

Pasion

TAGALOG, NOW ALSO PRACTICED IN MANY PARTS OF THE COUNTRY.

Among the most popular forms of literature, music and drama during the Spanish times were the various renditions and versions of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, or the Pasyon ni Kristo.



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(top) A naive folk participation in Eleventh Station of the Fourteen Stations of the Cross depicting the nailing of Christ on the Cross during a Lenten celebration.

(center) Ritual emulation in a performance of the carrying of the cross during a Lenten celebration. The actor is actually a penitent doing the imitation of Christ in fulfillment of a vow, although not necessarily because of penitence.

(bottom) The Lenten "Pieta" re-enactment when the body of Christ is brought down from the cross to the arms of his mother.

(opposite page) A local re-enactment of the betrayal of Christ by Judas the Escariot in the Garden of Gethsemane.

A LAYMAN'S VERSION of the story of the life of Christ done in poetic Tagalog language was first published in 1704. It was written by Gaspar Aquino de Belen, a Spaniard born in the Philippines who worked in a printing press run by the Jesuits in Manila. He patterned the Tagalog version from a 17th century Spanish *pasion*, but he was so steeped in indigenous customs that his *pasion* became an instant hit. By 1760, his version was on its fifth edition.

In the early 19th century, authorless versions of the *pasion* proliferated. Some of these, however, were marked by factual lapses and what the friars declared as errors in doctrine. It was also lamented that the *pasion* was used out of social context in local festivals and gatherings, even in weddings and wakes. This indicated how entrenched the *pasion* had become in the local culture, not only in the Tagalog region, but also in other provinces. To correct these lapses, a Filipino priest, Fr. Mariano Pilapil, made reference to these errors and wrote what was later known as the *Pasyon Pilapil* or *Pasyon Henesis*, which became the most popular version.

All the *pasion* plays were usually performed in the local churchyard, with the Spanish friars' approval. The production was often financially supported by the local elite. There are collateral segments in the *pasion*, the main feature of which is the passion and death of Jesus Christ that constitute the *aral* (lesson) which preaches the duties of Christians; the subservience to the will of God in anticipation of heavenly rewards. But the lesson portions have actually little connection to the flow of the story of Christ. They are commentaries introduced by the religious functionaries and censors to push evangelization.

Today, Lenten season in the Philippines still resound with the chanting of the *pasion*, now blared from loudspeakers throughout entire neighborhoods from the early evening through the night until dawn.