Performing the *Panata*: The Calvariohan Lenten Tableau as a Dynamic Expression of Practice, Faith, and Ethno-Religious Identity in Catanduanes, Philippines

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.101000807

Received: 30 October 2026; Accepted: 04 November 2026; Published: 18 November 2026

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study documents and analyzes the Calvariohan, or Human Tableau, a prominent and competitive Lenten religious drama staged in Catanduanes, Philippines, with the aim of establishing its significance as a cultural and literary heritage. Employing a qualitative methodology guided by Practice Theory, the research utilized documentation, transcription, observation, and interviews to systematically analyze the tradition's material culture, beliefs, and customs. The Calvariohan is staged annually during Holy Week and involves near-island-wide community participation, with villages collaborating and competing to create static "frozen scenes" depicting key moments of the Passion of Christ (*Pasyon*).

Findings reveal that the Calvariohan is a powerful synthesis of the sacred and the local. Its material culture demonstrates resourcefulness by ingeniously combining indigenous materials (e.g., *anahaw* for the cross, *kawayan* for stages) with modern elements (e.g., speakers, Christmas lights) to enhance the dramatic effect. The practice is sustained by a robust framework of communal values, including cooperation (*pagtutulungan*), sacrifice (*pagsasakripisyo*), and a spiritual vow (*panata*), cementing its role as a catalyst for social cohesion. Liturgically, the tableau functions as a street-level re-enactment, with the priest sprinkling holy water as the procession pauses before the scenes.

Dramatically, the Calvariohan is classified under the Tragedy archetype, which strategically emphasizes suffering and sacrifice to inspire contemplation and faith. The performance utilizes public settings (e.g., *Gilid ng Kalye*) to integrate the biblical narrative into the community's environment, while characters, led by rotating local Cabo/Caba leaders, embody themes of faith, betrayal, and resilience. Ultimately, the Calvariohan is more than a performance; it is a dynamic expression of Catanduanes' ethno-religious identity, serving as a critical bridge that connects the community to its history, faith, and moral values.

Keywords: Drama, Religious Plays, Material Culture, Customs and Traditions, Literature

Background of the Study

One of the most famous and prominent religious dramas during Lent in Catanduanes is the *Calvariohan*, more popularly known as the Human Tableau. Almost every town and village (*barangay*) across the island province conducts this performance. The Human Tableau, which is staged every Holy Wednesday and Good Friday in Catanduanes, is a significant element of these religious plays. This initiative not only features scenes from the Passion of Christ (*Pasyon*) but also highlights the collective participation of community members, with the church, the townspeople, and the Municipal Tourism Office collaborating in the planning and execution.

The Human Tableau is an art form composed of standing figures representing various scenes from the Bible. In this event, it often features key moments from the *Pasyon*, including the Last Supper, Jesus' Prayer in the

Garden of Gethsemane, the Arrest of Jesus, and the Crucifixion. Good Friday is extremely important in the Christian faith, and this tradition emphasizes the commemoration of Jesus' sacrifices.

In every village and town, the church assigns groups to form the Human Tableau, where they serve as instruments in expressing religious messages and stories. The participation of local people in building the stages strengthens their collective action and brings about a spirit of unity and cooperation within their communities.

The stages are placed in strategic locations within the village to maintain the attention of the people. The selection of scenes from the *Pasyon* underscores the importance of these events and encourages contemplation and reflection among the viewers. For example, the Last Supper serves as a symbol of the last time Jesus gathered with his disciples, filled with emotion and symbolism. As the procession passes, the characters in the Human Tableau seriously perform their respective roles. The procession participants pause briefly in front of the performances to offer prayers to the Lord. The priest, meanwhile, sprinkles holy water (*agua bendita*) on the area where the staging is taking place.

The Human Tableau is not just a visual performance but a crucial part of the Holy Week celebration. It provides an opportunity for people to reflect once more on Jesus' sacrifices and the importance of faith in their lives. This tradition stems from religious history and helps people maintain their connection to their faith and local culture. Therefore, the Human Tableau is a significant contributor to the transmission of Christian culture and faith in Catanduanes. While the scenes presented may reflect past historical events, their continuous performance serves as a bridge to the present and future pride in their religious traditions.

In many villages and towns in Catanduanes, the tableau has become a highlight because it is conducted as a competition. Aside from being a tourist attraction, the presence of prizes or rewards for the winning groups is a major motivation for the citizens. Thus, the people prepare for it thoroughly. Even before Holy Week, they look for people skilled in acting and playing the various characters such as the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, Mary Magdalene, John the Baptist, the Jews, Dismas and Gestas, Herod, and many others. Even the costumes and the staging areas are arranged, planned, and executed early.

According to Raymond Molod, the Tourism Officer in the town of Caramoran:

"*Ang tableau making contest dae man siyang igasabi na mga words they just acting, gaposisyon lang sila ning freeez pero yapahiling nila su nangyayari during the pasyon of the death of christ. So ang mga barangay apat na barangay ang galaban laban jan, uya sa población, Toytoy, Baybay, Bothoan at Icanbato pero ining mga barangay igatuwangan ning mga kataning na barangay. So ang nangyayari bako man sya programa ning tourism ahm it is an old tradisyon siya na nag evolved lang sa halawig na panahon*." (The tableau-making contest, others say, the characters are only positioned and do not move. But it should clearly show the important events in the Passion, especially the scenes before the death of Jesus Christ. Here in our town of Caramoran, four villages compete in the Poblacion. These include Toytoy, Baybay, Bothoan, and Icanbato. Neighboring villages also help in the preparations. Therefore, what happens is, it is not just a Tourism program but an old tradition of the town that has been handed down over a long period).

Tourism Officer Raymond Molod's statement shows the significance of the Human Tableau as a traditional art form in the town of Caramoran, while highlighting the rituals and events during the Passion. He expresses the cooperation of the villages in creating the performances, which is focused not only on tourism but also as a part of their culture and history. According to Molod, the Human Tableau is not simply a display of characters who are merely positioned. The goal is to show and express the events that happened in the Passion of Christ's death. Despite the people standing and seeming "frozen," they must still show the emotion and context of the events, which are vital to their tradition.

Molod stated that four villages—Toytoy, Baybay, Bothoan, and Icanbato—compete in this contest in the Poblacion. These villages work together and coordinate to further enhance the preparations. In this way, it is not just a competition but also an opportunity for the villages to foster camaraderie and cooperation. Molod's statement that the creation of the tableau is an ancient tradition that has evolved over time and not just a

tourism program is important. Such activities enrich the culture of Caramoran and serve as a remembrance of past generations. Preserving this tradition shows respect for their deep-rooted beliefs and history. Because of this, the Human Tableau is more than just an art or a show; it is a bridge that connects people to their culture, history, and spiritual perspective. This activity emphasizes the importance of the past, while showcasing the present and sharing the stories for the future.

Meanwhile, the Human Tableau is also vibrant in other towns in Catanduanes. In the towns of San Andres and San Miguel, in addition to the use of colorful lights, costumes, music, and sound, there are also actions, movements, and dialogues. While the performers are still in their positions, for example, in the scene where Christ's body has been removed from the cross, the sobs and weeping of the surrounding characters, especially his mother, the Virgin Mary, can be heard. In the scene of Christ's crucifixion, the chilling wail of his mother, the Virgin Mary, can be heard, along with the shouting of lines: "Jesus! My Son! My Son! Jesus!"

The Human Tableau is a form of performance that uses actors to create static scenes or "frozen pictures" representing stories from the Bible, particularly the events from the Passion. In this manner, the participants act as characters in the story while standing in a specific position, becoming a symbol of the important moments in the life and sacrifice of Jesus.

The Human Tableau is specifically considered a religious drama because it emphasizes the key events in the Passion—such as the Last Supper and the Crucifixion. Through the use of actors positioned on different stages, the spiritual and emotional significance of these scenes is shown. The content of the tableau forms a visual analysis of these stories in a way that relates to the Christian faith.

A crucial aspect of the Human Tableau is the active participation of the community in its creation. The villages come together to discuss and execute the characters and stories they will present, fostering a spirit of unity and cooperation. This kind of collaboration strengthens the community spirit and serves as a reconnection to their local traditions and faith.

The Human Tableau provides a unique platform where art and religion converge. Elements of visual art are essential in the tableaux, where actors use props and focus on their poses to express the feelings and stories from the Bible. The non-verbal nature of the performance delivers a powerful message to the viewers, allowing them to contemplate the messages of faith.

As part of the religious dramas, the Human Tableau has a deep meaning in the culture of the people in Catanduanes and other areas. The involvement of local people and the propagation of traditional stories provide an opportunity for future generations to revisit and enrich their history and faith. Such re-enactments do not only serve as a page of history but also as an instrument for building community identity.

Statement of the Problem

The primary aim of the study is clearly established as the cultural documentation and analysis of the Calvariohan, a religious drama performed during Lent in Catanduanes. This overarching goal is achieved by focusing on the three main classifications of culture derived from Practice Theory: material culture, beliefs, and customs.

A second major objective revolves around the ethno-religious and moral dimensions of the tradition. This involves to document and categorize the beliefs and values associated with the conduct of the Calvariohan, specifically separating them into *Beliefs Based on Fact* (e.g., belief in *suwerte* or luck, and divine favor) and *Beliefs Based on Value* (e.g., cooperation, sacrifice, and obedience) (Olfindo, 2023). Furthermore, an objective is to analyze the communal customs and practices involved in staging the tableau, detailing the entire process from pre-performance planning (e.g., the *Pagpupulong* and appointing of *Cabo/Caba*), to the technical execution of the ritual, and the post-performance competition (e.g., the Judging of the Best Scene), thereby highlighting the tradition's role in social cohesion.

Finally, the study establishes a distinct objective related to the literary and dramatic structure of the Calvariohan. This includes to analyze the literary elements of the Human Tableau, specifically by identifying

and discussing the roles and functions of the key characters (e.g., Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary, Saint Simon of Cyrene), describing the strategic setting (*Kalbaryo*, *Kabayanan*) that integrates the drama into the community's physical space, and classifying the performance's underlying plot structure as the Tragedy archetype, explaining how this framework reinforces the messages of sacrifice and faith. Essentially, the research aims to provide a comprehensive cultural and literary profile of the Calvariohan tradition.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Literature and culture share a profound and interconnected relationship in shaping the identity and consciousness of Filipinos. According to Santos (as cited in Semorlan, 2014), literature reflects the environment and social events occurring within a specific context. Arrognate et al. (2010) and Waddington (2002) further emphasize that every nation and region possesses a distinct culture and identity expressed through its native language and literature. In general, literature is recognized as a mirror of human life, history, and experience (Webster, as cited in Villafuerte, 2000; Reyes, as cited in Semorlan, 2014). As Esch (2002) notes, creative literary expression enriches knowledge and deepens our understanding of art and human experience, integrating aspects of philosophy, history, and sociology. Serving as a powerful vehicle for teaching values, literature embodies the indigenous thoughts and aspirations of various ethnic groups in the country (Lockyer, 2002).

In the context of education and history, the 1987 Philippine Constitution (Article IV, Section 3, and Article XIV, Section 18) mandates the cultivation of ethical and spiritual values, as well as the promotion of historical and cultural heritage and research in arts and culture. Studies by Tallada (2009) and Remolacio (2008) have proven that regional literature and folklore serve as effective bases and instructional materials for explaining Filipino identity and imparting moral lessons. Furthermore, local studies have explored cultural beliefs, behaviors, and traditions within the Bicol Region, such as the legends of Sorsogon (Gilbas, 2003) and the *dalits* in the Aurorahan of Camarines Norte, which reflect the ethnicity and religious devotion of local communities (Basco, 2014).

The history of colonialism has also significantly influenced the rise of religious traditions in the country. According to Retana (1907) and Guillen (1991), the arrival of the Spaniards brought Christianity, the Bible, and European theatrical traditions, which paved the way for the development of stage arts and dramatic performances in the Philippines. Among these notable traditions are the *Moriones* in Marinduque, which serves as a center of faith and tradition (Quirino, 1965); the *Senakulo*, which depicts the life, passion, and death of Jesus Christ (Mirano, 1986); and the *Pasyon*, which bridges religion and the daily lives of Filipinos (Demetrio, 1991). These religious dramas serve as living re-enactments of biblical teachings designed to deepen faith and devotion to Jesus Christ (Arcellana, 1974).

Accompanying these performances are rituals of vow (*panata*) and penance, which, according to Calderón (1989), vividly manifest the spiritual faith and behavioral culture of Filipinos since the Spanish colonial period. These traditions, including contemporary manifestations such as the *Calvariohan* or Human Tableau in Catanduanes, continue to connect the past, present, and future of the community through collective expressions of faith, sacrifice, and cultural heritage.

Framework

The foundational theory of this research is the theory of cultural relativism, which states that an individual will better understand the product of the experiences of the people in past periods. According to this theory, other ethnolinguistic groups can better understand their fellow Filipinos in order to gain awareness and knowledge of the philosophies, aspirations, values, aspects of thought, puzzles, superstitions, folktales, folk wisdom, indigenous dramas, and rituals.

According to Kenneth Goldstein, "every society creates its own culture and literature." Maraba (1971) further added that if literature is translated across every period, the culture embedded within it is also translated. If everyone has sufficient knowledge of their literature, then they also possess knowledge of these cultures. Therefore, cultural identification will not be a problem because if everyone knows the culture embedded in the

literature, and if everyone has sufficient knowledge of different cultures, we can more easily understand and appreciate our literature.

Consequently, people can create a more developed literature if it is based on their experiences of how they live and interact within society. When the experiences of people in a society are written down and the cultures contained within them serve as a model for shaping one's personality, this is a reflection of their customs, experiences, emotions, and thoughts, whether factual or fictional. The way of life of the people is influenced by the culture embedded in the literature and is based on what is available in their locality.

In the case of religious dramas, based on the theoretical foundations above, they were formed as a result of the experiences of the Catandunganon people and how these dramas help them in the social and spiritual aspects. As the main subject of this research, the data was collected through documentation, observation, and interviews. The gathered dramas were analyzed based on two interconnected concepts: the cultural aspect and the literary aspect. Both of these are products of human experience in daily life and interaction within the community, based on the principle of cultural relativism.

The analysis of the cultural aspects was based on the Practice Theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1990). The main principle of this theory is *practice* or repetitive action that leads to the formation of people's cultural habits. The resulting cultural activities can be categorized into material culture, which consists of equipment, tools, relics, and other tangible objects used in carrying out the cultural activity; customs, which are traditions consistently regarded by the people and thus always performed; and belief, which is rooted in their minds as to whether a cultural activity is beneficial or harmful.

The structuralism theory of Saussure (1966) served as the basis for analyzing the literary aspects. It is essential to analyze the relationship between the elements in the religious dramas performed during Lent (*Cuaresma*) in Catanduanes. The characters, as the main element, not only emphasize their individual traits but also their relationships with one another and how they contribute to the overall theme highlighted by the drama. For example, the characters participating in these dramas may represent symbolic aspects of faith, repentance, and recognition of mistakes, expressing a deeper message of sacrifice and acceptance of forgiveness. From this perspective, each character is dependent not only on their personal stories but also on their role in the larger narrative of religion and culture.

The setting, which is based on the local traditions and environment of Catanduanes, provides the context for the rituals and religious dramas being performed. In the analysis, the setting is not merely a simple location but an important part of the structure that highlights the church and the culture of the majority, where important rituals take place during Lent.

The plot, or the sequence of events, emphasizes the understanding of the characters' reactions to their surroundings and what events prompt them to act in specific ways. These components serve as a guide to showcase the essence of the Lenten season, where these dramas are performed not just as entertainment but as a way to re-enact and express the faith and tradition of the people in Catanduanes.

The analysis of the two aspects of the religious drama served as the researcher's basis for developing a proposed instructional material for the Filipino specialization with a descriptive course on Philippine Drama (*Dulaang Pilipino*). The development of the instructional material was based on the statement of Espinas (1978): Education is meaningless if culture is not included and taught. Through education, culture is rediscovered, preserved, developed, and expressed. Thus, many scholars have conducted studies regarding their respective cultural activities in the place where they grew up.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in the study of the Calvariohan is fundamentally qualitative and ethnographic, designed to provide a deep, contextual understanding of this religious tradition as both a cultural and literary phenomenon. Guided by Pierre Bourdieu’s Practice Theory, the research systematically categorized the acquired data into three key areas: material culture, beliefs, and customs.

Fieldwork Sites, Dates, and Observed Events

The fieldwork was conducted across key municipalities in Catanduanes known for active Lenten tableaux, primarily focusing on the towns of Caramoran (specifically within the Poblacion areas involving the villages of Toytoy, Baybay, Bothoan, and Icanbato), San Andres, and San Miguel. Observations and data collection took place during the Lenten season, specifically from Holy Wednesday through Good Friday. Key events observed included pre-performance planning meetings (*Pagpupulong*), the construction of staging areas (*Kalbaryo*), costume preparations, street processions, actual static and performance-based enactments (*Actual Re-enactment of Designated Scenes*), the priest's blessing (*Pagbendisyon ng Pari*), and post-performance evaluation and judging (*Paghuhusga ng mga Hurado*).

Informants and Roles

The study engaged a comprehensive group of key informants selected through purposive and snowball sampling. The informants comprised:

Local Leaders and Organizers. Municipal Tourism Officers (such as Raymond Molod in Caramoran), barangay captains, and youth leaders.

Cabo / Caba. Annual rotating leaders responsible for directing individual barangay tableaux and managing logistics.

Performers / Participants Local residents embodying biblical characters such as Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Roman soldiers (*Hudyo*).

Community Elders and Devotees. Long-time residents who provided historical context regarding the evolution of the tradition.

Language, Consent, and Ethical Clearance

Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted primarily in the local language (Catanduanes Bikol and Tagalog) to ensure comfort and expressive accuracy among informants. Prior to fieldwork, free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) was secured from all interview participants and key informants. Ethical clearance protocols regarding community engagement, privacy, and the respectful representation of religious practices were strictly observed.

Transcription, Translation, and Analysis

All ethnographic interviews and audio-visual documentations were transcribed verbatim. The transcribed texts and qualitative field notes underwent rigorous thematic and structural analysis. Bikol-language excerpts and local terminologies were translated into English and later verified by a native Bikol speaker to guarantee linguistic and contextual precision. Data were coded and categorized according to Practice Theory (material culture, customs, beliefs) and structuralist literary elements (characters, settings, and the tragedy plot archetype). Triangulation was heavily relied upon to capture both visible practices and underlying motivations, distinguishing between Beliefs Based on Fact (e.g., *suwerte* or luck) and Beliefs Based on Value (e.g., *pagtutulungan* and *pagsasakripisyo*).

Researcher Positionality

The principal researcher is an academic and cultural worker employed as an Associate Professor V at Catanduanes State University and serving as the Director of the *Sentro ng Wika at Kultura*. Being a native and locally based researcher within the province of Catanduanes provided a deep, insider perspective (*emic view*) and established trust with local communities, municipal offices, and parish leaders. While this familiarity facilitated smoother access to informants and authentic participation in local Lenten rites, methodological reflexivity was continuously maintained to ensure objective ethnographic documentation, preventing personal familiarity from overriding empirical rigor during data analysis and interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Calvariohan's Cultural Contexts

Every country has its own culture. This serves as the foundation of any race because their beliefs, values, customs, traditions, livelihoods, and other daily activities are based on their respective cultures. Every culture has a unique nature and distinct characteristics that set it apart from others. However, Practice Theory, one of the theoretical foundations of this study, explains that culture can be classified into three categories: material culture, non-material culture (which are usually customs), and beliefs, which stand between the former two types. This aligns with Sarmiento's (2019) discussion regarding the types of culture typically included in qualitative research, such as ethnography and phenomenology. Thus, this research, titled **Performing the *Panata*: The Calvariohan Lenten Tableau as a Dynamic Expression of Practice, Faith, and Ethno-Religious Identity in Catanduanes, Philippines**, presents the analyzed cultural aspects of this documented religious drama. After the documentation, transcription, and analysis of the religious dramas during Lent in Catanduanes were completed, the researcher analyzed the various material cultures, beliefs, and customs of the citizens in the performance of each drama.

Material Culture Used in *Calvariohan*

The Calvariohan or Human Tableau is a visually rich religious drama in Catanduanes, whose material culture is a blend of natural, locally sourced items and modern theatrical elements, all imbued with deep symbolic meaning. The performance heavily relies on natural materials found in the local environment, such as anahaw (fan palm), bao (coconut shell), and bunot (coconut husk), which are ingeniously repurposed. The anahaw, for instance, is used to represent the cross, making it a local symbol of Christ's sacrifice. Other organic materials like kawayan (bamboo), dayami (straw), kabibe (shells), and various plants and flowers are utilized for stage decoration, grounding the biblical narrative within the regional landscape and highlighting the community's connection to its natural surroundings.

Table of Materials Used in the Calvariohan

Category	Specific Materials	Cultural & Dramatic Function / Symbolism
Indigenous & Organic Materials	*Anahaw* (fan palm), *Kawayan* (bamboo), *Dayami* (straw), *Bao* (coconut shell), *Bunot* (coconut husk), shells, and local foliage	Used for stage (*Kalbaryo*) construction and cross making. Represents local resourcefulness and grounds the biblical narrative in the Catanduanes environment.
Costumes & Props	Ancient costumes (*Sinaunang Kasuotan*), *Tarapal* (tarpaulin armor), *Baluti* (armor), *Espada* (swords), *Sibat* (spears), Cross (*Krus*)	Distinguishes character roles (Jesus, Mary, Roman soldiers/*Hudyo*) and heightens dramatic realism during the arrest and trial scenes.
Theatrical & Special Effects	*Uling* (charcoal), *Apoy* (fire), *Pausok* (smoke effects), *Kolorete* (theatrical make-up/artificial blood)	Emphasizes physical suffering, bloody wounds, and intense emotional scenes, such as the Crucifixion.
Modern Technology & Lighting	Christmas lights, *Ilawan* (lamps), Audio speakers, Amplifiers	Provides bright, symbolic illumination ("light of faith") and broadcasts hymns, recorded weeping, sound effects, or spoken dialogue.

Beyond the locally sourced natural elements, the tableau incorporates costumes and props crucial for character representation. Essential religious artifacts such as the Krus (Cross) and the Sibat (Spear) are used to depict the Passion scenes accurately. The actors wear ancient costumes (*sinaunang kasuotan*), with specific attire for key figures like Kristo and Birhen Maria. Unique and striking elements like the Kauotan ng mga Hudyo (Costumes of the Jews), which are made from materials like *tarapal* (tarpaulin), *bao*, and *sibat*, add to the dramatic

distinction of the characters. Furthermore, baluti (armor), espada (sword), and elements like uling (charcoal), apoy (fire), and pausok (smoke effects) are employed to heighten the theatrical realism and emotional intensity of the scenes. To create a more convincing illusion of Christ's suffering, kolorete (make-up) is used to simulate wounds and blood.

The use of modern technology demonstrates the tableau's evolution and flexibility. Contemporary items like Christmas lights and ilawan (lamps) provide bright and decorative lighting, symbolizing the light of faith. Crucially, speakers are employed to play hymns and sometimes even dialogues or sound effects, providing an auditory backdrop that reinforces the modern understanding and practice of the religious activity.

Finally, materials such as pintura (paint) and additional make-up are used to polish the appearance of the stage and the participants, making their representation of the saints and biblical figures more compelling and visually attractive to the audience. In sum, the material culture of the Calvariohan successfully synthesizes indigenous resources, traditional craft, and modern technology to create a powerful, localized expression of Christian faith and community identity.

Beliefs and Values in the Calvariohan (Human Tableau)

The conduct of the Human Tableau (or Calvariohan) in Catanduanes is underpinned by a rich framework of religious and cultural beliefs that drive participation and ritual behavior. These beliefs are divided into two main categories: Beliefs Based on Fact (*paniniwalang batay sa katotohanan*) and Beliefs Based on Value (*paniniwalang batay sa pagpapahalaga*), providing both spiritual motivation and moral guidance. At the most personal level, participants are motivated by spiritual aspirations that blend the sacred with the practical.

This includes a fervent belief in luck (*suwerte*) and divine favor; actors feel that by embodying holy characters, they internalize sanctity, thus attracting fortune and warding off misfortune in their daily lives. Furthermore, the act of participating is a direct manifestation of thanksgiving and gratitude to God for past blessings, an expression of the *Pagtanaw ng Utang na Loob* (indebtedness) taught to the younger generation through the ritual's visual reminders.

The core religious purpose of the Human Tableau centers on commemoration and spiritual commitment. The performance functions as a solemn, collective act of remembering God's suffering (*Pag-alala sa pagpapasakit ng Diyos*), a necessary prelude to the joy of the Resurrection. This reflection is channeled through the belief in sacrifice and penance (*pagpapakasakit at penitensiya*).

Actors willingly perform a form of penance by enduring fatigue and physical discomfort as they remain perfectly static for extended periods, enduring the strain of their poses to visually depict the *Pasyon*. This rigorous endurance is viewed as a minor sacrifice compared to Christ’s Passion, but it is a powerful demonstration of their dedication and sincere faith. The entire ritual is fundamentally anchored by a strong belief in the power of prayer, which connects the community to the divine and provides hope amidst trials and hardships.

Beyond individual devotion, the execution of the Calvariohan is sustained by and reinforces vital communal and moral values. The large-scale undertaking requires immense cooperation (*pagtutulungan*) and *bayanihan*, with townspeople collaborating seamlessly to prepare costumes, construct the *kalbaryo* (staging areas), and manage the performance logistics.

This collaborative effort strengthens community bonds and reflects a collective commitment to the tradition. Additionally, the need for a dignified and accurate staging necessitates obedience (*pagiging masunurin*). Participants diligently follow the instructions of the ritual commanders regarding their fixed poses and expressions, ensuring the smooth flow and solemnity of the event and demonstrating respect for the religious narrative.

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume X Issue X October 2026



An actor who played the role of the Risen Christ in one of the Calvarios in San Andres, Catanduanes during the Good Friday of Lenten 2023.

In essence, the Calvariohan is more than just a historical reenactment; it is a dynamic expression of Catanduanes' ethno-religious identity. The performance acts as a powerful catalyst for moral reflection and social cohesion, utilizing the tragic narrative to encourage contemplation on sacrifice, while simultaneously promoting positive societal values like cooperation, endurance, and piety. The fusion of these beliefs and values ensures that the Human Tableau remains a deeply meaningful and enduring tradition, serving as a constant spiritual compass for the community during the sacred season of Lent.

Customs and Practices of *Calvariohan*

The Calvariohan (Human Tableau) in Catanduanes is a vibrant Lenten tradition involving a precise, staged series of customs aimed at re-enacting the sacrifices of Christ. The ritual begins with detailed planning and leadership appointment. Before any activity commences, a Meeting (*Pagpupulong*) is held by the youth and leaders of each village (*barangay*) to settle details, secure consensus, and designate the specific scenes to be staged. Following this, the community practices rotation by appointing new Cabo and/or Caba (male and female leaders) annually. These leaders are crucial, as they take charge of all preparations and the execution of their barangay's scenes, ensuring the right sequence of moments is assigned through the Designation of Scenes (*Pagtatalaga ng mga Tagpong Isasadula*) to effectively convey the message of suffering and redemption.

The second major phase involves extensive preparation of materials and staging structures, highlighting the resourcefulness of the local community. This involves the laborious Preparation of Materials by collecting wood and other items to ensure the stability of the stage. Crucially, each barangay undertakes the Construction of the *Kalbaryo* (Calvary stage), which serves as the elaborate setting for the tableau. These structures are beautified and reinforced, often utilizing indigenous and local materials—a practice celebrated locally, as noted by Adrian de Quiroz, as a demonstration of the community's creativity and ingenuity. Simultaneously, the Preparation of Costumes is handled, frequently through community donations, to ensure the attire accurately reflects the biblical characters.

The climax of the tradition occurs during the actual performance and ritual acknowledgment. When the procession passes, the characters in the Human Tableau engage in the Actual Re-enactment of the Designated Scene. The actors hold their poses according to the established script, fulfilling their mission to impart the deep message of faith. To affirm the solemnity and sincerity of their effort, a significant ritual takes place: the Priest's Blessing of Each Scene (*Pagbendisyon ng Pari*) before the actual dramatic display. As the performance concludes, the Lighting of Candles or any other Illumination serves as a final symbolic act, representing the light of faith and hope in the lives of the devotees, often offered as a collective prayer.

Finally, the entire tradition is formalized through competition and recognition. As the performances conclude, a panel engages in the Judging of the Best Scene (*Paghuhusga ng mga Hurado*), which elevates the event beyond a simple devotion to a major cultural and social contest. The winning barangays are recognized and

rewarded, further fueling community motivation and participation in the following year. This competitive structure, coupled with the deeply personal and communal efforts involved in the staging, underscores that the Calvariohan is not merely a public show but a cherished vow (*panata*)—a complex, multi-stage process of spiritual reflection that is deeply embedded in the cultural identity of the Catanduanes people.



Calvariohan performers of San Miguel, Catanduanes

While the Calvariohan is rooted in spiritual devotion (*panata*), its execution is deeply intertwined with socio-economic and institutional dynamics. The competitive nature of the tableau contest, backed by municipal tourism offices through cash prizes and logistical support, serves as both an incentive and a structural framework that elevates community engagement. Funding for each barangay's *Kalbaryo* is a collective effort—relying on local government subsidies, parish contributions, and voluntary donations from community members and overseas workers. This financial pooling reflects the enduring spirit of *bayanihan*, where economic resources are mobilized for spiritual fulfillment.

Furthermore, gender roles within the tradition demonstrate a balanced division of sacred labor. While the *Cabo* (male leader) often manages physical construction and heavy logistical preparations, the *Caba* (female leader) frequently oversees costume design, spiritual coordination, and actor styling. Both men and women participate actively as performers and organizers, illustrating how the *panata* transcends gender boundaries. Ultimately, the Catholic Church acts as the spiritual anchor, validating the street-level re-enactments through liturgical blessings, thereby harmonizing folk devotion with institutional religious authority.

Calvariohan's Literary Contexts

Roles and Characters in the Tableau Performance

In performing the tableau related to the life and suffering of Jesus Christ, the characters each have their own role that gives overall meaning to the ceremony. The cabo or caba are the leaders who form the *kalbaryo* (Calvary group), serving as the center of the performance and the ones who guide the devotees. They provide recognition and respect for the tradition, and their roles usually change annually.

An important character in the tableau is Jesus Christ, who serves as the principal figure. He depicts the various scenes in Jesus' life, especially the suffering and death he endured, which serves as an example of sacrifice and faith. Meanwhile, the Virgin Mary plays a high role as the mother of Jesus Christ, participating in the significant events of His life. Judas Iscariot, as the disciple who betrayed Jesus Christ, emphasizes the trials and tragedy in His story. Also present is Mary Magdalene, who is a loyal follower of Jesus Christ and known for her resilience despite challenges. Saint Veronica is a woman who was shown a miracle by Jesus Christ, and her important role serves as a symbol of faith and hope amid hardship. Along with Jesus Christ is Saint John the Baptist, His first cousin, who has a significant part in His life and mission. Another character is Saint Simon (of Cyrene), who helped Jesus Christ carry the cross, serving as a symbol of unity and assistance. The Jews (referring to the Roman soldiers/figures who persecuted and arrested Christ), as the soldiers who arrested and tortured Jesus Christ until His death, depict the trials faced by Jesus, showing the reality of His suffering.



Two Calvariohan scenes in San Andres, Catanduanes.

Therefore, the characters in the tableau provide a deeper understanding of the messages of faith and sacrifice. Their interaction and assembly in each scene become a reflection of the insights and lessons that can inspire the devotees, promoting unity, recognition, and gratitude for the sacrifices of the Lord Jesus.

The Setting of *Calvariohan*

The performance of the **Human Tableau**, locally known as the **Calvariohan**, utilizes public and community spaces to bring the Lenten drama directly to the people. The settings for this religious drama are strategically chosen and include the **town proper (*Kabayanan*)**, the **roadside (*Gilid ng Kalye*)**, and various **yards (*Bakuran*)**. This use of everyday locations is deliberate: it transforms ordinary spaces into temporary, symbolic stages that enhance the ritual's visibility and accessibility during the Holy Week processions. The specific term **Calvariohan** itself is used by the community to refer to the staging area, underscoring the cultural and religious significance of these performance sites. Unlike other religious dramas held in the elevated sections of the church, the varied and public nature of the Human Tableau's setting emphasizes its function as a dramatic, street-level enactment, ultimately integrating the sacred stories of the Passion into the community's physical environment and daily life.



A simple Calvariohan setting.

The Plot Structure of *Calvariohan*

The plot structure of the **Human Tableau** (or Calvariohan) is fundamentally classified under the **Tragedy**

archetype. This categorization means the performance is designed to focus on a narrative arc that involves the protagonist—Jesus Christ—facing intense trials, enduring suffering, and ultimately leading to his death. As a Lenten religious drama, the Human Tableau embodies this tragic plot by visually and non-verbally enacting key scenes from the Passion, such as the arrest, scourging, and Crucifixion. While the narrative is defined by suffering and sacrifice, its purpose is not to end in despair. Instead, the tragic framework serves to emphasize the profound cost of the sacrifice, teaching lessons about human fallibility and the possibility of **hope emerging from darkness**. Therefore, the Human Tableau uses the plot of Tragedy as a powerful tool for the community to engage deeply and emotionally with the central, sacrificial events of the Christian story.

CONCLUSIONS

The Calvariohan is an immensely resilient and dynamic cultural synthesis, utilizing both indigenous resources and modern technology to create a localized, yet universally understandable, expression of Christian faith. The material culture—combining local materials like anahaw and bao with contemporary items like speakers and Christmas lights—demonstrates the community's resourcefulness and their ability to keep the tradition vibrant and relevant. Furthermore, the performance is sustained by a robust framework of communal values (*pagtutulungan*, *pagsasakripisyo*, *pagiging masunurin*), confirming that the Calvariohan serves a dual function as a profound spiritual vow (*panata*) and a critical catalyst for social cohesion within the community.

Beyond its religious and social functions, the Calvariohan is structurally and thematically a significant literary and dramatic heritage. Its plot is fundamentally classified as the Tragedy archetype, specifically designed to elicit a deep emotional engagement with the themes of sacrifice and hope. The deliberate use of public settings (*Gilid ng Kalye*, *Kabayanan*) and clearly defined character roles (like the rotating *Cabo/Caba* and the symbolic figures of Christ and Mary) transforms everyday space into a sacred stage, effectively integrating the biblical narrative into the physical and ethical environment of the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that the Calvariohan is a complex, multi-stage process driven by unwritten local knowledge and customs, the local government unit (LGU) or the parish should formally document the entire ritual process. This documentation, covering the specific customs (*Pagpupulong*, *Pagtatalaga ng Cabo/Caba*, *Paghuhusga ng mga Hurado*) and the symbolic use of material culture, should be used to create instructional materials or modules for local schools and cultural organizations. This initiative would help institutionalize the knowledge, ensuring accurate transmission and sustaining the tradition’s integrity across future generations.

The unique synthesis of indigenous materials and communal creativity in constructing the elaborate *Kalbaryo* should be leveraged. The LGU should actively promote the *Calvariohan*—particularly the Kalbaryo-making aspect and the focus on sacrifice and penance—as a distinct eco-cultural tourism attraction during Lent. This promotion should emphasize the commitment to using local materials, encouraging artisans, and offering small grants or enhanced prizes for the *Calvario Making Contest* to further incentivize artistic innovation and environmental responsibility.

Administrative Statements

Research Limitations

This study is geographically and culturally bounded to select municipalities in the island province of Catanduanes (specifically Caramoran, San Andres, and San Miguel) where the Calvariohan tradition is prominently practiced. While the findings comprehensively capture the ethno-religious and literary dimensions of these specific communities, they may not fully represent variations of Lenten tableaux practiced in other provinces across the Bicol Region or the Philippines.

Ethics Statement

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with ethical standards.

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study, ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and respect for cultural and religious sensitivities.

Conflict-of-Interest Statement

The author declares no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data-Availability Statement

The qualitative data, interview transcripts, and field notes generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Glossary of Key Local Terms

- **Calvariohan.** The overall annual Lenten religious drama and human tableau tradition practiced across Catanduanes.
- **Kalbaryo.** The temporary, elevated, or decorated roadside stage constructed by each barangay to hold the tableau.
- **Human Tableau.** The artistic style of performance consisting of actors holding static "frozen" poses to portray biblical events.
- **Cabo / Caba.** The designated male (*Cabo*) or female (*Caba*) community leader appointed annually to direct, organize, and manage a barangay's tableau scene.
- **Panata.** A solemn religious vow or commitment expressed through penance, static endurance, and active participation in the ritual.
- **Pagpupulong.** The initial organizational meeting held by barangay leaders and youth to plan scenes, budget, and assign roles.
- **Pagbendisyon ng Pari.** The liturgical ritual where the parish priest pauses at each *Kalbaryo* along the procession route to sprinkle holy water (*agua bendita*) and bless the staging.