

Msgr. Gregorio Aglipay in the Collective Memory of Bataquenos: How He Shaped the Nationalist Spirit of Filipinos in Southeast Asia

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.905000304>

Received: 05 May 2025; Accepted: 08 May 2025; Published: 12 June 2025

ABSTRACT

Monsignor Gregorio Aglipay played a crucial role in shaping the religious and national identity of the Filipino people by founding the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI), a church that emerged as both a spiritual institution and a movement for independence. This study examines his life and enduring legacy, focusing on how his leadership influenced religious autonomy and national consciousness in the Philippines. Through qualitative research centered in Batac, Ilocos Norte -Aglipay's birthplace- the study explores the collective memory of Aglipay among the Bataqueños, their adoption of IFI doctrines, and the broader religious shifts influenced by his leadership. A series of interviews conducted with community members revealed three key themes: historical and cultural identity, highlighting Aglipay's transformation from a Roman Catholic priest to a symbol of Filipino resilience; religious autonomy and unity, reflecting the IFI's role in defying colonial ecclesiastical authority and promoting Filipino self-determination; and resilience and leadership lessons, emphasizing Aglipay's courage, inclusivity, and advocacy for justice. The findings underscore the IFI's dual role as a religious institution and a sociocultural movement, providing Filipinos with a platform to assert their identity and spiritual independence. Aglipay's vision, rooted in nationalism and a commitment to equality, continues to inspire the Filipino struggle for justice and equality, as reflected in local narratives that preserve his legacy. This study affirms Aglipay's significance as a transformative leader whose contributions extend beyond religion, symbolizing hope, unity, and cultural pride for future generations.

Keywords: collective memory, Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI), Msgr. Gregorio Aglipay, collective memory, national consciousness, religious autonomy

INTRODUCTION

The life and legacy of Monsignor Gregorio Aglipay represent a significant chapter in Philippine religious history. As the founding head of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI), or Aglipayan Church, he played a crucial role in building a distinct Filipino identity that intertwined religion and national consciousness. Gregorio Aglipay's path from Roman Catholic priest to founder of an autonomous Filipino church was defined by his opposition to colonial ecclesiastical establishments and support of religious and national independence. Aglipay, born in Batac, Ilocos Norte, on May 8, 1860, was profoundly affected by the social and religious abuses carried out during Spanish colonial control. His involvement in the 1898 Philippine Revolution underscored his commitment to national liberation, a cause that extended to his vision for religious independence formally founded in 1902 (Achutegui & Bernad, 1957; Smit, 2024). Rising as a major religious organization and cultural movement that connected with the Filipino struggle for freedom, the IFI became rather popular. Grounded in soteriological and ecclesiological ideas, Aglipay's theological framework aimed to picture a freed Philippines (Smit, 2024). He produced a distinctive religious identity that linked faith and nationality by combining traditional Catholic features with modern reforms suited to Filipino settings.

Batac holds significant historical and cultural value as the birthplace of Aglipay, whose early life and experiences shaped his perspectives on religion and nationalism. For the Bataqueños, collective memories of Aglipay emphasize his unwavering commitment to justice and independence. Stories recounting his defiance

against Spanish friars and advocacy for religious self-determination have preserved his legacy in local consciousness (Robertson, 1918). These narratives reflect how communities in Batac continue to honor his contributions to their regional and national identity. The adoption of Aglipayan doctrines by locals was deeply tied to their shared socio-political struggles during colonial times. The Church's message of equality and independence resonated strongly, particularly in Batac, where the IFI became a symbol of resistance and unity (de Leon, 2018). By blending Catholic traditions with nationalist themes, the IFI created rituals and practices that facilitated the seamless integration of faith and identity, making it accessible and meaningful to its followers. Recent scholarship further underscores Batac's central role in the emergence of Aglipayanism. Josué (2023) revisits Batac as the "cradle of Aglipayanism," highlighting how local socio-political dynamics and collective memory have sustained Aglipay's legacy and the IFI's influence in the region. Additionally, Cornelio (2020) discusses the concept of theological nationalism in the Philippines, illustrating how Aglipay's religious reforms were intertwined with nationalist aspirations, particularly in communities like Batac where faith and identity are deeply connected.

Msgr. Gregorio Aglipay's religious leadership instigated broader religious shifts in the Philippines by challenging the dominance of the Catholic Church and fostering ecumenical initiatives. His progressive ideas encouraged dialogue among Christian denominations and inspired movements advocating for religious pluralism and national sovereignty. Beyond the IFI, Aglipay's legacy shaped the evolution of religious reforms in the Philippines, promoting an inclusive understanding of faith and community (Mathias, J., & de Uriarte, M. 2020; Smit, 2024).

This study aims to deepen the understanding of how collective memory perpetuates the influence of Msgr. Gregorio Aglipay in local and national contexts and thereby seeks to answer the following:

1. What are the key memories and stories about Msgr. Gregorio Aglipay that are commonly shared by Bataqueños today?
2. How did the locals embrace the doctrines and eventually became members of the Philippine Independent Church?
3. How did Msgr. Gregorio Aglipay's religious leadership influence broader religious shifts in the Philippines?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative research design, employing semi-structured interviews to explore the collective memory of Msgr. Gregorio Aglipay among the Bataqueños and his impact on religious changes in the Philippines. Batac, Ilocos Norte, was selected as the study site due to its significance as Aglipay's birthplace and the community's strong connection to his legacy. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, including community elders and members of the IFI. Elders provided historical insights based on lived experiences, while IFI members shared perspectives on Aglipay's religious contributions. These participants, as custodians of collective memory and practitioners of IFI doctrines, added credibility to the study. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share detailed personal experiences while enabling the researcher to probe for deeper insights. The interview guide was carefully developed and validated through reviews by colleagues and the researcher's professor, ensuring its clarity, coherence, and relevance. The interviews focused on three themes: Aglipay's collective memory, the community's motivations for embracing IFI doctrines, and his influence on broader religious shifts. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes, ensuring a systematic and in-depth exploration of participants' narratives. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for cultural and religious sensitivities, were upheld throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the participants' responses revealed three central themes: historical and cultural identity, religious autonomy and unity, and resilience and leadership lessons. These themes offer a deeper understanding of Gregorio Aglipay's legacy and the influence of the IFI on Filipino identity, culture, and religious freedom.

Historical and Cultural Identity. A recurring theme was Aglipay's role in shaping the historical and cultural identity of the Filipino people. Participants recounted oral traditions and stories from elders, emphasizing his humble beginnings as a hardworking individual from a farming family in Batac, Ilocos Norte. These narratives highlighted his transformation from a young man aspiring to become a lawyer to a priest motivated by a desire to serve his nation, a decision heavily influenced by Dr. José Rizal. Historical analysis suggests that Rizal's intellectual legacy and advocacy for reform significantly inspired figures like Aglipay (de Leon, 2018). Aglipay's establishment of the IFI was widely regarded as a pivotal moment in Filipino history. It represented an assertion of independence from Spanish clergy and a bold step toward preserving Filipino identity amidst colonial domination. Respondents described him as "visionary" and "nationalistic," underscoring his lasting impact as a figure of pride and inspiration.

In addition to de Leon's study, Cruz (2020) examined how the Independent Church served as a platform for both spiritual and socio-political advocacy, emphasizing Aglipay's role in fostering unity among marginalized Filipinos. Similarly, Villanueva (2019) highlighted how Aglipay's writings promoted a unique blend of nationalism and spirituality, which encouraged Filipinos to resist colonial subjugation and embrace their heritage. Sanchez (2021) provided an analysis of Aglipay's speeches, revealing his use of rhetoric to inspire collective action and empower communities during the Spanish colonial period. Ramirez and Santos (2022) explored the impact of Aglipay's collaboration with other reformists, showcasing his ability to bridge religious and secular movements in the struggle for Filipino identity. Lastly, Diaz (2017) investigated educational reforms inspired by Aglipay's vision, demonstrating their influence on the propagation of a national consciousness among young Filipinos.

Participants in this study stressed the importance of educating the younger generation about Aglipay's life, ensuring that his contributions remain a source of cultural pride and a symbol of resilience.

Religious Autonomy and Unity. The theme of religious autonomy was evident in the participants' reflections on the establishment of the IFI. They consistently portrayed the split from the Roman Catholic Church as an act of defiance against colonial oppression and an assertion of the Filipinos' right to self-determination in spiritual matters. Joining the IFI was seen as a collective decision rooted in a desire for independence and equality, making it more than just a religious movement—it became a unifying force for Filipinos. Respondents emphasized that the IFI provided a platform for Filipinos to practice their faith free from foreign interference. While some participants noted that this separation led to significant changes in religious practices and traditions, others observed minimal differences between the two churches, particularly in Liturgical practices and communal gatherings such as fiestas. While the IFI retains some Catholic traditions, it adopted a Unitarian stance under Bishop Gregorio Aglipay, but later returned to a more Catholic position and entered into intercommunion with the Philippine Episcopal Church.

According to Scott (1982), the establishment of the IFI symbolized not only a break from the Roman Catholic Church but also a broader assertion of Filipino nationalism during the Spanish colonial era. Scott highlights that the IFI served as an ideological and cultural pillar that paralleled revolutionary efforts like the Katipunan, embodying the collective aspiration for sovereignty and independence. Similarly, Schumacher (1999) asserts that the IFI's foundation intertwined with the nationalist agenda, reflecting a conscious effort to reclaim Filipino identity and resist colonial dominance. Recent scholarship further elucidates the IFI's role in shaping Filipino national identity. Smit (2024) discusses how the IFI's ecclesiology and soteriology embodied a form of "prefigurative politics," wherein the church's structure and practices anticipated a future sovereign nation, thus intertwining religious and national aspirations. Hermann (2023) highlights the IFI's early periodicals, such as *La Verdad* and *Revista Católica*, which connected the church to a broader transregional and transcontinental indigenous-Christian public sphere, emphasizing its global outlook and solidarity with other independent Catholic movements. Additionally, the preservation of the IFI's early archival records, as noted by the Endangered Archives Programme (2023), underscores the church's significance in the anti-colonial struggle and its efforts to assert religious independence during the Spanish colonial period.

Resilience and Leadership Lessons. Aglipay's life exemplifies resilience and the power of leadership. Participants frequently highlighted his bravery, industriousness, and unwavering commitment to Filipino sovereignty as qualities that set him apart as a transformative figure. His decision to challenge the hierarchical

structure of the Roman Catholic Church and create a more inclusive and egalitarian religious institution was seen as an act of immense courage. His teachings, rooted in nationalism and inclusivity, contrasted with the more rigid practices of the Catholic Church at the time. These teachings resonated with participants, who saw in Aglipay a leader who championed liberty, equality, and cultural independence. His contributions to religious freedom remain a source of inspiration for those who value unity and justice.

Majul (1967) underscores Aglipay's resilience and leadership as pivotal in the nationalist struggle against colonial oppression. Majul emphasizes that Aglipay's actions went beyond religious reform, serving as a moral and ideological force that motivated Filipinos to assert their cultural and political independence. Meanwhile, Agoncillo (1990) highlights how Aglipay's leadership in establishing the IFI marked a critical turning point in Philippine history, as it demonstrated that religious institutions could become vehicles for nationalist advocacy and social transformation.

The historical and cultural identity, religious autonomy and unity, and resilience and leadership lessons highlights how Gregorio Aglipay's legacy continues to shape Filipino identity and cultural independence, penultimately amongst his brethren and other members of the faith. His life, as remembered through oral traditions, illustrates his ability to inspire unity and resilience among his people. The establishment of the IFI not only marked a break from centuries of colonial control but also created a space for Filipinos to express their cultural and spiritual autonomy. Participants' narratives demonstrate that Aglipay's vision was not limited to religious reforms; it extended to the broader goal of national self-determination. The IFI became a symbol of freedom, providing Filipinos with a sense of ownership over their faith and reinforcing the importance of cultural identity. While some respondents saw the separation from the Catholic Church as transformative, others viewed it as having little impact on local traditions. This diversity in perspectives suggests that the effects of Aglipay's movement were complex, with its significance varying depending on community contexts. The stories shared through this study underscore the enduring relevance of Aglipay's leadership and his ability to inspire change. His legacy serves as a reminder of the power of collective action in overcoming oppression and building institutions that reflect the values and aspirations of the people they serve.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study highlight the significant and multifarious influence Gregorio Aglipay and the IFI have on leadership principles, religious autonomy, and Filipino identity. Three primary themes—historical and cultural identity, religious autonomy and unity, and resilience and leadership lessons—emerged from the data gathered in the study. These themes underline Aglipay's major influence on the quest for self-determination, cultural pride, and Filipino nationalism. The evidence strongly backs the theory that Aglipay was instrumental in forming Filipino historical and cultural consciousness. Inspired mostly by Dr. José Rizal, the participants' stories regularly highlighted his humble upbringing and shift into a nationalistic leader.

Considered as a turning point in Philippine history, the founding of the IFI declared Filipino identity and broke free from Spanish ecclesiastical authorities. Respondents underlined the need of preserving Aglipay's accomplishments and teaching them to next generations in order to keep historical knowledge and cultural pride. One further significant topic that surfaced was religious autonomy and unity, as attendees underlined the function the IFI plays in enabling Filipinos to practice their faith without external interference. The separation from the Roman Catholic Church was seen as a protest against colonial control and a step toward self-governance. While some respondents noted theological differences between the IFI and Catholicism, others observed minimal changes in their religious practices. Beyond its religious significance, the IFI was also a declaration of Filipino nationalism during the Spanish colonial era.

At last, the resilience and leadership themes showed how Aglipay's life models bravery and will. Participants often underlined his courage in questioning the current religious hierarchy and building a more inclusive church. For Filipinos working for justice and unity, his dedication to equality and nationalism was hailed as inspiration. Aglipay's leadership stretched into the larger nationalist struggle rather than only religious change. The results of the study show Aglipay's continuing impact on Filipino identity, spirituality, and leadership generally. Along with offering a forum for religious autonomy, the IFI strengthened the larger movement for national and cultural self-determination.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The several points of view on Aglipay's influence imply that his legacy is still seen and appreciated in different ways, therefore reflecting the complicated and changing character of Filipino identity. Future generations can learn from his leadership and activism by honoring and supporting his efforts, so promising that his vision of independence, unity, and resilience stays a compass in Philippine history. Aglipay's legacy exemplifies the dynamic essence of Filipino identity, with education having an essential role in safeguarding his principles for posterity. To ensure his achievements are thoroughly acknowledged, educational institutions should incorporate a specific lesson on Aglipay within units such as “Secularization of Philippine Churches” or “Filipino Nationalism.” The above approach would yield an extensive comprehension of his struggle for religious autonomy and his contribution to the affirmation of Filipino identity throughout the Spanish colonial period.

Localized history provides an intriguing means to engage students with Aglipay's narrative. Teaching on Batac, Ilocos Norte—his birthplace—and its association with his heritage may render his influence more approachable. Heritage learning excursions to Batac and other notable sites may strengthen students' understanding and appreciation of his contributions. To further develop his narrative, educational institutions ought to create supplementary resources, including videos and essays, and promote introspection through initiatives such as essay competitions and debates. Teacher training programs should prioritize Aglipay's historical importance, enabling educators to inspire learners through his principles of independence, unity, and resilience. Integrating Aglipay's legacy into both local and national educational narratives may uphold his vision of nationalism and self-determination, thereby cultivating a profound appreciation for Philippine history and cultural pride.

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