

**Patterns of Devotional Perception for Fr. Francesco F. Palliola, S.J. in Zamboanga del Norte,
Philippines**

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Abstract

This study intends to write a narrative on the fame of Sanctity of Fr. Francesco F. Palliola, S.J., relative to his martyrdom and identify devotees' patterns of devotion. The researcher used the phenomenological research design as well as the inductive, descriptive research approach to study devotees' experiences, those taken-for-granted assumptions, and usual ways of perceiving. Data collected was through interviews and archival researches. The narrative is significant to enrich the documents compiled by the Diocese of Dipolog City for the beatification. Findings show that there has been an intense devotion to Fr. Palliola by some townfolk in Zamboanga del Norte. Patterns of devotion involved healing answered prayers or mysterious phenomena. In a way, it went into a cycle of supplication- thanksgiving- supplication. Written accounts and shared stories had contributed to the popularity of the devotion.

Keywords: devotion pattern, the fame of Sanctity, phenomenological research design, Ponot, Zamboanga del Norte, Philippines

1.0 Introduction

The Catholic Church recognizes the godliness of a person-specific to his life and character. It is called the fame of sanctity in which a person exercises heroic virtue during his lifetime (Gealogo, 2017, Grzymala-Busse & Slater, 2018, Henn, 2017, Krebs, 2017). This is one of the diplomatic considerations to canonize or beatify a person after this has been proven by common repute for sanctity and by conclusive arguments. The cause for the recognition of the martyrdom and sanctity of the life of Fr. Francesco Palliola, a Jesuit missionary to Northwestern Mindanao, especially to the indigenous people, arose in the context of an on-going remembrance of this missionary at the place of his martyrdom. This site is at a seaside village of Ponot, in the Municipality of Jose Dalman, Diocese of Dipolog, Zamboanga Del Norte Province, and Mindanao, Philippines. This area has been inhabited by the Subanun and by the migrants from the north, notably the Visayans.

The Diocese of Dipolog has already submitted in Rome, Italy pertinent documents for the beatification of Fr. Francesco Palliola S.J. Awareness of the people on his fame of sanctity in Zamboanga del Norte and its nearby municipalities is evident hence, it is becoming essential to write a narrative of the devotees' various experiences. Basis of the narrative of Fr. Francesco Palliola's fame of sanctity are patterns of their perception and behavior. These are actually lived by them. Taken-for-granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving

The fame of sanctity of Fr. Palliola started as early as the 17th century. In the letter of Padre Jacob Antonio Basilius to the Superior General of the Jesuits in Mexico in 1650, he mentioned that the corpse of Francesco Palliola called forth great veneration to those who knew him and he was honored. Padre Juan Nadasco wrote in his article *Adiciones al martirologio de Padre Alegambre* that the Christians learned of his holy death, and they came for his corpse, which they placed in a casket with much honor, venerating him as a martyr of Christ and later celebrated his martyrdom. Moreover, Fr. Miguel Bernad also wrote that there is a grave in Ponot which he pointed out as the place where the priest was murdered and this has become a place of pilgrimage. Even members of the Subanun tribe are said to come to the grave and pray or light candles (Ayo, 2020, Baring, 2018, Carbayas & del Castillo, 2020, Kahambing, 2019, Oracion & Madrigal, 2019).

The memory and veneration of this priest has been kept alive hitherto. Much has been said about granted supplications through the intercession of Fr. Francesco Palliola. There are reported stories of healing for some who had visited his gravesite and claimed that they were restored of being well in body or mind. Most of these stories are not yet properly documented. They are just shared by mouth. This narrative will provide authentic and relevant information on the fame of sanctity of Fr. Francesco Palliola SJ. Written accounts collated from undocumented shared stories may enrich the religious-historical perspective and deepen the understanding of the Filipino culture on spirituality through the veneration of the martyrs and saints. The holistic quality of this scholarly paper will fortify the understanding of the people in Northwestern Mindanao that there was once a Jesuit Priest who died a martyr due to hatred of faith at the expense of sowing the Christian faith in this part of Mindanao that has become the origin of his fame of sanctity. With these, the output can affiliate to strengthen the fame of the sanctity of Fr. Francesco Palliola, S.J in the whole Zamboanga del Norte as support documents for the beatification of Fr. Palliola. The Diocese of Dipolog City has formally opened the cause for his martyrdom. An investigative process for his beatification is now set in motion. This to ascertain the authenticity of his life, the prominence of his sanctity, and the miracles attributed to him.

2.0 Methodology

Study Area. This study is conducted in the municipalities of Katipunan and Jose Dalman (Ponot). It aims to identify patterns of devotion for the late Padre and to know his antiquity who was a historical figure and a figment of the imagination of those who lived in the periphery of the Philippine society. He was considered very significant in the propagation of Christianity, especially in Dapitan-Dipolog-Lubungan areas.

Sampling. It uses non-probability sampling since it focuses on small samples that examine the real-life phenomenon. In particular, it uses purposive or judgmental sampling in which interviewees were selected deliberately to gather meaningful information.

Data Gathering. The indirect and direct methods of accumulating data were used to identify the patterns of devotion for Fr. Francesco Palliola, S.J. The documentation involved both pre-identified and random interviews in substantiating the testimonies of different people who have encountered unusual cases. There were 9 of them- 5 males and four females with an age range of 30-73 years old. The respondents came from various localities. The majority came from Zamboanga del Norte (e.g., Jose Dalman, Dapitan City, and Manukan). One from in Manila and two came from Misamis Oriental. Three of them were Subanuns, one a Baptist pastor, and one priest from the Diocese of Dipolog City.

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The rest were lay believers. Other data were taken from the internet and collated files from the unpublished articles of S.J. Province Archivist, research of Fr. Rene B. Javellana with his assistant archivist, Amando T. Tumbali, S.J. and from the works of Dr. Bernadette C. Abera of UP Diliman.

Data Analysis

The phenomenological research design is used to describe the informants' various experiences as they live it since this is an anecdotal study. Using the inductive, descriptive approach, experiences from the informants' perspective, including those taken-for-granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving, were identified. The various holy patterns were ascertained then.

Similarly, true to most historians were the limitations that the information collected may be incomplete, partly incorrect, or biased. This evidences might be doubtful, scattered, or nearly unintelligible. These limitations are considered first and foremost since data to support the narrative of the fame of the sanctity of Fr. Francesco Palliola, S.J. depended so much on interviews and printed materials at hand. However, the documents and the data are treated critically according to the ethical standards of anecdotal writing.

3.0. Results and Discussions

Admiration of Fr. Palliola through the years has led to the emergence of local devotees. Findings revealed that various devotional patterns are apparent; hence, his fame of sanctity.

Visit the gravesite. For so many years now, devotees and pilgrims flock to the shores of Ponot (now Jose Dalman, Zamboanga del Norte) to set foot on that mound of crush, coral and limestone that clothe the grave of Fr. Francesco Palliola, S.J. which is now fenced with iron grilles. The site is the spot believed by the pilgrims to be the gravesite of Fr. Palliola. Devotees come to light candles and offered flowers.

Datu Leonardo Mandi Andus, Subanen Datu of Zamboanga Peninsula. I am not familiar with Fr. Palliola, but I remember that my father used to go to Ponot to light candles at the gravesite of a priest. He just kept going back there to light candles. My father was a friend of Fr. Ganason. There has been a good relationship between the Catholic Church and the Subanuns. The Catholic Church was instrumental in organizing the Tribal Filipinos.

Requiem Mass. Since the opening of his cause for martyrdom, requiem mass commemorates the death for the late Padre every 29th of January. The number of devotees has been increasing every year, according to Fr. Patrick Dalangin. Other devotees come every 10th of May to light candles for his birthday.

Healing from Ailment. Results show that devotees pray for healing, are cured and restored of being well in body and mind. One of the dutiful devotees of Fr. Palliola is Mrs. Monica Alpas Luage, 58 years old. She is the mother of Jason Luage. Jason has a case so close to quadriplegia – an impairment in motor or sensory function of the four limbs. From birth, Jason has a total loss of use of all his limbs, and so he cannot walk because his feet were awfully small and his arms were straight. Both arms and legs have no joints. However, he learned to use his foot to eat. Four doctors examined his case now that he is already 30 years old and declared the same diagnosis that such a situation is irreversible. It

means that Jason has no chance to walk and no opportunity to use his arms in his lifetime. When the family moved from Liloy to Ponot in 1999, she started the devotion from her uncle's suggestions to go to the gravesite, pray and hope for a miracle for Jason. According to her, "I put Jason on top of Fr. Palliola's grave, which was covered with coral stones and left him there to pray and play while I was weeding the area surrounding the grave. He would inch his way around the site, crawling or rolling using his buttocks. We constantly came to visit (about 3 to 4x a week). I made a promise to come and clean the gravesite as long as I lived if Jason would be able to walk." For two years, she regularly did that. Even Jason himself will not miss a schedule to visit the place for the same constant supplication. In 2002, when Jason was nine years old, a miracle happened. He was able to stand while pushing hard his back on the wall and stride a few steps. Jason added more steps towards the boy; he wanted to help for his kite to fly and realized he could walk comfortably for the first time. To his glee, he went immediately to the gravesite, lit a candle, and prayed for thanksgiving of a granted petition. After Jason was able to walk, Monica continued visiting the grave, usually at 6 p.m. as a sign of gratitude and joy because Fr. Palliola has made a difference in their lives.

Mrs. Luage added several favored supplications of healing, including the supposed caesarian operation of her daughter because of eclampsia yet, a safe delivery happened inside the ambulance while on their way to the hospital. Somehow, it saved them from the expected hospital bills and medicines, which was the favor she beseeched from the "Padre." She counted to the healing of her daughter-in-law, whom she believed to have jaundice by merely drinking water mixed with brown sugar. This mixture was advised by a friend whom Mrs. Luage recognized as the "Padre's" instrument to give them the idea of alternative medicine since they don't have money for proper medication. Another severe case was that of her sister in Liloy, Zamboanga del Norte, who was unconscious for a day due to a critical health issue. The family decided to admit her to the hospital in Dipolog City for being in a coma. Mrs. Luage, while waiting in Ponot, dropped by in the gravesite and begged of "Padre's" intercession for her sister's recovery. A lump almost the size of the fist came out from her genitalia's opening. It happened even before her sister reached the hospital. Her sister became well again after that incident and decided to return to Liloy.

Felicia Guadalupe, 63 years old, said that in her 16 years of residency in Jose Dalman, she already heard many miraculous encounters of the Jesuit Priest. The latter died just a meter away from her house was located. At first, she did not believe such rumors until one day; she experienced a severe pain in her body that made her prayed over Father Palliola's grave. Felicia testified that she experienced the unexplainable feeling, during the time she solemnly prayed to him, she was astonished that she feels better the following day without any medical treatment. Felicia said that he will intercede healing your pain if you only have a strong faith in him.

Marina Asentista, 40 years old, cleans the late Padre graveyard every day since the year 2000. Like Mrs. Luage, it is her way of thanking Fr. Palliola for all the blessings and protection that her family received from the intercession of the late Padre. She never missed a day without visiting and cleaning his gravesite; if ever she has a top-priority that she urgently needed for that day, she secured time to visit his graveyard. There was an instance when she suddenly became unconscious for a reason they didn't know but recuperated afterward after her family prayed to the late "Padre."

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Msgr. Emigdio T. Socias is 73 years old. He is the Vicar General of the Diocese of Dipolog City. In 2003, a cyst almost the size of a corn grit started growing in his tongue. The doctor, who was his best friend, wanted to have it excised although it was not advisable because experience-wise, he knew it could lead to more problems (e.g., swollen tongue and inability to take in food by mouth). His sacristan Eddie who had arthritis, had been healed of it and even had stopped limping. Eddie told him that he went to Ponot, the gravesite of the beheaded priest named Fr. Palliola. He added that he prayed, and he got cured of his arthritis. Msgr. Socias was experiencing pain at that time. It so happened that the scheduled recollection for lay ministers was conducted in the gravesite as proposed by Mr. Calud Ortega. Msgr. Socias gave a talk and celebrated a mass. After the mass, he knelt near the gravesite and prayed for a cure. He asked the Lord to provide him with a sign of treatment. Close to the grave, that time was a guava tree trunk that was all dried, but he noticed a fresh shoot coming out. He took it as a sign, plunked the shoot, and chewed it while praying for healing. The next morning, he looked at the mirror in the sacristy and noticed that the cyst was gone! No scar neither trace of it, whatsoever. He went back to the grave, feeling grateful that he could already sleep well without worrying about the cyst. He made a promise to come on his birthday every May 10 (Based on Fr. Bernard's biography) to pray the rosary. Since then, he always made it a point to come with a friend, Cesar Barrica. Once, he talked before the CCD members and told them about the story of his healing. Then, people kept coming despite issues ongoing negotiations as regards the turnover of the site to the Diocese of Dipolog.

He learned from the Subanens that their ancestors were aware of Fr. Palliola, whom they referred to as ‘pari’. The devotion has not waned since then. Cesar Barrica is 66 years old. He is based in Manila but has a farm in Ponot. His devotion to Fr. Palliola began after Fr. Bernard's article came out. He met Msgr. Socias in 2009. Since then, they would go to Fr. Palliola's grave together to pray. When he read about Fr. Palliola, he imagined and realized how difficult life must have been for him. He came from Italy to a strange place for the conversion of pagans. Fr. Palliola made his faith stronger. Since then, he had been bringing friends to come and light candles.

Rosalinda Salaveria- Caracha, 61 years old and a resident of Turno, Dipolog City. Rosalinda was first diagnosed to have ovarian cancer in 2010. It was stage 1B then. She underwent surgery of the ovary and uterus and had chemotherapy. Two years after, it progressed to stage 2. On August 27, 2013, she was confined at the ZaNorte Hospital because cancer had progressed to stage 4. It has metastasized to her kidney and liver. The doctor refused to admit her instead advised her to stay at home because it was only a waste of resources. She heard about Fr. Palliola from Msgr. Socias and started a devotion to Fr. Palliola in the Cathedral because she was too weak to go to the gravesite. In December of 2013, she planned for a visit to the grave and was able to stand up. She took that experience as a miracle. The same thing happened this January 29, 2014. Another miracle enabled her to come for the second time to light candles and offer flowers to Fr. Palliola's grave. She never thought to still survive up to this time with stage 4 ovarian cancer.

Mysterious Phenomenon. From the testimonies, devotees disclosed that a Padre Doctor, dressed either in black or white soutane, talked and instructed the Subanon to visit his grave or pray for treatment of their ailments and infirmities.

Interestingly, since Jason was able to walk, the family had witnessed a ball of light so cool to the eyes as described by Mrs. Luage. It passed through under the coconut trees and moved towards the gravesite direction where it alighted atop Fr. Palliola's grave. They believed it could be Fr. Palliola. Similar circumstances were experienced by them three times in different instances. The family only experienced this phenomenon, and no one among their neighbors had witnessed every time it appeared.

Other supplications. Some devotees invoke the Padre's intercession for safety from storm, bad weather, and other calamities, or even when they travel at night or sea. They claimed that Padre is quick to intercede for them. Some fisher folks still carry on the tradition of stopping by his grave to pray for a good catch.

Mrs. Luage added, she believed that Father Palliola helped their family in many ways, such as more catch so that they can sell some fish to buy candles as they are used to light the grave six candles every day. The school fees of her grade IV daughter, which was marked paid, but the teacher cannot identify who settled it. She even mentioned a devotee from Lanao del Norte who came all to Ponot for a petition to pass the board examination and returned for thanksgiving after her successful board examination for Nurses before she went to the United States of America.

Many believed that Fr. Palliola is always there to help them when asked for fervent intercession. It is a simple faith yet an intense devotion; those who have medical problems come to him for healing. He has helped a lot of people in need. In a way, such encounters have sustained the devotion as the devotees went into a cycle of supplication- thanksgiving- supplication. Devotees who experienced these encounters with Fr. Palliola shared their stories with others, mainly through oral accounts. Similarly, written statements (i.e., Fr. Bernads article) contributed to the popularity of the devotion.

The devotees found him a True Father, who although had passed away long ago yet still alive in their memories and very active in interceding for them. People believed that he continues to care for his adopted homeland to this day, interceding for people in need. The memory of this priest has been kept alive by the Lumad community of the Subanun. They are the ethnolinguistic group or cultural community that calls Zamboanga Del Norte home, their ancestral land.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

From the findings, therefore, various devotions to Fr. Francisco Palliola and popular piety exercises are strongly evident in Zamboanga del Norte, especially in Katipunan, Ponot, and Dipolog City that defines Fr. Francisco Palliola's fame of sanctity. The devotees' religious fervor in Zamboanga del Norte has substantial similarity with that fame of the sanctity of Fr. Francisco Palliola, S.J., in Nola, Italy. The devotional patterns found are similar to those done in honor of personalities who have been officially proclaimed by the Catholic Church as saints. Stories of miracles and mysterious phenomena abound, which piqued the curiosity and increased the number of devotees. Only, here in Zamboanga del Norte, there is no image to kiss, but there is a grave to clean and visit and offer flowers for, and there is, at least, the memory of a man who continues to intercede on their behalf beyond the grave. Filipinos are culturally respectful of their dead. It is the same respect that the Italian priest" who traveled far and sacrificed his life for the Christian faith." had received.

Despite the popular elements of the devotion, the interviewees displayed a certain degree of maturity of faith every time they said they always invoked God's power, Mama Mary, and other saints.

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The following recommendations are offered: (1) Devotees' testimonies in the language they used to be compiled into a narrative to keep the authenticity of the information; (2) Further documentation to elaborate on other practices relative to the Fame of Sanctity of Fr. Francesco Palliola be conducted.

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