

Symbolism of the Siraman Ceremony as a Formative Framework for Faith, Identity and Communal Belonging in ALMA Puteri's Perpetual Vows

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Abstract

The *siraman* (shower) ceremony performed before the perpetual vows of ALMA Puteri in Indonesia represents a unique case of ritual inculturation in Catholic religious life. Nevertheless, its symbolic reinterpretation within a consecrated-vows context has not been systematically examined. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing how the *siraman* ritual functions as a symbolic, theological and social mediator in the vocational formation of ALMA Puteri candidates. Using a qualitative descriptive–analytical design, data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews with ten sisters who underwent the ritual, and document analysis. The data were coded thematically and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings reveal three key insights. First, the ritual's symbolic elements such as blessed water, purple garments, jasmine decorations, and the use of traditional vessels, embody themes of purification, repentance and vocational readiness. Second, the ceremony strengthens communal identity by involving leaders, formators and family members, thereby reinforcing social support and ecclesial belonging. Third, the ritual recontextualizes Javanese cultural symbols within Catholic theological anthropology, demonstrating how indigenous practices can enrich spiritual formation. These findings highlight the *siraman* ceremony as a meaningful locus of inculturation that integrates

cultural heritage with Catholic consecrated life. The study concludes that such rituals can deepen spiritual identity and recommends further research on intercultural formation in women's religious communities.

Keywords: Ritual Symbolism, *Siraman* Ceremony, Perpetual Vow, Religious Formation, Communal Belonging.

Abstrak

Upacara siraman yang dilaksanakan sebelum kaul kekal ALMA Puteri merupakan contoh unik inkulturasi ritual dalam kehidupan religius Katolik. Namun demikian, reinterpretasi simboliknya dalam konteks kaul hidup bakti belum pernah dikaji secara sistematis. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan menganalisis bagaimana ritual siraman berfungsi sebagai mediator simbolis, teologis dan sosial dalam pembentukan vokasional para calon suster ALMA Puteri. Dengan menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif-analitis, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan sepuluh suster yang telah menjalani ritual, serta analisis dokumen. Data kemudian dikodekan secara tematik dan dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan tiga hal utama. Pertama, elemen simbolik dalam ritual seperti air berkat, busana ungu, hiasan melati, dan penggunaan wadah tradisional, mewakili tema penyucian, pertobatan dan kesiapan vokasional. Kedua, upacara ini memperkuat identitas komunal melalui keterlibatan para pemimpin, formator dan anggota keluarga, sehingga meneguhkan dukungan sosial dan rasa memiliki secara eklesial. Ketiga, ritual ini merekontekstualisasikan simbol-simbol budaya Jawa dalam antropologi teologis Katolik, menunjukkan bahwa praktik-praktik lokal dapat memperkaya pembinaan spiritual. Temuan tersebut menegaskan bahwa siraman merupakan locus inkulturasi yang bermakna, mengintegrasikan warisan budaya dengan kehidupan bakti Katolik. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa ritual semacam ini dapat memperdalam identitas spiritual dan merekomendasikan penelitian lanjutan mengenai formasi interkultural dalam komunitas religius perempuan.

Kata kunci: *Symbolisme, Upacara Siraman, Kaul Kekal, Pembinaan Iman, Makna Sosial.*

Introduction

Rituals occupy a central role in shaping religious identity, spiritual interiority, and communal belonging across diverse cultural and theological contexts. Within global discussions on ritual studies and intercultural theology, scholars emphasize that symbolic rites are not peripheral embellishments but transformative thresholds that mediate the relationship between the sacred and the social (Grimes, 2022; Wepener, 2021). Water-based rituals, sacred attire, and embodied gestures have long served as liminal spaces of purification, renewal, and vocational transition in many religious traditions (Sánchez & Ortega, 2020). These insights underscore the importance of examining how symbolic practices contribute to faith formation, particularly in non-Western Catholic communities navigating the intersection of local culture and ecclesial norms.

In the Indonesian context, the siraman ritual holds deep cultural significance as a symbol of purification, readiness, and communal support (Fathiha, 2022; Setyaningsih & Zahrulianingdyah, 2015). Within the ALMA Puteri community, this ritual is adapted as part of the preparation for perpetual vows, functioning not merely as a cultural expression but as a theological and social act of total self-offering to God. As the congregation becomes increasingly multicultural, with members originating from various regions of Indonesia and Timor-Leste, questions arise regarding how this ritual is interpreted, received, and integrated into vocational formation (Derung, 2019).

Despite extensive studies on siraman in Javanese matrimonial traditions (Sasmita, 2018; Nur Muharromah et al., 2024), no research has examined its symbolic recontextualization within

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Catholic consecrated life, particularly in the context of perpetual vows. Existing literature has not addressed how Javanese symbols acquire new theological meaning when incorporated into religious formation, nor how such rituals mediate identity construction in multicultural communities (Santiago, 2023). This gap highlights the need for a focused analysis of the siraman ritual as practised by ALMA Puteri.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how the flushing (siraman) ceremony functions as a symbolic, theological, and social mediator for ALMA Puteri candidates preparing for perpetual vows. Guided by Van Peursen's triadic symbolism, mythical, ontological, and functional (Guarango, 2022; Purwanto, 2020), the research investigates how cultural symbols are reinterpreted within Catholic theological anthropology and how the ritual contributes to vocational identity, spiritual purification, and communal solidarity. This study offers two key contributions. First, it provides a novel theoretical integration of Van Peursen's symbolism with Catholic vocational formation, demonstrating how indigenous symbols can be theologically reframed within consecrated life (Fathiha, 2019). Second, it contributes practical insights for religious communities by showing how inculturated rituals can strengthen spiritual identity, intercultural belonging, and pastoral formation. As one of the first analyses of siraman within a Catholic perpetual-vow context, this research advances the discourse on ritual inculturation in non-Western women's religious communities.

Literature Review

The literature on ritual symbolism and cultural–religious integration reveals two major thematic strands relevant to the siraman ceremony

in ALMA Puteri Indonesia: (1) theoretical perspectives on symbolism and ritual meaning, and (2) the cultural–anthropological significance of Javanese siraman and its evolving functions in contemporary contexts. Together, these strands illuminate how symbolic practices operate across spiritual, social, and cultural domains, while also exposing the absence of scholarship on their reinterpretation within Catholic consecrated life.

Theoretical Frameworks on Ritual and Symbolism

Scholars of symbolism consistently emphasize that rituals serve as multidimensional mediators between the sacred and the social, yet they differ in how they conceptualize the mechanisms of symbolic meaning. Van Peursen’s triadic framework: mythical, ontological, and functional, offers a holistic model for understanding how symbols operate across experiential, existential, and pragmatic layers (Guarango, 2022). His emphasis on the “mystical” dimension, as elaborated by Purwanto (2020), foregrounds the experiential and ineffable aspects of ritual, highlighting how symbols facilitate encounters with the divine that transcend rational explanation. This perspective positions ritual as a space of interior transformation, where personal experience becomes central to meaning-making (Suliyati, 2013).

In contrast, functionalist interpretations, such as those referenced by Sari and Lessy (2023), shift the focus from interior spirituality to the social and contextual roles of ritual. Here, symbols are not primarily vehicles of mystical union but instruments that reinforce communal cohesion, social order, and cultural continuity. This approach resonates with Fromm’s (2023) relational view of human existence, which frames ritual as a contextualized interaction between

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individuals and their world. While Van Peursen underscores symbolic depth and metaphysical resonance, functionalist thinkers emphasize adaptability, immanence, and the socio-existential relevance of ritual practices.

A third perspective emerges from intercultural theological studies, which argue that rituals become transformative when cultural symbols are reinterpreted within new theological frameworks (Setyaningsih & Zahrulianingdyah, 2015; Robinson, 2021). These scholars highlight the dynamic interplay between local culture and Catholic orthodoxy, suggesting that inculturated rituals can enrich faith formation when accompanied by theological discernment. Unlike Van Peursen's universalist symbolic theory or functionalism's sociological orientation, intercultural theologians foreground the negotiation of meaning across cultural boundaries.

Taken together, these theoretical approaches reveal both convergence and tension (Yassa, Wahyono, 2021). All agree that symbols mediate meaning, but they diverge on whether the primary locus of meaning is mystical experience, social function, or intercultural negotiation. This divergence underscores the need for empirical studies that examine how these dimensions interact within specific ritual contexts, particularly those involving the recontextualization of indigenous symbols within Catholic religious life (Royyani, 2013).

Javanese Siraman and Its Cultural–Social Significance

The siraman ceremony has been widely examined within Javanese cultural studies, where it is traditionally associated with purification, readiness, and familial blessing. Janah and Karunia (2020) describe siraman as a preparatory rite that integrates sacred water, floral

elements and communal participation to symbolize physical and spiritual cleansing. Their analysis highlights the aesthetic and moral dimensions of the ritual, emphasizing its role in preparing individuals for major life transitions (Oktavia, Adinda, 2022).

Muharromah et al. (2024) expand this understanding by framing siraman as a moral and communal practice that reinforces familial unity and social support. Their work underscores the relational dimension of the ritual, suggesting that its significance lies not only in symbolic purification but also in the collective affirmation of shared values. Meanwhile, Sasmita (2018) situates siraman within broader Javanese heritage, emphasizing its historical continuity and cultural embeddedness. Unlike Janah and Karunia, who focus on symbolic elements, or Muharromah et al., who foreground social cohesion, Sasmita highlights the ritual's role in preserving cultural identity.

Other scholars examine specific symbolic components of siraman. Dewi (2018) interprets the gentong (water vessel) as a metaphor for life, fertility, and spiritual readiness, while Wibisono (2017) reads the siwur (coconut-shell dipper) as a symbol of simplicity, honesty, and perseverance. These interpretations reveal the multilayered nature of Javanese symbols, which carry both practical and metaphysical meanings. Yevun (2023) adds another layer by analyzing the color purple as a symbol of repentance and spiritual maturity, demonstrating how visual elements contribute to the ritual's moral and emotional resonance.

Despite their differences, these studies share a common assumption: siraman is fundamentally a cultural and matrimonial rite. None examine how its symbols might be reinterpreted when transplanted

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into a religious-vocational context such as Catholic perpetual vows. Moreover, while scholars acknowledge the ritual's spiritual undertones, they do not explore how these meanings shift when embedded within a theological anthropology distinct from Javanese cosmology (Setyaningsih, Zahrulianingdyah, 2015).

Across both thematic strands, the literature affirms that rituals are symbolically rich, socially embedded, and culturally meaningful. However, no existing study investigates how the siraman ceremony is recontextualized within Catholic consecrated life, nor how its Javanese symbols acquire new theological, vocational, and communal meanings when adapted for perpetual vows in ALMA Puteri Indonesia (Wepener, 2021). The absence of such analysis leaves a critical gap in understanding the dynamics of ritual inculturation, symbolic reinterpretation, and intercultural formation in non-Western women's religious communities. This study addresses that gap by examining the siraman ceremony not as a cultural artifact but as a transformative locus of spiritual identity, vocational readiness, and communal belonging within a Catholic religious framework (Bell, 2009; Grimes, 2022).

Method

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore the symbolic, theological, and social meanings embedded in the *siraman* ritual within the perpetual vow preparation of ALMA Puteri. A qualitative approach was selected because the research seeks to understand subjective interpretations, embodied ritual experiences, and the construction of meaning among participants, all of which require close engagement with personal narratives and contextualized practices. These dimensions cannot be adequately

captured through quantitative methods, which are limited in their ability to access the depth of spiritual experience, symbolic interpretation, and communal dynamics. The case study design further enabled an intensive and holistic examination of the ritual as it is practiced within a specific religious community, allowing the researcher to analyze its cultural, spiritual, and communal significance in its natural setting. This approach was particularly appropriate because the *siraman* ritual is an inculturated practice that blends Javanese cultural symbolism with Catholic theological formation, requiring a method capable of capturing its layered meanings.

Data were collected through three primary techniques: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation was conducted during several vow cycles, enabling the researcher to witness firsthand the spatial arrangements, ritual gestures, symbolic objects, and non-verbal expressions that accompany the *siraman* ceremony. This method provided rich contextual data on how the ritual unfolds, how participants interact with symbolic elements such as *janur*, infused water, *gentong*, and *siwur*, and how the community collectively participates in the ceremony. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten sisters who had undergone the *siraman* ritual within the past five years. These participants were purposively selected to ensure that their recollections remained vivid and accurate, and to capture a range of interpretations shaped by personal experience, spiritual maturity, and cultural background. Individuals who had not experienced the ritual or who had professed vows more than five years earlier were excluded to maintain the relevance and

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reliability of the data. Document analysis was also conducted using community records, ritual guidelines, and written reflections that provided additional insight into the intended meaning of the ritual and its role in vocational formation.

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were read repeatedly and coded thematically to identify recurring patterns related to symbolism, spiritual transformation, and communal cohesion. These initial codes captured key elements such as purification, repentance, surrender, communal blessing, and vocational readiness. In the data display phase, the codes were organized into matrices and thematic clusters that allowed for comparison across participants and data sources. This process made it possible to identify convergences and divergences in how the ritual was interpreted, particularly in relation to its symbolic elements and spiritual impact. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verifying them through iterative comparison with the raw data. Codes were then organized into broader analytical categories aligned with Van Peursen's symbolic dimensions, namely mythical, ontological, and functional, to interpret how Javanese symbols were recontextualized within Catholic theological anthropology. This alignment allowed the researcher to examine how the ritual operates simultaneously as a sacred narrative, an existential transformation, and a communal affirmation. Throughout the analysis, credibility was strengthened through triangulation of data sources and repeated validation of

emerging themes against participant testimonies and observational records.

Results and Discussion

The symbolic elements embedded in the *siraman* ceremony reveal a profound integration of Javanese cultural heritage with the spiritual formation of ALMA Puteri candidates preparing for perpetual vows. All ten informants consistently emphasized that the ritual begins in a space intentionally designed to evoke sacredness, a structure resembling a joglo house adorned with janur decorations. In Javanese tradition, such structures known as gedhong siraman or gedhong manten are temporary ceremonial buildings constructed specifically for purification rites, especially in wedding preparations (Crosbie, 2022; Cao, 2023). Made of bamboo and decorated with *janur kunir* (young coconut leaves), flowers, and other natural ornaments, the gedhong creates an atmosphere of solemnity and transition that marks the candidate's movement from her former life into a new spiritual identity (Bangunjiwo, 2019). Within the ALMA context, this spatial symbolism is reinterpreted as a sacred threshold where candidates prepare to enter a lifelong covenant with God, mirroring the cultural symbolism of entering a new phase of life.

Clothing worn during the ritual further reinforces themes of purification and vocational readiness. The bodo shirt and purple veil signify repentance, humility, and spiritual maturity. Purple, a color traditionally associated with penitence and renewal in both Catholic and broader Christian traditions, invites candidates to reflect on their past, acknowledge personal shortcomings, and embrace the call to transformation (Yevun, 2023). The batik-patterned knitted cloth

adds another layer of meaning because it symbolizes modesty, propriety, and disciplined comportment, virtues essential for religious life. These garments collectively express the candidate's willingness to adopt a posture of humility and readiness before God. The warm water used in the ritual, infused with roses and jasmine, symbolizes purity, the fragrance of virtue, and the beauty of surrender. As several informants noted, the act of flushing performed by the general leader and spiritual guide signifies not only purification but also the conferral of authority, blessing, and prayerful support for the candidate's transition into a new vocational stage (Fathiha, 2022). When the supervisor performs the flushing, it highlights the formative role of educators who accompany candidates toward wisdom, virtue, and spiritual maturity.

The *gentong* or water vessel serves as another central symbol in the ceremony. In various cultural and philosophical traditions, the *gentong* represents fertility, abundance, and the source of life. When filled with water, it signifies purity, renewal, and the beginning of a new chapter, which is consistent with water's universal role as a life-giving element. In Javanese rituals, the *gentong* is frequently used as a medium of blessing and self-cleansing, reinforcing its association with purification and spiritual readiness (Dewi, 2018). Within the ALMA ritual, the *gentong* also carries a deeper spiritual meaning because it symbolizes the human soul as a vessel capable of receiving divine grace. An empty *gentong* represents openness and readiness to be filled with new spiritual gifts, while a full one symbolizes maturity, wisdom, and the richness of a life dedicated to God (Ekpenyong, 2025; Li, 2025).

The *siwur* or dipper, traditionally made from coconut shells, adds yet another layer of symbolic meaning. Its material, which is durable, natural, and commonly used in daily life, reflects simplicity, perseverance, and closeness to nature. The coconut shell's strength and resilience mirror the virtues expected of candidates preparing for perpetual vows. In many cultural contexts, the *siwur* also conveys values of honesty, humility, and hard work because it is crafted from natural materials that are readily available and used for practical and meaningful purposes (Wibisono, 2017). Within the ALMA ritual, the *siwur* becomes a symbol of the candidate's readiness to embrace a life of service marked by simplicity, perseverance, and dedication to the needs of others, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Taken together, these symbolic elements such as the *gedhong siraman*, ritual garments, infused water, *gentong*, and *siwur* form a cohesive symbolic system that expresses purification, transformation and vocational readiness. They reflect not only the cultural richness of Javanese tradition but also the theological depth of Catholic consecrated life (Schjoedt et al., 2025). Through these symbols, the *siraman* ceremony becomes a powerful act of spiritual preparation that enables candidates to enter their perpetual vows with purified hearts, renewed commitment, and a profound sense of readiness to embrace their lifelong vocation (Idler, 2013; Yang, 2024).

Siraman Prior to ALMA Puteri's Perpetual Vows

The *siraman* (shower) rite, adapted from Javanese custom into the religious formation of ALMA Puteri, symbolizes physical and

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spiritual purification prior to the profession of perpetual vows. Each stage of the ritual carries profound philosophical and theological meaning, marking the candidate's readiness to dedicate her life fully to God and to the service of others (KWI, 2016). According to the ten informants, the ritual consists of three main stages: pre-flushing preparation, the flushing ceremony itself, and post-flushing consecration (O'Neil, 2024). These stages are summarized in table 1.

Table 1.

Stages of the Flushing Rite Prior to the Perpetual Vows of ALMA Puteri

Rite Stage	Description
1. Pre- <i>Siraman</i> Preparation	Spatial and symbolic arrangements are made prior to the ritual. The ceremony takes place in a chapel decorated with yellow <i>janur</i> (young coconut leaves) and jasmine flowers, symbolizing purity and sincerity. Warm spring water infused with rose and jasmine is prepared to signify self-purification. Candidates wear purple garments and jeans, representing simplicity, penitence, and vocational steadfastness.
2. <i>Siraman</i> Ceremony	The rite begins with a solemn procession led by a priest and accompanied by community members. Upon arrival at the chapel, an afternoon prayer service and a brief spiritual reflection are conducted.
3. Post- <i>Siraman</i> Consecration	After the flushing, candidates are dried with white towels and dressed in white garments, symbolizing inner purity and total devotion to Christ. A further consecration follows: candidates receive anointing on the forehead and palms from a spiritual director, followed by the imposition of a hood as a sign of faithfulness.

Table 1 illustrates the three-stage ritual process. The first stage, pre-*Siraman* preparation, involves arranging the ritual space. The ceremony is conducted in a chapel adorned with yellow *janur* and jasmine flowers, symbolizing purity and sincerity of heart (Oktavia

& Adinda, 2022). Warm spring water mixed with roses and jasmine is prepared as a symbol of self-purification. Candidates wear purple clothing and jeans, representing simplicity and steadfastness in their vocational commitment.

The second stage is the *Siraman* ceremony itself. The ritual begins with a procession from the community residence to the chapel, led by a priest. Upon arrival, the community participates in an afternoon prayer service and listens to a brief reflection delivered by the spiritual director. This procession symbolizes the candidates' inner journey toward embracing their vocation. Family members present offer blessings and messages in their regional languages, expressing support for the candidates' decision (Nurhadi et al., 2018). During the flushing, candidates come forward individually and sit on prepared chairs. The general leader and spiritual guide perform the ritual, pouring water gradually over the head, shoulders, palms, and feet, symbolizing purification of body and mind and affirming readiness for total self-giving. Throughout the ceremony, mothers of perpetual-vow sisters read mottos and parental messages, reminding candidates of the values they are called to uphold. Thus, the flushing becomes not only a symbolic act but also a sacred moment that deepens the meaning of vocational surrender to God. The *siraman* ceremony can be seen in Figure 1 below (Hand & Shweder, 2023).



Figure 1. The *siraman* ceremony prior to the perpetual vows of ALMA Puteri
(Source: Author documentation, 2023)

The third stage, *post-siraman*, marks the transition into consecration. Candidates are dried with white towels and dressed in white robes, symbolizing holiness and complete devotion to Christ. They return to the chapel to receive anointing on the forehead and palms from the spiritual guide. The imposition of a hood follows, signifying fidelity to their calling. Candidates then prostrate before their parents to seek blessings, express apologies, and convey gratitude for their love and sacrifices (Oktavia & Adinda, 2022; Gultom & Wiwin, 2025). They also receive the scapular as a symbol of protection and loyalty in living their vocation.



Figure 2. The post-*siraman* ceremony of ALMA Puteri
(Source: Author documentation, 2023)

In the final symbolic act, the candidate is laid down, covered with a knitted cloth, folded, sprinkled with blessed water, and showered with flowers, signifying repentance and dying to worldly attachments in order to live fully in the love of Christ. With the completion of this ritual sequence, the candidate is spiritually prepared to enter the next stage of her vocational journey, offering herself entirely to God in service, especially to poor and abandoned children, in accordance with ALMA Puteri's mission.

The interview data strongly reinforce the interpretation that *siraman* functions as a symbolic act of purification, repentance, and vocational readiness. Across participants, the ritual is consistently understood as a transformative moment that prepares candidates spiritually, psychologically, and communally for perpetual vows. This aligns with Van Peursen's mythical and ontological dimensions of symbolism, which emphasize spiritual rebirth and existential transformation (Guarango, 2022; Purwanto, 2020), as well as

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Javanese interpretations of *siraman* as a rite of cleansing and preparation (Janah & Karunia, 2020).

Several informants explicitly described *siraman* as a process of purification and readiness, echoing the cultural symbolism highlighted in Javanese tradition. For example, U.S. emphasized that the ritual “teaches purity, sincerity, and readiness to enter a new life” (*Informant US, Interview, March 3, 2025*), reflecting the continuity between cultural meanings and their adaptation within ALMA Puteri. This supports earlier literature that views *siraman* as a preparatory rite marking transition into a new life stage (Sasmita, 2018). Similarly, HS and YR interpreted the ritual as washing away negativity to enter “holy marriage with Christ,” underscoring the moral and spiritual cleansing central to purification symbolism (*Informant HS, March 6, 2025; Informant YR, March 10, 2025*). These interpretations resonate with the ontological dimension of symbolic self-renewal described by Purwanto (2020).

Other participants expanded the meaning of purification toward psychological and vocational readiness. FN described *siraman* as a call “to accept change, leave behind ego, and grow into a more mature life” FN highlights inner transformation rather than merely ritual cleansing (interview on March 5, 2025). This complements the literature that views ritual as a liminal space for personal renewal (Sánchez & Ortega, 2020). While RA deepens this interpretation by framing *siraman* as both “a challenge and a grace” requiring detachment from family, comfort, and personal preferences, an ascetic reading that aligns with Catholic theological anthropology and extends beyond traditional Javanese symbolism (Interview on March 5, 2025).

A strong theme of total surrender and vocational commitment also emerged. VG, AL, and SS consistently described *siraman* as “self-purification, total surrender to God, and spiritual preparation before eternal vows,” while also emphasizing the role of community and family blessings (Interview with VG on March 6, 2025; AL, SS on March 7, 2025). Their interpretations affirm the integration of purification symbolism with vocational readiness, supporting the argument that the ritual mediates both spiritual and communal dimensions of consecrated life (Setyaningsih & Zahrulianingdyah, 2015).

Some informants introduced explicitly theological and mystical interpretations. AB described *siraman* as an encounter with “God’s eternal love” and a symbolic becoming of “His bride spiritually” (Interview on March 7, 2025). This mystical framing aligns with Van Peursen’s mythical dimension, where symbols mediate divine-human encounter (Guarango, 2022). Meanwhile, RA interpreted the ritual as a symbol of full devotion to the Church’s mission, especially service to the marginalized, extending the meaning of purification toward vocational mission and social commitment (Interview on March 6, 2025).

Finally, YR highlighted the culturally situated nature of symbolic interpretation, noting that *siraman* is a “local symbol” whose meanings vary across individuals (Interview on March 10, 2025). This observation reinforces the interpretive flexibility of symbols and supports the study’s argument that the ALMA Puteri adaptation recontextualizes Javanese symbols within Catholic theological anthropology.

Symbolic Dimensions of the Siraman Ceremony: A Van Peursen Cultural Theology Analysis

Drawing on Van Peursen's theory of cultural symbols, the *siraman* ritual performed by ALMA Puteri prior to the procession of perpetual vows can be understood as a symbolic continuum encompassing three interrelated phases: the mythical, the ontological and the functional. In the *mythical dimension*, *siraman* operates as a sacred narrative of purification and divine betrothal. Van Peursen's *mythical phase* reflects humanity's inclination to interpret reality through symbol-laden stories that link ordinary acts to cosmic or divine meaning. The testimonies of the ALMA sisters clearly reveal this symbolic consciousness. Informants such as HS and AB describe the ritual as preparation for "marriage with Christ the Bridegroom," while others speak of being "cleansed" or "made worthy" of a divine call. In this interpretive frame, water becomes more than a physical substance; it functions as a medium of sacred transition that washes away psychological burdens, ego, worldly attachments and past identities. Viewed through this lens, *siraman* resembles a baptismal reconfiguration of the self, a symbolic death and rebirth into a new ontological state as Christ's bride (Nguyen & Loughlin, 2023).

The ontological phase in Van Peursen's framework marks a shift from mythic storytelling to existential awareness, where symbols demand personal commitment and transformation. For the ALMA sisters, *siraman* signifies a decisive break from the former self and a turning toward total surrender. FN and RA articulate this explicitly, describing the ritual as a moment of "leaving behind ego" and "building a new life" (March 5, 2025). This transition reflects a

movement into a new existential vocation defined by kenosis (self-emptying), sanctity, and readiness to embrace the evangelical counsels of virginity, poverty, obedience, and service. The ritual thus inaugurates a new ontology of consecrated being, integrating the intentionality that sanctification is not passive but actively embraced. As Grimes (2022) observes, rituals marking vocational transitions are “embodied moments of existential truth,” and in this context, the sisters are not merely purified but transformed into women dedicated to Christ and to others.

The functional phase emerges when symbols become socially institutionalized and communally affirmed. In the ALMA context, siraman is performed in the presence of family, community members and the Church, whose prayers and blessings provide symbolic release and social validation. Informants such as VG, AL, and SS emphasize that the presence of others transforms the ritual from a private act into a public rite of passage, affirming that vocation is not only personal but also ecclesial and social. The ritual becomes a liminal bridge between the sister’s former identity and her new role within the Church’s mission, particularly in service to the displaced, the poor, and the marginalized (March 5, 2025). Such communal participation embodies what KWI (2016) describes as “ritualized identity construction,” wherein vocation is not only received from God but also socially recognized and sacramentally lived (Santiago, 2023; Ikoku, 2024). In this sense, siraman functions not only as purification but also as commissioning, i.e., an induction into a life of service with public resonance.

Viewed holistically, the siraman ritual integrates the mythical, ontological, and functional dimensions of symbolism. It narrates

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spiritual union, calls for inner transformation and sanctity, and affirms communal belonging and ecclesial mission. This multidimensionality exemplifies Van Peursen's insight that symbols evolve yet operate simultaneously across multiple layers of meaning. For the ALMA sisters, to be "sanctified through flushing" is not merely to be cleansed but to be called, transformed, and sent, a sacramental-symbolic process involving God, the self, and the community. The ritual thus stands as a rare instance of indigenous symbolism that harmonizes seamlessly with Catholic sacramentality and contemporary theological anthropology (Barrett, 2023).

The *siraman* ceremony also offers a compelling model of ritual inculturation, demonstrating how local cultural symbols can be integrated into Catholic religious life without being reduced to folklore. Ritual inculturation enables cultural symbols to carry theological meaning, forming disciples who are both culturally rooted and spiritually transformed (Sánchez & Ortega, 2020). The *siraman* ritual becomes a moment of deep reflection for candidates preparing for perpetual vows, symbolizing self-purification, spiritual renewal, and readiness for total surrender to God's will (KWI, 2016). Through the gentle pouring of water accompanied by prayer, candidates release past attachments and ego-centered desires, crossing a threshold from personal formation into consecrated service.

Beyond individual transformation, the ritual shapes the collective identity and mission of ALMA Puteri. It reinforces their vocation to embody maternal care for the most vulnerable, especially children with special needs. The ritual fosters not only personal sanctification but also a renewed awareness of their calling to be spiritual mothers

who are nurturing, compassionate, and self-giving (Royyani, 2013). In this way, siraman becomes both an inward journey of sanctification and an outward commitment to incarnate God's love in service to others.

In terms of faith appreciation, siraman symbolizes physical and spiritual cleansing (Irmawati, 2023), preparing candidates to enter a new life as the bride of Christ. It invites candidates to recall their spiritual journey, struggles, and graces, strengthening their resolve to remain faithful to their vocation (Mustofa & Syihabuddin, 2025). The communal dimension of the ritual further strengthens sisterhood within ALMA Puteri. Shared preparation, mutual support, and collective prayer embody the community's love and unity (Nurhadi et al., 2018). This togetherness becomes a source of strength, ensuring that no sister faces her mission alone.

Finally, the ritual serves as a reminder for all members to continually return to the foundational values of their calling, including service in love, unity in prayer, and fidelity in spiritual life (Oktavia & Adinda, 2022). Thus, the meaning of siraman extends beyond ceremonial practice; it becomes a lived expression of faith within communal life, guiding each member to remain steadfast in vocation, faithful in service, and mutually supportive on the path toward spiritual perfection in Christ (Santiago, 2023; Plante, 2024).

Conclusion

This study concludes that the *siraman* ritual preceding the perpetual vows of ALMA Puteri Indonesia functions as a multidimensional symbolic act that directly answers the research question regarding its theological, spiritual, and social significance. The findings

demonstrate that *siraman* operates simultaneously as a rite of purification, a moment of vocational readiness, and a communal affirmation of identity. Through Van Peursen's symbolic framework, the ritual is shown to embody mythical meanings of divine espousal, ontological transformation through self-emptying and renewed commitment, and functional integration into the ecclesial community. In this way, *siraman* becomes a locus of inculturation where Javanese cultural symbols are reinterpreted to deepen faith formation and strengthen communal belonging.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its qualitative case study design, which relies on a small number of participants from a single religious community. The findings therefore cannot be generalized to all Catholic women's congregations or to other cultural adaptations of purification rituals. Future research should expand the scope by comparing *siraman* practices across different congregations, regions, or cultural contexts, and by employing mixed-method approaches to examine how symbolic rituals shape long-term vocational identity, spiritual resilience, and intercultural formation. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable in assessing how the meanings of *siraman* evolve throughout the sisters' religious life.

Overall, this research contributes to the broader field of ritual studies, intercultural theology, and symbolic anthropology by demonstrating how an indigenous Javanese ritual can be theologically reframed to support Catholic consecrated life. The *siraman* ceremony exemplifies how inculturated rituals can serve as transformative spaces where cultural heritage, spiritual identity, and ecclesial mission converge. As such, this study affirms the

importance of culturally rooted yet theologically grounded rituals in shaping the spiritual depth, communal identity, and vocational integrity of contemporary religious communities.

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