



Healing and Discernment in Indonesian Catholicism

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Abstract: This article examines the pastoral and doctrinal challenges faced by the Catholic Church in Indonesia in responding to the phenomenon of Catholics who seek healing through shamans and paranormal practitioners. While traditional Church teaching categorically rejects practices such as divination and occultism, the persistence of vernacular healing in culturally plural contexts raises important theological and anthropological questions. Using a qualitative-descriptive method based on literature analysis and pastoral commentary, this study draws on reflections from three Indonesian Catholic priests—Fr. Ferry Hartono, Fr. Dominic Kusumawanta, and Fr. Telephorus Krispurwana Cahyadi—who provide narrative insights into the lived reality of spiritual ambiguity among the faithful. The findings show that while certain abilities may stem from natural or instinctive gifts and need not be rejected outright, any healing practice must be critically discerned based on its alignment with Christ, the Church's sacramental life, and the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The discussion highlights the need for contextual theological anthropology that bridges fidelity to doctrine with sensitivity to culture. This article concludes that the Church must adopt an approach of pastoral discernment rather than legalistic condemnation, equipping its ministers and communities to accompany the faithful through culturally sensitive catechesis and spiritually grounded formation.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Indonesian society, particularly within rural and culturally plural settings, the persistence of shamanic practices—such as consulting a *dukun* (traditional healer)—reflects the enduring vitality of indigenous religious worldviews. Despite the formal presence of organized religions, including Catholicism, many believers continue to seek healing, counsel, or spiritual protection from shamans when institutional religious or biomedical responses are perceived as inaccessible, inadequate, or overly abstract. For some Catholics, this phenomenon is not necessarily an act of infidelity to Church teaching, but rather a culturally embedded way of responding to existential needs, rooted in local cosmology and mystical traditions.

The continued presence of *dukun* in Catholic communities reveals a deeper phenomenon of religious hybridity and cultural resilience. While the Catechism of the Catholic Church explicitly condemns all forms of divination and magical practices (CCC 2116–2117), in practice, many believers navigate between formal ecclesial teachings and ancestral traditions. As Sutiono (2014) observes, "*wong pinter are despised by some mainstream religions but are needed by many people who do not have adequate access to public health service*" (2014:2).

This paradox illustrates not only a pastoral challenge but also a hermeneutical opportunity to discern how Catholic faith is lived amid culturally embedded religiosity.

Drawing from Agustinus Sutiono's comprehensive ethnographic research, the *wong pinter*—a Javanese term meaning “the wise one”—is shown to be a complex social type: “a spirit master, wise man, spiritual advisor, protector, local prophet, healer and other roles” (Sutiono, 2014: 3). These roles are not incidental but constitutive of the socio-religious fabric of Javanese life. Far from being mere relics of superstition, *wong pinter* represent a system of knowledge and spiritual practice that is relational, ritualized, and locally legitimate. As Sutiono affirms, “the phenomenon of *wong pinter* is a never-was reality for Javanese society because their relevance has embodied with people's everyday preoccupation with maintaining and enhancing their lives to its maximum possibility” (2014: ii).

From a phenomenological lens, such interactions between Catholics and *dukun* should not be read simply as doctrinal deviations but as vernacular theological expressions—manifestations of *rasa ketuhanan* or the lived sense of the divine. Sutiono, drawing on Mircea Eliade, argues that shamanic figures like *wong pinter* mediate between the sacred and the profane through symbols, prayers, and ritual acts deeply embedded in local tradition (Sutiono, 2014: 21). Their spiritual authority does not arise from formal ordination, but from perceived intimacy with the spirit world, ritual efficacy, and experiential trust. As he writes elsewhere, “Religion is not the only giver of essential answers to humanity's fundamental questions and these practitioners still find that the local tradition offers a deep understanding of the surrounding world” (Sutiono, 2014: 4).

Despite the increasing attention to cultural theology and inculturation within the global Church, there remains a significant gap in theological-pastoral reflection concerning the phenomenon of Catholics who consult shamans (*dukun*) for healing and spiritual assistance. This issue is particularly pressing in regions like Indonesia, where traditional cosmologies coexist with established religious systems. While anthropological and ethnographic studies—such as those by Agustinus Sutiono (2014)—have richly explored the role of *wong pinter* in Javanese society, their theological implications, especially in relation to Catholic sacramentality, ecclesiology, and moral teaching, have not been systematically addressed within ecclesial discourse.

Existing magisterial documents (e.g., CCC 2116–2117) tend to frame practices such as divination and contact with spirits within a moral-theological logic of prohibition, often without nuanced attention to the cultural-religious motivations and socio-pastoral realities underlying them. On the other hand, theological anthropology—especially post-Vatican II approaches—has developed frameworks to understand the human person as culturally embedded and spiritually searching. However, these frameworks have yet to be adequately applied to concrete situations like Catholic interactions with *dukun* or *wong pinter* in Southeast Asia.

Moreover, the theological literature on inculturation has primarily focused on liturgy, symbolism, or spirituality, and seldom on the *moral ambiguities* or contested practices found at the margins of institutional religious life. There is also a lack of critical dialogue between

theological anthropology and the lived religious experiences of marginalized or hybrid Catholic communities—where traditional healing practices function not as alternatives to faith, but as complementary or compensatory responses to suffering.

By situating this phenomenon within the tensions between official Church teaching, cultural continuity, and the pastoral needs of the faithful, this study seeks to develop a nuanced and constructive theological response. It aims to contribute to the emerging field of contextual moral theology and intercultural ecclesiology, offering insights not only for Indonesia but for other postcolonial and religiously plural societies grappling with similar challenges.

The question of how the Catholic Church responds to indigenous healing practices remains an underexplored issue in contemporary theological scholarship. While inculturation theology and contextual approaches have significantly shaped post-Vatican II reflections, theological engagement with traditional healing—especially when practiced by baptized Catholics—has received little systematic attention. Although inculturation frameworks have helped the Church appreciate cultural expressions in liturgy and spirituality (Bevans, 2002), they often bypass practices that exist on the margins of orthodoxy, such as shamanic or non-sacramental healing rites.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC 2116–2117) strongly condemns magic, divination, and spirit invocation, describing them as "a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings" (CCC, 1992). Nevertheless, in socio-pastoral contexts marked by poverty, weak health infrastructure, or deep cosmological traditions, many Catholics continue to seek healing from shamans (*dukun*). As Shorter (1994) notes, "Where healing and salvation are equated, the popular recourse to traditional healers becomes, in practice, a parallel ecclesial activity" (1994: 98). This raises not only doctrinal concerns but also urgent pastoral questions.

Anthropological research in Southeast Asia affirms that traditional healing often serves broader social and cosmological roles. As Bowen (1995) explains, "Southeast Asian cultures have been particularly rich in publicly displayed religious and ritual forms, where healing, ritual, and cosmology intersect" (1995: 1048). Such practices are not merely health-related but encode deeper understandings of suffering, kinship, and cosmic balance. Bowen further notes that cultural forms are "not as containing meanings, but as giving rise to the creation of meanings by differently situated actors" (1995: 1050). This insight is vital in understanding why Catholic individuals may simultaneously adhere to the Church while participating in alternative healing systems.

Despite this, theological literature has tended to remain at a distance from such phenomena. As Chong (2007) points out in his reflection on Southeast Asian ethnography, scholarship on the region often suffers from "tunnel vision," focusing on state-centered or normative frameworks while neglecting lived and vernacular religiosity (2007: 213). Moreover, what Saloni Mathur (2000) calls the "search for indigenous forms of knowledge" has been central to postcolonial anthropology but has yet to find consistent resonance in theological anthropology. As she emphasizes, "it is no longer feasible to do anthropology in South Asia

without attending to one or more of these five themes," among them the search for indigenous knowledge and the legacy of colonial epistemology (Mathur, 2000: 90).

From a theological standpoint, contextual moral theology has only partially engaged with these questions. While scholars like Phan (2003) and Schreiter (1997) advocate for intercultural ecclesiology and pastoral flexibility, few have examined how the Church can discern, accompany, or transform traditional healing practices without resorting to blanket condemnation or uncritical assimilation. As Cameron (2005) argued, theological anthropology must engage with "the concrete situation of the human person as embodied, suffering, and searching for meaning," especially within particular cultures.

Therefore, this article seeks to address a critical lacuna by raising two central theological inquiries: (1) How should the Catholic Church respond pastorally and doctrinally to Catholics who seek healing from shamans? (2) And to what extent can these practices be understood, critiqued, or integrated within a broader theological anthropology that respects culture without compromising core doctrine? By bridging anthropology, theology, and pastoral praxis, this study contributes to the development of a more integrated and discerning ecclesial response to vernacular religious practices in culturally plural societies.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive method grounded in theological reflection and contextual analysis. Although initial references to interviews with shamans are acknowledged in the early formulation, the primary data in this article are derived not from fieldwork-based ethnography, but from published pastoral commentaries, theological responses, and catechetical reflections by Catholic priests in Indonesia. These sources—particularly the responses of Fr. Ferry Hartono, Fr. Dominic I Gusti Bagus Kusumawanta, and Fr. Telephorus Krispurwana Cahyadi—serve as pastoral voices offering insight into how the Church in Indonesia interprets and responds to vernacular healing practices and popular religiosity among Catholics.

The research thus adopts a literature-based approach, combining ecclesial documents, theological writings on inculturation and discernment, and media-published pastoral reflections. The methodological focus is interpretive and dialogical, aiming to synthesize Catholic doctrinal principles with the concrete spiritual experiences of local communities. This approach allows for a contextual theological anthropology to emerge—one that respects culture while safeguarding the integrity of Catholic faith and sacramental life.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The practice of consulting shamans or *wong pinter* has existed since ancient times and can be found in various cultural and religious traditions around the world (Anisa et al., 2017). In the biblical tradition, particularly within the culture of ancient Israel, such practices were strictly forbidden and regarded as abominations before God. The Book of Leviticus explicitly warns the people of Israel: "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled

by them. *I am the Lord your God*" (Leviticus 19:31, NIV). These prohibitions stem from the belief that shamans attempt to invoke supernatural forces that operate outside the will and power of God. Therefore, seeking guidance from such figures is understood as a form of idolatry and spiritual rebellion. As stated in *Deuteronomy 18:10–13*, those who practice or consult sorcery and divination are detestable to the Lord.

Despite these prohibitions, biblical history records several examples where individuals—including kings and entire nations—sought out occult practices in times of crisis. One of the most notable examples is King Saul, who, when faced with despair, consulted a medium at Endor and asked her to summon the spirit of the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 28:4–20). Rather than turning to God, Saul sought spiritual power from the realm of the dead, an act that ultimately led to his downfall.

Similarly, the northern tribes of Israel, as described in *2 Kings 17:16–17*, abandoned their covenant with God by worshiping celestial bodies and practicing divination. They erected idols to Baal and Asherah, embracing witchcraft and child sacrifice. Another grave example is King Manasseh of Judah, who not only practiced sorcery and consulted mediums but also committed the heinous act of offering his own son as a burnt sacrifice (2 Kings 21:4–7). His actions brought collective judgment upon the nation, as narrated in *2 Kings 21:8–16*.

In the New Testament, the rejection of occult practices is reaffirmed and made even more explicit. In *Acts 16:16–19*, Paul encounters a slave girl possessed by a spirit of divination. While her powers were used for profit by her owners, Paul discerned the source of her abilities as demonic and cast the spirit out. Moreover, in *Galatians 5:20*, Paul categorizes idolatry and sorcery as works of the flesh—acts that are opposed to life in the Spirit and the values of the Kingdom of God.

The biblical evidence, therefore, clearly affirms that practices associated with shamanism, divination, and magic are contrary to God's will. They are not expressions of spiritual wisdom but violations of the covenantal relationship with the one true God. As a consequence, those who persist in such practices face divine judgment. *Exodus 22:18* demands the destruction of sorcerers, while *Revelation 21:8* warns that sorcerers and idolaters will share in the "fiery lake of burning sulfur"—a symbol of ultimate separation from God, often described as the second death.

This theological and biblical analysis affirms that reliance on spiritual forces outside of God—no matter how culturally accepted—is fundamentally incompatible with the Christian faith. Such practices, while often motivated by a desire for healing or clarity in suffering, lead away from trust in divine providence and open the door to spiritual deception.

The findings of this study reveal that in the New Testament (NT), sickness is interpreted not merely as a physical condition but as a theological symbol that points to the presence of the Kingdom of God and the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ. Healing miracles are not isolated acts of compassion, but signs of divine action breaking into human history. As Reginald H. Fuller (2022) emphasizes, these miracles should not be seen merely as human accomplishments of Jesus as a charismatic figure, but rather as acts of God mediated through

Jesus: “*the healing miracle was not the work of Jesus himself as a human miracle worker, but God himself who did it through Jesus.*”

Central to the healing narratives in the Gospels is the role of faith. The research finds consistent textual evidence that faith is a necessary condition for the reception of divine healing. Jesus regularly responded to the pleas of the sick or their intermediaries—friends, parents, or communities—who approached Him in desperation after other remedies had failed. In these encounters, Jesus often questioned or affirmed their faith. For example, in *Mark 9:23*, He says, “*If you can! Everything is possible for one who believes.*” Similarly, in *John 14:13–14*, Jesus promises, “*Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*”

The pattern continues in *John 15:7*, where Jesus links discipleship and prayer: “*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*” These texts collectively affirm that healing is not an automatic outcome, but rather occurs within a relationship of trust and surrender to Christ. In healing the daughter of Jairus (*Mark 5:36–42*), the two blind men (*Matthew 9:28*), and the demon-possessed child (*Mark 9:23*), Jesus clearly demands belief in His divine power. Conversely, the absence of faith inhibited miraculous works, as seen in *Matthew 13:58*, where Jesus “*did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.*”

Thus, the research demonstrates that within the NT framework, faith is not merely emotional or intellectual assent, but a relational openness that enables divine healing to occur. Faith becomes the medium through which the power of the Kingdom is received. In the theological logic of the Gospels, healing is not separated from salvation but is part of the holistic restoration offered by Christ. The teachings of the New Testament consistently emphasize that the power of healing does not originate from human strength or supernatural forces, but from God Himself through Jesus Christ. In many healing events performed by Jesus—such as the restoration of sight to the blind, the casting out of demons, and the curing of physical ailments—these miracles are always associated with faith in Jesus and a personal relationship with God. Jesus declared, “*Your faith has saved you*” (*Mark 5:34*), signifying that a miracle is not merely a display of supernatural power, but an encounter with divine love and power that liberates the whole person. The New Testament also firmly rejects practices that derive from evil spirits, as seen in *Acts 16:16–18*, where Paul casts out a spirit of divination from a slave girl who had been exploited for economic gain.

In response to the enduring presence of traditional beliefs and the complex spiritual needs of the faithful, several Indonesian Catholic priests have developed contextual pastoral approaches to address the phenomenon of Catholics turning to shamans or so-called “wong pinter”. Rather than offering simplistic condemnation, these priests engage the issue with discernment, recognizing the blurred lines between natural abilities, cultural heritage, and occult practices. Their pastoral responses reflect a desire to guide the faithful toward a deeper relationship with Christ, while also acknowledging the psychological and social reasons that lead some Catholics to seek alternative spiritual solutions. Through catechesis, personal

witness, and theological reflection, these priests seek to redirect the longing for healing and certainty back to the sacraments, the life of the Church, and trust in God's providence.

Faith in Crisis: The Pastoral Challenge of Paranormal Belief in the Indonesian Church

The belief in paranormal powers remains widespread in Indonesian society, including among Catholics, often as a response to unresolved personal suffering or spiritual confusion. In his pastoral reflection "*Paranormal, Bagaimana Menanggapinya?*" (2009), Fr. Ferry Hartono CSE presents a nuanced theological and pastoral perspective on this phenomenon. He acknowledges that many people, when faced with physical or psychological hardship, are tempted to seek immediate answers through shamans or paranormal practitioners, particularly when they feel that religious or medical interventions have failed. This tendency reflects both cultural conditioning and a spiritual longing that is misdirected.

Fr. Ferry affirms the reality of certain paranormal phenomena, distinguishing between natural, neutral gifts—such as heightened sensitivity or extrasensory perception—and occult powers that are incompatible with Christian faith. He recounts several pastoral experiences that illustrate these phenomena. For instance, he tells of a child who began seeing invisible beings and conversing with them; though initially terrified, the child eventually adapted, but his behavior grew increasingly abnormal. In another case, a man who had practiced *tenaga dalam* (inner energy) attempted to test his power against the Blessed Sacrament during Eucharistic Adoration, only to be forcefully repelled by an invisible, overwhelming force. Such testimonies are interpreted not merely as curiosities, but as indications that the spiritual realm—both good and evil—is real, and that not all spiritual power originates from God.

In line with the New Testament teaching that true healing and deliverance come from Christ alone, Fr. Ferry warns that many paranormal practices lead people away from God, especially when they are rooted in fear, confusion, or manipulation. He recounts the story of a man who kept multiple *jinn* (spiritual entities) for protection, but instead lived in constant anxiety and restlessness. Despite feeling trapped, the man admitted he had "sold his soul" and could no longer free himself. This testimony illustrates a common pastoral pattern: people seeking healing through hidden forces may find short-term relief, but the long-term spiritual cost is profound. The peace and wholeness that come from God, by contrast, are marked by the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, and self-control (Gal 5:22–23).

Fr. Ferry does not deny that certain individuals may possess innate spiritual sensitivities. However, he emphasizes that such gifts must be discerned, purified, and directed toward God's purposes. If these abilities are used to manipulate others, gain power, or predict the future, they fall into the category of sorcery and divination, which are explicitly condemned in Scripture (cf. Deut 18:10–14; Gal 5:20; Rev 21:8) and in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC 2116–2117). In contrast, healing and spiritual gifts that bring about faith, repentance, and deeper communion with God are welcomed and even encouraged by the Church, as they reflect the genuine movement of the Holy Spirit.

To guide the faithful, Fr. Ferry proposes several pastoral principles for discernment. These include: seeking rational explanations first; avoiding involvement when uncertain; not experimenting with the occult “just to see what happens”; refusing to act under emotional pressure; and judging every spiritual experience by its fruits. He also advises those with natural sensitivities to remain humble and consult the Church, rather than rely on self-direction. Regarding charms, amulets, or sacred objects associated with occult practices, he urges Catholics to renounce and dispose of them through prayer and, if needed, seek deliverance with the help of trained clergy.

In summary, Fr. Ferry Hartono offers a deeply pastoral approach that combines scriptural integrity, theological clarity, and cultural sensitivity. He does not dismiss the reality of paranormal experiences, but he insists that only those spiritual gifts and phenomena that lead to deeper faith in Christ and full communion with the Church are acceptable. His reflection represents an important voice in the contextual theology of Indonesia, showing that pastoral care must balance realism about spiritual experiences with a firm orientation toward the truth of the Gospel. Through this lens, the Church is called not merely to reject the paranormal, but to evangelize and accompany those caught in its shadow, pointing them toward healing, freedom, and peace in Christ.

Pastoral Prudence and Doctrinal Discernment in the Face of Paranormal Practices

This study finds that within the Indonesian Catholic context, the Church’s pastoral agents—both clergy and informed laypersons—approach the phenomenon of paranormal and shamanic practices with a balance of doctrinal clarity and cultural sensitivity. A key finding is the distinction made by Fr. Dominic I Gusti Bagus Kusumawanta, who draws a line between shamanism, which relies on supernatural or occult forces, and paranormal practice, which may involve natural instinctual gifts or abilities rooted in energy from creation. He states, “*A shaman treats through belief in mystical powers, while a paranormal uses natural energy, an instinctive gift from God that allows one to read nature*”. For instance, he cites individuals who can locate underground water sources using tools such as tree branches or pendulums, interpreting these capacities as non-supernatural and therefore not in conflict with Catholic teaching—provided they do not cross into esoteric or magical territory.

At the heart of Fr. Wanta’s pastoral concern is the need for discernment: when practices rely on specific rituals involving *sacred days* (such as *Jumat Kliwon*) or include elements of prediction, divination, or power beyond reason, they are no longer compatible with Catholic faith. He warns that “*if it goes beyond reason and Catholic faith, such as fortune-telling, it is clearly against Catholic doctrine.*” His view reflects the Church’s cautious acknowledgment that certain natural gifts may exist, but the application and theological context of these gifts determine whether they are morally acceptable or spiritually dangerous.

Further clarification is offered by Ingrid Listiati, a Catholic lay apologist, who reinforces the Church’s official stance based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Quoting CCC 2116–2117, she affirms that “*all forms of magic and divination are gravely contrary to the*

virtue of religion”, especially when they involve attempts to manipulate hidden forces for personal gain, health, or knowledge. She notes that even if a psychic is a devout Catholic, their practices must still be evaluated according to whether they call upon powers beyond human reason and natural law. Her conclusion mirrors that of Fr. Wanta: if the practice remains within the realm of science and common sense, such as the use of herbs or natural energies, it may still fall within the permissible “corridor” of the Church. However, once it relies on unverifiable energies, dark powers, or hidden forces, it must be rejected.

Thematically, both contributors underline the pastoral ambiguity and blurred boundaries inherent in this issue. Ingrid cautions: “*I tend to be careful with paranormal practices, precisely because the boundaries are rather blurry between what is acceptable to reason and science, and what is not.*” This caution reflects a key research finding: while there is room for discernment and openness toward natural abilities, the risk of spiritual harm and doctrinal confusion necessitates pastoral vigilance. Both voices converge on a common pastoral strategy: Catholics should be encouraged to seek healing through the means that are fully embraced by the Church—namely prayer, the sacraments, and medical treatment—rather than through untested spiritual channels.

In conclusion, the discourse from Fr. Wanta and Ingrid Listiati demonstrates an emerging model of Catholic pastoral response in a pluralistic and culturally layered society. Rather than rejecting all phenomena as superstition, the Church's representatives call for discernment rooted in faith, reason, and ecclesial authority. Their insights contribute to the broader theological conversation about how the Church in Indonesia can accompany the faithful who live amidst overlapping cosmologies, without compromising doctrinal integrity or pastoral care.

Theological Discernment and Pastoral Clarity on Paranormal Ability in Catholic Life

The findings of this study reveal a nuanced and thoughtful theological reflection by Fr. Telephorus Krispurwana Cahyadi, SJ, regarding the presence of paranormal abilities among individuals—including priests—and the appropriate Catholic response. Responding to the widespread phenomenon of belief in paranormal powers in Indonesian society, Fr. Kris acknowledges that some people possess extraordinary abilities that allow them to see invisible realities, locate underground water, or help others overcome addictions and attachments. These individuals are commonly referred to as *paranormal*. He states, “*There are certain people who possess capabilities beyond what is normally natural, hence they are referred to as paranormal*”, indicating that such phenomena are not automatically to be condemned, but rather examined in light of faith, grace, and their spiritual fruits.

Fr. Kris grounds his pastoral-theological response in biblical tradition, showing that the ability to perform acts beyond natural power is not foreign to Scripture nor to the life of the Church. He references Moses and Aaron facing Egyptian magicians (cf. Exod. 7–11), and Jesus Himself, who was accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul (cf. Luke 11:14–23). Likewise, the Apostles performed signs and wonders in the name and power of Christ

(Acts 5:12–16; 9:32–42). According to Fr. Kris, such abilities—when rightly ordered—are *gratia*, a grace given by God to manifest His saving work. He writes, “*These abilities are grace, granted by God Himself and used for the manifestation of His salvific work.*”

However, Fr. Kris carefully distinguishes between graced ability and natural talent. Some abilities, he notes, may be the result of heightened human instinct or sensitivity, which although natural, still participate in God’s providential design. Yet the key question is always theological: whether such powers bring people closer to Jesus Christ as the sole source of salvation, or whether they serve only self-fulfillment, ego, or power. He warns that the danger lies not in the power itself but in spiritual narcissism and *false mysticism*, where the pursuit of healing or success becomes centered on the individual rather than on God. Quoting from the 2003 Vatican document on *New Age*, he notes that many paranormal practices are based on vague energies or spiritual powers outside the Christian understanding of God, leading to “private realms of self-fulfillment detached from the real world.”

Fr. Kris further stresses that true healing and salvation come only through Christ. He writes, “*Jesus is the only one who saves and heals, gives strength and deliverance from all burdens and suffering. If people stop at the healer or the medium, they will not arrive at God.*” This theological center shapes the entire Catholic discernment on paranormal phenomena: the issue is not simply whether the phenomenon is effective, but whether it draws people into deeper communion with God, the Church, and the sacramental life. For Fr. Kris, any spiritual gift—especially those deemed paranormal—must be evaluated based on its orientation toward the Gospel and ecclesial life.

This same standard applies, he says, even when the one possessing such power is a priest. The critical question is not whether a priest can have such abilities, but “*whether these abilities draw others to God, or cause them to stop at the person and the means.*” He insists that any exercise of spiritual gifts by clergy must be rooted in humility, ecclesial obedience, and sacramental fidelity. Priests, or any individuals with such gifts, must always recognize their own limitations and act as servants of Christ’s salvific work, not as autonomous healers.

In sum, Fr. Kris offers a robust theological framework that affirms the possibility of extraordinary human or spiritual abilities while placing clear doctrinal and pastoral boundaries around their use. His approach combines biblical theology, ecclesial tradition, and pastoral prudence, offering the Church in Indonesia a contextualized model of discernment in a society deeply shaped by mystical and spiritual syncretism. His voice is especially vital in articulating the Church’s role not in suppressing such phenomena, but in accompanying, guiding, and integrating them within the authentic path of Christian faith and salvation.

Common Ground in Pastoral Discernment on Paranormal Practices

The responses of Fr. Ferry Hartono, Fr. Dominic Kusumawanta (with Ingrid Listiati), and Fr. Telephorus Krispurwana Cahyadi present a cohesive pastoral-theological stance on the phenomenon of paranormal practices within the Catholic context in Indonesia. Although their language and emphases vary, all three voices affirm a core ecclesial commitment: any spiritual

power, ability, or practice—whether extraordinary, instinctive, or mysterious—must be discerned by its orientation toward Christ, ecclesial communion, and the Gospel.

First, they all recognize that not all paranormal experiences are categorically evil. Fr. Ferry distinguishes between innate, neutral natural gifts and practices derived from dark spiritual sources. Similarly, Fr. Dominic identifies a distinction between shamans (who invoke supernatural forces) and psychics (who may operate through natural energies or sensitivities). Fr. Kris acknowledges the existence of gifts that exceed ordinary capacity and roots them in either natural human potential or grace, depending on their use and fruits. All three stress that such phenomena are not necessarily condemned, but must be evaluated carefully.

Second, they agree on the need for discernment and doctrinal boundaries. Fr. Ferry urges testing “the tree by its fruit,” and warns against spiritual deception. Fr. Dominic and Ingrid appeal to both reason and Church teaching, affirming that practices that invoke hidden powers, engage in divination, or operate outside sacramental life are incompatible with the faith. Fr. Kris goes further by naming the dangers of “spiritual narcissism” and “false mysticism,” in which individuals may become fixated on self-fulfillment or personal power rather than openness to divine grace.

Third, they all insist that true healing and salvation come only from Christ. Whether describing inner healing, deliverance, or spiritual power, each contributor centers the discussion on the Lordship of Jesus and the primacy of the sacraments. Fr. Kris articulates this most explicitly: “*If people stop at the healer or the medium, they will not arrive at God.*” Fr. Ferry and Ingrid similarly caution against seeking healing outside the normative means of the Church—prayer, the sacraments, and trusted pastoral care.

Lastly, all three affirm that the Church’s task is not simply to condemn, but to accompany and guide. Fr. Dominic notes that even in gatherings of Catholic *kebatinan* practitioners in Semarang, the Church maintains supervision through Eucharistic celebration and pastoral presence. Fr. Kris calls for those with gifts to remain rooted in humility, ecclesial life, and obedience. Fr. Ferry, too, offers practical principles for engagement, emphasizing pastoral care alongside theological integrity.

In conclusion, these perspectives converge in offering a contextual Catholic model of spiritual discernment that is theologically sound, pastorally sensitive, and culturally aware. While affirming the complexity of paranormal experiences in Indonesian religious life, they call the faithful to orient all healing, power, and mystery toward Christ, the sacraments, and the communal life of the Church. This unified voice represents a valuable foundation for developing a nuanced, incarnational pastoral theology in contexts where spiritual hybridity and traditional beliefs remain pervasive.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Catholic Church is called to respond to the phenomenon of Catholics seeking healing from shamans with both theological clarity and pastoral sensitivity. Through the insights of Fr. Ferry Hartono, Fr. Dominic Kusumawanta,

Ingrid Listiati, and Fr. Telephorus Krispurwana Cahyadi, this research affirms that while certain human abilities may have natural or instinctual origins and need not be automatically rejected, any spiritual practice must be discerned in light of its orientation toward Jesus Christ and ecclesial communion. Practices rooted in hidden spiritual forces, magical thinking, or divination are clearly incompatible with Catholic doctrine. However, if such capacities are ordered toward love, service, and the sacramental life of the Church, they may be integrated pastorally within proper boundaries.

This reflection supports the need for a contextual theological anthropology that respects cultural expressions of spiritual longing without compromising the core truths of the faith. The existence of local cosmologies and traditional healing practices points to the deep human desire for wholeness, protection, and transcendence. Rather than opposing these desires, the Church must interpret them theologically and pastorally, recognizing them as potential entry points for evangelization and catechesis. The aim is not syncretism, but inculturation: ensuring that grace transforms culture, and that the Gospel becomes embodied within the particularities of people's lives. To achieve this, the Church must strengthen its teaching, foster discernment, and accompany the faithful with care and compassion.

By integrating theological reflection, anthropological insight, and pastoral praxis, this study contributes to a more discerning and responsive ecclesial approach to vernacular spirituality in culturally plural settings. It calls for the Church to be both guardian of truth and companion in the journey of faith, helping the faithful navigate spiritual ambiguity with wisdom rooted in Christ. Ultimately, any authentic healing and liberation must lead not to dependence on intermediaries, but to deeper communion with God through prayer, the sacraments, and participation in the life of the Church.

Theologically, this study contributes to the development of a contextual theological anthropology that takes seriously the complexity of lived religiosity in plural cultural settings. By engaging the voices of local clergy and grounding the discussion in magisterial teaching, the article offers a framework for discerning vernacular religious practices not merely as threats to orthodoxy, but as invitations to deeper pastoral engagement and theological reflection. Practically, the findings call for renewed catechetical efforts, the formation of pastoral agents in the art of spiritual discernment, and the strengthening of ecclesial spaces where questions about healing, culture, and spiritual power can be addressed openly and compassionately. In contexts where the boundaries between faith, culture, and superstition are often blurred, the Church must remain both faithful to its doctrinal heritage and attentive to the concrete spiritual needs of its people.

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