



## Living the Gospel in Modern Times: Ritual and Evangelization in the Holy Trinity Community

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**Abstract:** This study explores the Holy Trinity Community (*Komunitas Tritunggal Mahakudus* or KTM) as a case of alternative Catholic spirituality that responds to the religious needs of individuals in the context of modernity. In an era marked by rapid change, secularization, and individualism, many young people experience disconnection from traditional religious structures. KTM offers a dynamic and participatory model of spirituality that integrates traditional Catholic elements with innovative ritual practices designed to foster personal relevance and communal belonging. Using a qualitative methodology with anthropological and theological approaches, data were collected through in-depth interviews with five unmarried youth members of KTM and supported by document and literature analysis. The findings reveal that KTM's rituals function not only as expressions of faith but also as mechanisms for building collective identity, social cohesion, and spiritual resilience. The community's emphasis on active participation, small cell groups, and emotional support networks meets the spiritual needs of its members while navigating the tension between tradition and innovation. This study concludes that KTM represents a successful model of ritual transformation, showing that religion can remain relevant by adapting to contemporary contexts without losing its core. KTM thus exemplifies how religious communities negotiate meaning, identity, and faith in the modern world.

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## INTRODUCTION

Modernity has brought profound transformations in various aspects of human life, including spirituality and religious practices. In the context of globalization, religious understanding and expression have undergone significant shifts. Traditional religious practices are no longer the sole reference point for spiritual life; instead, many individuals now explore new forms of spirituality that are more personal and contextual. As Anderson (1991) argues, globalization not only affects the economic and political spheres but also changes the way people perceive and live out their spirituality. Clifford Geertz (1973) emphasized that religion is not merely a ritual system but also a cultural framework that helps people make sense of life. Within this framework, new religions or alternative religious communities have emerged, offering practices and rites that combine traditional elements with modern innovations. This indicates that religion is a dynamic phenomenon, constantly adapting to social and cultural change.

The urgency of studying this phenomenon grows as these new forms of spirituality not only offer alternative theological frameworks but also respond to the identity crises and sense of alienation experienced by many in modern society. In many cases, these new religious practices are more flexible, personal, and inclusive—blending technology, media, and cultural pluralism into their expressions. Religious communities such as the *Komunitas Tritunggal Mahakudus* (Holy Trinity Community) in Malang present a compelling example of how Catholic faith is contextualized within the landscape of contemporary spirituality. In such communities, spirituality is expressed through communal structures, active evangelization, and new rites that are perceived as more relevant to people's spiritual needs. Thus, it becomes essential to understand how new rituals emerge, function, and are received, particularly for theological and pastoral reflection within the Church today.

Although there have been many studies on religion in the context of modernity, there remains a research gap in studies that integrate anthropological and theological approaches to explore ritual transformation in contemporary Catholic communities. For instance, Saiful Hakim et al. (2016) examined the commodification of religion in South Korea, focusing on how religious institutions adopt market strategies to sustain their relevance. Martinus J. Lelono (2019) studied the Holy Trinity Community as a form of renewal within the Catholic Church but did not explicitly connect its rituals to the construction of religious identity in the context of modernity. Meanwhile, Moh Riza Fahmi (2023) highlighted the practice of online rituals during the COVID-19 pandemic as an adaptation of technology in spiritual life. While these studies offer valuable insights, they do not fully address how new rituals contribute to shaping religious identity in modern times or how they interact with traditional religious practices.

Based on this research gap, the present study seeks to explore the origins, meanings, and functions of new rituals emerging within the Holy Trinity Community. This study aims to answer the following questions: What social, cultural, and theological factors underlie the emergence of new religious practices in modern Catholic communities? How do these practices interact with the established ecclesial traditions? More broadly, how do these new practices shape the identity and spirituality of Catholics amid the challenges of modernity? By integrating anthropological and theological approaches, this research aims to offer both theoretical and pastoral contributions to understanding the dynamics of ritual and spirituality in contemporary religious life. The Holy Trinity Community in Malang will serve as a concrete case study to reflect on how the Catholic Church responds to, adapts, and reinterprets meaning in a rapidly changing society.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method using both anthropological and theological approaches to explore in depth the ritual-religious practices of new religious expressions in Indonesia, with particular focus on the *Komunitas Tritunggal Mahakudus* (Holy Trinity Community). The research aims to uncover how ritual practices within this community reflect efforts to reinterpret and recontextualize Catholic spirituality in light of modern realities.

Data collection was conducted through two main strategies: first, in-depth interviews with active members of the Holy Trinity Community, particularly unmarried young adults; and second, library research, involving a close reading of books, articles, primary texts, and official documents related to the community and the broader themes of modern religious transformation. The interviews were conducted via WhatsApp (WA), allowing for flexible, responsive, and context-sensitive engagement with the participants. In total, five active members of the community were interviewed in depth, providing insight into their motivations, spiritual experiences, and understandings of the community’s ritual life.

The dual methodology was designed to provide both empirical access to the lived religious practices of the community and critical theological interpretation of the meanings embedded within their rituals. The anthropological approach enables a contextual understanding of how these rituals are constructed, performed, and socially perceived, while the theological lens allows for reflection on how such practices engage with, affirm, or reinterpret Catholic doctrinal and liturgical tradition.

In addition to interviews and textual analysis, this study also includes a critical examination of religious media, digital platforms, and relevant documentation used by the community, in order to understand how modernity, technology, and globalization influence the shaping of their belief systems and ritual forms. The data were thematically analyzed and interpreted to identify patterns, symbolic meanings, and theological implications.

The anthropological and theological locus of this study is rooted in the Holy Trinity Community’s attempt to reconstruct the meaning of modernity within their ritual life—by integrating traditional Catholic values with the demands and conditions of contemporary life. Several members of the community noted that the fast-paced and high-pressure environment of modern society often leads to spiritual fatigue and isolation from deeper religious experience. Thus, the community’s ritual innovations serve both as a spiritual response and as a theological statement about faith in the modern world.

By choosing the Holy Trinity Community in Malang as its primary case study, this research offers a focused examination of how new ritual practices function within and beyond the boundaries of institutional Catholicism, shedding light on the evolving nature of faith, identity, and liturgy in the face of cultural and technological transformation.

Table 1. Questions for interview

No	Concept	No	Question
1	Modernity	1	How did you first come to know, encounter, or get involved with the Holy Trinity Community (KTM)?
		2	What motivated you to join KTM?
		3	How often do you participate in KTM activities?
2	Ritual	4	What kinds of prayer practices or spiritual routines are present in KTM?
		5	How do the parish community or Church members respond to KTM’s prayer practices?
		6	What do you know about KTM?
3	KTM	7	What is the pattern or model of spiritual accompaniment (mentoring) within KTM?

		8	What spiritual fruits or outcomes have you experienced while being part of KTM?
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### Analysis of Bronislaw Malinowski’s Functionalist Theory

Bronislaw Malinowski, in his classic work *Magic, Science, and Religion and Other Essays* (1948), views ritual as an essential component of social life that serves both practical and psychological functions. From a functionalist perspective, every cultural element—including religious rituals—exists to fulfill a purpose that sustains the cohesion and survival of the community. For Malinowski, rituals are not merely symbolic expressions or inherited traditions; they are active responses to existential situations that generate uncertainty or anxiety in the lives of individuals and groups.

According to Malinowski, rituals emerge as functional mechanisms to address human needs that cannot be resolved through science or rational logic. In situations such as death, natural disasters, or unpredictable life transitions, communities create and perform rituals as a way to gain a sense of control, hope, and psychological security. Rituals, therefore, help reduce anxiety, stabilize emotional responses, and strengthen social solidarity. In this light, ritual acts as both a psychological buffer and a social stabilizer.

In the context of the *Komunitas Tritunggal Mahakudus* (Holy Trinity Community), Malinowski’s functionalist theory provides a helpful framework for interpreting how new ritual practices serve to meet the spiritual needs of its members—particularly young people navigating the pressures and uncertainties of modern life. Participation in the community’s activities, such as shared prayer, worship, and evangelization, is not only a religious observance but also a source of belonging, existential meaning, and emotional equilibrium. The rituals developed by KTM do not merely replicate formal Catholic liturgy; instead, they creatively adapt and innovate forms of spiritual expression that are functionally relevant to contemporary realities.

Furthermore, these rituals foster communal cohesion, establish mutual support networks, and reinforce the religious identity of the members. In a functionalist framework, religious rituals are not just spiritual duties but are also cultural strategies to manage social stress, strengthen group integration, and maintain psychological balance in a rapidly changing society. Thus, a functionalist analysis of KTM helps explain why and how new religious rituals not only emerge but also take root and become meaningful in the everyday lives of modern believers.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Ritual Transformation in the Context of Modernity

Rituals are an integral part of religious practice. Durkheim (1995) argued that rituals create social solidarity and reinforce collective identity. However, in the context of modernity, rituals also undergo transformation. Giddens (1990) emphasized that globalization reshapes patterns of social interaction, including religious aspects. Rituals that were once local in nature are now integrated into global networks. The *Komunitas Tritunggal Mahakudus* (Holy Trinity

Community, or KTM) is an example of how religion adapts to changing times, particularly in responding to the challenges of modernity. In today's world, religion must adapt to the demands of modern life and digitalization (Beyer, 1994). Rituals that were formerly traditional have been transformed and adapted to meet the spiritual needs of believers in a rapidly changing world.

The religious practices within KTM reflect the influence of modernity through the incorporation of modern values into worship structures. KTM emphasizes participatory and interactive elements in every ritual, where community members are actively involved in offering prayers, sharing spiritual experiences, and taking on roles in liturgical celebrations. This approach responds to the patterns of modern life, which are increasingly democratic and individualistic. Modernity also encourages people to hold firmly to and practice their religious lives with greater conviction (Hakam et al., 2017).

The Holy Trinity Community is highly attuned to the needs and desires of modern society. KTM provides space and time for those who yearn for communal religious activities such as Mass, faith formation sessions, and group prayer. The community strongly emphasizes the presence and active (and regular) participation of its members in every activity. This structure resonates well with modern individuals who are seeking avenues to develop themselves in various aspects of life, including spiritual and religious growth (Veronica, interview, 2024).

Furthermore, KTM emerges as a response to the pressures of modern life. One of the defining characteristics of the community is how it offers spiritual experiences as a form of resistance to modern lifestyles, which are often perceived as stressful. KTM offers spiritual spaces such as retreats and meditation sessions to help members "slow down" from the fast-paced, high-pressure, and competitive rhythm of life. By focusing on self-reflection and strengthening personal relationships with God, these rituals are designed to offer inner peace amidst the demands of modern society (Markus, interview, 2024).

While responding to the needs and habits of modern people, KTM continues to uphold key elements of traditional Catholic ritual, including prayer, the Eucharist, *lectio divina*, faith-sharing, and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. This is because KTM sees itself as a community committed both to fidelity to the Catholic Church and to reaching out to those outside it (Lelono, 2023). Evangelization is KTM's central mission. In line with the Church's teaching, KTM understands evangelization as "bringing the Good News" into all layers of humanity and, through its influence, transforming people from within (Paul VI, 1975, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 18).

### Collective Identity Formation Through Ritual

The Holy Trinity Community (KTM) is not merely a prayer group, but also a space for building collective identity and community cohesion. The rituals practiced within it serve not only as expressions of spirituality but also as a means to strengthen social bonds and solidarity among members. Armada Riyanto (1995) observes that rituals in the context of religious communities function not only as acts of worship but also as mechanisms for constructing

collective identity. Rituals in KTM are performed communally—both physically in places of worship and through online platforms. Shared prayers, Masses, and other religious activities are not merely ceremonial; they are moments that fortify social relationships among members. Active participation in these rituals enhances the sense of belonging, fosters deeper communal ties, and creates a strong social network (Renata, interview, 2024).

Cell group meetings are considered the primary communal activity within KTM. These gatherings emphasize personal relationships with God and fellow members. They create space for interpersonal dialogue, as each member is encouraged to engage in conversation grounded in a spirit of solidarity and mutual care (Armada Riyanto, 1995). In this way, ritual becomes not only a religious duty but also a formative tool for building trust, intimacy, and shared purpose within the group.

In addition, KTM has succeeded in fostering a strong collective identity among its members. This identity is rooted in a shared commitment to live a deep spiritual life amid the challenges of modernity. Members often describe KTM as a "second family"—a community that offers both spiritual and emotional support, as well as a space to express their religious beliefs and values. Through participation in ritual, members affirm their acceptance of the practices and maintain the beliefs and traditions associated with them (Fahmi, 2023). In a modern world that is often perceived as secular, KTM offers its members a place to rediscover spiritual meaning and reinforce their religious identity (Diana, interview, 2024).

However, amid this ritual transformation, KTM also faces challenges in positioning itself within the traditional structure of the Catholic Church. Some innovations in ritual may be viewed as deviations by outsiders or ecclesial authorities. “When adopting the idea of cell communities, Fr. Yohanes could not directly translate the model because he was not founding a new church but rather a community within the Catholic Church. Therefore, KTM continues to struggle for recognition from the Catholic Church. In carrying out its evangelization, the community draws members from different parishes and dioceses. Some Catholics perceive this as a betrayal of the Church and label KTM a ‘church within the Church’ or an exclusive community” (Lelono, 2023).

Nevertheless, such innovations are seen as necessary to meet the specific spiritual needs of individuals in the modern era. The cell community model itself was designed as an instrument to multiply communities (Indrakusuma, 2009). These challenges are part of KTM’s negotiation process to remain relevant while upholding the core values of the Catholic faith. KTM’s goal in building community and engaging in dialogue with the institutional Church is to promote a vision of evangelization that responds to the influence of Pentecostalism within Catholic Charismatic movements.

### Implications of KTM’s Presence

Modernity brings new challenges for religious communities. Lyon (2000) notes that religious practices now compete with a wide range of alternative spiritualities. Bellah (1991) asserts that religion must find ways to remain relevant in an increasingly secular world. The

*Komunitas Tritunggal Mahakudus* (Holy Trinity Community, or KTM) stands out as a form of alternative spirituality that successfully responds to the spiritual needs of individuals, especially among youth who feel dissatisfied with more formal and rigid religious structures.

KTM has created a space where individuals can discover a more personal form of spirituality, one that is relevant to the pace and complexity of modern life. In a secular and fast-moving modern context, many people—particularly the younger generation—feel disconnected from traditional, formal religious practices. KTM offers a more dynamic and participatory alternative. Its rituals are designed to meet personal spiritual needs that are often unmet by conventional religious institutions. In doing so, KTM appeals to those seeking a deeper, more relevant, and more personal spiritual experience (Rio, interview, 2024).

Despite its success in attracting individuals through ritual innovation, the community also faces challenges in maintaining a balance between adapting to modernity and preserving the core traditions of the Catholic faith. Some of its innovations have drawn criticism from traditional sectors within the Church. However, for KTM members, these innovations are not seen as deviations but rather as necessary strategies to keep religion relevant in today's world. This illustrates KTM's effort to safeguard spiritual integrity while navigating the social and cultural dynamics of modernity. The community affirms this mission in its vision statement: "Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we experience and personally live the loving and saving presence of God unto union in love, and we bring others into the same experience" (Lelono, 2023).

From an anthropological perspective, the Holy Trinity Community exemplifies how religion can remain relevant in the modern era through ritual transformation. This reflects the notion that religion is not a static entity but one that is dynamic and adaptive. The rituals practiced in KTM are not merely acts of worship but are also tools for negotiating spiritual meaning within the context of modernity. This opens new insight into how religious practices and spirituality can evolve over time without losing their essential core. Ritual practitioners in KTM seek to encounter the sacred through these adapted forms, even as they maintain a Catholic identity. In this case, it is the human need for meaning and transcendence that becomes the primary driver of religious change, as human beings are capable of making rational choices concerning their existential orientation (Pinatik et al., 2021).

## CONCLUSION

The *Komunitas Tritunggal Mahakudus* (KTM) can be regarded as a form of alternative spirituality that effectively responds to the spiritual needs of individuals and provides a space for them to discover a more personal and relevant form of spirituality within the context of modern life. KTM offers a dynamic and participatory alternative by introducing rituals specifically designed to meet personal spiritual needs. In doing so, it attracts many young people who seek a deeper, more meaningful, and more personalized spiritual experience.

KTM is not merely a worship group; it is also a space for building collective identity and communal solidarity. The rituals performed within the community are not solely expressions

of personal piety but function as practices that strengthen social bonds and mutual support among its members. KTM stands as a compelling example of how religion can remain relevant in the modern era through ritual transformation. This reflects the understanding that religion is not a static entity, but a dynamic and adaptive force.

The rituals carried out within KTM are not just acts of worship, but also serve as tools for negotiating spiritual meaning in the context of modernity. By combining personal experience with communal participation, and tradition with innovation, KTM demonstrates how religious communities can evolve to meet contemporary challenges while remaining faithful to the core values of their faith. Through such transformation, KTM offers a model for how religion continues to thrive—not by resisting change, but by engaging it creatively and faithfully.

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