



## Unveiling the Javanese Spiritual Legacy: Exploring Its Impact on Leadership Among Catholic Priests

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to examine the types of local knowledge associated with priestly leadership behaviours in the context of Indonesian experiences. Specifically, the research explored the significance of spiritual life among Catholic priests with a Javanese cultural background in the diocese of Malang and whether Javanese values influenced their spiritual and priestly lives. A qualitative approach was utilized, and a questionnaire was administered to collect research data from actively ministering priests in the deanery of Malang. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive analysis methods. The findings of the study revealed that Catholic Javanese priests embodied six indicators of Javanese spirituality, including Javanese manners (*tata krama* or *unggah-ungguh*), selflessness (*sepi ing pamrih*), role model (*panutan*), tolerance (*tepa selira*), celibacy, and meditation. The implications of the study were thoroughly reviewed and discussed. The study highlighted the influence of Javanese cultural values on Catholic priests' spiritual and priestly lives in the diocese of Malang. The findings shed light on the importance of understanding and appreciating the local knowledge and cultural context in shaping effective priestly leadership behaviours. This research contributes to intercultural studies within the Catholic Church. It provides insights for pastoral training and formation programs that aim to develop culturally sensitive priests who can effectively serve diverse communities.

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## INTRODUCTION

Priestly leadership has been discussed (Tinambunan, 2021; Du, 2021). A priest holds a unique role in the Catholic Church's apostolate. Through the authority of Christ, they are ordained to teach, sanctify, and govern the congregation. Their responsibilities include ministering the Word of God and administering the sacraments. Living a life of obedience, chastity, and poverty, a priest becomes a tangible representation of Christ, the Good Shepherd. The authority of a priest originates from and is directed towards Christ.

Leadership development within the ministerial priesthood raises whether leaders are born or shaped. According to a theory, leaders are shaped by specific situations and conditions. Qualified leaders emerge under the pressure of challenges. The distinction between common and Christian leadership lies not in the methodology, function, or position but in the calling, values, and philosophy. Christian leadership aims to elevate leadership to a higher level by aligning with God's plan and agenda (Wiwin & Firmanto, 2021). Since church leaders are spiritual leaders, their actions should be driven by and rooted in spirituality. Thus, Christian leadership should nurture spiritual needs.

Exploring local wisdom is one approach to cultivating a spiritual life (Tinambunan, 2022; Firmanto, 2017). Local knowledge is collectively owned and can be expressed through stories, songs, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, customary laws, local languages, and the utilization of natural resources. It is also called local or indigenous knowledge by Ellen, Parker, & Bicker (2005). Local knowledge is characterized as 1) knowledge associated with a specific place and experiences developed by local people; 2) knowledge acquired through imitation, mimicry, and experimentation; 3) practical knowledge gained through day-to-day trial and error; 4) empirical knowledge rather than theoretical; and 5) comprehensive and integrated knowledge rooted in tradition and culture. Although different terms are used, local wisdom and knowledge share the understanding that they are products of human civilization through cultural processes within the surrounding natural environment (Dahliani, 2015).

In the research context, local wisdom can be a strong foundation for forming priestly spirituality because it has been processed for years in people's lives. Local wisdom is acquired long ago and passed from generation to generation. People learn to better manage and understand their lives from within their traditions (Eko & Putranto, 2019). By reviving what traditional knowledge and wisdom remained, people can adapt their lives and gradually improve individual, family, and community life (Firmanto & Setiyaningtiyas, 2017). Leadership as a practical aspect of human life is rooted in local culture. Following the saying "think global, act local," could the local wisdom develop the priestly leadership concept?

Javanese wisdom is one of the local pearls of wisdom (Geertz, 1976). Javanese local wisdom is the heritage of Javanese people living in the central and eastern parts of Java. They are the largest population in Indonesia. The Javanese live in the provinces of Central Java, Yogyakarta Special Region (DIY), and East Java on the island of Java, Indonesia. Java has a history; various religions are growing rapidly on this island. But before the official religion entered, the Javanese already had a belief. Religion and culture in its development go hand in hand; according to Reksosusilo, Javanese people are currently influenced by incoming religions and cultures, namely Hindu-Buddhism, Islam, and Western culture. This condition makes Java, as it is today, a plural island (Reksosusilo, 1993).

The expression *wong Jawa nggone semu* has been popular in Javanese society. This expression implies that the Javanese do not only present everything in physical (visible) form. The appearance of the Javanese is full of gestures or *sasmita*. Many things are veiled and expressed using distinctive signs. For example, suppose a Javanese woman is to be arranged for an arranged marriage with a man. The woman does not have to say yes or refuse in that case. She answers the question enough with gestures or hand movements and nods if she wants. Even if the woman responds that she wants to, it would be considered inappropriate (*pener*) even though it was good (*bener*).

The Javanese prefer to act indirectly, so it isn't easy to know what is meant or desired at once. Traditional Javanese society (formerly) often actualized their attitudes and behaviour in a form that was not clear (disguised). Moral teachings concerning Javanese attitudes to life

are always kept secret (not openly). The symbol system is also inseparable from the social system, lifestyle, religion, and social mobility.

The Javanese have traditional wisdom that comes from a synthesis of the historical journey of their people. Although these noble Javanese teachings are addressed to Javanese people, these noble teachings as local wisdom are universal (Nasruddin, 2011). These teachings can be a guideline for interaction between human beings. The Javanese people have knowledge that forms the basis of thought and a unique cultural history. In their epistemology and culture, they use these symbols in actions, language, and religion (Magnis-Suseno, 1984). The Javanese people have an understanding of how a leader should perform leadership. A leader must have two sources of legitimate leadership: formal approval and divine power (Koentjaraningrat, 1984). Formal approval comes from customary or legal procedures that live in society. Divine power comes from the enhancement of a leader's spiritual life.

Leadership performance starts from Javanese ethics. It becomes the two basic rules that most determine the social pattern of Javanese society, namely the principle of harmony and the principle of respect. These two principles are closely related to each other. The concept of *rukun* knows the principle of harmony. *Rukun* aims to maintain a harmonious state in society. Then *rukun* means "in a state of harmony," "calm and serene," and "without strife and conflict, united to help one another." This condition is a lofty goal. For the Javanese, harmony is a social mechanism for integrating personal interests for the group's welfare.

The principle of respect, a very strong value in Javanese society, is a hierarchical value based on the principle of respect. Society is structured hierarchically and beyond moral obligations, and maintaining and expressing such a pattern of social order is a virtue. Maintaining a harmonious order does not only mean maintaining unity and maintaining harmonious relations in society. Those who are higher must be respected, while those who are lower must be protected with a sense of responsibility (good manners or *unggah-ungguh*).

Three concepts show the core of Javanese leadership. Javanese leadership primacy departs from having the right mental attitude (De Jong, 1976). The Javanese see that two dangers threaten the maintenance of stability, namely *hawa nepsu* (lust) and *pamrih* (egoism). *Hawa nepsu* causes a person to be shackled to the world so that his spirit is dulled and does not function as a driver of human behaviour. Likewise, *pamrih*, which seeks personal interests, is an attitude that does not pay attention to social harmony. Lusts that show self-interest must be appeased by controlling passions through reducing food and sleep, controlling sexual appetite, or other forms of mortification.

Meanwhile, practicing equanimity is showing *sabar*, *nrima*, and *rila*. *Sabar* (patience) is a careful attitude in stepping; an open heart can embrace all conflicts, able to wait for the moment calmly and not need to be pushed. *Nrima* means feeling satisfied with his fate, not rebelling, accepting with gratitude, remaining rational, and not collapsing even though he is disappointed, still willing to continue the journey. *Rila* is the sincerity to let go of his individuality and fit into the great harmony. The *rila* attitude liberates the Javanese from attachment to the external world because he surrenders everything to God.

The second concept is the right action. This attitude is reflected in the proper behaviour of humans towards the world. Man must let go of the world's shackles; he must be free from self-interest and thus be free to live his life. The Javanese emphasize the importance of humans carrying out their functions in society by carrying out their duties as well as possible. Faithful to carry out obligations in their respective places of responsibility. Through this attitude, the Javanese help a just, prosperous, harmonious, and mutual respect in maintaining the order of the universe. Javanese people are taught to be *eling* (be aware) of their God and to be *waspada* (introspective) so that they are always *prasaja* (simple) and *andhap asor* (humble). Everything can be returned to the well-known basic attitude of *sepi ing pamrih*, *rame ing gawe* (selfless, diligent work). Only selfless people can concentrate divine powers in their minds and, therefore achieve a deepening of the *rasa* (an intuitive and affective aspect of human rationality) within them. Javanese people who can realize all of these things are called virtuous people. Elevated virtue is the sum of all the primal qualities and radiates a divine presence. There is also Javanese culture, which, if left unchecked, will be dangerous. This condition means that it will harm other people and the Javanese themselves. The bad habits of the Javanese people, it turns out, are ingrained and hard to get rid of just like that, such as *drengki* (low-mindedness), *srei* (envy), *dahwen pati open* (reproaching but wanting), *jail* (having evil intentions), *methakil* (everything rough). Javanese people who are wise can control these bad habits.

The third concept is the ability to determine the right attitude or the right place. For the Javanese, it is very important to understand their proper place in this world because harmony can only be achieved if each person occupies their respective position according to the order of the cosmos, physically and spiritually. The belief that humans are required to play roles according to their respective places is closely related to the belief in destiny, which can be explained in 3 terms: *takdir* (fate), *dharma*, and *karma*. *Takdir* is a belief that everyone is completely determined, and nothing can deviate from that destiny. People are only required to carry out their role as well as possible according to the cosmic order. *Dharma* means the obligation to live according to one's position in the world and society. *Karma* means that all our behaviour is overshadowed by divine law. Five sources can be used as a guide for someone in carrying out their life tasks, namely: 1) customs regarding what is good and what is not good in living in society; 2) social order and its manners; 3) decisions made by discussion (*musyawarah*); 4) a decision from the authority as long as it is taken according to the appropriate form of deliberation; and 5) extraordinary summons due to supernatural powers as long as it can be proven in society.

Based on Javanese perspectives on leadership, Widharsana (1988) stated that a priest directly involved in the congregation should identify with the local values. Further, Reksosusilo (1993) also suggested that Javanese priests cultivate local wisdom to act harmoniously with its milieu. It is urgent to examine whether the Javanese Catholic priests live according to the Javanese concept of religious life (Ratna, 2012).

Budiyono et al. (2017) conducted a study to explore the local wisdom of Javanese culture as a source of character education. This study examined Javanese cultural values as the

basis for character education. The goal is to find the various values contained in Javanese expressions; then, a noble value will be obtained to be used as a universal source of character education (Budiono, 2017).

Ahmad Bahtiar researches Javanese religiosity in modern Indonesian literature. He wrote that good literature could provide information about various people's lives, including those related to their religiosity (Bahtiar, 2011). The author of this study explores several things that are the subject of the problem: what are the characteristics of Javanese religiosity? How does the Javanese priest live his Javanese religiosity?

In the context of the spiritual heritage of the Catholic Javanese priests, the study explores whether the priests did their ministry by integrating their understanding of an ideal leader with the Catholic concepts of priests' ministry (Steenbrink, 2020). For these spiritual achieving, the Catholic Javanese priests should cultivate their perfect life, namely (1) good manners, (2) selflessness, (3) role modelling, (4) tolerance (*tepa selira*), (5) celibacy, and (6) meditation for controlling lust and egoism.

**Table 1.** Indicators and Their Definition

Indicator	Definition
1. Javanese good manners ( <i>tata krama</i> )	attitudes that pay attention to social courtesy while performing priestly ministry because Javanese society maintains and expresses patterns of social order through hierarchical relationships.
2. Selflessness ( <i>tanpa pamrih</i> )	Perspectives for placing a harmonious order through voluntary activities so that people maintain unity and harmonious social relations.
3. Role model ( <i>panutan</i> )	The belief is that humans must play roles according to their respective places.
4. Tolerance ( <i>tepa selira</i> )	An inner being for expressing someone's willingness to measure, reflect, or feel what others are experiencing.
5. Celibacy	A special gift from God so that people adhere to Him easily.
6. Meditation	Serenity or mindfulness among his people so that he knows how to respond to the situation of his people, make judgments, and determine the right attitudes and actions.

## METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach. It describes priestly spirituality. The study's target population is Catholic priests actively ministering in the diocese of Malang, Indonesia. The data collection technique is a purposive sampling method. The study used a sample size of 50 priests in the deanate of Malang, 100 km from Surabaya to the southern region.



**Figure 1.** Map of Eastern Java

Javanese culture is their cultural background. They are members both of diocesan and congregation priests. The researcher conducted this research from October to November 2019 by distributing questionnaires. The priests were mailed self-report survey instruments. The research instrument employed the 5-Likert scale to measure respondents' perception concerning the matter questioned in the questionnaire. The researcher followed descriptive analytics steps through means, frequencies, percentages, and tables for identifying and describing the spiritual heritage of the Catholic Javanese priests. It reveals trends and patterns that perform the spiritual life of the Catholic Javanese priest.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The researcher reached all 50 priests through the distribution of questionnaires. All questionnaires were returned to the researcher. The higher response rate was due to the researcher's effort in collecting intensive data and creating a good rapport with the respondents. Table 2 illustrates the research result. It shows that 81% of the respondents affirm their spiritual heritage background. It was considered that respondents acknowledged that they live their priestly spirituality through appreciation of spiritual heritage.

**Table 2.** The Result of the Questionnaire

No	Indicators	Research Statements	%	%
01	Javanese Good manners ( <i>tata krama</i> )	I dress neatly and politely	88.8	83
		I respect differences of opinion and class	85.2	
		I build dialogue and tolerance	72.6	
		I protect fairly	84.6	
		I speak according to the circumstances of the people.	81	
		I think, behave, and act according to the dignity of a priest.	85.4	
02	Selfless ( <i>tanpa pamrih</i> )	I have priesthood spirituality	97.2	84.8
		I am more important to serve the people	76.4	
		I work sincerely	80.4	
		I sacrifice worldly pleasures	84.2	
		I don't judge, and I don't seek praise.	79.8	
		I am faithful to a priesthood calling.	90.8	
03	Role modeling ( <i>panutan</i> )	I embody the message of the gospel in my daily life	83.8	84.8
		I prioritize discipline and hard work	82.8	
		I am fair to others	83.4	
		I give moral encouragement to the people	82.2	
		I commit assignment	90.8	
		I am consistent with my words	85.6	
04	Tolerance ( <i>tepa selira</i> )	I have a considerate attitude	77.4	79.2
		I have sensitivity to the problems of the people	82	
		I have empathy for people	90	
		I care about the environmental issues	82.2	
		I maintain the peace and harmony of the people	65.2	
		I build tolerance with anyone	72.8	
05		I celebrate the Eucharist every day	85.4	

No	Indicators	Research Statements	%	%
	Celibacy for imitating Jesus	I imitate Jesus	84.6	84.2
		I serve the sacrament	96.2	
		I obey the bishop or provincial	86.6	
		I keep the purity	76.8	
		I meditate on controlling lust and egoism.	76.8	
06	Meditation for controlling lust and egoism	I perform an ascetic life through a simple life.	76.6	70.6
		I pray my breviary	86.4	
		I go to the confessor for personal confession	76	
		I read and contemplate the Scriptures as the Word of God	78	
		I observe fasting and abstinence	54.4	
		I do adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and other Catholic piety	52.6	
Total			81%	

Source: Research Data, 2019.

Table 3 shows the research findings. “Selflessness” and “role model” show that 84.8% of respondents pay attention to their performance as priests among their parishioners. Cavendish’s (2000) shows similar results. Being present among their people is a way to fulfil their vocation as priests.

**Table 3.** Spiritual Heritage of the Catholic Javanese Priests

Research Themes	%
1. Selflessness ( <i>tanpa pamrih</i> )	84.8%
2. Role model ( <i>panutan</i> )	84.8%
3. Celibacy	84.2%
4. Good manners ( <i>tata krama</i> )	83%
5. Tolerance ( <i>tepa selira</i> )	79.2%
6. Meditation	70.6%

Source: Research Data, 2019.

Selflessness gets 84.2 %. It is a very high percentage of all indicators. This finding shows that the Javanese priests behave properly in society and the world by carrying out obligations faithfully (*rame ing gawe*). Selflessness marks a noble character as the basic attitude of an ideal Javanese priest. Javanese people believe that the world must be in order if people show their duties faithfully. The world is in order when each one has the right attitude because harmony is then maintained, and everything follows the right rhythm. *Rame ing gawe* (diligent work) means that each party should fulfil its obligations in their respective places. Doing what is required by our rank and position because harmony in the world is not disturbed. A Javanese priest must have an attitude of selflessness, which expresses a basic willingness to confine himself to his proper place in ordinary life (Firmanto, 2021). The selfless person remembers his true reality, his position as a whole, his dependence on the Divine, and his place in the world and society. Javanese people are invited to always remember themselves (*eling*) in every aspect of life. Only then will humans understand their position, role, and duties in the world, especially in living together. Thus, a Javanese priest in his daily life has moral

foundations for acting and the main pressures in living together. These various aspects are not something that stands and is carried out independently but requires a harmonious relationship between one and the other to maintain unity.

Role models get 84.8 %, which equals good manners. The authority of a Javanese priest is also closely related to his example. As a leader, a priest is made a role model. His own life is the main witness of his message. Because priestly authority is related to personal qualities, priestly leadership relies on the knowledge of Christian teachings on the holiness of daily life to avoid the snares of lust and self-interest. On the quality of priestly service to the community, if they can find that qualified life, people will make the priest a role model, an example for them to follow.

Further, harmony and respect are the two basic rules in the Javanese social order and social life. A leader carrying out his leadership is required to uphold the principles. His way of leadership, the decisions he takes, and his approaches are expected to reflect his personality as a unifying figure. The Javanese generally do not like shocks that disturb harmony, order, and peace. So, the leadership model that is authoritarian and revolutionary is not proper for the Javanese. Javanese will not easily accept sudden and quick changes. Initiating a change without creating a shock in the society, empowering deliberation and consensus systems to achieve the intended changes.

Celibacy gets 84.2 %. Celibacy is valued, accepted as a Godly gift, and respected in Javanese society (Du & Firmanto, 2021). By practising celibacy, priests are consecrated to Christ. They more easily adhere to Him with an undivided heart, more freely in Christ, and devote themselves to the service of God and neighbour through Him. Through priestly ordination, Catholic priests have a high position as leaders who receive special gifts from God to become distributors of His grace (Sumaryanto, 2017). Therefore, the Javanese expect the priests to realize and uphold the dignity of their priesthood by being faithful to their promises. This faithfulness is seen in carrying out the Scriptures and the care and love given to his people in their duties. In their ministry, the priests become the movers from below so that all people participate actively in building the Church.

Table 3 shows that 83% of respondents have a good perception of good manners (*tata krama* or *unggah-ungguh*). *Tata krama* expresses the Javanese concept of perceptive intellect (*rasa*) (Goei, 2022). *Rasa* has two main meanings: first, feeling, and second, meaning. Regarding feeling, *rasa* is an integration of the internal human existence: seeing, speaking, smelling, feeling, and experiencing. Feelings in this sense include three aspects: taste on the tongue, taste on the body (touch), and emotional feelings in the heart, such as sadness or happiness.

Regarding meaning, *rasa* is applied to words in letters, poems, or greetings, which can express another meaning behind the literal sense. *Rasa* contains everything from physical and sensory feelings to inner awareness of reality. The reality and importance of what is felt in *rasa* open up to the Javanese. In this sense, one has to open oneself up so that one has *alus* (smooth) personality and not allow the harsh elements to stick to one's self. One must begin by refining



what is born. Refining the external world means achieving a proper relationship with the outer realm (Banusu & Firmanto, 2020; Sardono, 2021).

Table 3 shows that 88.13% of priests perform tolerance. It aims not to annoy others so we do not experience the same way. A Javanese priest must not lie but be honest, forthright, and abstain from lying. Authority is directly related to the personal qualities of a leader and how important this element is in the eyes of the Javanese, who have high respect for their leadership and expect a living example. This condition applies to priests, who receive legitimacy from above for their position. That authority grows, develops, or fades along with the growth, development, and fading of the personal qualities of a leader. They were maintaining high personal qualities in the leader. So that whatever they do will affect the life of the Catholic community. They also influence all Indonesian people with different religious backgrounds. Of course, they have to show good behaviour to Catholics. However, the behaviour seen by the people is not something to build a good self-image.

The speciality of the Javanese is the lofty ideal of a culture of peace. Peace is the primary condition for living well. Peace will lead to a calm and secure milieu. The peace-loving principle is not just a Javanese social philosophy but is an extraordinary inner manifestation. The principle adhered to in achieving peace is the concept of *rukun*. *Rukun* is a condition where social balance is achieved.

Living harmony occurs because each persona is intertwined with mutual respect, politeness is maintained, and mutual respect for one another. The spirit of kinship, cooperation, and the concept of *tepa selira* are always at the forefront of life. In this way, relations between members are always towards peace and tolerance.

Table 3 shows that meditation has a very low percentage of 70.6% among respondents. Meditation is one way to practice the refinement of *rasa*. Meditation is enhanced with various self-restraints, which are generally rarely practised nowadays, such as fasting, not sleeping, or walking away on pilgrimage. Meditation results in the emergence of awareness to let go of lust and egoism. Lust will be attached to worldly pleasures, while self-interest means the nature of seeking self-interest. By meditation, a priest can consider things well. A priest is expected to have the ability to create a harmonious atmosphere. For this reason, a priest must always stand in the middle, not only in the sense of being fair and impartial but also among his people, so that he knows how to respond to the situation of his people, make judgments, and determine the right attitudes and actions.

## CONCLUSION

The essence of Javanese leadership manifests in response to the demanding obligations that accompany the ministerial priesthood. In this context, a leader is not simply an authoritative figure but someone who comprehends the intricacies of organizational growth and human performance. They strive to cultivate authentic leadership behaviours by integrating cultural values deeply rooted in the beliefs of the local community.

Embedded within the Javanese leadership concept is the transmission of fundamental organizational principles, which all followers will embrace and manifest. These principles are derived from the rich tapestry of local wisdom. With teachings handed down through generations, the Javanese seek to establish harmony in the lives of individuals, fostering a profound connection with nature and their fellow human beings.

Known as *njawani* (= being a Javanese), these teachings stem from a deep contemplation on the true essence of human existence within the Javanese tradition. They serve as a guiding force, instilling in leaders the responsibility to align their actions with the natural order of the world and the well-being of their community. By embracing the values of *njawani*, Catholic priests can embody leadership qualities that reflect the wisdom and spiritual heritage of the Javanese people.

Drawing from the Javanese spiritual legacy, leaders among the Catholic priests can offer a unique approach to leadership that incorporates empathy, harmony, and a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all things. By embracing the Javanese teachings, Catholic priests can navigate the challenges of their ministerial roles with grace, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to bettering their congregations and communities.

In essence, the Javanese spiritual heritage provides a profound framework for leadership among Catholic priests, infusing their service with local wisdom and cultural values. By embracing the principles of *njawani*, these priests can unlock their true potential as leaders, fostering spiritual growth and guiding their communities towards a more harmonious and interconnected future.

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