



Modern-Day Flagellants from the Philippines

By [Sergiom](#) | Posted March 28, 2013 | Muntinlupa City, Philippines

CNN PRODUCER NOTE Every Easter in Victoria Town in the Tarlac province of the Philippines, Christian penitents take part in a self-flagellation ritual, where participants flog themselves with whips or chains to honor the suffering of Jesus. In other parts of the Philippines, men are even mock-crucified, with real nails driven into their hands and feet, although the Filipino Catholic Church strongly disapproves of this. iReporter [Sergiom](#) was there to capture the often gruesome event, watching the men on procession through the town whipping themselves fervidly until blood poured from their backs. "Because flagellation is becoming less popular in the country, people nowadays are curious and sometimes shocked as to why some men do such form of penitence," he said. Locals, however, are used to the sight and offer participants water and first aid. He said he hopes that in the future that the ritual becomes less bloody.

- [sarahbrowngb](#), CNN iReport producer

Flagellation (from Latin "flagellare", to whip) was really a common religious practice among followers of ancient religions. The practice was later adopted by Roman Catholics during the 13th century in Europe. Flagellation became a form of penance in the Roman Catholic Church, especially in ascetic monastic orders. Dominic Loricatus, an 11th century religious zealot once repeated the entire Psalter twenty times in one week, accompanying each psalm with a hundred lash-strokes to his back. Later on the Flagellants would take this self-mortification into urban areas and other public spaces as a demonstration of their piety and devotion to Christ. Aside from actual flagellation, the rituals were built around hymns, processions, distinct gestures, uniforms, veiled or covered faces, and discipline.

Flagellation was brought to the Philippines by Spanish monks during the Spanish colonial period. The practice is now being called as "penitensiya" (pronounced as peh-nee-ten-tia) in the Philippines. Certain religious brotherhoods from many parts of the country would organize 'flagellation activities' during the Holy Week for the specific purpose of scourging the flesh 'in payment for all the sins of the Christian people'. The men who would usually participate in the annual performances of "penitence" initially would meet together either in private homes or in parish churches and local monasteries, to contemplate Christ's suffering and share in evening meals. They would then extend to one another signs of affection and goodwill and will later on offer apologies for past sins. The flagellants would usually cover their faces in order to make a point that they're doing it for God and not for glory. Penitents silently journeyed out on to dirt and cobblestone streets, walking barefoot through narrow corridors of urban and rural thoroughfares for distances of some two to five leagues. Along the way they scourged themselves with knotted and wax-tipped ropes across their backs until blood drenched their linen tunics and spilled over on to darkened pavements.

Filipino flagellants today usually make sure that participants don't have any life-threatening disease and are all physically-fit to endure certain pains. Due to the physical strength and endurance required to perform in front of the public with unwavering resolve that corporate legislation required that flagellation only be performed by men under the age of fifty in good health. Fortunately, modern-day flagellants in the Philippines now have first-aid kits and are even monitored by government agencies to make sure that medical help will be given to flagellants who might become sick or who may faint along the way.

The images in this report were taken from Victoria Town, Tarlac Province, Philippines. The penitents started their procession at around 3 in the afternoon, Manila Time, this Maundy Thursday. The "penitents" covered their faces to make sure that no one from the viewing public knows who they are. Some of the penitents carried big wooden crosses and walked for more than one hour. There were medical volunteers behind them to ensure that none of the 'flagellants' would become ill or get exhausted. The flagellants who carried wooden crosses were later tied up on the cross and were left there for one hour. None of the flagellants were crucified because actual crucifixion is now hugely condemned by Roman Catholic bishops from all over the Philippines. Flagellation remains as a practice during Holy Week in most predominantly Roman Catholic countries. Modern-day flagellants in the Philippines are now more cautious about their own health and safety. In fact, most flagellants in the country would now stay away from actual crucifixion since such may bring tetanus to the one who is being nailed upon the cross.

Modern-day flagellants do the practice to commemorate Christ's ultimate sacrifice to save humankind from sins and damnation. But aside from the commemorative function, a personal meaning was expressed in these ceremonial acts. Since sufferings and afflictions

were experienced by all of those who imitated Christ's march to Calvary, modern-day flagellants would argue that 'self-flagellation' has the ability and power to cleanse, to heal, and to restore moral order. Besides, modern-day Filipino flagellants see flagellation as a religious devotion that can replenish one's spiritual wisdom and heal a person's physical illness. The said custom is one of the main traditions in the observance of Holy Week in the Philippines.

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