

Procession of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus: A Cultural Expression of Mena Vicariate Community Preserving the Image of Atambua Diocese

Lusius Tae Mau

Sekolah Tinggi Pastoral Santo Petrus Kefamenanu, Indonesia

Email: lusius74@gmail.com

Keywords:

Sacred Heart of Jesus, faith, culture, empires, royalty, religious life of the church.

ABSTRACT

Religious rituals are important cultural expressions that preserve collective identity, social solidarity, and spiritual values within a community. Amid globalization and modernization, local religious traditions face challenges in maintaining their continuity, particularly among younger generations. The procession of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Mena Vicariate, Atambua Diocese, represents a unique interaction between Catholic spirituality and the cultural identity of the Atoni Pah Meto community. This study aims to analyze the procession of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a cultural expression and its role in preserving the identity of the local church community in the Atambua Diocese. This research employed a qualitative approach with a socio-anthropological perspective. Data were collected through direct observation, documentation, statistical records from the Pastoral Center of the Atambua Diocese, and relevant literature studies related to religion, culture, and ritual practices. The findings reveal that the procession strengthens religious commitment and community identity through three main cultural dimensions: inclusiveness, symbolism, and intergenerational transmission. Statistical data indicate significant participation of the Mena Vicariate community, including 1,452 baptized members, 1,596 Eucharistic recipients, 269 marriage sacrament recipients, and 161 recipients of the Holy Oil sacrament in 2025. These findings demonstrate that the Sacred Heart of Jesus procession functions not only as a religious devotion but also as a cultural mechanism that preserves collective memory, strengthens social relationships, and maintains the identity of the Atambua Diocese. The study concludes that religious practices embedded within local culture play an essential role in sustaining faith, tradition, and community continuity amid social change.

INTRODUCTION

The Mena Vicariate, geographically, includes plains, beaches, hills, mountains, and valleys. With a total of 82,967 people, this region of vicariate is built on ten parishes under the patronage of ten saints and saints in the Catholic Church. The parishes are Saint Philomena Mena, Saint Francis Xavier Wini, Saint Joseph Manamas, Saint Anthony Padua Fafinesu, Saint Peter Canisius Manufui, Saint Peter and Paul Lurasik, Sacred Heart of Jesus Manumean, Saint Virgin Mary Mother of God Ponu, and Saint Francis Xavier Fatuoni (PusPas KA, 2025). The location and area of these parishes are varies, resulting in the number of people demographically varying from one parish to another. The presence of this vicariate is spread across the territory of the empire region, royalty, and kingdom. It is not surprising, then, that

Jesus Christ– the King of the Universe – faithfully visited them with his most sacred heart (Dilexit Nos, 2010).

With His very sincere heart and love, the Lord Jesus Christ "the King of the Universe" crosses, encompasses, and encompasses the territory of the empire, the royalty, and the kingdom formed from the generation of "Atoni Pah Meto" to the ecclesiastic Catholic Church of the Diocese of Atambua in the vicinity of the Vicariate Mena. Within the territory of the Biboki empire, there are the Parish of Saint Filomena of Mena, the Parish of Saint Peter Canisius of Manufui, the Parish of Saints Peter and Paul of Lurasik, the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus of Manumean, the Parish of the Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of God of Ponu, and the Parish of Saint Francis Xavier of Fatuoni. Meanwhile, for the royalty region, there are the Parish of Saint Joseph of Manamas and the Parish of Saint John the Baptist of Bakitolas. As for the kingdom territory, there are the Parish of Saint Anthony Padua of Fafinesu and the Parish of Saint Francis Xavier of Wini (TTU in numbers, 2026).

The relationship between religion and culture has become an important global issue in contemporary social science studies because religious practices are no longer viewed merely as expressions of individual faith but also as cultural systems that construct identity, social solidarity, and collective memory (Terzidou et al., 2017). In many societies, religious rituals function as mechanisms for preserving cultural heritage amid globalization, modernization, and changing social structures (Weikin et al., 2025). Globalization has accelerated cultural transformation by introducing new values, lifestyles, and patterns of interaction that may influence traditional religious practices. According to UNESCO (2022), intangible cultural heritage, including rituals, traditions, and community-based religious expressions, requires preservation because it represents collective identity and historical continuity. Therefore, understanding religious processions as cultural expressions has become increasingly relevant, particularly in communities where religious traditions remain closely connected with local values and social organization. This view is reinforced by more recent scholarship confirming that intangible cultural heritage functions as a driver of social resilience and cohesion by anchoring communities to a shared sense of continuity amid rapid social change (Zabulis et al., 2025), and that sustained engagement in religious rituals continues to reinforce cultural belonging and the intergenerational transmission of identity within diverse religious communities (Santiago, 2023).

Religious rituals continue to play an important role in strengthening social cohesion and maintaining cultural identity among local communities. Recent sociological studies indicate that communal religious activities contribute to social integration by creating shared meanings, collective participation, and emotional attachment among community members. Research by Hervieu-Léger (2021) emphasizes that religious traditions serve as “chains of memory” that connect past generations with contemporary communities through symbolic practices. Similarly, Turner’s theory of ritual processes explains that collective rituals generate social bonds through shared experiences and symbolic interactions. These perspectives demonstrate that religious ceremonies are not only theological activities but also social and cultural phenomena that preserve community identity. This issue is particularly significant in indigenous and local communities where religious traditions interact with historical narratives, cultural symbols, and collective values. Empirical network-based evidence from rural worship communities likewise confirms that shared participation in

collective ritual strengthens supportive social ties among co-participants, lending quantitative support to the long-standing claim that collective religious ritual fosters social cohesion (Power, 2018).

In Indonesia, the preservation of religious-cultural practices faces various challenges due to rapid social change, digital transformation, and generational shifts. Indonesia, as a country with diverse religious and cultural traditions, has thousands of local rituals that represent the relationship between belief systems and community identity. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia has recorded more than 11,000 intangible cultural heritage entries submitted from various regions, demonstrating the richness of local cultural expressions. As communities of practice, such intangible cultural heritage networks derive their sense of identity and interconnectedness from a shared historical and geographical relationship that is actively practiced and transmitted (Fusté-Forné & Nguyen, 2019). However, many local traditions experience declining participation among younger generations because of modernization, migration, and changing social preferences. This condition creates a need for academic studies that document and analyze religious-cultural practices not only as spiritual activities but also as mechanisms of cultural preservation.

Within this broader context, the procession of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Mena Vicariate of the Atambua Diocese represents a significant local religious-cultural phenomenon. The Mena Vicariate consists of ten parishes distributed across different socio-geographical territories, including former imperial, royalty, and kingdom areas, with a population of approximately 82,967 people. The procession reflects the interaction between Catholic spirituality and the cultural identity of the *Atoni Pah Meto* community. The practice demonstrates how religious devotion is integrated with local cultural symbols, social structures, and communal participation, a pattern echoed in comparable pilgrimage centers elsewhere, where ritual practices likewise promote social cohesion, economic well-being, and spiritual fulfillment for the surrounding community despite pressures from modernization (Wondimu et al., 2025), and where community-centered participation is essential for safeguarding a sacred site's continuity across generations (Banda et al., 2024). However, despite its importance as a religious and cultural expression, this procession has received limited scholarly attention, particularly regarding how it contributes to preserving the identity of the local church and strengthening cultural continuity within the Atambua Diocese.

Previous studies have explored the relationship between religion, ritual, and culture from various perspectives. Geertz (1973) examined religion as a cultural system in which symbols create meaning and influence social behavior. Turner (1969) investigated rituals as symbolic processes that generate collective identity and social transformation. Meanwhile, Lindholm (2007) highlighted that cultural identity develops through shared experiences and practices transmitted across generations. More recent studies indexed in Scopus and Google Scholar have also demonstrated that religious rituals contribute to cultural resilience by maintaining collective memory and strengthening community belonging. However, most previous studies have focused on broad theoretical discussions or large religious traditions, while studies examining specific Catholic processions within indigenous communities in Eastern Indonesia remain relatively limited. Even recent ethnographic work on the *Atoin Meto* community of Timor, such as studies of traditional houses as vehicles of cultural identity in school learning (Taneo et al., 2024) and of communal feasts deliberately timed to coincide

with parish anniversaries in North Central Timor (Mokos, 2026), tends to concentrate on discrete cultural artifacts or single events rather than on a diocese-wide religious procession as an integrated cultural-identity mechanism.

The existing research gap lies in the limited exploration of how a specific religious procession functions simultaneously as a theological expression, cultural practice, and identity-preservation mechanism within a local Catholic community. Previous research has generally examined religious rituals through anthropological or sociological perspectives separately, without deeply analyzing the relationship between religious symbols, local cultural structures, and institutional identity of the church. Furthermore, limited studies have investigated how Catholic communities in border and rural regions of Indonesia maintain their religious identity through culturally embedded practices. Therefore, this research addresses the gap by examining the Sacred Heart of Jesus procession in the Mena Vicariate as a cultural expression that connects spirituality, tradition, and collective identity (Mulyati, 2019).

The urgency of this research is strengthened by the increasing need to document and preserve local religious traditions amid globalization and cultural transformation. Without academic documentation, religious-cultural practices that contain historical, social, and symbolic meanings may gradually lose their significance among future generations. The Sacred Heart of Jesus procession represents not only a religious devotion but also a form of cultural inheritance that reflects the relationship between the Catholic Church and the local community of Atoni Pah Meto. Through systematic academic analysis, this research provides evidence regarding how religious practices can function as cultural preservation instruments while maintaining spiritual values and community solidarity.

The novelty of this research is its emphasis on the socio-anthropological interpretation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus procession as a cultural model for preserving the identity of the Atambua Diocese. Unlike previous studies that mainly discuss religious rituals from theological perspectives, this study examines the procession through three interconnected dimensions: its inclusive character, symbolic representation, and transmission across generations. The research highlights how religious symbols, such as the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus combined with local cultural attributes, become meaningful representations of identity and belonging among the Mena community. This approach provides a new understanding of how Catholic religious practices adapt to and preserve local cultural expressions.

Based on this perspective, the purpose of this research is to analyze the Sacred Heart of Jesus procession as a cultural expression of the Mena Vicariate community and to understand its role in preserving the identity of the Atambua Diocese. Specifically, this research aims to identify the cultural meanings embedded within the procession, examine the relationship between religious devotion and local cultural identity, and explain how the practice contributes to maintaining communal solidarity. The study applies a socio-anthropological approach by integrating religious studies, cultural anthropology, and local church perspectives to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the phenomenon (Yohana, 2023).

This research contributes theoretically and practically to the development of studies on religion, culture, and identity preservation. Theoretically, it enriches academic discussions regarding religious rituals as cultural systems that produce meaning and strengthen collective identity. Practically, the findings provide documentation and knowledge for the Catholic

Church, local communities, and cultural institutions in preserving religious traditions as part of intangible cultural heritage. Furthermore, this research benefits future scholars by providing a reference for studying similar religious-cultural phenomena in other indigenous communities. Through this contribution, the Sacred Heart of Jesus procession in the Mena Vicariate can be understood not only as a religious activity but also as a cultural expression that preserves the continuity of faith, identity, and community values within the Atambua Diocese.

METHOD

This research was built by the researcher's awareness of the growth of faith in the people of the vicariate of Mena in the Diocese of Atambua about the Sacred Heart of the Lord Jesus in the teachings of the Catholic religion. The location chosen by the researcher covers all parishes spread within the vicinity area of the vicariate of Mena. The parishes include Saint Philomena Mena, Saint Francis Xavier Wini, Saint Joseph Manamas, Saint Anthony Padua Fafinesu, Saint Peter Canisius Manufui, Saint Peter and Paul Lurasik, The Sacred Heart of Jesus Manumean, Saint Virgin Mary Mother of God Ponu, and Saint Francis Xavierius Fatuoni. These parishes are socio-geographically located between the territory of the empire, royalty, and kingdom. Therefore, socio-demographically, the people in this region have different cultural lifestyles from one place to another. Hence, the researcher seeks to conduct this research by actively participating in every single visit to the Parish area while observing the intensity of the people of each Parish following the procession of the Sacred Heart of the Lord Jesus.

The data needed in this study were summarized by the researcher after obtaining from the statistics of the North Central Timor district in 2026, statistics from the Pastoral Center of the Atambua Diocese and the Committee of the Procession of the Sacred Heart of the Lord Jesus in Mena. All data were assessed by the researcher as an integral part of the analysis of this study. So, the researcher analyzed it part by part to get the validity of information about the procession of the Sacred Heart of the Lord Jesus in the vicariate of Mena, Diocese of Atambua.

Once the data was collected and analyzed, the researcher discussed it with some literature specifically related to this theme. The researcher takes it with anthropological social issues combined with the teachings of the Catholic religion in order to making an appropriate academic contributions that need to be scientifically accountable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From May 12 – June 8, 2026, the Lord Jesus Christ "the King of the Universe" with His sacred heart "Sacratissimi Cordis Iesu" – the Sacred Heart of Jesus – visited the generation of "*Atoni Pah Meto*" in the vicariate region of Mena. These days are the time of God's grace visiting His people while looking closely and being a part of them. He was moved by compassion by crossing hills and mountains and valleys and plains and oceans. His visit and presence are a blessing for the growth and development of the local Church of the Diocese of Atambua socio-demographic and cultural life of the church. The presence of the Church of the Diocese of Atambua maintains the faith of His people through the presence and visit of the Sacred Heart of the Lord Jesus on the land called as "*Atoni Pah Meto*".

From the statistical data of the Pastoral Center of the Diocese of Atambua, it is known that the generation of "*Atoni Pah Meto*" in the vicariate of Mena has added 1,452 baptized members of the Catholic Church. For the empire area such as Mena Parish as many as 341 people, adding to the total of 12,869 people., Manufui: 79 people to 9,304 people., Lurasik: 160 people to 16,916 people., Manumean: 45 people to 9,670 people., Ponu: 134 people to 8,504 people., and Fatuoni: 316 people to 8,656 people. Meanwhile, for royalty areas such as Manamas Parish as many as 88 people to 5,247 people, and Bakitolas: 29 people to 3,265 people. As for the kingdom area such as Fafinesu Parish, 77 people to 4,394 people and Wini: 183 people to 4,142 people. (PusPas KA, 2025). The large number of souls is significant for the Local Church of the Diocese of Atambua to always preserve the collegiality and communion of the Church in its people for the honor and salvation of their souls in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Catholic Church according to the mandate of the Book of Canon Law, namely "*Salus animarum supreme lex*" – The salvation of souls is the supreme law – (Can. 1752).

Table 1. Data on the Number of Baptized as of 2025

No	Status of the Region			Total
	The Empire	The Royalty	The Kingdom	
---	---	---	---	---
1	Mena			341
2	Manufui			79
3	Lurasik			160
4	Manumean			45
5	Ponu			134
6	Fatuoni			316
7		Manamas		88
8		Bakitolas		29
9			Fafinesu	77
10			Wini	183
TOTAL				1452

Source: KA Pastoral Center, 2025

Not only that. The significance of the salvation bestowed by the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the pilgrimage of His visit to the people in this vicariate is the addition of 1,596 souls of the people in their intimacy to receive the Most Holy Sacrament, namely the Body and Blood of Christ. In the territory of the empire such as Mena there are 346 inhabitants., Manufui: 176 inhabitants., Lurasik: 218 inhabitants., Manumean: 120 inhabitants., Ponu: 199 inhabitants., and Fatuoni: 227 inhabitants. Meanwhile, in the royalty areas such as Manamas: 85 people and Bakitolas: 56 people. Meanwhile, in the territory of the kingdom such as Fafinesu: 56 people and Wini: 113 people (PusPas KA, 2025).

The significant increase in the number of souls in the process of forming and preserving the local church is believed to be an effort to enforce a strong and independent faith intelligence in the culture of life of the people of God in the Diocese of Atambua so that they remain steadfast in maintaining their faith in the Holy Trinity of God. Thus, the people of

God still feel themselves as part of a close and intimate communion with God as the source and peak of life in church life.

Table 2 Data on Receiving the Most Holy Body Sacrament as of 2025

No	Status of the Region			Total
	The Empire	The Royalty	The Kingdom	
---	---	---	---	---
1	Mena			346
2	Manufui			176
3	Lurasik			218
4	Manumean			120
5	Ponu			199
6	Fatuoni			227
7		Manamas		85
8		Bakitolas		56
9			Fafinesu	56
10			Wini	113
TOTAL				1596

Source: KA Pastoral Center, 2025

The growth of the faith of God's people in the area of the vicariate also influenced the Local Church of the Atambua Diocese is to be preserved and used as a model in family life. The statistical data of the Pastoral Center notes that there are 269 new families that have been united in the bond of the sacrament of Marriage as a means of uniting the Church as the bride and Christ as the groom. In the Biboki empire area such as Mena there are 42 couples, Manufui: 27 couples, Lurasik: 34 couples, Manumean: 14 couples, Ponu: 24 couples, and Fatuoni: 38 couples Meanwhile, for royalty areas such as Manamas, there are 14 couples and Bakitolas: 13 couples. Meanwhile, for the royal territory such as Fafinesu there are 10 couples and Wini: 53 couples (PusPas KA, 2025). The growth of faith in family life is an aspect of the maintenance of the Church that requires active involvement in living and preserving the Church both locally and universally, both in anxiety and in the hopes of facing the challenges of the world today. It was here that the Church was formed as the first foundation of faith for God's people in their family to be united with the family of the universal ruler of God, Christ the Lord – "the King of the Universe".

Table 3 Data of Marriage Sacrament as of 2025

No	Status of the Region			Total
	The Empire	The Royalty	The Kingdom	
---	---	---	---	---
1	Mena			42
2	Manufui			27
3	Lurasik			34
4	Manumean			14

5	Ponu	24
6	Fatuoni	38
7	Manamas	14
8	Bakitolas	13
9	Fafinesu	10
10	Wini	53
TOTAL		269

Source: KA Pastoral Center, 2025

Therefore, it is not surprising that in 2025 the statistical data from the Pastoral Center of the Diocese of Atambua records that in the vicariate of Mena there are only 161 people who receive the Sacrament of Anointing. For Biboki administrative areas such as Mena Parish, 7 people were recorded, Manufui: 9 people, Lurasik: 11 people, Manuean: 5 people, Ponu: 6 people, and Fatuoni: 90 people. Meanwhile, in the royalty area such as Manamas Parish, 13 people were recorded, and Bakitolas: 12 people. As for the kingdom area such as Fafinesu Parish, 3 people were recorded and Wini: 5 people. In other words, the more God's people in this vicariate of Mena increase their devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the more God cares for as well as embraces His people in the world He created. He does not allow His appointees and His elect to perish but to gain life and even allow them to have it abundantly (PusPas KA, 2025).

Table 4 Data of Sacrament of Anointing as of 2025

No	The Empire	The Royalty	The Kingdom	Total
1	Mena			7
2	Manufui			9
3	Lurasik			11
4	Manumean			5
5	Ponu			6
6	Fatuoni			90
7		Manamas		13
8		Bakitolas		12
9			Fafinesu	3
10			Wini	5
TOTAL				161

Source: KA Pastoral Center 2025

The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus: A Culture Model of Caring for the Face of the Church First, Encompasses Everything.

The visit of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus the Lord to every parish and even a neighborhood as close as Mena is an abundant grace and gift of God. This is marked by His visit that does not stop at one place or at a certain space and/or time but on all aspects of the line of life of the people as a whole in the vicariate of Mena. He started His visit from Mena Biboki Moenleu, along the coast of North Wini Insana, moved again to Naibenu Manamas and Bakitolas, combed the hills of Insana Fafinesu, then combed towards Biboki South Manufui, moved again to Biboki North Lurasik, towards the hills of Biboki Feotleu

Manumean, and valley to Biboki Anleu Ponu and Fatuoni, and finally re-entered Sonaf Sepe Naek Biboki Moenleu, which is the Vicariate Center of Mena Parish of Saint Filomena Mena (Mena, 2026).

This visit is very socially anthropological in addition to being characterized by the spirituality of God's divinity for His people within the vicariate of Mena. The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus reaches every soul in His Church, crosses every boundary that exists in Him, and encompasses every ethnicity and race, class, and social stratification that exist in the vicariate region. The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus meets His people by greeting every social, ethnic and racial group with its level and uniqueness. He greeted those who were in the empire group., He also greeted those who belonged to the royalty group., He also greeted the royal family at every moment He settled in *Atoni Pah Meto* near Mena. He brought glad tidings to His people who were temporarily pilgriming to Him. He makes His people rejoice and rejoice as His sons and daughters. (Fransiskus, 2011) A similar all-encompassing character is documented in the Semana Santa procession of Larantuka, East Flores, another Eastern Indonesian Catholic tradition in which sacred symbols carried through the community embody the educational and communal values of the Lamaholot people (Wissang & Pratiwi, 2022), even as the growing popularity of such processions among wider audiences raises questions about their commodification for religious tourism (Fanggidae & Fongo, 2020).

"The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept His offer of salvation are freed from sin, suffering, emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is always born again. In this appeal, I would like to encourage Christians to begin a new chapter of evangelization with joy."

Clifford Geertz in his book *The Interpretation of Culture*, especially on the topic of Religion as a Cultural System, emphasizes that the social structure and personality of each person as well as the symbols or signs that exist in his environment are cultural products that participate in shaping the pattern / way of life of a person in his territory. In other words, devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus by the people within the vicariate of Mena is the embodiment of a religious way of life that includes all aspects of human life, both material and non-material, such as ethnicity and race, social class, social stratification, livelihood, science, technology, social organization, language, art, and schools of belief. This dynamic mirrors the wider inculturation practice of the Catholic Church in Indonesia, which has long sought open dialogue with the archipelago's diverse cultures as a way of responding to local socio-religious realities (Rukiyanto, 2019), and which continues, through translation, documentation, and dedicated study centers, to integrate local values into religious life while preserving community languages and traditions (Widyawati et al., 2025).

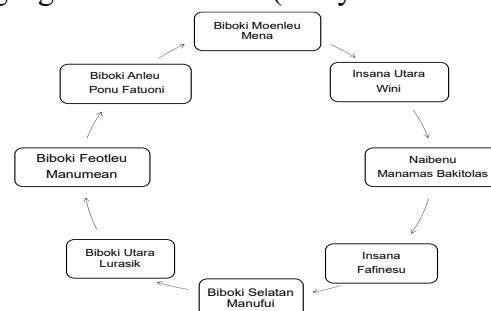


Figure 1 Mapping of the visit of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Vicariate Mena, 2026

Second, Symbolic Presentation

The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus is a symbol of God's presence for His people. The vicariate of Mena embedded this symbol in the Lord Jesus the Son of God. He is God who became man. He – the God who appears to man who believes in Him. He is also God who is close to His created humans. It is the so called as "nomen est omen" – the name that is a sign – of the presence of God the Father and the Holy Spirit in man.

In his book entitled *Jesus of Nazareth (The Infancy Narratives)*, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who later became Pope Benedict XVI (2005 – 2013), explained that Jesus Christ is the invisible image of God, a representative person of God and an image of God's form (Hebrews, 1:3). In Him, everyone who believes will see the Father (cf. John, 14:9). That is, He is God (Colossians 1:19., John, 1:1-2., 14-18) the perfect image of God in Himself for those who believe in Him. Through Him, the invisible God becomes visible resulting in the power and wisdom and the goodness of God is to be perfect in Him (Ratzinger, 2012).

As a symbol of the invisible presence of God, the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus is embedded with the patriarchal symbol of the *Atoni Pah Meto* generation. The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus indeed is a sign of God's presence that gives the seeds of fertility and the newness of life to His people in the scope of Biboki, Naibenu, and Insana. He is wearing *pilu* (a small cloth that hanged as headband), pinned *bet ana'* (meaning small shawl), *aluk* (meaning betel nut place for gentlemen), and *bete* (meaning cloth for gentlemen). The various motifs and designs of the three social structures of the Mena vicariate community are pinned to the Lord Jesus in His pilgrimage across this region. Various colors and patterns of the cloth are also imposed on Him as a sign that He is the earthly God who accompanies His people in *Atoni Pah Meto* Biboki, Naibenu, and Insana. This embedding of local symbols into the image of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus parallels the inculturation documented at the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Ganjuran, Yogyakarta, where Javanese liturgy, architecture, and dress were woven into Catholic devotion to deepen the spirituality of the local community (Rosidy & Prasasti, 2021), and where the pilgrimage to the Javanese Hindu-style Sacred Heart temple likewise reinterprets a universal devotion through distinctly local cultural forms (Tridiatno, 2023).

Victor Turner in his book entitled "The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure" asserts that religious practices in the form of symbols are believed to be products of local culture as visible images of transcendent reality. He more emphatically defines the meaning of symbols as a conventional sign, which is something built by society or individuals with a certain meaning to express another meaning lies behind with the standards that is approved by the members of society.

Regarding symbols that are pinned to the subject or product of society's culture, Turner states that humans are "Agents of symbols" who like to symbolize something that produces a meaningful thing for others. Man never sees, finds and knows people directly, but through various symbols, he knows who and what is pinned to him. Thus, culture as a way of life contains the real patterns that are hidden, from and for behavior that is obtained and / or transferred with symbols as the work of humans in their society.

Third, Culture that is Shared and Forwarded

Culture as a way of life belongs to everyone as a member of a social group., a way of life such as observing, speaking, listening, and interacting with others are the main characteristics of culture. Cultural differences in life in terms of thinking, behaving, feeling, and interacting eventually become a habit of people's lives through sharing together or the action of continuing the way of life together.

In his book entitled *Culture and Identity: The History, Theory, and Practice of Psychological Anthropology*, Charles Lindholm describes the cultural practices of humans in their society as believed to be their way or pattern of life in every aspect of life. Culture means a way of life. Therefore, the logical consequence of a cultured human being is that the behavior and way of thinking or the way he interacts must be shared in a group of people in order to be considered as part of his culture or way of life. Some cultural patterns are passed on by close people in cultured life, and the shared culture shapes people in the same experiences of both biological and psychological characteristics, both vertically and horizontally among human groups in their society. This principle of shared, transmitted culture is precisely what liturgical inculturation seeks to achieve within the Indonesian Catholic Church, whose formulation of the Order of Mass in the Indonesian language illustrates how church teaching on inculturation is worked out communally rather than imposed individually (Martasudjita, 2024).

The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus who walks while making a pilgrimage is the one who greets the group of His people in the Diocese of Atambua, especially the vicariate of Mena. It enters into social groups and groups of society through its territory and boundaries. There are groups of Priests, Sisters, Catechists, Parish Councils (DPP/DKP), Pastoral Ministry of Youth such as OMK, THS-THM, Group Prayers includes Legio Maria, Charismatics, Children Schooling Group (Early Childhood, Elementary, Junior High, and Vocational School/High School), Village and District Officials, Military Groups such as TNI and POLRI, and even other social organization groups (which are not Catholic) that inhabit the Biboki, Naibenu, and Insana areas. (Mena, 2026). This pilgrimage gives rise to two sides of relationship that are closely related to each other. On the one hand, there is a pilgrimage from the Most Sacred Heart of the Lord Jesus to His people, on the other hand, there is a pilgrimage from the people to the Most Sacred Heart of the Lord Jesus. This relationship results in a reciprocal relationship. J.H Steward in his book entitled *Theory of Culture Change*, describes this model relationship for humans in society as a cultured way of life. According to him, reciprocal relations model are a custom of humans giving and receiving, believed to be a medium to establish friendly relationships without taking advantage of them. For example: people eat together to get friends, not friends to eat. Therefore, this model relationship can be possible if it is carried out in the spirit of social solidarity for the sake of a society with integrity for the common welfare. For the sake of this purpose, reciprocal relations are concretized through cultural transformation both vertically and horizontally from one generation to the next. A comparable social construction of meaning is evident in the Friday Legi Mass of Pohsarang Village, Kediri, where both Catholic and non-Catholic residents interpret an inculturated ritual practice as a shared social resource that shapes belonging within a pluralistic community (Pilhandesi & Laksmana, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The procession or devotion of the pilgrims of the vicariate of Mena to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus is an expression of cultural identity as a way of life in the Church of the Diocese of Atambua. This finding resonates with other Catholic processions across the Eastern Indonesian archipelago, such as the centuries-old *Semana Santa* procession of Larantuka, Flores Timur, which has similarly become the cultural identity of its local community through sustained devotional practice, through a ritual process rich in religious meaning and symbolism, and through inherited Portuguese colonial representations that the community continues to preserve as their own. More broadly, these findings align with the understanding that religious devotion, whether experienced through pilgrimage or procession, is embodied and performative, continually reconstructing faith and belonging through the lived, physical participation of the faithful.

From the planning process to its implementation from May 12 to June 8, 2026, both the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and Catholics in this diocese made pilgrimages. The results of the analysis of the researcher's findings boil down to the socio-anthropological concept of culture and identity. Culture will live when individuals in their society have found their identity correctly and appropriately as part of the region or society in which they live. On the other hand, identity both individually and collectively will be valuable or meaningful if it is lived in culture as a way or lifestyle in its society. The identity of the people of the vicariate of Mena in the procession of the Sacred Heart of the Lord Jesus is seen in the cultural model that encompasses everything, symbolic, and is passed on and shared. This cultural model is believed by researchers to be the foundation for taking care of the face of the Church in the Diocese of Atambua both spiritually and physically. Thus, a cultured Church is its members who know their identity as the Sons and Daughters of God both individually and collectively. A cultured church also encourages its members who feel and see closely the invisible God to be visible in every activity in order to maintain the spiritual life for other Parishes and Vicariates that grow in the Diocese of Atambua.

REFERENCES

- Badan Pusat Statistik, Timor Tengah Utara Dalam Angka, 2026.
- Condrad Phillips, Kottak., *Cultural Anthropology – Appreciating Cultural Diversity*, Fourteen Edition, New York: McGraw Hill, 2011.
- Charles, Lindholm, *Culture and Identity: The History, Theory, and Practice of Psychological Anthropology*, United State of America: One World Publication, 2007.
- Clifford, Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, New York: Basic Books Inc., 1973.
- Emanuel Gerri, Singgih., *Bertelologi Dalam Konteks*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2000.
- Gerry, Ferraro., *Cultural Anthropology: an Applied Perspective*, Sixth Edition, United State of America (USA): Wadsworth, 2008.
- Haralambos & Holborn, *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*, Sixth Edition, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004.
- J.H., Steward., *Theory of Culture Change*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976.
- John, Jacoby, et al., *Cultural Anthropology*, Second Edition, United State of America: British Library Cataloguing Press, 2007.
- John J, Macionis., *Sociology*, Fourteen Edition, New York: Pearson Printing Press, 2013.

- Joseph, Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth – The Infancy Narratives*, translation edition, New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2012.
- Panitia Perarakan Hati Kudus Yesus, Mena: Panitia Perarakan, 2026.
- Pusat Pastoral Keuskupan Atambua, Emaus: Data Statistik, 2026.
- R. Robyatmoko., *Kitab Hukum Kanonik 1983, Edisi Revisi*, 2006, Jakarta: Konferensi Wali Gereja Indonesia, 2006.
- Raymond, Scupin., *Cultural Anthropology: A Global Perspective*, Sixth Edition, United State of America (USA): Pearson Printing Press, 2007.
- Ritzer., George., *Sociological Theory*, Eight Edition, New York: The McGraw Companies, 2008.
- Tridiatno, A. Y. (2023). Presenting the love of God through the Javanese Hindu temple of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Ganjuran Yogyakarta. *Journal of Asian Orientation in Theology*, 5(1), 99–131. <https://doi.org/10.24071/jaot.v5i1.5810>
- Victor, Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antri-Structure*, New York: Ithaca Cornel Press, 1969.
- William, Haviland, et al., *The Essence of Anthropology*, United State of America (USA): Thomson Higher Education, 2007.
- Wekin, V. W., Indawati, N., & Firdaus, R. M. (2025). The meaning and process of the Semana Santa ritual in Larantuka, East Flores. *International Conference on Interdisciplinary Studies*, 1(1), 315–323. <https://doi.org/10.31316/icis.v1i1.9295>
- Widyawati, F., Lon, Y. S., & Midun, H. (2025). Mission and inculturation: Preserving local language and culture in the Indonesian Church. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 81(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v81i1.10516>
- Wissang, I. O., & Pratiwi, Y. (2022). Semana Santa tradition educational symbol. *Central Asia & the Caucasus*, 23(2), 281–291.
- Wondimu, H., Kassaw, E., & Melkamu, G. (2025). Hadra ritual practice: Cultural significance and continuity in the Deger pilgrimage center of Amhara, Ethiopia. *Heliyon*, 11(2), Article e42022. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2025.e42022>
- Yohana, S. (2023). Portuguese representations in the Semana Santa ritual in Larantuka. *IAS Journal of Localities*, 1(1), 30–40.
- Zabulis, X., Partarakis, N., Zidianakis, E., & Kaplanidi, D. (2025). A critical review of the function of intangible cultural heritage as a driver for social resilience and cohesion. *Encyclopedia*, 5(4), Article 189. <https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia5040189>