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Understanding the Correlation Between the Cear Cumpe Ritual and the Sacrament of Baptism in the Catholic Church: A Study at St. Peter Parish Tanggar Diocese of Ruteng

Yoranimus Kame[1)],Yoseph Lodowik Deki Dau[2)]
STIPAS Keuskupan Agung Kupang[1,2)]
jeromekame@gmail.com[1)], yos10.74dau@gmail.com[2)]

Abstract

This study investigates the correlation between the Cear Cumpe initiation rite and the Sacrament of Baptism within the Catholic Church, as understood by the faithful of Golo Nderu Village in the Parish of Saint Peter Tanggar, Diocese of Ruteng. Employing a qualitative descriptive methodology, the research aims to explore the theological, cultural, and social dimensions that connect this traditional Manggarai ritual with Christian sacramental theology. Data were gathered through observation, interviews, and documentation, and were analyzed systematically to uncover meaningful patterns and theological implications. The findings reveal that the local community demonstrates a high level of awareness regarding the relationship between the Cear Cumpe rite and Baptism. This awareness is reflected in their understanding of symbolic elements, the process of initiation, and the transmission of communal and spiritual identity. The study highlights the theological convergence between local wisdom and ecclesial teaching, offering an example of contextual theology where inculturation fosters deeper ecclesial participation. This research contributes to broader discussions on ritual integration and identity formation in faith communities. It also emphasizes the need for pastoral sensitivity in engaging traditional practices as vehicles of divine grace within the Catholic sacramental framework.

Keywords: Cear Cumpe, Sacrament of Baptism, Initiation rite, Catholic Church, Inculturation.

Introduction

Culture is inseparable from the human experience. It constitutes the symbolic and material framework within which individuals express identity, construct meaning, and sustain communal life. Anthropological scholarship recognizes culture as both inherited and adaptive, transmitted through generations as a body of knowledge, ritual practice, and shared belief (Doyle, 2012). Within the Manggarai context of Flores, Indonesia, traditional practices serve not only as markers of ethnic identity but also as vehicles of spiritual expression. Among these practices, the Cear Cumpe ritual holds a central position in affirming communal belonging and spiritual initiation.

The term Cear Cumpe originates from the Manggarai language, where "cear" denotes the act of uncovering and "cumpe" refers to a traditional fireplace. Symbolically, the ritual signifies the acknowledgment of a newborn's identity and their entrance into the community. It serves as a cultural form of naming and blessing, typically performed five days after birth (Regus & Deki, 2012). As a rite of passage, Cear Cumpe bears profound social and religious significance, aligning with Victor Turner's understanding of liminality and transformation within ritual performance.

In Catholic sacramental theology, Baptism is regarded as the foundational sacrament that initiates individuals into the life of faith and the community of believers (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992). Theologically, Baptism is understood as both cleansing from original sin and incorporation into the Body of Christ (Martasudjita, 2003). The similarities between the symbolic gestures in Cear Cumpe and those in the Baptismal rite provide fertile ground for examining inculturation as a theological approach that values the interplay between Gospel and culture.

Several scholars have argued for the necessity of contextualizing Christian rituals within indigenous settings to foster meaningful participation and deeper theological understanding (Phan, 2003). In this light, the Cear Cumpe rite may be viewed not as a pre-Christian superstition but as a culturally rooted sacramental expression capable of mediating divine grace. The process of interpreting such rituals within the framework of Christian theology requires a hermeneutic of respect and openness.

Studies on inculturation in Southeast Asian contexts highlight the challenges and opportunities presented by local religious practices that intersect with Christian beliefs (Chen, 2007). In the case of Manggarai, the community's strong adherence to ancestral rituals coexists with their Catholic faith, demonstrating a form of religious syncretism that invites theological reflection. This dual belonging suggests that traditional rituals such as Cear Cumpe may function as preparatory rites that resonate with Christian sacramental logic.

The naming aspect of Cear Cumpe bears a striking resemblance to the naming performed during the Baptismal rite. While the former confers a culturally significant identity, the latter bestows a Christian name linked to a saint, symbolizing the child's spiritual lineage. This dual naming structure reinforces the idea that identity in Manggarai is simultaneously cultural and ecclesial (Jagom, 2020).

From a theological standpoint, Cear Cumpe can be interpreted as a natural sacrament, wherein the signs and symbols used reflect the community's belief in divine protection, social integration, and ancestral blessing. As such, it aligns with the Catholic understanding of sacramentality that sees the material world as capable of conveying spiritual realities (Keuskupan Padang, n.d.). This perspective opens a space for mutual enrichment between local traditions and ecclesial teachings.

The integration of local rituals into ecclesial life has been the focus of theological inquiry across global Catholic contexts. Scholars advocate for liturgical inculturation as a necessary step toward building authentic local Churches (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1993). Their work emphasizes that faith expressions must be rooted in the lived experience of the people and that cultural rites, when theologically reinterpreted, may become avenues of evangelization.

Empirical studies on Catholic communities in Indonesia indicate that traditional rites remain integral to faith formation, particularly in rural areas where ecclesiastical structures and indigenous customs converge. These findings resonate with the experience of Golo Nderu, where faith is lived through a synthesis of sacramental practice and traditional ritual.

Pastoral responses to such cultural practices must go beyond tolerance to active engagement and theological accompaniment. The Second Vatican Council's call for inculturation invites the Church to affirm what is true and good in every culture. In this regard, the Cear Cumpe rite represents a valuable locus theologicus, a place where theology and culture intersect meaningfully.

This study seeks to examine the understanding of the faithful in Golo Nderu regarding the relationship between Cear Cumpe and Baptism. By exploring the theological and cultural significance of both rituals, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on inculturation and the integration of indigenous rituals into the sacramental life of the Church. The findings will offer insight into how faith communities negotiate identity, belonging, and grace through both ecclesial and ancestral practices

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design with a descriptive analytical approach to explore the correlation between the Cear Cumpe ritual and the Sacrament of Baptism as understood by the Catholic community in Golo Nderu Village, Saint Peter Parish, Tanggar. The

qualitative approach was chosen to allow an in-depth examination of participants' experiences, beliefs, and interpretations regarding both ritual practices. Through this method, the research aimed to uncover not only the external expressions of these rites but also their internal theological and cultural meanings.

Data collection was conducted using three primary techniques: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observation allowed the researchers to witness the ritual context and the behavior of participants during ceremonial acts. Interviews were conducted with local elders, catechists, and parents to obtain rich descriptions and interpretations of both Cear Cumpe and Baptism. In addition, relevant documents such as liturgical texts, local catechetical manuals, and cultural records were analyzed to supplement field data and provide a broader context for interpretation.

The data analysis followed a multi stage process that included data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Initial field notes and interview transcripts were coded and thematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns and conceptual categories. Triangulation was employed to ensure the validity of findings by cross-verifying insights from interviews, observations, and textual sources. The research was conducted with ethical considerations in mind, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for local cultural and religious norms throughout the research process.

Research Findings

Theological Dimension

The findings indicate that the Catholic community in Golo Nderu Village possesses a profound theological understanding of the Cear Cumpe ritual. For the local faithful, this rite is not merely a cultural heritage but a spiritual expression of gratitude for the gift of new life. Cear Cumpe is regarded as a communal acknowledgment of divine presence and ancestral protection during the process of childbirth. In addition, the community demonstrates a mature comprehension of the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism within the Catholic Church. Baptism is recognized as the beginning of a life of faith and as a moment of spiritual rebirth. Through this sacrament, individuals are believed to be welcomed into the community of believers and incorporated into the Body of Christ.

A clear correlation between Cear Cumpe and Baptism is reflected in the community's understanding of both as rites of initiation. Cear Cumpe marks the child's entry into the

customary community, while Baptism signifies the child's inclusion in the ecclesial body. Both serve transformative purposes by affirming social and spiritual belonging simultaneously.

Socio Cultural Dimension

From a social perspective, Cear Cumpe plays a vital role in establishing a child's identity within the genealogical and territorial structures of society. This ritual binds the child to ancestral lineage and customary land, which serve as the foundations of communal life. Baptism, by contrast, connects the child spiritually to the broader community of believers, namely the universal Church. Both rites are understood to possess protective functions. Community members believe that Cear Cumpe shields the child from harmful spirits and misfortune during early life. Baptism, on the other hand, is perceived as a liberation from original sin and a reception of divine grace. These parallel beliefs reflect a shared concern for infant vulnerability and the need for divine intervention.

In terms of moral responsibility, the community maintains that while Cear Cumpe does not explicitly convey moral instruction, it implicitly contains the expectation that the child will uphold ancestral values and cultural honor. Baptism, in contrast, clearly places the child within a Christian vocation characterized by faith, love, and witness. These shared moral dimensions indicate the formative ethical significance of both rites.

The spiritual lives of individuals who have undergone both rituals reflect a dual identity that is consciously embraced. Rather than being perceived as contradictory, traditional and ecclesial values are seen as mutually enriching. Within this framework, Cear Cumpe and Baptism together reinforce a sense of belonging to both the customary and ecclesial communities.

Symbolic Ritual Dimension

Both rituals employ rich symbolic elements. Cear Cumpe features fire, white chickens, palm wine, and ancestral prayers, each representing purity, life continuity, and ancestral presence. These elements bear symbolic parallels to Baptismal liturgical signs such as water, chrism oil, white garments, and candles, which signify purification and spiritual rebirth.

The naming process in both Cear Cumpe and Baptism carries theological and identity forming significance. In Cear Cumpe, names are chosen through communal discernment and are often linked to ancestral memory. In Baptism, names are associated with saints, providing spiritual protection and direction within the Church's life.

The ritual structure of Cear Cumpe bears resemblance to Catholic liturgical practices. Although it is not part of the official liturgy, its execution involves communal participation, the use of sacred symbols and the recitation of prayers. These features suggest that Cear Cumpe possesses both *forma* and *materia* that warrant theological recognition as a natural rite with sacramental character.

Pastors and catechists in the Parish of Tanggar exhibit pastoral openness toward Cear Cumpe. They view it as a preparatory rite for Baptism, provided it remains consistent with Church doctrine. This attitude reflects the spirit of inculturation articulated by the Second Vatican Council and supported by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

The integration of these two rituals into the faith practice of the Manggarai Catholic community indicates a more holistic formation process. Children are raised in an environment that upholds both cultural values and Christian teachings. This synthesis affirms that inculturation is not only feasible but essential for nurturing a living, meaningful, and contextually grounded faith.

Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be explained that the Catholic community in Golo Nderu possesses a profound understanding of the Cear Cumpe ritual. This understanding is neither superficial nor merely cultural, but is rooted in a theological awareness that regards the ritual as an expression of gratitude to God and to ancestral spirits for the gift of new life. Participants emphasized that Cear Cumpe is a spiritual necessity, marking the child's full acceptance into family and communal life. This perspective is consistent with anthropological theories such as those proposed by Webb (1986), who views rites of passage as indicators of both social and spiritual identity.

A similar depth of awareness was observed in the community's theological reflection on the Sacrament of Baptism. Members of the local Church recognize Baptism as an initiation into the ecclesial community and as the beginning of one's journey of faith. It is not merely regarded as a ritual requirement but as a transformative experience in which a child is reborn as a Christian and becomes a member of the ecclesial body. This theological insight reflects Barnes's (1992) affirmation of Baptism as a primary entry point into a life of grace.

Participants consistently highlighted the interconnectedness between the Cear Cumpe ritual and the Sacrament of Baptism. Both are perceived as transitional and initiatory moments.

While Cear Cumpe signifies a child's formal acceptance into the clan and cultural community, Baptism marks the child's inclusion within the spiritual community of the Church. This dual process of incorporation demonstrates a harmonious integration of social and spiritual belonging. Similar patterns of integration between traditional and ecclesial rites have also been identified in various Catholic communities that embrace liturgical inculturation (Borgias, 2015).

The symbolic elements in Cear Cumpe further underscore the sacred dimension of the ritual. Objects such as fire, white chickens, palm wine, and prayers to ancestors are not merely cultural artifacts but carry profound spiritual meaning. These elements function as cultural analogues to sacramental signs. As explained by Tandak (2019), indigenous symbols may embody spiritual significance and therefore resonate with the Church's understanding of sacramentality.

One important aspect shared by both rituals is the naming process. In Cear Cumpe, the child's name is selected through communal deliberation involving ancestral consultation, whereas in Baptism, names are typically drawn from the communion of saints. Both practices imbue the child with a sense of destiny and spiritual protection. According to Pasi (2021), this dual naming structure forms a narrative identity that integrates both cultural heritage and ecclesial belonging.

Participants also emphasized the protective functions of the two rites. Cear Cumpe is believed to shield the child and mother from harmful spiritual forces, while Baptism is viewed as liberation from original sin and entrance into divine protection. This shared emphasis on spiritual safeguarding reflects a broader cosmological concern common in traditional societies, particularly those that affirm divine intervention during moments of vulnerability (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2022).

Although Cear Cumpe is not formally institutionalized within the Church's liturgical framework, participants described it as a structured communal liturgy, complete with prayers, symbols, and ritual acts. This organic theological response to divine presence in life events illustrates the sacredness inherent in indigenous ritual. In their study of liturgical adaptation in Eastern Indonesia, Denar et al. (2023) argue that such practices reveal forms of sanctity comparable to ecclesial celebrations.

From a pastoral perspective, many local clergy view Cear Cumpe as a form of cultural catechesis that prepares families for receiving the Christian sacraments. Some priests even

interpret it as a praeparatio evangelica, or a preparatory step toward the Gospel. This approach aligns with the call from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences to integrate local cultures within theological and pastoral praxis (Jebar, Riyanto, & Adon, 2024).

An analysis of the ritual structures reveals that both rites contain *forma* and *materia* that communicate spiritual truths. In Cear Cumpe, ritual words seek ancestral protection, while in Baptism, the Trinitarian formula invokes divine grace. Kartono (2022) notes that ritual language and material signs serve sacramental functions in both traditional and ecclesial settings, acting as mediators of spiritual meaning.

On a social level, the two rites affirm the individual's role within broader communal frameworks. Cear Cumpe immerses the child in the identity of family and customary territory, while Baptism introduces the child into the Body of Christ. This dual belonging supports the view that religious identity is always shaped within interdependent social contexts (Chen, 2007).

The initiatory nature of both contexts also involves moral and ethical expectations. Baptism calls for a life of discipleship marked by faith, love, and witness. Although Cear Cumpe does not explicitly articulate moral instruction, it implies an expectation that the child will uphold cultural values and familial loyalty. This convergence of ethical formation indicates that both rites serve as foundational frameworks for personal development and moral orientation.

Local theological interpretations suggest that Cear Cumpe may be understood as a *sacramentum tantum*, or a preparatory rite for receiving the true sacrament. It does not replace Baptism but provides a cultural matrix that facilitates a deeper encounter with sacramental grace. This conceptualization reflects Rahner's idea of the "anonymous Christian," in which divine grace is believed to operate even beyond the explicit sacraments of the Church.

Participants who have experienced both rituals often express a sense of dual belonging, with one rooted in local culture and the other in the universal Church. This dual identity is not perceived as conflicting but rather as mutually enriching. Ritual practices such as naming, blessing, and community acceptance are understood as layered expressions of a single divine calling toward life and communion.

In addition, the findings indicate that the continued practice of both rituals contributes to a more holistic formation of faith. Children raised within these dual frameworks develop an integrated awareness of cultural loyalty and ecclesial commitment. This process underscores the

importance of incorporating local traditions into catechetical programs, particularly in rural areas where traditional cosmologies continue to shape religious life.

In summary, the relationship between Cear Cumpe and Baptism is not merely symbolic but reflects a profound theological synthesis. It represents a sacramental vision in which divine grace is mediated through culturally meaningful signs. Acknowledging this relationship allows the Church to promote an inculturated faith that respects the universality of Christian teaching while also honoring the uniqueness of indigenous religious experience.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This research was limited to a single parish and cultural setting, which may not fully represent the diversity of inculturated ritual practices across Manggarai or other regions of Indonesia. The sample size was also constrained by logistical factors and limited access to extended ethnographic immersion. Furthermore, theological interpretations were based on qualitative data and community testimony, which may benefit from more rigorous comparative theological analysis.

Future studies could expand the scope to include multiple parishes across the Diocese of Ruteng or neighboring dioceses with similar cultural contexts. Comparative research involving clergy and theologians may yield deeper insights into ecclesial perspectives on traditional rites. Further interdisciplinary inquiry into liturgical inculturation could also draw upon systematic theology, cultural anthropology, and missiology to inform ecclesial practice and pastoral approaches.

Conclusion

This study has revealed a meaningful theological correlation between the traditional Manggarai ritual of Cear Cumpe and the Catholic Sacrament of Baptism. Both rites serve as gateways to communal and spiritual belonging, offering symbolic acts of naming, blessing, and initiation. While differing in theological formulation and ritual procedure, each affirms the identity and sacred value of the individual within their respective cultural and ecclesial communities.

The correlation lies primarily in three interrelated dimensions. First, both rituals emphasize process, form, and material elements that serve as conduits of communal recognition and divine encounter. Second, they embody values of initiation, status recognition, and liberation whether from spiritual vulnerability or original sin. Third, these values resonate within wider

religious, social, and cultural frameworks that shape individual and collective identity in Manggarai Catholic life.

Ultimately, the convergence of Cear Cumpe and Baptism points to a sacramental imagination rooted in lived tradition. It invites the Church to recognize indigenous rituals not as obstacles to faith but as contexts for divine self disclosure. Through respectful dialogue and theological integration, the Church can affirm the richness of local cultures while nurturing a deeper, more contextualized expression of Chris.

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