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Research Note

JOSÉ S. ARCILLA, S.J.

The Culion Leper Colony, 1900s–1970s

The story of the Culion Leprosarium, once said to be the world's largest, exemplifies the effort to solve a painful human situation. This essay narrates the involvement of the Catholic Church in the leprosarium, particularly the role of the Society of Jesus as well as the Sisters of Charity, since its founding in 1906. It also discusses problems regarding family life and the segregation of the sexes, which resulted in open rebellion in 1932. It ends with the rehabilitation efforts in the early 1970s.

KEYWORDS: LEPROSARIUM · HISTORY · JESUITS · SISTERS OF CHARITY · FAMILY LIFE

To the sick restored to health and eager to start life anew the hospital is the best place in the world. To a leper isolated perhaps for life, with little hope of recovery until modern science developed a cure, the leprosarium is the exact opposite. It is the “city of horrible death,” where one sees “decay setting in before death” (Cannon 1939).

I have taken this opportunity to humbly extend a plea for your kind and benevolent generosity to shed a bit of sunshine and gladness to one whose misfortune is to be “forgotten exiled and cast off” from society. It is indeed bitter to be separated from one’s kinsfolk and friends as the final reward of an affliction so much misunderstood and widely taken as horrible and obnoxious. This is the fate of a leper patient and become invalid. (Tamara 1962)

These lines written not too long ago, in 1962, by a leper in the Leprosarium at Culion are a poignant summary of the fate of lepers. Their affliction, the “dread disease,” also called Hansen’s disease after G. Armauer Hansen, who in 1873 had identified the bacillus causing it, has been a plague of human society. Ancient literature, religious and profane, describes it with fear and loathing, and mainly to arrest the spread of the disease the accepted cure has been isolation, which of course goes against the human need for companionship.

Fortunately efforts have not been lacking to alleviate its dehumanizing effects. In the Philippines, unknown to historians, charitable heroes and heroines have tried to transform the leprosaria into “havens of mercy in which Christian priests and sisters have long been doing a work that is more than human” (Cannon 1939).

Spanish and American Approaches to Leprosy

Before the Americans came to the Philippines, the Franciscan friars had already opened a hospital in Manila. During the Christian persecutions in Japan, a shipload of Japanese Christian lepers arrived in Manila, a “gift” from the cynical Japanese who had heard the Spaniards wanted to convert the Japanese. The Franciscans in Manila took them in and in 1635 opened a section in the San Lázaro Hospital as a leprosarium. In 1784 King Charles III of Spain granted the Franciscans the estate of San Lázaro for its sup-

port. But during the revolution against Spain, the Franciscans were forced to leave Manila and the lepers left the hospital and wandered all over.

At the time of the change of governments, there were three important leprosaria in the Philippines: in Manila, in Cebu, and in Palestina near Naga City. These were church institutions, with hardly the modern facilities to discover at any future time the remedy that would lead to the disappearance of the disease. But many lepers lived freely at large, and there was ample opportunity for the disease to spread indefinitely.

At least to contain the spread of the disease, the new American government sought means to curtail the disease, and decided to gather and segregate the lepers, initially in the small island of Cagayan de Sulu. But it lacked an adequate water supply and the government looked elsewhere and chose Culion, the second biggest of the islands of the Calamianes Group north of Palawan.¹ Centrally located in the archipelago, it was also sufficiently distant from the important travel routes. Its climate was cool, it had an excellent harbor and adequate water, and it could be developed at relatively small expense.

Culion was a typical rural Filipino town at the southeast end of the island, on a promontory jutting out to the sea, a large grassy area called *Malaking Patag* (Cogonal Grande), about twenty-five meters above sea level. At the end of the peninsula was an old *cota* (fort) of thirty square meters, with towers at the four corners. Its walls of stone and mortar two meters thick had been built in 1875. Within the fort was an older church built earlier, measuring twenty-nine meters long, 9 1/3 meters wide. Its façade faced north.

By 1906 there were eighty-six houses in the town. Visible from the sea, an old *convento* (convent) served as some kind of a hospital. Properly compensated, its new residents agreed to transfer to the neighboring island of Busuanga, north of Culion. Their parish priest went with his flock, and Bishop Frederick Z. Rooker of Jaro felt concerned about the spiritual welfare of the lepers who were expected to move there, because they were mostly Catholic.

Fr. Manuel Vallés, S.J., and Jesuit Involvement at Culion

To his credit, Dean C. Worcester, the Secretary of the Interior, felt the same concern, and he communicated with Bishop Rooker and the archbishop of Manila. But minor difficulties kept the first volunteers—two priests from Naga and one from Cebu—from proceeding to Culion. Worcester then ap-

pealed to Archbishop Ambrosio Agius, the Apostolic Delegate, who in turn approached the Jesuit Mission Superior, Fr. Fidel Mir.

Without hesitation, and even considering the request a mark of honor and trust, the Jesuit Superior accepted the request, promising the Jesuits would always be available for work in Culion.² He assigned Fr. Manuel Vallés, a veteran Spanish missionary in southern Mindanao, to Culion, whose mastery of Visayan, the idiom of the lepers soon to be brought there, greatly facilitated his work.³ He happened to be in Manila preparing to sail for Spain to serve at the leprosarium in Gandía. Asked to go to Culion instead, he readily accepted the change, and was so happy that he had to pray hard that the Lord moderate his deep joy.

Fr. José Algué (1906), the Director of the Manila Observatory, notified the Secretary of Interior about Father Vallés and he also asked to be allowed to set up a meteorological station in Culion. Gratified, the Secretary informed Dr. Charles de May, the director of the leprosarium, who cabled back that the two Jesuits take the first boat for Culion. Father Vallés took along to serve as his sacristan, a Zamboangueño, Ramón Fermin, a young man of most edifying manners, who reminded the Jesuits of the traditional *donados* who used to devote their whole lives to serve God but without taking the religious vows.

After a stop at the quarantine station in Mariveles, Father Vallés arrived in Culion on 16 May 1906.

What was the role of the Jesuits in Culion?⁴ The government did not entrust to the Society of Jesus the spiritual care of the lepers; rather, it *employed* a member of this religious order to attend to the spiritual needs of the inhabitants of Culion, who might want to avail of the services of the priests. The latter, according to the agreement when the chaplaincy was discussed, would minister for free also to the officials, employees, and the residents who might wish to avail of their ministries.

Asked his opinion, Bishop Rooker suggested that they be considered as chaplains who would perform their spiritual ministries freely, much like the traditional chaplains of the army and the navy, and removable if they failed to live or work harmoniously with the lepers and the medical staff and other employees of the leprosarium. They would receive a salary for their “decent sustenance” and other essential needs, their duties would include ministering to the needs of the officials and employees of the colony, making them in effect “government chaplains,” whose appointment on the recommendation

of the Bishop of Jaro needed the governor-general’s approval. In a sense they were “parish priests,” with no fixed working hours.⁵

Sisters of Charity and the Arrival of Lepers

A hospital and other edifices essential to health care had already been constructed, but eleven days later, when the first group of lepers arrived from Cebu on board two Coast Guard cutters, *Polilio* and *Mindanao*, not everything was ready, conditions were chaotic, and some necessities of life were inadequate or lacking. In due time things improved. Eventually, the success of the leprosarium caught the attention of the world and many foreigners came to observe and study the resources and the methods used in Culion.

On 25 May 1906, four Sisters of Charity of St. Paul de Chartres⁶ arrived in Culion. There was no wharf, it was raining, but the Chief of the Colony, Doctor de Mey, went out, greeting them, to the Sisters’ pleasant surprise, in perfect French. They had not yet been expected, but in that dark rainy night they unloaded their baggage on a raft that ferried them to the village for nonlepers, Balala, west of Culion.

Father Vallés was waiting for them. All he had for them was a spacious house, with steep steps leading to four rooms. There was only one table, four chairs, four beds, and two candles stuck in two bottles. One of the Sisters tried sitting on a chair, which immediately crashed to the floor. They had to replace it with an old box. Indeed, they were in for real missionary life.⁷ The next day the first group of lepers arrived from Cebu.

A page in the Sisters’ diary describes the welcome they gave to the lepers:

The Sisters go down to the shore to meet them; the Chief and the Chaplain are also there. They immediately get busy in the kitchen to distribute the food—boiled rice and salmon. The next day their work in the hospital began, only one patient having come to the hospital...The less afflicted lepers who were counted upon to help in the care of the more seriously afflicted showed considerable repugnance to the idea, and the Sisters, not knowing the Visayan dialect, had their own difficulty trying to convey the idea. Soon, however, the repugnance of the healthier patients and the linguistic barriers of the Sisters were somewhat overcome.⁸

The arrival of more lepers sharpened the challenge for the Sisters to give their best. The second group of lepers, also Visayans, who arrived on 4 July, were in an even worse condition. The Sisters' diary noted:

Seeing them disembark, we looked at one another speechless, all of us feeling that the good Lord had in consideration of our weakness refrained from sending these patients with the first batch . . . all disfigured, some having no nose, or their lips and eye-lashes eaten away, horrible to look upon—and the odor that they spread about them!⁹

A simple phrase sums up the heroic work of the Sisters at Culion: they became the “true mothers” of the lepers, especially of the orphans. They supervised the cleaning of the hospitals and clinics.¹⁰ But in no way could selfless dedication ever make Culion a “home” for the lepers.

Frs. Thomas Becker, José Tarrago, and Felipe Millan

The records of Culion for the first year after its establishment, 1906, show how faithfully Father Vallés (and all the Jesuits who came after him), fulfilled his duties (see *Culion* 1956). That year, all who perished had died *con todos los sacramentos* (with all the sacraments); 50 percent of the Muslim lepers had received Catholic baptism before they died.¹¹ This, of course, had its price.

The work proved more than enough for a single priest, and a second Jesuit, Fr. Thomas Becker,¹² was assigned to Culion. He arrived in 1908 and stayed for two years. But Father Vallés's insistence that only Catholics in good standing could stand as baptismal sponsors, or be buried in consecrated ground, earned him a simmering grudge of a leper who exercised some influence over his fellow patients.

In 1910, to take Father Becker's place, Fr. José Tarrago arrived in Culion.¹³ He soon organized the Sodality of Mary (today, Christian Life Communities) for the older women and the younger girls, introduced the common recitation of the Rosary in the church and in the hospital wards, and the traditional May devotions. He also provided brass instruments to form a band of the musically inclined among the lepers.¹⁴ When he was in Culion the Blessed Sacrament was reserved in the church.

In 1917 Father Tarrago noticed some strange skin eruptions, which he submitted for medical examination. On suspicion that he had himself

made, and because subsequent examinations seemed to confirm the first diagnosis that he had contracted leprosy, he willingly moved to the lepers section.¹⁵ Two and a half years later, he was brought to Manila, but careful tests showed he was not a leper. He did not return to Culion, but volunteered to go to the Portuguese mission in China, but with a new name, José Tarrago Aragonés. Unable, however, to learn the language, he returned to Spain, where he died.

Fr. Felipe Millan¹⁶ was another Spanish Jesuit who worked in Culion for eleven years. He had been a Master of the Jesuit novices in Spain, and had to obtain permission to come and work at the leprosarium. One day, out of nowhere a crazed leper attacked him. The surprised chaplain parried the blows with his umbrella, but he slipped and had to be nursed back to health. He died in 1926, the only chaplain to die in office at Culion. The grateful community at Culion named a plaza in his honor, the “Plaza Millan.”

Isolation and the Desire for Family Life

Lepers are unique. Although debilitated or partly maimed, not all are bedridden. To a certain extent they can lead a “normal” life. Some still have the energy to cultivate a garden or raise livestock and live in a designated zone in individual houses of their own, and a farm area much like an ordinary “town.” But it is an unusual town. Totally dependent on government subsidies, its residents do not earn their keep and rely on outside help and support. Charity decides their future.

Time lies heavy in their hands. The most painful deprivation hardly anyone can accept is not necessarily their physical ailment but its consequence—the lack of family life. The most ideal pastoral care of the most unselfish love of nurses and Sisters cannot substitute for the warmth and love of a family.

Isolation immediately brought up the very delicate problem of marriage for the lepers. Segregation, everyone admitted, should not be more onerous than was absolutely necessary. Living conditions should approximate as much as possible those of the healthy life. But was it not risking the spread of the disease through the children of leprous parents? The problem was not as simple as it seems.

There was no clear policy for the children born of leprous parents, except to have them examined at frequent intervals in the first years of the lep-

rosarium. Some children were brought to charitable institutions in Manila, like the Hospicio de San José, but the parents objected to the move. Those found with signs of leprosy were left with the parents.

In 1915 a Children's Home was built in the nonleper section of Culion, where, reared away from their parents, the latter could visit them. Infants who were separated after six months from their parents but who contracted the disease were returned to the lepers' section. However, when the babies were separated early from their parents the mortality rate was high. Finally, in 1925–1926, infants two years and older who had not contracted leprosy were sent to the Welfareville Institute in Manila. Fifty percent of the children who were left with their parents longer than six months developed the disease by their fifth birthday.

The Separation of the Sexes and the 1932 “Uprising”

Initially different wards or hospitals were assigned to male and female patients in Culion—as elsewhere in the world. But the separation of the sexes merely sharpened the difficulty. By 1932 discontent exploded in open defiance of certain rules.

At first, there were vexations and open taunts aimed at the members of the women's Sodality of the Virgin Mary. Openly the Sisters were jeered at, “*Nanay, Nanay!*” (“Mother, Mother!”), when they passed by. An investigation in 1910 solved nothing, and the provocations continued.

Then in 1932, the Jesuit chaplain reported that the chief of police in the colony, a leper, felt offended by Father Vallés's restrictions, and led “three gangs of leper desperados [who] have adopted Russian methods and have this place in a reign of terror” for about ten days (McNulty 1932a). They threatened to burn the girls' house. But convinced by the chief physician to leave peacefully, the gang merely went down the hill, and came back a half-hour later. They threatened the girls with revolvers, and there “began an exodus of girls.” The men proceeded to the other houses of women, threatened to burn the buildings, and about 600 of the inmates walked out. The “Reds” went to the Protestant dormitory, too, and a few girls willingly left with them.

Two days later, Easter Sunday, they came to some agreement. Visits to the girls were allowed, but the revolvers were not withdrawn. The following Wednesday, “wholesale instruction about prevention and methods of contraception” was held. But various incidents still continued.

Against advice, for example, María Idongo left with her *novio* (boy-friend). Against her mother's will, a certain Margarita was forced out of the women's dormitory. The Jesuit's report continues:

Constancia del Corro had been placed in the house of policeman Hermosa with his wife for protection. Selerioso Sevillano came openly on April 6th, and announcing himself a Sergeant of the Reds, demanded Constancia and handed her over to her *novio*, Nicolás, who took her away. Crisólogo, the openly declared head of the Reds, married . . . and had already returned Emilia Traje, came today [2 April] and took her away again . . . openly in complete defiance of authority. (*ibid.*)

By 6 May, feelings had not yet quieted down. The chaplains' house maintained a night watch. About twenty Constabulary troops were called in to patrol the colony for the next two weeks, and several nonleper employees were under arms.

The gang leader did not know when to stop. He accused the Sisters of negligence, but their wards stood up to defend them. This disarmed the leader, whose authority was drastically clipped. In due time, the “uprising” died away, despite the publicity it had engendered.¹⁷

Culion in the 1970s

The Philippine constitution provides that a senate bill becomes a law thirty days after approval. On 4 May 1971, the House of Representatives approved a bill making Culion a regular municipality. A year later, on 16 March 1972, the Senate voted favorably on the bill. This meant that Culion had become a municipality, whose residents, as in other Philippine towns, could elect their own representatives and public officials, earn needed revenue that they could dispose of, and own property with titles issued to them. Governed by the hansenites themselves and other nonlepers in the town, Culion had acquired a legal personality, a dignity that incited them to help and work for the welfare of their own people.

In 1972 a former inmate of the colony tried to answer a basic question, “which has not been raised up yet by neither the progressive nor the radical elements” (Ramirez n.d.). What has the Catholic Church done for Culion?

Daily, she wrote, she saw the white-robed Jesuits and Sisters leave their residences on the hill to immerse themselves among the lepers in the hos-

pitals and dormitories in catechetical and social work, and in the schools. Twenty-seven islands comprised the leprosarium, with a population of 6,500, a little over 50 percent in the lepers' sector (3,500), and the rest healthy residents (physicians, nurses, government employees, and others). There were three parishes in the colony proper: for the children, the nonleper section, and the neighboring islands. The sanitarium had twelve wards, for the children, the tuberculosis patients, adult men and women patients, walking patients, the insane (men and women), and others. The priests performed the sacramental and priestly ministries during their visits around the wards and in the churches, while the Sisters nursed, consoled, and dispensed material help: extra nourishment, bandages, medicines, and the like. The hardest adaptation the doctors and nurses had was to use makeshift apparatus and the lack of adequate medical supplies, which most of the time were supplied by the priests and Sisters with donations from outside.

Rehabilitation of the lepers was a key program. Outcasts socially since birth, they depended on government largesse and sympathetic benefactors, and had lost practically all interest in earning a living. Their rehabilitation was the purpose of a Jesuit-initiated cooperative agricultural project¹⁸ to develop 1,000 hectares, with donations that brought in modern farm equipment and material, and even agricultural technicians to make them self-reliant. But physical weakness, general apathy, and the like did not always help the plan. Nevertheless, forty-two leper families cultivated about eighty-five hectares of land allocated to them.

Perhaps the most important work was through St. Ignatius Academy, the school in Culion that held promises for a better future. It was free; and its teachers and administrators employed "all means to develop [the children] as person. Graduates from the high school were helped to continue higher studies elsewhere."¹⁹

By 1972 there still remained much to be done. The Catholic Church in Culion was confronted

not only with problems in fighting for human rights, social justice, looking for ways and means to develop [the lepers] as human Persons and build a better community to live in, but like Christ, they, too are oftentimes met with ingratitude, hatred, misunderstanding and abuse. Nevertheless, these headaches and heartaches serve only as a challenge to move on . . . (Ramirez n.d.)

Notes

- 1 Through Executive Order signed by Gov. Luke E. Wright on 22 Aug. 1905. On 5 July 1912, Acting Gov. Newton N. Gilbert added thirteen smaller islands around Culion to the reservation.
- 2 Worcester (1904) also wrote to the Jesuit Superior, part of which reads: "The Bishop of Jaro, on account of the shortage of priests in his diocese, could not well spare a suitable man for this place, and an effort was made to secure Fr. Flores from Cebu, who was giving the lepers confined at the place such good care. When it was found that Fr. Flores was not available, the Apostolic Delegate (Mons. Agius) very kindly took up the matter of securing a proper appointee for the position, and ultimately recommended to me a member of the Jesuit Order for appointment, with the further understanding that the members of this Order would always be available for appointment to this position."
- 3 Born in Manresa, Barcelona, Spain on 2 Apr. 1851, entered the Society of Jesus on 4 Mar. 1876, and came to the Philippines in 1883. After three years teaching at the Ateneo Municipal in Manila, he was assigned successively to Bislig, Caraga, Mati, and Davao, before going to Culion. He died in Dapitan on 20 Aug. 1918.
- 4 See Appendices A to D for brief excerpts describing the engagements of the Jesuit priests in Culion.
- 5 The Jesuit Superior agreed with Worcester that a fair estimate would be \$900 (P1,800) a year. In 1925, however, the amount was reduced, without any explanations, although the records continued to mention that same amount as originally budgeted.
- 6 Sisters Thérèse, Marie du Bon Pasteur, Calixte, and Sidonie (Superior).
- 7 Notes from the Sisters' diary (Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres n.d.) and later conversations with Sister Damien who came to Culion in 1908. I have not found out why these, and not another Sisters' congregation, went to Culion.
- 8 Notes on the Culion Mission, from Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres n.d.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Walking patients not confined to the hospital wards, who lived in their own houses, had to report for regular treatment to the clinics.
- 11 See the appendices for a brief description of the daily morning routine of the chaplains at Culion.
- 12 Born in Washington, D.C., on 22 Sept. 1872, entered the Society on 13 Aug. 1887, and was one of the first American Jesuits who volunteered for the Philippines in 1900. He taught at the Ateneo de Manila for a few years before volunteering to work at Culion. He died in Woodstock, Maryland, U.S.A., on 17 Feb. 1954.
- 13 Born in Dosaiguas, Tarragona, Spain on 21 May 1879, entered the Society of Jesus on 29 June 1904, and was assigned to teach at the Jesuit Colegio-Seminario in Vigan in 1908. He died in Barcelona on 2 Feb. 1943.
- 14 The band played brilliantly during the celebration in Culion of the American Independence Day on 4 July 1915, and the government granted them a salary as musicians for the colony.
- 15 His separation from the small Jesuit community in Culion was rather painful. The diary of the Jesuit community in Culion describes the unspoken suffering they all felt, realizing it was the last

night they would rather be together with him, conversing with him, sharing their life with him, and never expecting to see him again although he was still alive, and so forth.

16 Born in Fuentelmonje, Soria, Spain on 5 Feb. 1868, entered the Society of Jesus on 30 Jan. 1890, and came to the Philippines in 1916. He died in Culion on 23 Oct. 1926.

17 We do not have the documents to show how the incident was finally settled.

18 Started by a Spanish Jesuit, Ignacio Maria de Moreta, who several times traveled to Spain to solicit donations for the lepers and his projects. Other benefactors in the Philippines included the Knights of the Order of Malta headed by José Maria Soriano, Friends Who Care, and several private individuals too many to mention. Financial support from abroad came from ANESVAD (Spain), established through the help of one of the Spanish chaplains in Culion, Fr. Javier Olazábal; MISEREOR (Germany); and the Jesuit Missions, Inc. (U.S.A.). This was especially helpful, since by this time the Philippine government reduced its subsidy for Culion.

19 In 1972 nineteen of the faculty of the St. Ignatius Academy were its former students, four had passed the board examination for nurses, two were teachers in a school in Bangkok administered also by the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres, and seventeen were teaching in various schools in Manila.

Appendix A

Life at the Culion Leper Colony in the First Four Years

Source: Excerpts from Vallés 1910

With zealous Fr. Tarrago coming to help me in the tasks of this leprosarium, I am not as overworked During the Spanish government, the leprosaria were all helped with public funds, pious foundations, and donations. Under the American government, it was decided to gather all the lepers and oblige them to come to this island of Culion. After purchasing private lands and obliging the residents to leave, new solid buildings were built. When the place was ready, the government severely banned hiding those infected with the dreadful disease or blocking their transfer to Culion. Considering the need for water, a necessary element of the first order, the government succeeded through a good pipe system in bringing water to the colony from a brook nearby, supplying it to different sectors of the colony: the streets, washing places, bathrooms, public toilets, etc. With the abundance of waters, the lepers can bathe as often as they want, keep laundering their clothes, and carefully wash down the floors of the hospital. Hence, the lepers are clean, tidy, and properly dressed.

The leprosarium consists, first, of a new concrete hospital for men, and the old one for women, of hard wood, both reserved for male and female patients, who, not seriously sick, have difficulty in walking and because of that cannot provide for themselves three times a day in the colony's kitchen, like the rest. An auxiliary hospital is under construction planned for a cooperative bar or canteen, where lepers can obtain what they need at modest cost. A central kitchen prepares all the food for the lepers living here (about 1,800). We can mention finally the government house, or *Tribunal*, which also serves as the police barracks.

Besides these public buildings, about 90 light huts are being built, occupied by entire families. Among the 1,800 lepers, the majority is of the poor class, although there are some rich individuals.

In general, the situation of the leprosarium is satisfactory. Many, very many had their wounds cured. Rare, perhaps less than a dozen, the repulsive sick with distorted faces. Instead, many deserve deep compassion, for their hands have no fingers or their feet have no toes, some of them without one or two feet or hands. In many cases, the disease shows itself in the gradual consumption of the fingers of the hands, which deteriorate from a small wound that opens at the tip of the fingers. More common are wounds on the legs, as well as on the soles, not big, but deep, of little suppuration. But if neglected, they emit a very foul odor.

Other patients present no other symptoms than hunched fingers, and others have only lobules on the noses, ears, or on both. Finally, there are others who show no external symptoms at all, their sickness consisting only in germs discovered in their blood through analysis.

Because of leprosy, the unfortunate ones here are victims of other diseases, like loss of eyesight, dysentery, tuberculosis, gangrene, beriberi particularly, which have caused terrible harm.

For this reason, one distinguishes the newly arrived patients from those now living here.

The sick receive exquisite care from the physicians, as well as from the priests and sisters, as well as the nurses (lepers themselves) who help and play an excellent role. Even the monthly mortality rate has gone down from 150 to 15.

The colony has its own local administration by the lepers themselves. So, too, 19 musicians form a band, and others the orchestra and the choir of the church.

When we arrived, the island was deserted. Its traditional residents had abandoned it. We found only 12 workers and Dr. de Mey, his wife and child. Soon, on 25 May, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres arrived. They have done immense good here, they are true mothers of the lepers, above all the little girls and the young, exiles, who miss a mother's care, which these good Sisters give, through their solicitude, love, and admirable dedication.

They seek to make them live apart, help by teaching them the Catechism, prepare them for membership in the various pious associations. Notable is the work they give to prepare the solemn First Communion, or the processions. It is a joy to see these little boy and girl lepers dress for the occasion. The little girls in turn love them so much that I do not hesitate to say that they love them as much as their real mothers. These poor little ones so much need it, lest sooner or later, they are swallowed in the abyss of corruption around.

One must not be surprised at this, in view of the circumstances surrounding this foundation. On the one hand, there is a certain freedom, which it was thought would be good to grant the lepers, namely, the bad example of a few scandalous ones, their separation from parents and acquaintances. On the other, especially, the desire for some relief from the long sad hours, which make many strongly nostalgic, has been the reason why much has to be corrected morally, which in God's mercy is successfully done.

Certain persons here with anti-Catholic ideas have, briefly, succeeded in influencing the lepers away from the priest and the Church. At this time, the Protestants tried to make converts, but they hardly succeeded.

The measures Dr. Clements took regarding the proper segregation of the lepers since his arrival, but allowing visits at the proper time, helped notably in reducing the prevailing dissipation. The permission recently granted the lepers to marry, formerly banned, has also helped.

All this change has been at the cost of sweat and labor, above all God's powerful help. Not least is the good practice of frequent confession by almost all those going to the hospital, from which it follows that few die without the last Sacraments. Catechism for the children, given with the help of intelligent lepers of good conduct, pious conversations, conference and sermons, and especially Communion with greater solemnity are the powerful means to move the lepers to piety and fear of God. We frequently have General Communion in the hospitals, making them as quite devout and with decorations and hymns. The Holy Rosary and other prayers are recited in common.

But the major fruit is obtained through pious associations. Besides the joy of fraternal and Christian harmony among themselves, they are in contact with the Sisters and Priests, and see with their own eyes how these sacrifice themselves for their good. The leper children have the Society of the Holy Angels; the young girls are aspirants for the Daughters of Mary; the young men, the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin; the women, that of the Five Wounds; and the Apostleship of Prayer. They hold regular meetings and monthly Communion. Many receive it daily.

A pity that the church is so small and poor, despite the great expense in it. We found it unadorned, without decorations or sacred vessels. The Culion town residents brought away with them all they had, even their parish priest, everything in the church, with the Bishop's permission. In the church, we recite the Holy Rosary in the church, hear confessions when it does not rain. We celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the center of the new hospital, where the priest can be seen.

Appendix B

Holy Communion and Mass for the Lepers at Culion, Christmas 1937

Source: Lynch 1937

Vesting himself in surplice, stole and veil, Father Rello opened the tabernacle and brought out a large ciborium. With the communion-paten, bell and umbrella in my hands, I preceded him through the door on the far side of the chapel. We picked our way along a short path to a rustic shelter where four silent altar-boys, lepers, awaited us. We had crossed the *leper line*, which marks off no-trespass areas for Culion's vast majority, and I was face-to-face with the world's most dreaded scourge. The little fellows held candles which cast dancing shadows on their faces. I took a cautious look at them. In their red cassocks and white surplices they did not seem much different from any other Filipino altar boys. But they were different!

One of them reached forward and took the bell from my hand. Another asked me for the paten. The third merely carried his sputtering candle, while the last relieved me of the umbrella. This youngster with a candle in one hand, held the umbrella in the other and provided the canopy in

our Eucharistic procession. Then we moved on, the uncertain light of the candles showing the way. The little cherub in front kept up a continuous ringing with his bell, displaying a serious enthusiasm that I had not expected to find. The first of the eight hospitals was at the top of a difficult climb and, as we drew near, I began to discern the outlines of the building. It had the appearance of a barracks, long, narrow and low. Mounting a dozen or more steps, we waited reverently near the door while Father Rello began the Communion prayers. Inside, we were met by a leper who grasped a bottle of holy water between his fingerless hands and presented it to the priest. As Father Rello made the blessing of the room, I took a quiet look around. But the feeble electric bulbs, which were meant to light up the long line of beds, were so dim that they shrouded all in a merciful half-light.

After the blessing we began to go from bed to bed. Because the light was so poor, I had to hold a candle close to the lepers who were receiving Communion. They were in every possible position, depending on how the disease had touched them and how much strength they had. Very few knelt on the floor, though some were able to kneel in bed. Several sat on the edge of their bed. Others sat with their knees drawn up, while many squatted on their heels in the familiar Filipino manner. Of course, there were those who were too weak to rise at all.

As the first of them saw the priest approaching, he opened his mouth to receive the Sacred Host. Leaving him, we went on and came to another. Bending over, candle in hand, I noticed that he stared with eyes gone white and did not know the *Pari* had come till he heard the soft "*Corpus Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*" . . . We stopped before others who neither saw nor heard but waited patiently until they felt the gentle touch of Father Rello's hand on their cheek. Most pitiful of all were the few poor lepers who, blind and deaf and robbed of nearly every sense, did not even feel the Sweet Presence on their tongues. After the priest had given them the Blessed Sacrament, he had to close their mouths and seal the living tabernacles.

Scenes like this were met in nearly all of the hospitals. With the women also leprosy had done its work of destruction. In one of their wards I heard for the first time the Communion formula reserved for the dying: "*Accipe, soror, viaticum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi* . . ." As we moved up and down among them, I could not help sensing the peculiar sadness that must sometimes fill the hearts of the younger ones. For here were maidens with scarcely a blemish to mar their beauty. And yet they could see all

around them what frightful wreckage the disease had wrought on others. Only the tell-tale dark spot on the cheek, that was all leprosy had done so far. But up and down the aisles were older women whose lips and ears were disfigured by ugly lumps, whose noses had simply fallen flat as the cartilage rotted away, whose hands were without fingers, whose legs were wrapped in damp, discolored bandages. Young and old, fair and scarred, all awaited the coming of the Lord. In their simple cotton dress and with a towel to cover the head, they had nothing to offer Him but their love. And His love was all they wanted in return.

Finally we reached the last of the hospitals. In it was the children's ward. Since they were very young, they did not add to the number to the two hundred and seventy-five who had received Communion that morning. Instead, Father Rello stood in their midst and, lifting the ciborium, blessed them. Then he turned around and gave a blessing to us all.

We walked [back] to the big church, where Father Rello placed the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. The altar-boys were dismissed; it was 6 o'clock. In the back of the church two infants awaited Baptism.

While we had been going the rounds of the sick, Father McNulty had been saying mass for the lepers who were able to get to it. He had distributed Holy Communion to nearly three hundred of them, bringing the morning's total to more than five hundred. When one considers the fact that these good people had to get up very early, the number is remarkable. And yet the all-year-round average is maintained at half a thousand or more. The two chaplains alternate from week to week, one taking the hospitals, the other taking the church. It is not an easy life . . . Imagine getting in an eight-hour day before twelve noon!

Appendix C

The Holy Death of Celestino the Leper

Source: McNulty 1936

He looked for all the world like a scarecrow—arms and legs wasted away—skin hanging loose—bones showing through his jeans and jumpers like sticks—hands and feet gnarled in a mass of open ulcers—face all cracked and disfigured—nose gone—such was Celestino.

He came to Culion when 10 years old—practically a paralytic. He was carried from the leper ship to his bed of boards in the hospital and was bed-ridden for 8 years.

For amusement he began to draw pictures, then to paint and he developed this talent so well that after 8 years, when he was able to leave bed and hospital, he was an artist.

Once a deluge of rain destroyed our eleventh station in the *Way of the Cross*—it was only a paper picture 12 by 18 inches—but Celestino painted a very good one in its place, which served for many years.

About a year ago he had to come back to the hospital; it was not paralysis this time but such a drying-up and cracking of the skin that for a long time his limbs looked like the protruding frames of old burnt upholstery. Then came the frightful ulcers. They were nailing him to his cross of terrible pain. From his description of his pain it must have been like a great rheumatism—added to the inflammation and repulsive break-down of many ulcers.

He received Communion every day. He prepared for death by thinking a great deal of the Station he had painted: Christ nailed to the cross—he would make some return to Our Lord.

And then Celestino died. His was a very holy death, and it took place on his twenty-eighth birthday. He had been in Culion 18 years.

Appendix D

Music in Culion

Source: McNulty 1932b

I can hear the band is giving one of its biweekly concerts . . . and it is very good. They have quite a repertoire of really good pieces, including several famous things from Spain. Occasionally, they drop to jazz and other such things, but in the main their taste is refined and far above the ordinary of today. There are twenty-eight pieces in the band. At present sixteen of the players are the men who developed here from the little beginnings they got as *Angelitos*—now playing, of course, like regular union men. There are three coronets, two clarinets, a French horn, etc.

The present leader is a man who was a band leader outside previous to contracting leprosy. His predecessor, who has recently gone home cured,

was rather a development in the Colony, and had learned most of his cleverness as a bandmaster here in his leper existence. Two or three of the others are young men who played instruments outside. Besides that, we have some players who simply took lessons on the instrument when they were boys at home, and then continued their development as lepers. But the former *Angelitos*, now playing in the band, were picked out here and put under instruction paid for by the chaplains.

We have a regular orchestra of some pretension, and it has a record of first-class public service because, like the band, it is called upon on all sorts of occasions and celebrations for entertainments, so that it is a real asset to the Colony. We also have a good string orchestra of young men besides the little orchestra of the *Angelitos* proper. For all of these musicians, the Fathers have supplied instruments, have aided in the mending that is necessarily entailed in the upkeep of such musical endeavor, have bought strings for violins and mandolins and guitars that would reach from Culion to New York, and have paid for these by little contributions received from the outside world.

The lepers are great singers, and we have some very good voices among them. I had a whole lot of the ends of songs in my head, so I got the notion to whistle them and get somebody who could catch the tune and put it on paper for me. To my great surprise, a young leper of about thirty years of age, Basilio, who had heard of my notion, presented himself and told me he could help me out.

We have a kiosk, a cement platform ten feet square with a rustic shade over it and rustic seats on three sides. Out to this kiosk I went with Basilio. He took out some music paper, lined and ready for copy, and he said to me, “If you will sing a song, I’ll write the music just as a stenographer takes dictation.” That sort of thing had never occurred to me before. I put my head back, closed my eyes, reached into memory and sang for him “*If You Were Born On An April Day*.” Once or twice he held me up a bit and asked me to start a line over again, but to my surprise, when I had finished my stunt, he turned around and sang it for me to perfection in a light baritone!

We met this way on five afternoons for sessions of about an hour and a half. Each time he took his copy away with him to the poor humble thatch shack, where he lives with some younger men in a sort of den, and there, on his humble table made of a soap-box, he worked out for me the music for quartette and piano. At the end of our sessions we had done sixteen songs of

varying merit, but nearly all of them a bit catchy, and at least some of them just the thing for our young men.

You should have heard the quartettes when I called to the kiosk afterwards and told them about the songs. They are now singing them with gusto. In some instances we re-wrote the songs to create local interest and make them more popular, putting in Filipino touches.

It is interesting to know that Basilio, music maker and clever harmony expert, not to say prize songbird in the baritone line, came to the Colony as a boy, and owes every bit of music training to the same good Sister who developed our organist in the Colony.

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