

# Pinatikan: Religious Tattoos in a Davao Sect (Abstract)

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The rise of new religious sects in society may be seen as a reaction against the traditional religion's static quality in the face of rapid cultural change. The Philippines had its share of revitalization movements, defined as deliberate, organized efforts to construct a more satisfying culture. One example is provided in the Holy Stone of the Catholic Apostolic Church of the Holy Spirit in Mati, Davao Oriental. The group is popularly known as the *pinatikan* because of the importance given to *patik*, or religious tattoos.

Tape recorded interviews of key informants ranging from the founder and his son to sect members and non-members, and several questionnaires elicited much of the data on the belief in and use of religious tattoos. The rest were derived from five *patik* prayer books obtained from sect members still affiliated with the Catholic Church.

Tattooing is an ancient custom in the Visayan area, and in pre-Spanish times was a mark of a man's bravery. In contrast, the *pinatikan* ascribes to its tattoos an innate power to protect the bearer from harm or to cure him of some affliction, provided he also leads a somewhat ascetic life free of vices. These representations

of saints, religious symbols and word abbreviations are placed all over the body from head to foot. Each picture carries with it the task of memorizing and reciting daily an associated Latin or pseudo-Latin phrase. The 360 translatable prayers listed in the five *patik* books refer to nine general categories: (1) physical sickness; (2) mental sickness; (3) preventive medicine; (4) self-defense; (5) defense against nature and natural phenomena; (6) defense against animals and insects; (7) supernatural; (8) moral, and; (9) miscellaneous. Looked at from a functional viewpoint, most *patik* and their prayers render protection from personal harm (306), while the rest (54) involve religious and moral situations. Notably absent are *patik* concerning livelihood (farming or fishing) and sex.

The *patik* phenomenon clearly answers a need for personal security apparently inadequately provided by other religious or secular institutions. Moreover, the practice stresses the dominant role of men over women in managing religious power, in contrast to the female-dominated practice of Catholicism among the Filipino laity. Although *pinatikan* women may receive tattoos, men tend to bear a far larger number of these imprints because, it is felt, only they have the physical strength required to withstand their powerful force.

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