-constructed with local cultural practices (Ileto, 1979) rather than a uniform process. This perspective challenges purely institutional narratives and emphasizes the importance of community participation in sustaining religious life.

Recent scholarship highlights the concept of lived religion, where faith persists through everyday practices such as prayer, devotion, and informal gatherings beyond formal church structures (Paredes, 2017). These practices become critical mechanisms of continuity in times of disruption. As demonstrated by Cornelio and Aldama (2016), faith-based social networks in the Philippines mobilize resources and social capital, enabling communities to sustain religious life even when institutional support is limited.

In Guimaras Island, historical accounts reveal multiple disruptions, including clergy absence, war destruction, and administrative transitions. Despite these challenges, communities maintained religious continuity through adaptive strategies. This study examines these processes, and positions Guimaras as a case of religious resilience grounded in community agency and plural religious ecologies.

Research Objectives

This study aims to analyze the resilience of Christian communities in Guimaras Island during periods of religious disruption.

Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Identify the major disruptions that affected religious practices in Guimaras
2. Examine the adaptive strategies employed by local communities
3. Analyze the role of community participation in maintaining continuity
4. Explore the emergence of alternative religious groups

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative historical research design, integrating oral histories and archival data.

Primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews with elderly informants selected through purposive sampling. Secondary data were obtained from historical documents and records. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on disruption, adaptation, and resilience. Triangulation ensured validity, while ethical standards, such as informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly observed.

Results and Discussion

1. Religious Disruption and Institutional Fragility

Religious life in Guimaras experienced recurring disruptions due to the clergy absence, colonial transitions, and wartime destruction. These disruptions weakened formal religious structures and limited access to institutional worship.

This pattern reflects what scholars describe as institutional fragility, where dependence on centralized religious authority creates vulnerability during crises. As demonstrated in disaster studies, disruptions often expose the limitations of institutional systems while simultaneously activating community-based responses (Burke, 2015).

Table 1

Religious Disruption and Community Responses in Guimaras

Type of Disruption	Community Response	Outcome
Absence of clergy	Lay-led worship	Sustained faith practices
War destruction	Temporary worship spaces	Continuity of worship
Lack of resources	Bayanihan reconstruction	Strengthened cohesion
Institutional gaps	Shift to other denominations	Religious pluralism

Consistent with findings by Cornelio and Aldama (2016), disruptions did not eliminate religious practice but instead triggered faith-based social mobilization, enabling continuity through community networks.

2. Lived Religion and Practices of Everyday Faith

This study's key finding is that religious continuity in Guimaras was sustained through lived religion, rather than formal institutional structures.

Communities engaged in prayer gatherings, home-based worship, and informal rituals. These practices align with Paredes' (2017) concept of ethnographic multiplicity, where Catholicism and other forms of religiosity coexist within diverse devotional ecologies.

Similarly, Jackson (2013) emphasized that everyday experiences, mobility, and social context shape religious belonging. In Guimaras, this is reflected in how faith persisted despite institutional absence. These findings demonstrate that religion is embedded in daily life and not confined to churches, allowing it to endure beyond structural disruptions.

3. Community Participation and Faith as Social Capital

Community participation, particularly through bayanihan, played a central role in sustaining religious life. The rebuilding of churches and the organization of worship activities were driven by collect efforts.

This aligns with the concept of religion as social capital, where faith-based networks provide resources, support, and cohesion during crises (Cornelio & Aldama, 2016). Communities mobilized labor, materials, and leadership to restore religious structures and practices.

Moreover, studies on faith-based social action in the Philippines highlight that when formal clergy are absent, lay leadership becomes critical (Moxham, 2014). In Guimaras, this shift empowered communities and decentralized religious authority.

4. Religious Pluralism as an Adaptation Form

The emergence of alternative religious groups, such as IFI, Seventh-day Adventists, and Baptist churches, reflects adaptive responses to institutional gaps.

Table 2

Major Religious Institutions and Their Contributions

Religious Group	Key Contribution	Impact
Catholic	Institutional foundation	Dominant identity
IFI	Local leadership	Religious autonomy
SDA	Education, evangelism	Membership growth
Baptist	Community programs	Grassroots engagement

Rather than weakening religious life, this pluralism enhanced resilience by expanding religious networks. As Paredes (2017) argues, Philippine religiosity operates within plural devotional ecosystems, allowing multiple faith expressions to co-exist.

5. Religious Resilience and Identity Formation

The Guimaras case demonstrates that religious continuity is rooted in community-driven adaptation, not solely institutional structures.

This aligns with Ileteo's (1979) framework of Catholicization as a negotiated process and with broader Southeast Asian scholarship on religious resurgence (Hefner, 2010). Faith evolves through interaction with local culture, governance, and social conditions (Lau, 2021).

Furthermore, studies on folk religiosity emphasize the persistence of hybrid practices that blend formal and informal faith expressions (Macaranas, 2021). In Guimaras, this hybridity contributes to resilience.

Integrated Synthesis

The Guimaras case demonstrates that religious continuity in island settings is not exclusively anchored in formal ecclesiastical structures; rather, resilience emerges from a tapestry of lay leadership, informal worship, and cross-denominational cooperation. Faith-based social capital and collective action enable communities to reconstruct both material and symbolic spaces of worship, preserving cohesion amid disruption (Cornelio & Aldama, 2016; Burke, 2015).

At the same time, lived religion and plural devotional ecologies emphasize that faith is co-produced through local practices and diverse belief systems (Ileteo, 1979; Paredes, 2017; Jackson, 2013). This explains the co-existence of Catholic, IFI, SDA, and Baptist traditions in Guimaras.

Finally, regional scholarship suggests that religious resilience is embedded within broader state–church–society dynamics, where lay spirituality and governance interactions sustain faith under postcolonial conditions (Hefner, 2010; Lau, 2021; Peracullo & Quindoza, 2022).

Conclusion

This study concludes that religious resilience in Guimaras Island is fundamentally rooted in community adaptation and religious practices. Despite disruptions caused by institutional gaps and historical events, faith persisted through informal worship, collective effort, and religious pluralism.

The findings highlight that religion is not merely an institutional system but a dynamic social process shaped by local agency. Understanding these processes provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of religious continuity in the postcolonial and island contexts.

REFERENCES

- Burke, C. (2015). Religious leadership and disaster recovery: A case study lens. *Disasters*, 39(3), 450–472. <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12056>
- Cornelio, J., & Aldama, P. (2016). Disasters, philanthropy, and religion: The Philippines. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 47(3), 420–444. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463416000178>
- Goh, D. P. S., & Chong, T. (2022). Christianity and citizenship in Southeast Asia: Negotiating religion and the secular state. *Social Sciences and Missions*, 35(1–2), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748945-bja10032>
- Hefner, R. W. (2010). Religious resurgence in contemporary Asia: Southeast Asian perspectives on capitalism, the state, and the new piety. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 69(3), 815–840. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911810002901>
- Ileto, R. C. (1979). Philippine spirituality and Catholicization. In M. P. Baerreis (Ed.), *The Philippines in a global perspective* (pp. 45–68). Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Jackson, L. (2013). “This is not the Holy Land”: Gendered Filipino migrants in Israel and the intersectional diversity of religious belonging. *Religion and Gender*, 3(1), 213–235. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18785417-00301002>
- Lau, J. (2021). Traffics of the sacred and the secular: Christianity and citizenship in Asia. *Social Sciences and Missions*, 34(2), 251–258. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748945-bja10032>
- Macaranas, J. (2021). Understanding folk religiosity in the Philippines. *Religions*, 12(10), 800. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12100800>
- Moxham, R. (2014). Postdevelopment and nonsecularism in an officially secular state: Faith-based social action in the Philippines. *Journal of International Development*, 26(7), 1000–1015. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3029>
- Paredes, R. (2017). Projecting order in the pericolonial Philippines: An anthropology of Catholicism beyond Catholics. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 28(4), 408–427. <https://doi.org/10.1111/taja.12234>
- Peracullo, A., & Quindoza, O. (2022). The environmental activism of a Filipino Catholic faith community: Re-imagining ecological care for the flourishing of all. *Religions*, 13(1), 14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010014>
- Stoneman, P. (2017). Global radio broadcasting and the dynamics of American evangelicalism. *Journal of American Studies*, 51(4), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875816002000>
- Tanaka, K., Kato, T. A., Sato-Kasai, M., Igarashi, Y., & Kato, H. (2018). A qualitative study on the stigma experienced by people with mental health problems and epilepsy in the Philippines. *BMC Psychiatry*, 18(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-018-1902-9>