

# KAPWA, BAYAN, AT SIMBAHAN: THE DANCE OF THE TRINITY TODAY

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*The celebration of the 500 years of Christianity comes in the midst of a pandemic and has challenged our leadership perspectives and ministry practices. While the pandemic is characterized by isolation and social distancing, it has also encouraged collective action, collaboration, and networking. The paper highlights the participation of people in the pandemic through the metaphor of dance and the symbolic action of individuals and communities. As these “dance” performances gesture towards new pathways in ecclesial life and pastoral practices, it also challenges pastoral responses that dance out of tune with the changing times. A Trinitarian spirituality explored in actual and symbolic dances of daily life is thus suggested to enrich pastoral leadership and ecclesial prophetic participation in society.*

Keywords: *Kapwa*, *bayan*, *simbahan*, pandemic, symbolic action, dance, Trinity, pastoral ministry

## INTRODUCTION

As a social drama, the pandemic constitutes an eruption that impacts how people interact, transact and behave.”<sup>1</sup> Creating *communitas* or new forms of social bonding in response to need, the pandemic also opens the world to new ways of relating and achieving goals, reshaping practices to respond to the new normal, as well as reconfiguring dynamics between institutions and society. Some studies manifest the pandemic’s power to reinterpret

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*, ed. Edith Turner (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1985), 196.

leadership and authority,<sup>2</sup> to deepen understanding about rituals of “containment, healing and reestablishing normalcy,” the power of “visual representations of human suffering, and solidarity, disruption, and danger,”<sup>3</sup> as well as how values are recontextualized and interpreted in new ways.<sup>4</sup>

With the pandemic crisis re-engaging various voices in the construction of history, also opens new understandings in the dynamics of ecclesial life and participation. Feminist theologians have focused on bodily participation especially in its “performative, incarnational nature,”<sup>5</sup> because they facilitate the active engagement of the “others” who are also creators and creations of human relations.<sup>6</sup> Their critical and reconstructive voices help us attend to themes of “embodiment, suffering, and ethics,”<sup>7</sup> allow new perspectives on healing and empowerment, and bring out new possibilities for renewal of rituals and practices.<sup>8</sup> Considering that the majority of Christians are not in church, their everyday practices and interaction in the pandemic might re-engage them in ecclesial life. Pilario notes this as a reality in the Philippine Church.

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith, “Covid-19 and symbolic action: global pandemic as code, narrative, and cultural performance,” *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 8 (2020):263-326.

<sup>3</sup> Ali Inayat, “Rituals of Containment: Many Pandemics, Body Politics, and Social Dramas During Covid-19 in Pakistan,” *Frontiers in Sociology* (April 30, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Jenus Renus Galang, Jose Ma. Gopez, Ivan Efreaiim Gozum, Philip Joseph Sarmiento, “Social Distancing as a Recontextualization of Filipino Values and Catholic Religious Practices: A Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 60 (July 30, 2021):3245-3264.

<sup>5</sup> Elaine Graham, *Words made Flesh: Women, Embodiment and Practical Theology* (London: SCM, 2009), 109.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>7</sup> Elaine Graham, “Only Bodies Suffer: Embodiment, Representation and the Practice of Ethics,” in *Words Made Flesh: Writings in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (London: SCM 2009), 116.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

With only ten percent of the Catholic population having formal theological training, access to popular religiosity is the only existing theology and spirituality for the non-specialists who compose the vast majority of the ordinary Catholic faithful. Since they have no access, they are also not heard. But even in the language of Catholic theology, these voices from the ground– the *sensus fidelium*– should be listened to since they are also considered a *locus theologicus*, one of the fundamental sources of the faith.<sup>9</sup>

This paper seeks to understand the performative dimension of the ongoing pandemic crisis through the participation of people. As the performance of bodies in society can be seen from “*mimesis to poiesis*,” and from “*poiesis to kinesis*.”<sup>10</sup> In particular, it seeks to reflect on the symbolic action of individuals and communities during the pandemic through the metaphor of dance. Understanding the dance of *kapwa* (neighbor), *bayan* (society), and *simbahan* (church) by exploring its meaningful connections with Christian tradition and the Trinity as a dance, it hopes to provide fresh perspectives in pastoral practices and in viewing church and society.

## DANCE AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES

Dance is both a communicative process and a historical and cultural event. Dance is both a product and a process as it surfaces the multi-layered relationship between dancer, dance, audience, and stage.”<sup>11</sup> As dynamic and moving, interacting and communicating, bodies can inform and transform, as well as interrupt and disrupt relationships and systems.

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel Franklin Pilario, “Catholics in Asia,” in *Christianity in East Asia and Southeast Asia*, eds. Kenneth Ross, Francis Alvarez and Todd Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Dwight Conquergood, “Of Caravans and Carnivals: Performance Studies in Motion,” *MIT Press Journals* 39, no.4, (Winter 1995):27.

<sup>11</sup> Olaf Kuhlke and Adam Pine, “Geographies of Dance – Introduction,” in *Geographies of Dance: Body, Movement and Corporeal Negotiations*, eds. Adam Pine and Olaf Kuhlke (New York: Lexington, 2014).

## DANCE AS CULTURAL PERFORMANCE

In the Philippines, where cultural and religious festivals are plentiful, dance offers a window to study communal values and practices as well as the tensions between institutions like a church and state. The *Sinulog*, a popular dance ritual and tradition with the image of Santo Nino from the Southern Philippines, showcases the Filipino identity in the south as it conveys a multilayer of meanings through its dance movements.<sup>12</sup> The dance choreography and historical development embody the intersections where the “warrior and the saint, the local and the foreigner, the Christian and the infidel, the families of the poor and the rich, the colonial and the nationalist,” complement and also contrast one another.<sup>13</sup> The different versions of the dance capture the common bonds of meaning between performers, choreographers, church and government organizers, as well as vendors and spectators.<sup>14</sup>

In the digital culture, dance as a collaborative product and process is reflected in many ways. As dancers and dance groups take the digital space as their stage, many others participate in the dance either by creating their version of the dance or collaborating with the original group. The dance song Tala by Sarah Geronimo has reached 100 million views as people from all walks of life developed their dance versions and uploaded them on various platforms creating a community among them of Tala dancers expressing their individuality and creativity in different ways.<sup>15</sup> *Tiktok* app likewise, has developed a culture of music and dance. As people listen to music on *Tiktok*, they are inspired to choreograph

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<sup>12</sup> Sally Ann Ness, *Body Movement, and Culture: Kinesthetic and Visual Symbolism in a Philippine Community*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1992), 41-47.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>14</sup> Ness, *Body Movement, and Culture...*, 222-225.

<sup>15</sup> Blesilda de la Cruz, “Sarah Geronimo’s viral Tala dance song reaches 100-million YouTube views,” <https://www.goodnewspilipinas.com/sarah-geronimos-viral-tala-dance-song-reaches-100-million-youtube-views/>.

their own rendition of the music, and once uploaded, others are called in to like, share or create another version of the music. As a space where dance is for everyone, it conveys the message that everyone can do it.<sup>16</sup>

## DANCE AS RELIGIOUS PERFORMANCE

Rituals are also dance performances. The ritual performance of devotees to the Black Nazarene enables the exploration of power and participation.<sup>17</sup> The practices involved in being *hijos* (sons) or *mamamasan* (the one who carries) suggest ways to facilitate an engendering of practices of worship. The devotion to the Black Nazarene has a wide following among Filipinos.<sup>18</sup> Many of the devotees belong to poor communities both in urban and rural settings. To be a devotee entails living out of a *panata* (commitment), an embodiment of one's relationship to the *Poon* (Lord Jesus). This commitment is lived out for the rest of one's life and passed on to the next generation. A male devotee from the community shares how it has helped him live a good life despite experiencing violence in the neighborhood.

Devotees can identify themselves with Jesus as they participate in the ritual. The act of standing is an act of resistance to failure and giving up. The *panata* is embodied in practices

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<sup>16</sup> Siobhan Burke, "What makes a Tiktok Dance go Viral," <https://www.dancemagazine.com/popular-tiktok-dances-2649519038.html?rebelltitem=6#rebelltitem6>.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Francois Tremlett, "Power, Invulnerability, beauty: producing and transforming male bodies in the lowland Christianized Philippines," *School of Oriental and African Studies, University Centre Website* (2016): 13-15. See also Jazmin Badong Llana, "Inaesthetics of Performance in the Black Nazarene Procession," *What is Performance Philosophy? Staging a New Field International Conference* (University of Surrey, April 11-13, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Antonio Gonsalves, "Understanding the Fierce Devotion Behind the Black Nazarene," *Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene Website*, accessed August 21, 2019, <http://www.quiapochurch.com/author/clemignacio/>.

manifested in gestures, movements, and terminologies like *pagpahid ng tuwalya at panyo* (touching the image with towel and handkerchief), *pagyayapak* (bare footedness), *pagpapasan* (carrying of the cross), and many others, manifest this devotion to the *Poon* (Jesus the Nazarene).<sup>19</sup> The movements during the procession of the *Nazareno* consist of a dance-like movement of the devotee or *mamamasan* (the one carrying the cross) led by the *hijo* (son or elder son). Once the *hijo* commands *indayog* (dance) the *mamamasan* commences the *salya* (forward push) while holding on to the rope attached to the *andas* (bier). The *hijo* shouts *otso!* to stop the movement during which the devotees will raise the rope to avoid danger. When a *namiminga* (a devotee near the wood called *pinga* which supports the *andas*) asks for help to be replaced, he will be carried by the crowd directly toward the first aid station nearby. As shown in the rituals, devotion not only conveys piety but the understanding of power, the role of men in society, as well as communal relationships.<sup>20</sup>

## SOCIAL PERFORMANCE AND SYMBOLIC ACTION AS DANCE

Practices in everyday life can also be mirrored as a dance as it reflects the five elements of a dance— a body or bodies, an action or a set of actions, a space, a particular time, and distinct energies—conveying a movement of bodies in harmony. Practices of participation in society convey bodies in movement performing collectively or undertaking a communal action at a particular space and time, each at their own pace conveying emotion, desire, or hope. Seen through the metaphor of dance, practices in daily life and participation of people in various events and occasions help to surface relationships, strategies, and tactics, as well as sources and forms of collective agency and collective energy.

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<sup>19</sup> Mark Calano, "The Black Nazarene, Quiapo, and the Weak Philippine State," *Kritika Kultura* 25 (2015): 173.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Francois Tremlett, "Power, Invulnerability, beauty: producing and transforming male bodies in the lowland Christianized Philippines," *School of Oriental and African Studies, University Centre Website* (2016), 13-15.

Collective action as well as harmonized movements of individuals in difficult situations reflect creative innovations and destabilizing elements that question oppression as well as resist it.<sup>21</sup> For Latino theologians attending to *lo cotidiano* or practices of everyday life is “creating knowledge from the underside of history.” *Lo cotidiano* is a heuristic device that allows a deeper understanding of oppression as well as suggests liberating practices that are hope-filled and life-giving. While the story and the place where it takes place may be important, the performative act reflects the way by which people deal with reality. For De Certeau, practices of everyday life can either be strategies or tactics.<sup>22</sup> Strategies have alluded to methods of structured relationships which happens when a “subject of will and power” can be detached from a specific place or space. Strategies refer to acts that are proper and “serve as the basis for generating relations.” On the other hand, de Certeau would refer to tactics as forms of resistance to a dominant culture as well as exposing an absence.<sup>23</sup> Tactics fill a void or a gap and indicate “victories of the weak over the strong, clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things,” among many others. In the ongoing pandemic, strategies suggested by authorities to curb transmission of the virus were followed and executed but many tactical practices surfaced among individuals and communities to respond to particular and unique situations they were faced with.

In Philippine history, pivotal events happened through symbolic action that can be seen as a dance. Astorga reflects on the peaceful revolt in EDSA as it brought out the dynamics of Filipino culture and the Christian faith through ritual practices that embodied *lakas-ganda* (gracious power), *lakas awa* (compassionate

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<sup>21</sup> Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, “*Mujerista* Discourse: A Platform for Latina’s Subjugated Knowledge,” in *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, eds. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Fordham, 2012), 48-49.

<sup>22</sup> Michel de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), xix.

<sup>23</sup> Antonio Eduardo Alonso, “Listening for the Cry: Certeau Beyond Strategies and Tactics,” *Modern Theology* 33, no. 3 (3 July 2017): 371.

force), and *lakas saya* (indomitable joy).<sup>24</sup> *Lakas* or power expressed with *ganda* or beauty was conveyed by the expression of faith by the people with their rosaries and statues as they barricaded the camps and stood in front of tanks manned by soldiers. Power conveyed with *awa* or compassion was exemplified by the response of people to the call of the Manila Cardinal to prevent bloodshed between the military against the military. Power conveyed with *saya* or joy was expressed by the way the revolution turned out to be a feast as people shared food and sang songs together at the crossfire. As a social drama, it was a dance of symbolic rituals and collective action that was a combination of strategies and tactics.

### **DANCING IN THE PANDEMIC**

The pandemic as a liminal phase brings out the interesting birth of *communitas* as well as the dynamic dance of *kapwa* (neighbor), *simbahan* (church), and *bayan* (society). Within such *communitas* reflect the interplay between structure and anti-structure, strategies and tactics, tradition and innovation. Like a dance, this liminal phase is portrayed by bodies in motion, acting and interacting with one another in a space or spaces that define and redefine their identities and responsibilities. While the pandemic time has seemingly stopped, these dances happen in varied moments in which embodied interactions between and among people convey emotions and energies that express desires, frustrations, as well as forms of resistance. Bringing out the reflexive agency of its participants and new ways of relating, it opens fresh possibilities in the becoming of church dancing with a new world.

### **KAPWA AND PROCESSION DANCE OF AYUDAS**

During the pandemic, we witnessed and became part of unending lines of *ayuda* (help, charity), buying basic needs, waiting to be vaccinated, going to the bank, etc. It seemed as if we were

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<sup>24</sup> Christina Astorga, "Culture, Religion, and Moral Vision: A Theological Discourse on the Filipino People Power Revolution of 1986," *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 585-590.



always on long religious processions. Like processions, the long lines we have witnessed and participated in during the pandemic have been challenging and most times sacrificial, under the sun or in closed spaces, even risking being infected with Covid, especially those in dire need having lost jobs or means of income.

Though Filipinos are used to queueing for hours in the pre-pandemic to wait for the bus to take them home or to fetch water from the public well, it is different in the pandemic. Lining up meant taking risks. People were in the midst of fear and courage. It was a no-choice option for the majority of Filipinos even those who had the means for online delivery or home services. At the peak of the pandemic, for many, it would take an average of 3-5 hours to buy groceries. The long hours involved standing outside the building before store hours, being given a seat when inside the store to transfer from one seat to another, and to wait for the attendant to finally inform you that you can enter. After feeling a sense of relief as you place items in the cart, you have to queue again for the cashier. Lining up for cash assistance or *ayuda*, seem to be the same but unlike buying groceries, it means lining up because you have no means to sustain your household in these times. Such lines are also chaotic as people are not sure about the procedure, who is entitled to receive, and who can take their chance to line up. Certain tactics emanate as “dancers” in the *ayuda* line discover anomalies or inconsistencies in the procedures. Those who are more knowledgeable and experienced become leaders as they choreograph new steps to attain what they desire. The stage of the *ayuda* dance extends to the streets and even into the nearby homes and commercial stores. When the wait gets longer and participants need to go to the toilet or a store for food, they communicate with their companions who readily volunteer to save the space for them. Meanwhile, new configurations develop as people converge in different places. Like in a dance, there are varied movements and interactions but still create a harmony of togetherness of *kapwa* (neighbor, fellow) and *pakikipagkapwa* (solidarity).

Like a dance, participants in these long lines had to adapt to elements of space and movement which are very similar to participating in a procession. In the pandemic, we have been very

conscious of each other's space (6 feet or at least two meters) and our movements are designed in such a way as to respect and protect our own and others' needs, especially safety. Like procession, there is a forward, backward and, sideward movement even in limited space as we wait, shift our tired hips and legs, rest a bit as we ask strangers to hold the line for us. During such lines, the energy picks up at the sight of others receiving what they needed. Sharing grief and anger when a *kapwa's* name is not among the list of recipients. Some take their energies to another level when they take up leadership roles while in line. Reminding people to follow the pacing or acting as *padrino* (sponsor) for someone who couldn't assert their rights.

Being part of such lines in the pandemic made one identity with the other – to a *kapwa* (neighbor, other) who shares the same need or desire. As we stand in line and move forward slowly, we are together. While waiting, especially when unsure about the process, we start asking questions to each other – verifying procedures, validating claims heard, and we also share similar stories that expand the reality we are in. While participation in the procession dances in the pandemic begins from a formal process or strategy, tactical maneuverings depending on how one's participation is made difficult by certain forces. In many cases, it is because of one's personal needs. But energy is heightened when personal needs are shared and if that happens, people in line become a force to compel with. A recent story of the *ayuda* lines for educational assistance organized by the new Cabinet secretary for DSWD reflects this.<sup>25</sup> Without passing through local government units and/or barangay officials, the secretary called on all who are qualified to avail of the cash aid to apply at their central office. They were not prepared with the result on the first day of distribution. Thousands flocked to their offices and there was chaos and confusion in all the regional offices. As the people came for the promised help, many went home frustrated and angry. They complained about the process that only wasted their time, effort, and money. *Ayuda* was not given to those

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<sup>25</sup> John Eric Mendoza, "Tulfo says sorry for chaotic DSWD "ayuda" distribution." *Inquirer* August 20, 2022, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1650220/tulfo-says-sorry-for-chaotic-dswd-ayuda-distribution>.

who are entitled while others who had more connections went home lucky. The department secretary apologized for the confusion and resolved to coordinate with the local units which can utilize the built-in systems down to the grassroots communities.

The *ayuda* procession dance is symbolic of the *kapwa* Filipino ethic. The pandemic did not respect any social divisions and powerplays. It affected all (*kapwa tayo apektado lahat*). Especially during the long locked-downs, even those who have means also lined up at the marketplace, groceries, banks, vaccination sites, etc. Because it was a global pandemic, we also became aware and perhaps also prayed for our *kapwa tao* in other parts of the world, seeing for example the hundreds of thousands dying in India. Those of us who were or had family members affected by Covid even became a closer *kapwa tao* to those who have and are suffering. With a global pandemic, we understood more deeply the ‘shared inner self’ that *kapwa* articulates. And like a religious procession, all of us *kapwa-tao*, humbled by this tiny virus ‘lined up’ to God and our favorite saints to help us through these most difficult moments.

Moreover, the *ayuda* lines also call to mind the walk for a cause or *alay lakad* organized to celebrate an important occasion (e.g. remembering the People Power Revolution), to raise an issue of national importance (e.g. Sumilao farmers’ cry for ancestral land), and to create social togetherness and encounter of people bonded by a common vision or passion (e.g. Walk for Life). The *alay-lakad* is a procession of bodies that follows a route and a program but is specially directed by a common path. Sometimes the processional route is disrupted when the government sends the police to stop it as a warning to people not to join such activities it deems critical to its rule. The *alay-lakad* procession is also asking for *ayuda*- for the collective courage and energy of *pakikipagkapwa* and *pakikipaglaban* (solidarity for the suffering kapwa/other and fighting for their rights).

### **SIMBAHAN AND THE FLASH MOB DANCE OF MINISTRIES**

In this pandemic time, we saw parishes and dioceses, although silent and inactive for a time, managed to wake up after

the initial shock and started responding to needs spontaneously – giving food, and money, helping with medical as well as counseling needs. We can compare such actions to dancing like the flash mob. Flashmob is a spontaneous dance, a seemingly random act, performed at a particular moment but it is actually planned and executed by a group of people who come to a specific location to perform an indicated action and then disperse.”<sup>26</sup> For example in SM Bacolod and Calamba Laguna Mall, a flash mob was performed to remind people to wear masks and to practice social distancing.<sup>27</sup>

Unlike a formal dance, with costume, specific steps, prepared program, etc. the flash mob performers start as part of a crowd and perform naturally. It usually is done to respond to a particular need– e.g. give joy to people in a time of difficulty or a particular social issue that people are anxious or bothered with at a particular time. We always say that a crisis is the mother of inventions. In this pandemic crisis, parish leaders and volunteers also innovated different ways of responding to the needs they perceived, especially because of the limitations the pandemic presented to ministries and ministering to people.

The *simbahan*, especially its ministries in the time of the pandemic are like flash mobs - spontaneous in the sense that they do not follow the usual ‘dance’ steps of church ministries – e.g. charity and gift-giving during Christmas and Fiesta, the unchanging ministry structures – but responded to a specific need arising at a specific time. Like flash mobs, spontaneous ministries gather people in a planned action in the midst of daily life needs. It is not systematic like a planned step in a 3-year pastoral plan but after responding, ministers disperse like in a flash mob. We also observed that church volunteers worked with different LGUs, NGOs and civic groups during the pandemic, again unplanned in the sense that they were not used to working outside the ‘church’ system in ministering.

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<sup>26</sup> Merriam-Webster definition, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/flash%20mob>.

<sup>27</sup>Affordable Staff Flash Mob. “Flash Mob in the Philippines,” accessed October 7, 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRMlc3SLiTs>.

A youth ministry group in an urban poor parish community in Navotas organized their house-to-house visits in the midst of the pandemic to deliver food relief for families in need and also to conduct house surveys to create a database profile of the families in their parish. The database became the basis for them to strategize their parish program during the pandemic. But like a flashmob, their visits caught people's attention about being church in these times. Many also began sharing what they have and offering their services. Similarly, when mental health issues, depression, and suicides were increasing during the pandemic, a diocese called on counselors and psychologists and organized basic counseling training for those who wish to be of service. After the basic training, like a flash mob, these teams were scattered in strategic areas (including malls) to promote mental health in the pandemic and to be available for those who need assistance.

As a dance with a specific time and space, flash mob ministries give a new face to the church never before experienced by people. Like flash mobs, they engage and welcome people's participation. Church experienced in the streets, in the malls; the church that is relevant and responsive.

## **BAYAN AND THE STREET DANCE OF COMMUNITY PANTRIES**

In the Philippine context, a street dance is a dance performed in the streets. Where the term and experience originated, supposedly in the US or the UK in the 70s, it is more connected to the beginnings of hip hop. It is actually

“an umbrella term for a large number of social dance styles such as hiphop and breakdancing, house dance, etc. Often improvisational and social in nature, encouraging interaction and contact with spectators and other dancers; street dances are considered “part of the vernacular culture of the geographical area that they come from”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Emily Pate, “Origins of Street Dance,” *Lifestyle EHow*, accessed October 3, 2022. [https://www.ehow.co.uk/about\\_6643056\\_street-dance-history.html](https://www.ehow.co.uk/about_6643056_street-dance-history.html)

Singer, songwriter, performer, and dance trainer, Jungee Manalo,<sup>29</sup> coming from the US and known to have brought the term and experience to the Philippines, did not want to use hiphop and simply used the more general term 'street dance'. At this point, religious processional dances like the *Sinulog*, *Ati-atihan*, and festivals featuring the story of the Sto. Nino being received by the indigenous Filipinos, like the *Dinagyang*, are also being called street dances.

During the pandemic, we can compare the street dances to the Community Pantries<sup>30</sup> spontaneously arising on different streets. Organized by a few well-meaning people, those in need of daily food and food supplies, people who want to give something too, line up and wait for another. Like a street dance - participated in by a lot of people because of the spiritual and cultural energies they create, the community pantries started in Maginhawa street in Quezon City and sprouted in a thousand other places in the country's streets. Before the community pantries, there were already the Kindness Stations set up by the Caritas and NASSA in different parishes and streets in the country.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, we also witnessed a lot of solidarity work from different people happening throughout the pandemic - from youth groups, *barangays*, NGOs, families, etc. *Bayanihan* (solidarity) - the *bayan* (people of a town, or country) doing good for and extending *malasakit* (compassion) to others- was very much alive, even if they are also very much in need and suffering.

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<sup>29</sup> Nash Ang, "Defining Streetdance in the Philippines," *Dance Pinoy Philippine Dance Network*, November 25, 2022, accessed October 3, 2022. <https://www.dancepinoy.com/2018/03/defining-streetdance-in-philippines.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Juli Suazo, "What the Community Pantry means for Filipinos," *CNN Life*, April 21, 2021, <https://cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/2021/4/19/community-pantry-filipinos-pandemic.html>

<sup>31</sup> Caritas, "Caritas Philippines Promotes "Kindness Stations" in Communities amid Covid-10 Crisis." April 29, 2020, <https://www.caritas.org/2020/04/kindness-stations>.

We also need to note that this community pantry-street dance is like an *wrong-sulong* (back and forth movement) dance for the *bayan* as the government continued its 'red scare' and supposedly anti-terror and other political maneuverings designed to dominate and police people. But the energy of *bayanihan*, like the energy of street dances, cannot be stopped. Patricia Non who started this and other volunteers from parishes, church institutions and different kinds of groups continue undaunted, exercising their civic rights as well as their Christian calling as *kapwa-propeta* (fellow prophets), partnering with all people of goodwill.

In one poor parish north of Manila, a lack of food was already being experienced by the villages as people lost jobs or earned very little during the pandemic. The BECs organized themselves into urban gardening units called *Gulayamanan* (literally community wealth in vegetables) to plant and produce vegetables, asking the help of the local department of agriculture to train them in effective planting systems. In a few weeks or months, they were already harvesting what they planted, helping feed their families as well neighbors in need. Like community pantries, *gulayamanan* is a movement of bodies energized by the 'jarring' music of a crisis, creating a dance of creativity and compassion.

### DANCE AND THE TRINITY

Could these images and praxis of *kapwa*, *bayan*, and *simbahan* today enable a creative revisiting of the Trinity today? Various understandings convey the contextual nature of the Trinity and pushes forward "a livingness in God; a beyond, a with, and a within to the world and its history."<sup>32</sup> As a God with us and within us, the Trinity conveys "the foundation for a vision of society and a vision of the church" and a "sign to the world of the ultimate destiny of all creatures" and thus directly impacts the way we understand church, politics, spirituality, and ethics."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 2014), 192.

<sup>33</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "The Practical Trinity," *The Christian Century* (July 15-22, 1992), 681.

La Cugna, who argues that there is no distinction between the immanent or divine Trinity and the economic Trinity suggests that there are three principles in the doctrine of the Trinity. First, we need to think about God not in isolation but as a God in relation to another person. Second, because we have a God who exists as a mystery of persons in communion, it is about people sharing life together. As a “universal communion,” God is both “the origin, the sustaining ground, and the final goal of this shared life.”<sup>34</sup> Johnson points three distinct characteristics that define this communion - mutual relations, radical equality, and a community in diversity. One characterized by absolute trust, common passion, and shared responsibility. Radically equal both what in quality and in identity. As relationship that is not hierarchical nor dominating, it allows each one to grow fully as subjects in history together. A community in diversity reflects a “differentiated unity of divine nature” despite being distinct complexities and unique richness. As the Triune God exists in love, so does God exist in all creatures. Third, La Cugna points out that with a God who is both personal and relational, as God’s creation made in God’s image and likeness, we can only live fully if we imitate Jesus Christ.

The Triune God’s participatory nature is best explained through the metaphor of a circle dance; God in a circle dance, indwelling, interpenetrating in harmony. Taken from early Eastern interpretation, the Greek term for this dance is *perichoresis*, which signifies a movement of revolving of each around the others, emphasizing a reciprocity, a “permeation of each person by the other” and “their co-inherence without confusion.”<sup>35</sup> Johnson uses the image portrayed by a ballet company of the divine trinity

Dancers whirl and intertwine in unusual patterns;  
the floor is circled in seemingly chaotic ways;  
rhythms are diverse; at times all hell breaks loose;  
resolution is achieved unexpectedly. Music, light  
and shadow, color, and wonderfully supply motion  
coalesce in dancing that is not predictable and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 682.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 71.



repetitive, as is a round dance, and yet is just as highly disciplined. Its order is more complex.<sup>36</sup>

As a dance, the Trinity expresses a certain fluidity and reflexivity. One move in response and in harmony with the other. One move is an expression of participation with the other. There is no hierarchy but equality. Boff expresses this participatory nature of the Trinity in ecclesial life

Such a church, inspired by the communion of the Trinity would be characterized by a more equitable sharing of sacred power, by dialogue, by openness to all the charisma granted to the members of the community, by the disappearance of all types of discrimination especially those originating in patriarchalism and machismo, by its permanent search for a consensus to be built upon through the organized participation of all its members.<sup>37</sup>

But the *perichoresis* is not only about the church within in a harmonious dance but it is about its dance with the entire creation.

Just as God creates space with the perichoretic movement in all creation for creaturely participation, so should Christian community practice embrace, rather than exclusion. The goal of the Trinity is to bring redeemed creatures into the glorious communing life that they themselves share from all eternity. Ecclesial life is to be opened out for the world, inviting all to join in the dance.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Johnson, *She...*, 220-221. Johnson writes in her footnote, "The Joffrey Ballet's repertoire includes a work entitled Trinity, having to do with the human Trinity of birth, copulation and death. But when, after portraying human creativity, eroticism, and distintegration, the interracial cast of both genders melts off the darkening stage to the pounding rhythms of a requiem, leaving flickering candles in each one."

<sup>37</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1988), 23.

<sup>38</sup> Molly Marshall, "Inviting to Dance," *Review and Expositor* 101 (Fall 2004): 766-767.

Vosloo opines how this metaphor enriches the participatory imagination of the Trinity and as such can facilitate the “creative embodiment of an ethic of hospitality.”<sup>39</sup> God as a dance conveys both “relatedness and particularity, both identity and otherness” challenging “notions of the isolated individual, enclosed identity, and cosy homogeneity.”<sup>40</sup> Echoing several thinkers about the psychological dynamics of the *perichoresis* in daily life, Gorshush suggests *perichoresis* as a hermeneutical key for ontology. He mentions how individuals are constantly engaged in encounters and mutual relationships that enrich but also expand one’s sense of self and belonging.

...our collective future, present, and history are literally recreated. We become part of something much larger than ourselves and emerge transformed in perichoretic relatedness from within the formative matrix of the relational unity itself. Accompanying such heightened experience of unity, we usually experience paradoxically an increased sense of personal identity and distinctiveness. Such moments transcend our cognitive reasoning, explanation, and even narrative, and though these aspects are integral within such encounters they are only known as such in immediate retrospection to the transforming moment. This is perichoretic relations—love.<sup>41</sup>

Robbins who sees the metaphor of the divine dance as a powerful tool in remembering, revisioning, and reweaving pastoral ministry recalls a personal experience of being in Washington DC on Memorial Day when the festivities began as she witnessed a blind man shouting at the top of his voice in the midst of the crowd.

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Vosloo, “Identity, Otherness, and the Triune God: Theological Groundwork for a Christian Ethic of Hospitality” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 119 (July 2004): 85.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>41</sup> Gregory Scott Gorsuch, “*Perichoresis* as a Hermeneutical Key to Ontology: Social Constructionism, Kierkegaard, and Trinitarian Theology,” *Perichoresis* 20, no.4 (2022): 78.

"Oh, God what was that? What's going on?" The crowd moved away from him, staring at him in horror. He screamed again in torturous agony "Where am I? What's going on? Help me. Help me." With this scream, he turned and I saw his face. Deep red gouges and scar tissue stretched taut the features of his face, the horror of which was intensified by his sunken eye sockets. Truly it was a face of terror, once again terrorized by the sound of gunshots. I moved quickly to his side and took his arm in my hand to stop him from spinning around again. I said that I was here with him and that the Naval Band had just done a multiple-gun salute and was continuing to do certain formations. With this, he regained his composure and told me that he had once been in the Navy. He then asked me to describe in detail the formations of the band since he was blind as I did so, he shared with me the meaning of each step. Gradually the people began to gather back around us. The man and I continued to do our own kind of dance in this unique exchange until the concert ended at which time he said simply "Thank you, I'm going home now". Several people from the crowd lingered afterward and approached me with words of gratitude, but no one was more grateful than I for the gift received that evening.<sup>42</sup>

Such a dance happens among those in communities inflicted by common stories of suffering. They dance together. Stories in communities inflicted by extrajudicial killings express how movements can speak of their compassionate connections.

Many times, situations thrust upon me the need to see beyond what was happening. I was sitting in front of my house when the police officers came looking for our neighbor. But the wife was already with them and she looked helpless leading the police officers to their house. When I saw this, I knew if no one was with her, anything can happen.

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<sup>42</sup> Martha Robbins, "The Divine Dance: Partners in Remembering, Revisioning, and Reweaving," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 51, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 345.

Either the husband gets killed on the spot or one of them takes the punishment. I stood up and walked with them to their house. I joined them inside the house as they surveyed the place in search of the husband. He was not there but the children and other family members were there. After that incident, they could talk about their family situation with me because I saw the need to help when the moment came.<sup>43</sup>

Sometimes healing and transformation need no words. A mother whose son was killed shared how one encounter strengthened her and help her foster bonds with those with whom she shares the same story.

One day I woke up feeling that I miss my son. I was crying and I didn't know how to appease myself. I walked outside and passed the houses that he helped to build. He was a good carpenter; people loved him for his craft. Yet he died. Why? I continued walking and saw his friend from way back and I remember how he stole food from the house to give to this kid. Then my feet led me to where he was killed. I was sobbing right in front of the house when the mother of his other friend who died came out. We cried together. No words were uttered.<sup>44</sup>

A brief moment changed both of them. As the dance of death continue in their neighborhood these two women experienced a dance of life together. As it dances in love in itself, the church is called to dance with the rest of humanity in dynamic openness and harmony with a sense of relational order. Like a dance, it doesn't impose nor dictate but moves and interacts inspired by the music of Trinitarian love and faithfulness. The *simbahan* is in fact, invited to dance along as the Triune God in *kapwa* and *bayan* facilitates a dynamic flow of relationality.

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<sup>43</sup> Jessica Joy Candelario, "Kapwa as Participation: Towards Re-membering the Filipino Passion," PhD Dissertation (St. Thomas University, 2020): 278.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

## CHURCH AND MINISTRY: DANCING IN AND OUT OF TUNE

The dance of the Trinity conveyed in the pandemic challenges ecclesial life to respond with a Trinitarian faith and sway and swirl around in harmony! How can the church dance along with the changing times? How can the dance of *kapwa*, *bayan*, and *simbahan* also facilitate the dance of ecclesial structures and practices? The pandemic heightened the tension of rituals and leadership patterns already present in the pre-pandemic times – traditional rituals vis-à-vis liturgies that emerge in response to daily life, male dominated and elitist leadership vis-à-vis situational and shared leadership, center-based ministries vis-à-vis ministries in new spaces and new forms.

Discordant voices with their innovative moves in the pre-pandemic sound off stronger and louder in these times. While the energies and emotions expressed in these new dances are varied, they propose improvisations and expand the space of the Trinitarian love.

## THE DANCE OF DAILY LIFE LITURGIES AMONG OUR *KAPWA*

As new rituals are evolving from the ‘streets’ the disconnect of official church structure happens in their difficulty to dance with the changing times.

As the Covid19 virus raged among the populace, everyone, especially our poorest and suffering *kapwa*, held on to their deep faith to pull them through. At a time when churches closed and liturgies stopped, new prayer experiences emerged from the pandemic such as simple home liturgies even in the most important and elaborate Holy Week, liturgies of daily life (e.g. ‘Prayer of the Face Mask’), online street liturgies, blended space liturgies (priest and other liturgical actors online, people attending mass in individual homes and others gathered in one room). It was also interesting how even the traditional community prayer among the BECs, e.g. Bible sharing and the home visits of the Virgin Mary, also continued but online. Indeed, the spiritual and emotional support of our *kapwa* was most needed at this time. But we also see and experience how lacking are our traditional liturgies, especially

on healing, grieving, wake, and funerals in the face of a crisis like this, when the suffering *kapwa* need them most. Moreover, how do liturgies, especially home and community prayer integrate the many facets of mental health affecting people at this time; especially experiences of suicide?

On the other hand, we experience our traditional sacraments alive in daily life in homes, neighborhoods, with professionals, in very poor communities, even those living under the bridge - sharing of meal, healing and forgiveness, commitment through thick and thin, as they become eucharistic communities in their work of solidarity and sacrifice.

As narratives take over doctrines and translation of everyday rituals into faith imperatives are slow in coming, people ask 'what now?' The call for liturgies to 'dance' at the frontlines of the *kapwa*'s daily life struggles becomes even clearer as deep faith in God is the *kapwa*'s only stronghold in a time of fear and uncertainty.

Liturgy is the privileged place of the Trinitarian in-dwelling among us. In the liturgies, the God-in-relation, the Trinity as *kapwa*, is deeply felt in the collective hopes and prayers of the suffering *kapwa*.

### **SIMBAHAN AND THE DANCE OF LEADERSHIP**

As church and faith life were being challenged and renewed in the pandemic, church leadership was also being redefined or reshaped. The traditional roles of the parish priest and the parish councils of keeping the *simbahan* alive by leading the implementation of pastoral activities became irrelevant as pastoral programs joined the lockdown. In the meantime, grassroots leaders were emerging and leading with others in the struggle for survival. New leaders and new leadership styles were dancing as it were with former and traditional ones.

Dance is not only a metaphor but literally conveys pastoral leadership. For example, while one prepares for priesthood through long years of study, pastoral leadership is not only about what one knows and was trained to do. It involves bodily movements in

response to situations and changing contexts, with individuals and groups in the pastoral space. In a study done about embodied leadership of a priest, charismatic preacher and a pastor, this dance is conveyed by the “complex landscape of various constituencies, cultural values, civic priorities, and...various visions of divine transformation.”<sup>45</sup>

Such a dance is continually limiting as pastoral leadership remains male-centered and elitist and leadership positions are only seen through center-based structures. The dance of the pandemic surfaces the dance of family taking on the identity of a domestic church. As fathers, mothers, and adult children take turns in leading home liturgies and emerging pandemic ministries, it challenges another look at church leadership that remains male-centered and top-down.

Dancing stops as church ministers fail to move out of the maintenance mode and expand their perspectives by learning to dance in the streets of leadership innovation. The participatory nature of the Trinity in ecclesial life is especially expressed in shared leadership and openness to the diversity of gifts granted to the entire community.

### THE DANCE OF COLLABORATION WITH THE GREATER *BAYAN*

A new leadership style that emerged during the pandemic was collaboration and networking. This could be new to most as church leaders are more used to working on their own. Perhaps the Church feels adequate in the face of challenges since it supposedly has ‘the truth’ and the resources. The pandemic has crushed this complacent attitude. All the elaborate pastoral plans for 3-5 years disappeared and most did not know how to proceed. Networking with others provided a way. Church leaders, especially BEC neighborhood leaders, collaborated with the greater *bayan* - the local government and civic organizations - in responding to the

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<sup>45</sup> Jack Barentsen, “Pastoral Leadership as Dance: How Embodiment, Practice and Identity Shape Communities and their Leadership,” *Practical Theology* 12, no. 3 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2019.1591796>.

myriad pandemic needs. The traditional hierarchical and dominating leadership exercised by the clergy and the Parish Councils was challenged with communal leadership of the greater *bayan*.

Perhaps '*daupang-palad*'<sup>46</sup> (literally 'hands linked' or partnership) is a good way to describe this dance - as communities and not just specific individuals were taking responsibility for facing the challenges of this pandemic. Throughout these difficult months, networking and partnership were becoming the approaches to effectively move forward, thereby sealing the reality that there is no dominant hand in the body (the clergy and even lay leaders are not the '*kanang kamay*' - right hand - of Jesus). A pandemic this wide and this deep needs the leadership, wisdom and skills of the greater *bayan* (community, society). We were witness to the *bayanihan* (cooperation, solidarity) of the medical, scientific, and political teams in overcoming the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the leadership of the young becomes more and more evident because of the online culture which all have to embrace and their creative and adventurous spirit. Even more so, local grassroots leadership creatively emerges as they respond to the needs on the ground despite risks. Likewise, the dance of different local government units working together, different disciplines in constant dialogue towards one vision, and the dance of local and global endeavors in this pandemic teach us new steps in our dance with a world in turmoil. Such collaboration in leadership articulates beautifully the mutual trust, radical equality, and shared responsibility of the Trinitarian communion-in-mission.

### ***KAPWA-SIMBAHAN-BAYAN TOWARDS THE 'NEW NORMAL'***

Although it was and is very challenging to dance in a time of war or crisis, we recognize that this theatre of daily life is a liminal space encouraging us to reshape pastoral perspectives, processes

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<sup>46</sup> For discussion on *daupang palad* as image of church leadership, See Estella Padilla, "*Ang Ministri ng Pamumuno bilang Punong Kadaupang-palad at ang Teolohiya sa Ministri ni E. Schillebeeckx: Isang Pag-uusap*" (Doctoral Dissertation, De La Salle University, 2006).



and programs. This call for renewal is a constant and continuous movement in our discipleship dance as we courageously sense God speaking through the signs of the times in the greater *bayan*.

The call for a 'New Normal' is enlivening this dance as we enter unvisited spaces and untrodden roads which bring out new questions. Although this phrase is contested as people question the meaning and framework of 'normal', the *simbahan* believe that our faith norms our ways. *Kapwa-Simbahan-Bayan* could be a creative reappropriation of our Trinitarian faith informed by the pandemic. It is a faith that specifically calls for listening to our *kapwa*, mindful of opening doors to suppressed cries of the poorest and marginalized. Listening as 'audire' invites us to authentic conversion and obey the Spirit we encounter, especially in the other/s and those who are 'not like us' in these uncomfortable spaces.<sup>47</sup> They are *kapwa*, even if they are '*ibang tao*', because we share the same *loob* (inner self), the same challenging context of the pandemic and perhaps the same dreams.

The *simbahan* also recognizes that in a time of crisis, it is one's faith that provides also the rope to cling on. The church's inner life of liturgies and ministries are called to be connect to the frontlines of struggle to help people in their meaning-making and moving forward. Moreover, the *simbahan*, need to have more courage in sustaining the new perspectives and practices that have been life-giving during this long pandemic pause. Recognizing the energies of emerging leaders especially among the youth and the grassroots and honoring the new ministries that have arisen in response to pandemic challenges will be the rhythm of this journey as we dance on the road from tradition to innovation. Networking with civic groups, NGOs, GOs, people's movements provide wider perspective and wisdom not just in becoming more relevant as a church but also in practicing a more participatory leadership style. Collaborating with the giftedness of the wider *bayan* in journeying towards a common mission of healing and renewal will be like a

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<sup>47</sup> Synod of Bishops, "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission." *Synod Preparatory Document 9*, [https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/preparatory-document/pdf/21x21/en\\_prepa\\_book.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/preparatory-document/pdf/21x21/en_prepa_book.pdf).

## KAPWA, BAYAN, AT SIMBAHAN

‘community pantry’ set up on the streets with needs and responses ‘dancing’ with the same beat of compassion.

The ‘new normal’ provides a ‘construction site’ for church renewal in the same way that the *simbahan* contributes to nourishing a ‘new normal’ culture guided by the divine dance:

...deep in our bones the rhythm of the music that inspires our steps in The Divine Dance. That rhythm...is one of dying and rising, of letting go and reappropriating, of leaving behind and passing over. While this rhythm can be heard in all created reality, the awareness that it is the music of the Divine Dance can only be known through revelation – the encounter with and faith experience of the living God present and active in our world.<sup>48</sup>

Like the Trinity in its unified dance of love and service, *kapwa-simbahan-bayan* articulates a spirituality shaped and renewed by the pandemic ‘signs of the times’ bridging individual and community, daily life and faith, church and the world. The liminal experience of the pandemic has indeed created a new *communitas* that integrates a lived theology of *kapwa-simbahan-bayan*, a Trinitarian dynamic leading us to new visions and mission as we journey together.

**Rowan Lopez Rebutillo**

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<sup>48</sup> Robbins, “The Divine...,” 346-347.