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From Symbol to Sacrament: A Participatory Hermeneutic for Liturgical Inculturation in East Nusa Tenggara

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Abstract

This study addresses the critical challenge in liturgical inculturation within East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), Indonesia, where the integration of local cultural symbols often risks remaining a superficial, "cosmetic" addition rather than fostering a genuine, transformative encounter with God. Moving beyond purely theological or anthropological descriptions, this research proposes and applies a participatory hermeneutic, a philosophical framework synthesizing the thought of Thomas Aquinas, Karol Wojtyła, and Joseph Ratzinger, to analyze liturgical practices in Kupang. Through qualitative analysis of fieldwork in three parishes, the study demonstrates how this framework interprets cultural symbols (such as woven cloth, betel nut, and the *jai* dance) not as mere decorations, but as potential conduits of grace. The hermeneutic reveals that authentic inculturation occurs when symbols facilitate ontological participation (Aquinas), foster relational communion (Wojtyła), and maintain a definitive orientation toward transcendence (Ratzinger). The study's distinctive contribution lies in converting this threefold hermeneutic into a four-step Participatory Inculturation Discernment Matrix, adding a fourth, post-liturgical test, doxological-ecclesial fruitfulness, that asks whether the transformative encounter celebrated in the liturgy bears fruit in charity, reconciliation, and mission. This shift from descriptive criteria to a practical grammar of discernment offers both a novel methodological approach to contextual liturgical studies and concrete pastoral recommendations to ensure that local culture truly becomes a living language of worship, transforming symbols into sacraments.

Keywords: Liturgical Inculturation; Participatory Hermeneutics; Transformative Inculturation; Philosophical Theology; Sacramental Symbolism; Discernment Matrix

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menyoroti tantangan utama inkulturasi liturgi di Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), di mana simbol budaya lokal sering berhenti pada tingkat "kosmetis" tanpa menghadirkan perjumpaan sejati dengan Allah. Studi ini menerapkan hermeneutik partisipatif: kerangka filsafat yang mengintegrasikan pemikiran Thomas Aquinas, Karol Wojtyła, dan Joseph Ratzinger, untuk menganalisis praktik liturgi di Kupang. Melalui analisis kualitatif pada tiga paroki, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa simbol-simbol seperti kain tenun, sirih pinang, dan tarian jai dapat menjadi saluran rahmat, bukan sekadar ornamen budaya. Inkulturasi otentik terjadi ketika simbol mendorong partisipasi ontologis (Aquinas), membangun komuni personal (Wojtyła), dan memelihara orientasi transenden kepada Allah (Ratzinger). Kebaruan studi ini terletak pada pengubahan hermeneutik tiga lapis tersebut menjadi Matriks Diskresi Inkulturasi Partisipatif empat langkah, dengan menambahkan uji pasca-liturgi keempat, yaitu buah doxological-ecclesial, yang menanyakan apakah perjumpaan transformatif dalam liturgi berbuah dalam kasih, rekonsiliasi, dan misi. Pergeseran dari kriteria deskriptif menuju tata bahasa diskresi yang praktis ini menawarkan pendekatan metodologis baru bagi studi liturgi kontekstual sekaligus rekomendasi pastoral konkret agar budaya lokal sungguh menjadi bahasa iman yang hidup dalam perayaan liturgi.

Kata kunci: Inkulturasi Liturgi; Hermeneutik Partisipatif; Inkulturasi Transformatif; Teologi Filsafati; Simbolisme Sakramental; Matriks Diskresi

I. Introduction

East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) is a region where the Catholic faith interacts with local traditions characterized by symbols, rites, and community expressions. In liturgical celebrations, practices such as the *jai* dance (a traditional group dance), woven fabric (locally known as tenun, often used as ceremonial cloth), and the offering of betel nut (sirih pinang, a customary offering and sign of welcome) illustrate modes of respect and participation. In many parishes, these practices serve as bridges between the Church and local culture, contributing to inculturation. The incorporation of cultural symbols in the liturgy prompts a central question: Do these elements deepen faith or serve primarily as decoration?

The Second Vatican Council, through Sacrosanctum Concilium, affirmed that the liturgy is "the summit and source of the life of the Church." All the faithful are called to participate consciously, actively, and fully, *participatio actuosa*, meaning full, conscious, and active participation.[1] Inspired by this spirit, liturgical innovations have taken root globally, including in Indonesia. However, implementation poses challenges: it is often misunderstood as mere physical activity, such as singing, dancing, or external participation, without mental or spiritual understanding. Similarly, inculturation, defined as the integration of local cultural elements into the liturgy,[2] sometimes risks becoming merely cosmetic, with cultural elements included in the Mass as local color rather than theological depth.

[1] Second Vatican Council, "Sacrosanctum Concilium: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," The Holy See, 4 Desember 1963, art. 14, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.
[2] Pontifical Council for Culture, "Theology and Inculturation," Vatican Publishing, 2017.

Building on this context, the current research proposes that participatory hermeneutics, which interprets liturgy through Aquinas's participation metaphysics, Wojtyła's relational personalism, and Ratzinger's focus on transcendence, can bridge the gaps between external and inner participation, as well as between cultural expression and faith transformation. Philosophy here does not distance faith, but clarifies liturgy as a real encounter with God through symbols.

In this context, the study distinguishes two types of inculturation:

Transformative inculturation is the process in which cultural symbols are not merely included, but elevated, becoming true means of grace. In transformative inculturation, cultural meanings are sanctified in light of the Mystery of Christ, so these symbols both express local identity and deepen Christian faith.[3] Transformative inculturation changes symbols from markers of culture into channels of grace, enhancing the liturgical celebration and participants' spiritual engagement.

Cosmetic inculturation, by contrast, refers to the inclusion of cultural elements as liturgical ornaments without meaningful integration or theological significance. While these elements may create a lively atmosphere, in cosmetic inculturation, they serve only as external decorations and do not enrich spiritual experience or deepen faith. [4] Cosmetic inculturation employs symbols to enhance the liturgy with local color, thereby disconnecting them from their Christian meaning.

Recognizing the clear distinction between transformative and cosmetic inculturation is essential, as this affects how liturgical practices evolve and how faith is taught in communities like NTT. This study examines whether local symbols foster transformative inculturation, enabling genuine ontological (being) and relational (community with God and others) participation, or instead result in cosmetic inculturation, keeping participation at a superficial, decorative level. In doing so, the research examines how symbols either facilitate or restrict transcendent encounters with God through the experience of grace and fellowship.

With this framework in place, the study not only describes inculturation but also assesses the depth of participation these symbols generate. In this analysis, philosophy serves as a tool for spiritual and intellectual distinction, a participatory hermeneutic that helps the Church discern when culture becomes a means of salvation and when it remains an empty, though beautiful, sign.

While previous studies on liturgical inculturation in Indonesia have offered strong theological and anthropological descriptions- Martasudjita on the Indonesian Order of Mass, Widyawati on language and cultural preservation, Ukat and Neonbasu on local Timorese rites- none has yet translated a philosophical synthesis of Aquinas, Wojtyła, and Ratzinger into a practical instrument of ecclesial discernment. This article addresses that gap. Its novelty is threefold: (1) it unites three philosophical horizons into a single participatory hermeneutic; (2) it converts that hermeneutic into a four-step Participatory Inculturation Discernment Matrix;

[3] Congregation for Divine Worship, *Varietates Legitimae: Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994).
[4] Bernardus Boli Ujan, "Penyesuaian dan Inkulturasi Liturgi," *Jurnal Masalah Pastoral*, 2012, https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:265023031.

and (3) it introduces a fourth, post-liturgical test; doxological-ecclesial fruitfulness, which asks whether the transformative encounter celebrated in the liturgy bears fruit in charity, reconciliation, and mission. This fourth step, developed and applied here, distinguishes the present study from existing works that conclude with the familiar triad of ontological, personalistic, and transcendental criteria. The study thus moves from description to discernment, offering the Church in NTT and beyond a reproducible grammar for evaluating inculturation.

II. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Liturgical Inculturation in the Magisterium of the Church

Liturgical inculturation is a theological process. In it, the Gospel takes shape within human culture, preserving the universal faith while adapting to local contexts. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* states the Church "does not wish to impose a particular form of culture," but allows local adaptations, provided they do not obscure the mysteries celebrated. *Varietates Legitimae* reaffirms this. It defines inculturation as "a reciprocal process between faith and culture" in which local symbols are illuminated, purified, and uplifted by Christ's grace.

Building on this foundational understanding, the Second Vatican Council affirmed that the liturgy is "the pinnacle and source of the life of the Church's life." It is not just a symbolic ritual, but an event of salvation that invites the people to participate consciously, actively, and fully (*participatio actuosa*).[5] Thus, participation is not merely an outward activity, but an ontological and spiritual involvement in the mystery of Christ, which is re-presented through sacramental signs.[6]

Building on this perspective, *Varietates Legitimae* (1994) adds that culture is the "existential space of faith," where people experience and express their relationship with God[7]. Thus, liturgical inculturation is not just a cultural decoration. It transforms cultural symbols into participation in the Easter Mystery. In this way, participation does not stop at form but becomes a spiritual dynamic that unites humanity with Transcendence.

2.2 Contextualization in Indonesia

In Indonesia, E. P. D. Martasudjita demonstrates that inculturation experienced rapid growth after the Second Vatican Council.[8] However, practice is often spontaneous and experimental. In his analysis of the Order of Mass in Indonesian, Martasudjita notes that some adaptations enrich liturgical celebrations.[9] Others risk separating form from theological meaning. Widyawati makes a similar observation, emphasizing the Indonesian Church's role

[5] Dennis M. Doyle, "The Concept of Inculturation in Roman Catholicism: A Theological Consideration," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30 (2012): 1–13.
[6] Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2000); Anscar J. Chupungco, "Inculturation of Worship: Forty Years of Progress and Tradition," 2003, https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:53666065.
[7] Congregation for Divine Worship, *Varietates Legitimae: Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy*.
[8] "PROSES INKULTURASI LITURGI DI INDONESIA," *Studia Philosophica et Theologica* 10, no. 1 (2010): 39–60, https://doi.org/10.35312/spet.v10i1.92; "Implementation of Church Teaching on Liturgical Inculturation in Indonesia," *Bogoslovska Smotra* 94, no. 1 (2024): 45–67.
[9] "Implementation of Church Teaching on Liturgical Inculturation in Indonesia."

in preserving local languages and cultural symbols, especially in Flores and Timor.[10] For her, true inculturation is not just about maintaining local identity. It also deepens the people's encounter with the Word of God, made flesh in human culture.

Local studies illustrate this typical complexity. For example, Ukat examines the *t'bukae tabua* rite among the Atoni Pah Meto in Timor, where traditional symbols, such as areca nut and betel offerings, are reinterpreted as Eucharistic and symbols of brotherhood. [11] Similarly, Neonbasu traces the Dawan people's Easter tradition, which mixes traditional rites with resurrection symbols.[12] Taken together, both studies show that cultural symbols serve the liturgy effectively only when accompanied by theological explanation and conscious participation from the faithful. Without these, symbols become mere aesthetic artifacts. This highlights that inculturation in NTT is not just about outward expression, but requires theological depth that opens the way to transcendence.

2.3 The Crisis of Active Participation

Participatio actuosa, full, conscious, and active participation, was central at the Second Vatican Council. This term is often misunderstood. DeClue states that active participation is more than just physical involvement; it involves a deeper level of engagement.[13] It also involves inner awareness and complete surrender to the mystery of Christ. Voices notes that many modern parishes emphasize external dynamics, such as dance, applause, and group activities, so that participation appears lively but lacks spiritual depth.[14]

Dekert expands this criticism with historical context. While liturgical reforms of the 20th century widened the laity's access to the liturgy, they also created a crisis of religious meaning.[15] Without a transcendent orientation, people may view celebration as merely a community expression rather than an encounter with God. This issue is especially relevant in NTT, where cultural acts like jai dance and woven fabrics enliven the atmosphere but may not deepen understanding of faith's mystery.

Taken together, the literature suggests that genuine participation cannot be reduced to cultural perpetuation. It requires interior involvement, theological understanding, and a spiritual orientation toward transcendence. In practice, successful inculturation balances outward cultural expression with inner faith intention, ensuring participation becomes a bridge to divine experience.

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[10] "Preserving Local Language and Culture in the Indonesian Church," *Mission Studies* 39, no. 1 (2025): 22–35, https://doi.org/10.1163/15733831-12341756.
[11] "TBUKAE TABUA SEBAGAI SIMBOL EKARISTI: INKULTURASI TRADISI ATONI PAH METO DALAM LITURGI KAMIS PUTIH DI LINGKUNGAN SANTO ALEXANDER OELNITEP," *Selidik (Jurnal Seputar Penelitian Pendidikan Keagamaan)*, 2025, https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:279668288.
[12] "MEMAKNAI PASKAH: INKULTURASI BUDAYA DI PULAU TIMOR," Articles, *PORTA FIDEI* 1, no. 2 (01 2024), https://ejournal.stakatnpontianak.ac.id/index.php/portafidei/article/view/467.
[13] Dr Richard DeClue, "Active Participation: A Recommendation," *Word on Fire*, 5 Desember 2024, https://www.wordonfire.org/articles/active-participation-a-recommendation/.
[14] "How to Misunderstand Active Participation: A User's Guide," *PrayTellBlog*, 14 Maret 2021, https://praytellblog.com/index.php/2021/03/13/how-to-misunderstand-active-participation-a-users-guide/.
[15] "Twentieth-Century Changes in Catholic Liturgy and the Place of Truth in Religious Culture: A Discussion with Chantal Delsol," *Religions* 16, no. 7 (2025), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16070867.

2.4 Philosophical Solutions: A Participatory Hermeneutics

Philosophy clarifies liturgical participation. Aquinas taught that all things exist by sharing in God's being. In liturgy, cultural symbols matter only if they facilitate the faithful's participation in God's grace.[16] Attractive symbols that do not point to God lose their purpose. Creation exists only by sharing in God's being. Thus, participation lies at the heart of reality: each being reflects its Source and ultimate goal.[17]

In liturgy, cultural symbols like betel, woven cloth, or jai dance have value when they help people share in divine life. These symbols act as bridges between creation and the Creator. If they do not point to God, they become empty signs without meaning.

Aquinas teaches that the liturgy allows creation to share in God's work. Culture is truly included in the liturgy if it helps people join in God's life and grace. True inculturation joins nature and grace: grace perfects nature [18].

Karol Wojtyła continues the idea of participation by focusing on people. In "The Acting Person," he suggests that people come to know themselves through their actions within the community. Participation is more than action, it is being part of a community based on mutual self-giving.[19] This view adds a relational aspect: people join in the mystery of God by loving others in the Church.

Karol Wojtyła deepens the idea of participation in anthropological and personalistic horizons. In *The Acting Person*, he asserted that the human person is realized through action: "man becomes himself through action."[20] Human actions always have a relational dimension because they involve directing to others. This concept gives rise to the notion of *participatio personalis*, personal participation, in which human beings engage with others through relationships of love, solidarity, and shared responsibility.

In the context of the liturgy, this means that the participation of the faithful is not merely an engagement in rituals, but an existential act of self-giving in a community of faith. The liturgy becomes a space of *communio personarum*, a personal communion that finds unity in the love of Christ. Wojtyła writes, "Participation reaches its fullness when the person acts together with others for the good that unites them" [21]. Thus, the liturgical act is the collective participation of the people in the highest good, that is, God Himself.

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[16] Xavier M. Montecel, "Liturgy, Virtue, and the Foundations of an Ecclesial Ethic," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 42 (2023): 401–16.
[17] Andrew Mullins, "Thomas Aquinas's Fourth Way as a Participation Argument," *Philosophia Christi* 24, no. 1 (2022): 23–40; A relevant study on Aquinas'participation see Gilles Emery, "Participation in Thomistic Metaphysics and Its Relevance for Cultural Hermeneutics," *Angelicum* 90, no. 2 (2013): 245–68.
[18] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, ed. oleh revised by the Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine Dominican Fathers (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2012) Gratia enim non tollit naturam, sed perficit; unde naturale rationis lumen adiuvatur a revelatione divina. Summa Theologiae I, q.1, a.8 ad 2.
[19] Karol Wojtyla, *The acting person*, no. 1 (D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1979), 272–75.
[20] Wojtyla, *The acting person*, 11–13 and 75–77.
[21] *The acting person*, 274.

This framework of personalism has direct implications for inculturation. Cultural symbols such as betel nut or ikat weaving take on new liturgical meaning when lived as signs of love, acceptance, and brotherhood, the personal-relational dimension that leads people to communion with God. True inculturation is not just about preserving ethnic identity, but transforming it into a medium of love that comes from the Eucharist.

Meanwhile, Joseph Ratzinger in *The Spirit of the Liturgy* affirms that true liturgy is always oriented *ad Deum*, towards God. He warned that if inculturation is trapped in a horizontal dimension, then the liturgy loses its transcendent power.[22] Transcendence does not mean rejecting culture, but instead directing it toward its highest goal.

Joseph Ratzinger reminds us that the true liturgy is always oriented *ad Deum*, toward God. He asserts that the greatest danger of the modern liturgy is "anthropologization," which occurs when celebrations become community-centered and lose their vertical direction.[23] For Ratzinger, liturgical inculturation is only valid insofar as it leads people beyond themselves to God, rather than simply reinforcing the expression of cultural identity.

Transcendence in the liturgy, according to Ratzinger, does not mean shunning the world but sanctifying the world by directing it toward God. In the context of NTT, this means that the integration of local symbols, such as dance or traditional music, should lead people "upwards" rather than imprison them in cultural sentimentality. Successful inculturation facilitates the experience of transcendence, making the faithful aware they are participating in a divine reality that transcends outward form and expression.

2.5 Hermeneutic Synthesis: From Ontology to Personality, Towards Transcendence

When combined, the three frameworks above form a single hermeneutic line. First, Aquinas showed that participation is an ontological structure: everything that exists is rooted in the existence of God. Wojtyła, then, interprets participation as a personal dynamic: the human being becomes himself in a relationship of love and self-giving. At last, Ratzinger directed the participation to a final orientation: transcendence as the culmination of all liturgical action.

Through this synthesis, the liturgy can be understood as a transcendental ontological-relational event. Inculturation is not simply cultural integration, but a process in which particular symbols become bridges to the universality of grace. Philosophy thus serves as a participatory hermeneutic that interprets how grace perfects nature in concrete liturgical actions.

This framework will be used to analyze liturgical practices in NTT, particularly the extent to which local cultural elements, such as natoni, jai, or betel nut symbols, serve as means of ontological and relational participation that lead the faithful to experience transcendence.

[22] *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 21–23.
[23] Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 83–85.

Thus, the philosophy of participation and relational personalism becomes a hermeneutic tool for assessing whether inculturation in NTT truly brings people into an encounter with the living God or affirms cultural identity without spiritual depth.

2.6 Research Gaps and Study Contributions

From the various literature above, two main patterns can be seen: (1) research on liturgical inculturation in Indonesia still focuses on theological and anthropological descriptions, not on philosophical analysis that reveals the structure of participation and transcendence; and (2) there has been no study that explicitly links the thought of Aquinas and Wojtyła in the reading of local liturgical praxis in NTT. In fact, these two frameworks offer a bridge between faith and culture: Aquinas through the ontological structure of existence, and Wojtyła through personal relational dynamics.

This research places itself at that common point: utilizing philosophy as hermeneutics to understand inculturation as a participatory and transcendental event. With this approach, culture is not only read as a context, but rather as a "container of existence" that participates in the experience of grace. This approach is expected to make a conceptual contribution to Indonesia's contextual liturgical theology, while enriching philosophical reflections on human beings as participatory beings called to transcendence.

The threefold synthesis above is conceptually robust but, taken alone, risks reproducing a conclusion that has become familiar in contextual liturgical theology: that authentic inculturation is ontological, personalistic, and transcendental. This study moves beyond that familiarity by asking a further, practical question: *How can a local Church actually use this synthesis to discern, evaluate, and reform its liturgical practice?*

To answer that question, this study converts the threefold hermeneutic into a four-step *Participatory Inculturation Discernment Matrix*. The first three steps correspond to the three thinkers; the fourth step is the study's distinctive contribution:

1. Ontological participation (Aquinas). Does the symbol genuinely mediate *participatio essendi*, a real share in divine life, or does it remain an aesthetic surface?
2. Personalistic communion (Wojtyła). Does the symbol foster *communio personarum*, relational self-gift, reconciliation, and mutual love, or does it remain a social performance?
3. Transcendental orientation (Ratzinger). Is the whole celebration oriented *ad Deum*, toward God, or is it absorbed into self-referential cultural expression?
4. Doxological-ecclesial fruitfulness (post-liturgical verification). Does the encounter celebrated in the liturgy bear fruit *after* the liturgy, in charity, reconciliation, and missionary witness?

This fourth step is grounded in the classical principle that liturgy is the "summit and source" of the Church's life: if inculturation is genuine, it must be verifiable not only in the liturgical moment but in the ecclesial and ethical life that flows from it.

This fourth step addresses a weakness in existing studies, which tend to evaluate inculturation primarily by what happens *within* the celebration. By adding a post-liturgical test, the study proposes that authentic inculturation is measured by its *doxological-ecclesial* consequences: the glory of God made visible in the transformation of the community. In this sense, the matrix is not merely a set of criteria but a discernment grammar, a reproducible tool that dioceses and parishes can use to evaluate any proposed inculturative practice.

Table 1. The Participatory Inculturation Discernment Matrix

Dimension	**Guiding Question**	**Transformative Indicator**	**Cosmetic Indicator**	**Pastoral Response**
Ontological (Aquinas)	Does the symbol mediate *participatio essendi*?	Symbol is explained and lived as a means of grace	Symbol is merely decorative	*Mistagogical* education in symbolism
Personalistic (Wojtyła)	Does the symbol foster self-gift and *communio personarum*?	Interior involvement, mutual giving, reconciliation	Social performance only	Formation in liturgical communion
Transcendental (Ratzinger)	Is the celebration oriented *ad Deum*?	Prayer, silence, Christ-centered focus	Ethnic identity or emotion becomes the center	*Ad Deum*-oriented liturgical guidelines
Doxological-ecclesial (post-liturgical verification)	Does the liturgy bear fruit in charity, reconciliation, and mission?	Concrete works of charity, restored relationships, witness	Fleeting euphoria without ecclesial or ethical fruit	Post-liturgical pastoral evaluation and follow-up

The novelty of the study, therefore, is not merely the application of philosophy to liturgy, but the translation of a philosophical synthesis into an operational instrument of ecclesial discernment, with a fourth, empirically verifiable step that existing studies have not proposed.

III. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative-philosophical approach, grounded in a theological hermeneutic framework and the phenomenology of participation. The goal is not to test an empirical hypothesis but to understand the most profound meaning of liturgical inculturation as a participatory and transcendental event. This approach follows the hermeneutic tradition of Hans-Georg Gadamer, which emphasizes understanding as the encounter of meaning between the subject and the text or action.[24] In this context, the "text" interpreted is not just a written word, but a liturgical act itself, a *living text* where faith and culture meet. Philosophical methodology presents philosophy not as an abstract theory but as a tool for reflective analysis to uncover the structure of meaning through participation and transcendence. Thomas Aquinas and Karol Wojtyła employed it as a double lens: the first highlighted the ontological dimension

[24] *Truth and Method* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1975).

of participation, while the second emphasized its personal and relational dimensions. This approach allows research to move from phenomenological observation to metaphysical and anthropological reflection.

The research was carried out in three parishes in Kupang City, namely:

1. Parish of Christ the King, the Cathedral, which represents urban and formal liturgy;
2. St. Joseph Naikoten Parish, which shows musical adaptations and local cultural symbols;

3. The parish of St. Maria Assumpta Kotabaru is known for its active involvement in developing forms of inculturation for wedding masses and traditional celebrations.

The research focuses on the practice of inculturation in the liturgy of marriage and the Eucharist, the two most symbolic rites. The observed phenomena include the use of woven fabrics, betel nuts, *natoni* (traditional speeches), and *jai* dances in mass celebrations.

Data is collected through three main types of sources. First, Liturgical Observation. The researcher attends and records the liturgical structure, the symbols used, and the people's responses. Observation is conducted in a participatory yet reflective manner: researchers not only record events but also interpret their meaning in the context of participation and transcendence[25].

Second, Semi-Structured Interviews**.** Conducted with parish priests, the bride and groom, choir coaches, and traditional leaders. The questions aim to understand the motivation and meaning behind the integration of cultural symbols in the liturgy. Interviews are used not to seek uniformity of answers, but to uncover the understanding that lies behind practice.

Third, Analysis of Liturgical Documents and Texts**.** Church documents such as *Sacrosanctum Concilium*[26], *Varietates Legitimae*[27] , and *Redemptoris Missio*[28] are normative sources. In addition, local texts such as the book of inculturative celebration etiquette, regional liturgical chanting, and the pastoral guidelines of the Archdiocese of Kupang are analyzed as concrete expressions of inculturation theology at the local level.

The analysis is carried out in an interpretive and reflective manner, with three layers of meaning:

First, Phenomenological Analysis explores the structure of people's experience during the liturgy and how cultural symbols are lived, understood, and perceived. This procedure follows Edmund Husserl's attempt to uncover the "essence of experience" through phenomenological reduction.[29] Second, Theological-Liturgical Analysis: Reading the practice of inculturation in the light of the Church's doctrine on the liturgy and sacraments. This analysis is used to assess fidelity to the theological structure of the liturgy, particularly with respect to orientation to the

[25] James P. Spradley, *Participant Observation* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980).
[26] Second Vatican Council, "Sacrosanctum Concilium: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy."
[27] *Varietates Legitimae: Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy*.
[28] "Redemptoris Missio," 1990.
[29] *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. oleh W. R. Boyce Gibson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931).

Easter Mystery and *participatio actuosa*. Third, Analysis of Hermeneutic Philosophy. Using the framework of Aquinas and Wojtyła to interpret the ontological and relational meanings of the symbols used. Aquinas helped to uncover the extent to which symbols participate in the divine essence, while Wojtyła highlighted the dynamics of self-giving in communion of persons. The analysis leads to an evaluation of liturgical transcendence, following Ratzinger, who emphasizes *ad Deum* orientation. A fourth, evaluative layer is added in light of the study's novelty: Doxological-Ecclesial Verification, which examines whether the inculturative celebration bears post-liturgical fruit in charity, reconciliation, and mission, thereby operationalizing the fourth step of the Discernment Matrix.

The analysis process follows the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which involves data reduction, data presentation, and a reflective conclusion.[30] A spiral hermeneutic process accompanies each stage, as initial understanding is tested and deepened through a constant dialogue between the text (the liturgy) and the context (local culture).

In philosophical and contextual research, validity is not measured by data replication, but rather by the depth of interpretation and the coherence of meaning[31]. The researcher's reflexivity is an important element because the researcher is also part of the faith community being studied. Awareness of this position is maintained by performing "reflective reduction", restraining personal prejudice so that understanding grows from the dialogue between liturgical experience and theological horizons[32].

This research respects all ethical norms of the Church and the university. Each interview participant was given information about the research objectives and agreed to participate voluntarily. No personal data is disclosed without permission. The interpretation of liturgical symbols and actions is carried out with respect for the teachings of the Catholic Church and the cultural sensitivity of the people of NTT.

This approach generates a dialogue between cultural facts and metaphysical reflections, between the experience of faith and philosophical categories. Through a hermeneutic approach, this study not only describes liturgical inculturation but also reveals the structure of participation and transcendence within it. Thus, this methodology integrates three horizons of understanding: Phenomenological, looking at how people experience liturgical symbols. Theological, assessing fidelity to the structure of faith and sacramentality. And Philosophical: interpreting participation and transcendence in the light of Aquinas and Wojtyła. To these is added a fourth, Doxological-Ecclesial horizon, which verifies the post-liturgical fruit of inculturation.

This approach makes philosophy not an object of research but a language for the analysis of faith, a tool for understanding how local culture in NTT participates in grace and leads to transcendence through the liturgy.

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[30] *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994).
[31] John W. Creswell dan Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4 ed. (SAGE Publications, 2018).
[32] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

IV. Findings and Philosophical Analysis

4.1 Three Patterns of Inculturation in Kupang

Field observations showed that the practice of liturgical inculturation in three parishes in Kupang City displayed three dominant patterns: (1) the integration of cultural symbols as part of the opening rites and offerings, (2) the use of local language and music in liturgical chanting, and (3) the involvement of indigenous communities in the sacramental celebration system, especially in the wedding mass.

In St. Joseph Naikoten Parish, for example, the bridal procession is accompanied by jai *dancing* and betel nut performances as a sign of family acceptance. The parish priest explained that the act was "not just a customary veneration, but a symbol of love and unity in Christ"[33]. In contrast, in the Cathedral Parish of Christ the King, the use of traditional elements is limited to certain celebrations, with consideration for maintaining the sacredness and integrity of the universal rite.

Interviews with the faithful show diverse views. Some believe that local symbols "bring the hearts of the faithful closer to the Mass," while others feel that "too many customs" can distract from the concentration on the celebration of the Eucharist. This dynamic reveals a duality of meaning, between the need for cultural expression and the pursuit of a deeper experience of faith. This phenomenon serves as the starting point for the following philosophical analysis.

4.2 Transformative Inculturation vs. Cosmetics

Field findings reveal two primary forms of liturgical inculturation: transformative and cosmetic.

Transformative Inculturation

Transformative inculturation occurs when cultural symbols are integrated into the liturgy with clear theological meaning and conscious participation of the faithful. At St. Maria Assumpta Kotabaru Parish, for example, the bride and groom bring woven cloth to the altar as a symbol of "uniting two families in one body of Christ." The priest explained this meaning in his homily, and the faithful responded with prayer and reverent silence.[34] In Aquinas's perspective, this action reflects *participatio essendi*, the material reality (cloth) participating in the reality of grace because it is directed to God as the ultimate goal[35]. Cultural symbols become *signum quod rem significat et continet*, signs that not only point to but also contain the reality they represent.

Cosmetic Inculturation

Rudolf Tjung Lake, "Inkulturasi Liturgi Sakramen Perkawinan," 12 Juni 2025.

[34] Tjung Lake, "Inkulturasi Liturgi Sakramen Perkawinan."

[35] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition* Necessarium est igitur omne quod quocumque modo est, esse a Deo. — Summa Theologiae I, q.44, a.1, Respondeo.

In contrast, cosmetic inculturation occurs when cultural elements serve only as markers of identity, lacking deep spiritual meaning. During one of the wedding masses at the Cathedral Parish, traditional dancers appear at the beginning of the mass in traditional clothing, but without an explanation of their symbolic meaning. Many people view it as mere "entertainment," not part of a sacred celebration. In Wojtyła's framework, this act loses the dimension *of communio personarum*, no relationship of self-giving unites the people with the mystery of Christ. The symbol remains aesthetically beautiful, but fails to become an existential event.

The distinction between transformative and cosmetic inculturation reveals that the essence of inculturation lies not in adopting a form, but in transforming *meaning*[36]. Grace does not eliminate culture but elevates it as a means of human participation in the work of salvation (*gratia perficit naturam*). This principle grounds the Church's teaching that cultural forms are not destroyed by the Gospel, but purified, elevated, and perfected in the light of Christ, precisely the idea expressed in *Varietates Legitimae* and *Ecclesia in Oceania*[37].

4.3 Aquinas's Ontological Analysis of Symbols

From a metaphysical perspective, cultural symbols in the Kupang liturgy can be understood as an ontological bridge between the sensory world and divine reality. In Aquinas's framework, participation means "taking part in a higher existence without losing one's own nature"[38]. Thus, every cultural symbol has value insofar as it *participat esse divinum,* partakes of God's existence. Betel nut is offered in large quantities as a symbol of love and peace; it not only conveys social values but also leads people to a sense of communion with God. The betel nut that is distributed symbolizes unifying love; in Aquinas's category, this reflects *participatio boni*, participation in God-derived goodness.

The results show that local cultural symbols, such as woven cloth, betel nut, and *jai* dance, have the potential to serve as a bridge between faith and culture, insofar as they are understood as signs of participation in divine reality. In Thomas Aquinas's view, every creature and every cultural symbol "partakes of the existence of God without being God himself"[39]. This means that these symbols are not merely social artifacts, but ontological media that enable humans to access the reality of grace.

True inculturation, therefore, is participatory: culture is not only absorbed into the liturgy, but raised into a vessel of grace. Aquinas affirmed the fundamental principle: *gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit eam*, grace does not negate nature, but perfects it. This principle is key to

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[36] Martasudjita, "Implementation of Church Teaching on Liturgical Inculturation in Indonesia."
[37] "Ecclesia in Oceania (November 22, 2001)," diakses 6 September 2025, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20011122_ecclesia-in-oceania.html.
[38] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition* Unde necesse est quod in Deo, qui est primum ens et simplex, praeexistat omnium rerum ratio secundum modum eius, qui est simplex et unicus. Et hoc est esse causam exemplarem. ST I, q.44, a.3 .
[39] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition* Dicimus autem Deum esse causam per seipsum non causatam, et esse primam causam efficientem. Necessarium est igitur omne quod quocumque modo est, esse a Deo. ST I, q.44, a.1.

understanding the dynamics of the liturgy in NTT: cultural elements should not be sanctified simply because they are "local," but sanctified insofar as they are directed and transfigured by grace.

4.4 Wojtyła's Relational Analysis of Participation

Wojtyła's (1979) approach to personalism enables a reading of the relational dimension of the faithful's participation in the liturgy. The liturgy is not only *actus ecclesiae*, but also *actus personarum,* an act of personal communion that participates in the love of Christ.

At the wedding mass in Kotabaru Parish, the bride and groom exchange betel nuts before exchanging their wedding vows. The act is not an official part of the rite, but is interpreted as "a symbol of self-giving and acceptance of love."[40] In Wojtyła's framework, this can be read as *actus participationis personalis*, in which two persons affirm their unity through symbols that touch both the physical and spiritual aspects.

However, observation reveals that not everyone can grasp the full depth of this meaning. Some consider it merely a "custom that must exist," suggesting the relational dimension of participation has not yet been fully realized as a form of *communio personarum*. Here, we see the importance of liturgical education that connects cultural symbols with the spirituality of love and personal responsibility [41].

Participation is not only ontological but also relational and personal, as Karol Wojtyła emphasizes in *The Acting Person* [42]. A person becomes themselves through actions that involve others; they cannot live or believe alone. In the liturgy, this personal act is embodied in *communio personarum*, a communion of persons whose unity is found in the love of Christ.

The inculturation of the liturgy in NTT reveals two relational layers: first, the interpersonal relationships within the community; second, the relationship between the people and God through cultural symbols that serve as a means of love. When betel nut is distributed on the altar as a sign of reconciliation, the act is not merely a social gesture but becomes a symbol of self-giving and acceptance of God's love. In Wojtyła's horizon, the act reveals *actus participationis personalis*, human participation in divine love through concrete action[43].

However, the phenomenon on the ground also reveals relational fragmentation: some people interpret traditional actions in social terms rather than spiritually. This signifies a crisis of personal participation: the people are physically present, but do not participate in meaning. Actual participation demands an existential awareness that liturgical action is a dialogue of love: "the person becomes more fully himself the more he gives himself to others" [44]. Inculturation that does not foster self-giving will result only in a liturgy that is culturally alive but spiritually dead.

[40] "Inkulturasi Liturgi Sakramen Perkawinan" People's Interview.
[41] Widyawati, "Preserving Local Language and Culture in the Indonesian Church."
[42] *The acting person*.
[43] Wojtyla, *The acting person*, 274.
[44] Wojtyla, *The acting person*, 285.

Therefore, this relational dimension highlights the importance of liturgical and mystagogical education. The local church needs to help people understand traditional symbols not only as ancestral traditions, but as a means of the living God's love. Without relational interpretation, symbols are never communio, but only performances.

Thus, relational participation requires two things: self-awareness of the meaning of action, and openness to greater loving relationships. When these two dimensions are present, inculturation not only unites the people socially but also leads them to experience the living love of God.

4.5 Ratzinger's Transcendence Analysis of Liturgical Orientation

One important finding is that cultural elements can help or obscure the experience of transcendence, depending on the direction and context. In a mass that emphasizes symbolic meaning and silence, the faithful report a "feeling of closeness to God" and "deep emotion."[45] Conversely, when cultural elements are too dominant, especially in music and dance, people tend to focus on performance rather than prayer.

Ratzinger refers to this phenomenon as a "liturgical orientation crisis", a situation in which celebrations are more human-centered than God-centered.[46] In the context of NTT, this is seen when customary symbols are used to reinforce ethnic identity without being directed at the Mystery of Christ. In fact, the ultimate goal of the liturgy is *ad Deum*, to direct all human reality to the transcendent God.

Joseph Ratzinger reminds us that true liturgy is always oriented *ad Deum*, to God. Transcendence is not a movement away from the world, but a movement toward the world's glorification by God.[47] Liturgy that focuses too much on the "culture of the people" risks losing its vertical orientation and degenerating into *a self-referential celebration*, a celebration of the self that separates man from the source of grace.

Field findings confirm this observation. When customary elements are integrated with clear spiritual focuses, such as prayer, silence, and the explanation of theological meaning, people experience a deep sense of closeness to God. However, when traditional elements dominate without a spiritual context, the orientation toward transcendence is blurred. In Aquinas's category, this describes a shift from *participatio essendi* to *participatio apparens*, participation that is visible, but not substantial.

The *ad Deum* orientation serves as a spiritual compass of inculturation. Culture is not a substitute for transcendence, but a path to transcendence. Thus, an authentic inculturative liturgy is not a "locally colored" liturgy, but one that radiates an awareness of God's presence

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[45] John Cavadini Weinandy Mary Healy, Thomas, "The Renewal of the Liturgy: Successes, Failures, and Contemporary Concerns," Church Life Journal, 19 September 2022, https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/the-renewal-of-the-liturgy-successes-failures-and-contemporary-concerns/.

[46] Joseph Ratzinger, *Das Fest des Glaubens: Versuche zur Theologie des Gottesdienstes* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1981), 65–66.

[47] Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 165–66; Joseph Ratzinger, *Aus meinem Leben: Erinnerungen 1927–1977* (München: Kösel Verlag, 1988), 148–49.

in the local culture itself. Transcendence demands that every cultural element lead people to true worship, not just to ethnic pride.

With the framework of Aquinas and Wojtyła, transcendence can be understood not as an escape from the world, but as the glorification of the world through participation in God. True inculturation is not "cultivating the Church," but rather "bestowing grace on culture"[48].

4.6 Four Criteria of Authentic Inculturation

The success of liturgical inculturation is not measured by the number of cultural elements incorporated, but by the depth of their integration into the mystery of faith. Building on the three philosophical horizons, and adding the study's distinctive fourth step, authentic inculturation is marked by four criteria:

1. Ontological Participation: cultural symbols must participate in divine existence, pointing beyond themselves to the reality of grace (*res*).
2. Personalistic Communion: the actions of the faithful must foster *communio personarum*, not mere social collectivity.
3. Transcendental Orientation: every liturgical act must be directed *ad Deum*, rather than reduced to self-expression or cultural identity.
4. Doxological-Ecclesial Fruitfulness: the inculturative celebration must bear verifiable post-liturgical fruit in charity, reconciliation, and mission.

This fourth criterion operationalizes the principle that the liturgy is the "summit and source" of the Church's life: if inculturation is genuine, its effects must extend beyond the celebration into the ethical and missionary life of the community.

Philosophy of participation and personalism provides not only deeper understanding but also a standard of discernment: true inculturation is the moment when culture is elevated by grace to lead humanity to God.

In NTT, this dynamic reveals a double movement: from nature to grace, in which culture is transfigured, and from community to communion, in which people are raised to deeper unity. Both movements culminate in transcendence, directing all liturgy toward God as origin and final end. The fourth criterion introduces a further movement, from celebration to mission, in which the grace received in the liturgy becomes visible in the community's transformation.

In Aquinas's terms, the liturgy becomes participatio divinae vitae, humanity's share in divine life. In Wojtyła's terms, it is actus amoris, an act of love uniting persons in Christ. In Ratzinger's terms, it is ad Deum, orientation to the Father through the Son in the Spirit. Integrated together, these frameworks yield the four criteria of authentic inculturation, which converge in the classical axiom gratia perficit naturam: grace perfects nature. Inculturation, then, is not simply the meeting of religion and culture, but their transformation through grace

[48] "Faith and Inculturation," diakses 6 Oktober 2025, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1988_fede-inculturazione_en.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

into a language of transcendence, verified not only in the liturgy but in the life that flows from it.

Table 2. Application of the Discernment Matrix to the Three Parishes

Criterion	**Cathedral Parish**	**St. Joseph Naikoten**	**St. Maria Assumpta Kotabaru**
Ontological	Symbols present but rarely explained	Symbols explained in homily	Symbols explicitly linked to grace
Personalistic	Limited interior involvement	Growing but uneven	Strong relational participation
Transcendental	Strong *ad Deum* orientation	At times performance-centered	Balanced with silence and prayer
Doxological-ecclesial (post-liturgical)	Moderate fruit in parish life	Emerging fruit in community reconciliation	Visible fruit in community life

This table shows that no parish fully satisfies all four criteria; rather, the matrix functions as a diagnostic and formative tool, not a judgment. The fourth criterion, in particular, reveals that transformative inculturation is a process that continues beyond the liturgical celebration.

4.7 Philosophical and Academic Implications

Conceptually, this study affirms the role of philosophy as a theological hermeneutic for contextual liturgical studies. Aquinas's philosophy of participation provides a metaphysical basis for interpreting cultural symbols as the participation of divine reality. At the same time, Wojtyła's personalism offers an anthropological framework for understanding the liturgy as an act of self-giving and a relationship of love.

The integration of the two presents a new paradigm: inculturation as ontological and relational participation directed at transcendence, and verified in doxological-ecclesial fruitfulness. With this paradigm, the Church can assess forms of inculturation using four balanced measures: metaphysical (the truth of meaning), personalistic (the quality of relationship), theological (the direction of transcendence), and ecclesial-missionary (the post-liturgical fruit).

Academically, this approach creates an opportunity for dialogue among philosophy, theology, and cultural anthropology within the Indonesian context. Cultural symbols are no longer mere local artifacts, but rather the "metaphysical language of faith" that bridges the human world with divine reality. The Discernment Matrix further offers a transferable instrument that can be tested in other local Churches, thereby opening a new research agenda for comparative contextual liturgical studies.

4.8 Pastoral Recommendations

The philosophical synthesis outlined above finds its concrete expression in pastoral practice. If authentic inculturation is the elevation of culture by grace, in which symbols, actions, and relationships participate in divine life, then this vision must be embodied in the pastoral and liturgical life of the Church. The following recommendations translate the four criteria of inculturation into practical orientations for dioceses and parishes. Each criterion becomes a pastoral pathway: the ontological dimension invites mistagogical education that unveils the divine depth of symbols; the personalistic dimension calls for formation in communion that transforms liturgy from performance into encounter; the transcendental dimension demands contextual guidelines that preserve the liturgy's orientation *ad Deum*; and the doxological-ecclesial dimension requires post-liturgical evaluation and follow-up.

Mistagogical Education Based on Ontological Criteria

Dioceses and parishes need to develop a mystagogical program that helps the faithful uncover the theological meaning of traditional symbols such as woven cloth, betel nut, or jai dance. Through this kind of construction, symbols are no longer understood aesthetically, but as a path to the mystery of salvation. The philosophy of participation helps people understand that every sign has its roots in God's existence.

Formation of Liturgical Community Based on Personalistic Criteria

The formation of priests, catechists, and liturgical ministers should be centered on communio personarum, the formation of a community that gives of itself to one another in love. The liturgy should be an event of communion, not a performance. In the spirit of Wojtyła, the faithful are led to see the liturgy as an act of love that builds the Church into a living body of Christ, not as a ritual performed without inner involvement.

Ad Deum-Oriented Contextual Liturgical Guidelines (Transcendental Criteria)

Each form of inculturation must maintain a vertical orientation toward God. Dioceses may develop contextual liturgical guidelines that affirm the principles of ad Deum orientation, unity with the Eucharist, and clarity of the theological meaning of symbols. Thus, cultural expression remains a means of worship rather than the center of attention during celebrations.

Post-Liturgical Evaluation and Follow-Up (Doxological-Ecclesial Criteria)

Parishes should develop simple mechanisms to evaluate the post-liturgical fruit of inculturative celebrations, for example, through community sharing, follow-up on reconciliation initiatives, and discernment of missionary witness. This step ensures that inculturation is judged not solely by the beauty of the celebration but also by its transformative effect on the community's life of charity and mission.

Through these converging efforts, the Church in NTT can ensure that cultural expression not only reflects local identity but also becomes a vessel of grace, leading the faithful toward the mystery of God.

V. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that liturgical inculturation in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) transcends mere cultural adaptation or religious expression. It constitutes a participatory and transcendental encounter in which cultural symbols and communal practices serve as vehicles for orientation toward divine reality. Drawing on Thomas Aquinas, Karol Wojtyła, and Joseph Ratzinger, the study establishes an integrated philosophical framework: Aquinas's participatio essendi illuminates the ontological grounding of cultural symbols in divine being; Wojtyła's communio personarum situates liturgical participation within self-giving and interpersonal communion; and Ratzinger's ad Deum safeguards the fundamentally theocentric orientation of worship. Together, these perspectives establish that authentic inculturation entails not merely the incorporation of cultural forms into the liturgy but their transformation through participation in divine grace.

Building upon this synthesis, the study advances its distinctive contribution: the Participatory Inculturation Discernment Matrix, which articulates four interrelated criteria for evaluating inculturative practice. The ontological criterion examines whether cultural symbols communicate participation in divine reality rather than functioning as aesthetic ornaments. The personalistic criterion considers whether liturgical participation fosters self-giving and communion rather than collective performance. The transcendental criterion assesses whether the celebration remains oriented ad Deum, rather than toward cultural identity or human self-expression as ends in themselves. Finally, the doxological-ecclesial criterion introduces a fourth, post-liturgical dimension of verification: whether the encounter celebrated in worship bears discernible fruit in charity, reconciliation, and mission. This final criterion extends the analysis beyond the liturgical event itself, making the transformative life of the ecclesial community an essential dimension of discernment.

These criteria also yield concrete pastoral implications. The ontological dimension calls for mystagogical formation that enables the faithful to recognize the theological significance of local symbols; the personalistic dimension requires formation in relational participation and ecclesial communion; and the transcendental dimension demands liturgical guidelines that preserve the primacy of divine worship over aesthetic or ethnic self-affirmation. The doxological-ecclesial dimension, in turn, calls for post-liturgical evaluation through which parishes can discern the celebration's continuing effects on communal relationships, charitable action, reconciliation, and missionary commitment. The study thus proposes a methodological shift from description to discernment, and from the liturgical moment to its transformative consequences, offering local Churches a transferable framework for evaluating and refining inculturative practices.

Ultimately, authentic inculturation is neither the mere localization of Christianity nor the preservation of cultural identity within religious celebration. It is the transformation of culture through grace, whereby local symbols become meaningful expressions of communion with God and one another. In this sense, the classical principle gratia perficit naturam finds its liturgical expression: grace does not negate culture but purifies, elevates, and perfects it. Liturgical inculturation in NTT can therefore be understood as an icon of grace, in which the particularity of local culture opens toward the universality of Christian communion. Its authenticity is disclosed not only in the beauty of worship but also in the life that proceeds from

it, where participation becomes charity, communion becomes reconciliation, and celebration becomes mission. *Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus*—that in all things God may be glorified.

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