

# THE MEANING OF *ROHANI* IN PROTESTANT CHRISTIAN TEENAGERS AND ADULTS THROUGH PHOTO ELICITATION

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## MAKNA *ROHANI* BAGI REMAJA DAN DEWASA KRISTEN PROTESTAN MELALUI PHOTO ELICITATION

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### Abstrak

Istilah rohani digunakan oleh individu di Indonesia untuk merujuk pada dimensi roh atau jiwa manusia. Namun, studi ilmiah mengenai makna rohani masih terbatas, sehingga diperlukan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai istilah yang bersifat kontekstual ini. Studi ini melibatkan individu remaja dan dewasa Kristen Protestan ( $n = 26$ ), dengan rentang usia berkisar antara 15–68 tahun. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode *photo elicitation* dan dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian mengidentifikasi beberapa tema utama makna rohani, yakni pengalaman personal, orang-relasi, alam, aktivitas ibadah, dan tempat ibadah. Selain itu, ditemukan pula tema tambahan seperti simbol, nilai moral, *cue*, dan *self-care*. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa makna rohani tidak hanya merefleksikan upaya individu dalam mencari yang suci atau ilahi, melainkan juga berkaitan dengan orientasi pada kesejahteraan diri.

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### Abstract

The term *rohani* is used by individuals in Indonesia to refer to the human soul or spirit. However, scientific studies on the meaning of *rohani* remain limited, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of this contextualized concept. This study involved Protestant Christian teenagers and adults ( $n = 26$ ), with ages ranging from 15–68 years. A qualitative approach was employed using the photo elicitation method, and the data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings identified several primary themes of *rohani* meaning, including personal experiences, people-relationships, nature, religious activities, and places of worship. In addition, several emergent themes were identified, such as symbols, moral values, cues, and self-care. These findings suggest that the meaning of *rohani* not only reflects individuals' efforts to seek the sacred or the divine, but also relates to an orientation toward personal well-being.

**Keywords:** photo elicitation, Protestantism, religiosity, *rohani*, spirituality

### Impacts and Implications in the Indigenous Context

This study contributes to indigenous psychology literature by highlighting how the culturally embedded term *rohani* reflects uniquely Indonesian understandings of religiosity and spirituality within Protestant Christian communities. The findings of this study have at least two implications for the Indonesian context. First, the term *rohani* appears to be predominantly associated with the search of the sacred which related to one's relationship with God. Therefore, its use is recommended for academic discussions concerning religiosity and spirituality. Second, future research is encouraged to adopt a quantitative approach to further substantiate and strengthen the findings and their implications.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is important to understand how individuals perceive religious concepts and terminologies, as these perceptions are closely related to factors such as cultural differences and discrepancies in terminology. In terms of cultural differences, it should be noted that the concepts of religiosity and spirituality are mainly defined within Western contexts and may be understood differently in Eastern cultures. Hood et al. (2018) asserted that individuals in Western cultures tend to separate the material from the immaterial, whereas those in Eastern cultures are less inclined to make such distinctions. Recognizing these differences highlights the need for further research on how individuals in Eastern cultures, such as Indonesia, understand these concepts.

Another important aspect in the scientific study of individual interpretations is the issue of terminology discrepancies. Research on religious and spiritual concepts tends to follow the definitions set by the researcher, which may not align with how such terms are commonly understood in everyday life. This creates limitations, particularly in terms of conceptual relevance. In this regard, Hood et al. (2018) suggested that researchers need to determine what they want to be measured rather than simply focusing on the meaning and definition of religiosity and spirituality.

A preliminary study conducted by the first author revealed a tendency among individuals in Indonesia to use the term “*rohani*” in their daily lives. It was found that the term *rohani* was more frequently searched online than the terms “religious” and “spiritual” (Garey, 2021), a pattern that appeared consistently across regions in Indonesia. Furthermore, searches for *rohani* tended to be more concrete and specific compared to those for “religious” and “spiritual”. These findings provide an initial basis for further investigation into what *rohani* means to individuals in Indonesia.

To date, the authors have not identified empirical research specifically examining individual interpretations of the term *rohani*. While several studies within Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism have discussed related concepts, these have largely taken the form of literature reviews (Katarina & Darmawan, 2019; Made, 2020; Othman et al., 2017). This highlights the need for further exploration of the subjective meaning of *rohani*, particularly to understand how individuals interpret the term and whether it overlaps with or differs from related constructs such as religiosity and spirituality.

### ***The Concepts of Religiosity, Spirituality, and Rohani***

Religion is inherently multidimensional. Drawing on prior works, religion can be understood as encompassing various dimensions, including beliefs, practices, experiences, and social environment (Glock & Stark, 1965; Saroglou, 2011). This multidimensionality helps explain why

individuals may express their religiosity differently depending on their life context.

In general, religiosity and spirituality are often distinguished by their contextual emphasis. Spirituality connotes a personal and subjective dimension, whereas religiosity is more closely linked to institutional structures (Hood et al., 2018). Similarly, Streib and Hood (2016) describe spirituality as a privatized, experience-oriented form of religion. Despite ongoing debates, these concepts continue to be interpreted and used differently by individuals.

Previous research indicates that individuals can identify themselves as either spiritual or religious. For instance, a study showed that adults in the United States are more likely to identify as spiritual rather than religious, with approximately one-quarter of respondents describing themselves in this way (Lipka & Gecewicz, 2017). This trend, which has increased over the past five years, illustrates how individuals distinguish between religiosity and spirituality.

To understand the concept of *rohani*, it is important to first examine its meaning within the Indonesian language. According to Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), *rohani* can function both as a noun and an adjective (Badan Pusat Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, n.d.). As a noun, it refers to *roh* (Indonesian word for “spirit”), while as an adjective, it relates to matters of the spirit or spirituality. Broadly, *rohani* encompasses aspects of human life that are immaterial or related to the inner self. Etymologically, the term derives from “*ruhani*”, which refers to matters concerning life or the soul.

Within Christianity, *rohani* is often associated with spirituality. Tanudjaja (2018) defines a spiritual person as one who demonstrates *rohani* maturity, by accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and living according to the faith that brings salvation. Such maturity is reflected in one’s relationship with God, pursuit of holiness, love for others, and commitment to fulfilling both divine and cultural mandates as outlined in the Bible. Thus, in this context, *rohani* refers to a way of being grounded in faith and therefore exhibits traits of having *rohani*.

Although the term *rohani* is often used interchangeably with “spirituality”, the authors contend that the two are not identical. Drawing on Hood et al. (2018), spirituality in contemporary discourse does not necessarily require an institutional framework, and individuals may identify as spiritual without reference to a divine being. Supporting this view, Willard and Norenzayan (2017) observed a growing trend of spirituality without religion in secular Western contexts. In contrast, the concept of *rohani* in Indonesia, particularly within Christianity, remains closely tied to belief in God (Tanudjaja, 2018), suggesting a distinct conceptual orientation from the Western contexts.

The urgency of this study is further supported by previous research conducted by Novianty and Garey (2020), which found that young adults in Indonesia tend to interpret religiosity and

spirituality in largely similar ways, often within an institutional framework. This contrasts with Western contexts, where there is a stronger tendency to distinguish between the two concepts. This finding underscores the importance of further exploring how individuals interpret *rohani*, a term that is culturally and linguistically specific to Indonesia.

This study focuses on the meaning of *rohani* within Christianity. This focus is deemed necessary given the variation in how the term *rohani* is understood across different religious traditions in Indonesia. It also aligns with Novianty and Garey's (2020) recommendation to consider theological perspectives when examining religious concepts. By focusing on a specific religious context, the study aims to provide a more grounded and nuanced understanding of the term.

A final point to consider is that interpretations of *rohani* need to be explored across different age groups. This assertion is based on Novianty and Garey's research (2020) where participants were primarily young adults in higher education. To address this limitation, the present study incorporates both teenagers and adults, thereby broadening the developmental scope. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals at different life stages interpret the concept of *rohani* within the Indonesian context.

## METHODS

### *Participants*

This study employed a maximum variation sampling strategy, particularly focusing on variations in participants' background across Christian denominations in Indonesia. This approach aims to capture and explain the central themes that emerge from the diversity of participants (Poerwandari, 2017).

A total of 26 participants agreed to take part in the study, consisting of 15 adults and 11 teenagers. The age of adult participants ranged from 19 to 68 years, while teenager participants were aged between 15 and 18 years. Among the adults, there were 5 males and 10 females; among the teenagers, there were 2 males and 9 females. Participants were affiliated with a wide range of denominations, including Calvinist, Lutheran, Methodist, Charismatic, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Baptist, Reformed, Mennonite, Anglican, and Adventist.

### *Design*

This study adopted a qualitative approach to address the research questions, employing a visual research method through photo elicitation. Photo elicitation refers to the use of photographs

when posing interview questions (Harper, 2002). According to Harper (2002), this method serves as a bridge between worlds of researchers and participants by grounding interview conversations in images that are comprehensible to both parties. Thus, it can be said that photo elicitation can be considered an effective qualitative method. In psychology, it offers particular advantages, including the ability to visually capture contemporary phenomena and experiences, making it especially relevant for present-day research contexts (Bates et al., 2017).

### ***Procedure***

The research process followed the practical steps set forth by Bates et al. (2017). The first step involved an epistemological consideration, in which the authors evaluated the suitability of a qualitative approach using photo elicitation for addressing the research questions.

The second step consisted of participant briefing. Prior to this, we had earlier contacted the participants by phone to obtain their consent using the informed consent form. At this stage, the first author-cum-lecturer (male), with the assistance of two trained students (male), briefed participants about the photographs to produce as well as the research objectives and ethics. The photo-collection procedure was adapted from the approach used by Novianty and Garey (2020).

The third step involved photo collection by participants. The fourth step consisted of interviews. The final step was data analysis.

### ***Instruments***

Participants were given two weeks to collect photographs, which included both newly taken images and existing photos from their personal collections. Using either mobile phone camera or digital camera, each participant gathered up to five existing photos and took five new photos that represented their understanding of the term *rohani* based on their religious beliefs. Participants were also asked to select one existing photo, and one newly taken photo that best represented the meaning of *rohani* for them personally. These selected images served as the primary data sources. In total, 260 photos were collected (150 photos from adult participants and 110 photos from teenager participants).

Interviews were conducted using a participant-driven open interview method (Bates, et al., 2017). Participants were interviewed online from their homes through Zoom meetings and were audio-visually recorded. The first author and the two trained students conducted the interviews, each lasting approximately 1 to 1.5 hours.

The first author tailored the interview questions to the research context and purpose. The questions posed included the following:

1. Can you tell and explain why you chose the photographs?
2. How do the photos represent the meaning of *rohani*?
3. Why is X (an image in the photo) an important aspect with regard to *rohani*?
4. Is there anything else you would like to discuss regarding your experience that has not been captured here in respect to the meaning of *rohani*?

### ***Analysis Strategies***

This study employed thematic analysis technique developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis followed six stages: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, definition and naming of themes, and report writing. The authors analyzed three forms of data: the photographs, the verbatim narratives associated with the photographs, and the selected images identified by participants as most representative of *rohani*. Two types of coding were applied: explicit and implicit coding of photographs. Explicit coding focused on the photo object as it is, while implicit coding was based on participants' narratives and interpretations of the images. The first author conducted the primary analysis of all photographs alongside the interview transcripts. The second author reviewed the analysis to ensure consistency and rigor. The discussion between the authors contributed to data credibility and can be considered a form of analyst triangulation, as suggested by Patton (1999).

## **RESULTS**

Explicitly, the photographs provided by the participants varied greatly: children in prayer, worship areas in a church, paintings of Jesus, self-portraits, photos of friends, natural landscapes, flowers, pets, books, decorations, roads, buildings, etc. Implicitly, the dominant photo themes were personal experiences and relationships. In terms of frequency, the photo themes reflecting participants' perceptions of *rohani* ranged between those were most frequently and least frequently captured. Due to the vast array of images in this study, we were only able to include several images to illustrate each theme.

In the themes of personal experience, we found images from participants that reflected their personal experiences. For example, an adult participant submitted a photo of her children (Figure 1).

The following is an excerpt from one participant’s narrative describing a personal experience in which God/divinity was referenced:

*“The paddle strokes move rhythmically, the same movement. The canoe will be calm, but the waves won’t always sway as calmly. I’ve told the kids, God is also calm. You will feel God’s love for you. I told them that their parents’ life isn’t always rosy. But God showed us the way.”* (Adult 3, Female, 65 years old).



*Figure 1. The Paddle: Photo submitted by Adult 3*

Another participant shared an image of her family house (Figure 2). She described her family’s financial hardship, explaining that they had long struggled to renovate the house and that it initially seemed impossible. She attributed the successful renovation to God’s help.

In the themes of people-relationship, participants described *rohani* as a relationship with other people. The following excerpt from a participant illustrates the association of the term *rohani* with relationships with others (Figure 3). *“I don’t like bitter coffee, whereas my partner dislikes sweet coffee. It doesn’t matter. When it comes to love there is what we call sacrifice, acceptance, sharing, receiving, and giving.”* (Adult 1, Female, 45 years old).



*Figure 2. House Renovation: Photo submitted by Teenager 4*



Figure 3. Two Cups of Coffee: Photo submitted by Adult 1

Other photo themes included nature, worship activities, and places of worship. These themes were also identified in a previous study (Novianty & Garey, 2020), along with new themes such as symbols, moral values, cues, and self-care. In the nature theme (Figure 4), one participant stated: *“Grateful to have the opportunity from God to see the beauty of His creation, there is peace in my soul.”* (Teenager 3, Female, 17 years old). In the theme of worship activities, one adult participant submitted an image of her participation in Holy Communion at her church (Figure 5). In the theme of places of worship, one participant submitted an image of her church building (Figure 6). Symbols were identified as images with religious characteristics. One participant submitted an image of painting of Jesus as a symbol of salvation (Figure 7). Another theme was moral values. At least four images were found to contain moral lessons meaningful to the participants. One participant submitted an image of pandan leaves representing lessons from her mother (Figure 8). As an illustration of cues (Figure 9), a participant stated: *“God is the place where I return to, where I can pour out my grievances, where I feel happy when I share my stories of joy and sorrow.”* (Adult 7, Female, 23 years old). As an example of self-care (Figure 10), watching a virtual concert by her favorite artist, BTS (a Korean musical group), was interpreted as a form of self-care/self-love: *“...we choose what is best for ourselves, for our own happiness. Others might not think the same. It is after all our choice to do what it takes to stay happy, which is not the same for everyone.”* (Adult 13, Female, 25 years old).



Figure 4. The Nature: Photo submitted by Teenager 3



*Figure 5. Communion Wine and Bread:  
Photo submitted by Adult 8*



*Figure 6. The Church Altar: Photo  
submitted by Adult 2*



*Figure 7. Jesus Holding Little Children:  
Photo submitted by Adult 4*



Figure 8. Pandan Leaves: Photo submitted by Adult 12



Figure 9. Home: Photo submitted by Adult 7



Figure 10. Virtual Concert: Photo submitted by Adult 13

Based on the accompanying narratives provided for the photographs, the authors described each photo theme. The following are the thematic categories identified in this study along with their descriptions.

Table 1.

*Themes in Interpreting Rohani*

No	Theme	Description
1	Personal experience	<p>Personal experience refers to specific events or moments that generally happened in the past and interpreted positively by participants as their relationship with God or God's help in coping with life's trials, moral lessons, or redemption. In these experiences or moments, individuals also partake in religious activities such as praying to God for help.</p> <p>Personal experience can also be interpreted negatively by participants, for example events or moments that remind them of unresolved problems or negative emotions. Personal experiences that are interpreted positively have a positive impact on the individual, such as feeling grateful, the ability to empathize, demonstrating endurance, and gaining insights. Personal experiences that are interpreted negatively have a negative or neutral effect, such as having to deal with many unresolved problems.</p>

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No	Theme	Description
2	People-relationship	People-relationship refers to a <i>rohani</i> theme that relates to the presence of people who are significant to the individual. In addition, people-relationships or interpersonal relationships also reflect an individual's self-orientation towards one's relationship with others in everyday life and work. Under this theme, individuals perceive the presence of people who are significant to their spiritual self in a positive way, for example by making the individual feel happy and warm. It is also believed that the presence of other people strengthen the individual's <i>rohani</i> . Under this theme, there are also individuals who have an orientation towards others, which drives the individuals to act or behave towards the welfare of others such as by giving support, helping, or serving others. This orientation towards others is also perceived as an action or behavior that follow the example of the Lord Jesus.
3	Symbol	A symbol is an object or something else such as an emblem, etc., which an individual perceives to represent one's religion. Symbols generally have specific characteristics related to religious attributes such as paintings of Jesus, Christmas trees, Bible verses, etc. Symbols can also be objects mentioned in the Bible such as lamps, trees, flowers, etc. Other symbols are objects associated with Christian figures such as Anabaptist figures.
4	Cue	Cues refer to objects or things within the surrounding environment that act as a stimulus for the individual to contemplate about the meaning of <i>rohani</i> . It differs from symbol as it does not need to have specific characteristics related to religion. Some examples of cues are calculators, general book titles, pictures, food, drinks, etc.
5	Nature	Nature is everything within the natural environment. This includes the sun, sky, clouds, mountains, seas, rivers, trees, etc., which give rise to thoughts of the greatness of God as the creator and gratitude for God's creations.
6	Activity/ritual	An activity/ritual is an individual's religious behavior or actions such as reading the Bible, praying, attending religious services, attending Holy Communion, etc.
7	Place of worship	A place of worship refers to a physical object in the form of a building or room of worship.
8	Moral values	Moral values are values that an individual lives by through different things such as objects, or people that are significant to the individual. An individual may acquire moral values from within his or her own understanding of what they represent or from other people significant to the individual, such as the parents.
9	Self-care	Self-care refers to an action or situation that the individual perceives as an important action or situation in the context of the individual's well-being. Self-care is subjective to the individual.

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## DISCUSSION

As observed in this study, the dominant themes in the interpretation of *rohani* are associated with personal experiences and people-relationships. This indicates that an individual's perception of *rohani* is shaped by personal life experiences and relationships with others. Accordingly, *rohani* is understood as more personal and relational when compared to findings from previous studies on the meaning of religiosity and spirituality, which tend to focus on religious activities and rituals within

formal religious institutional contexts (Novianty & Garey, 2020). This suggests that individuals interpret *rohani* through additional dimensions beyond conventional religiosity and spirituality. The findings of this study highlight the multidimensionality of *rohani*, consistent with earlier scholarly work noting the multidimensional nature of religion (Glock & Stark, 1965; Saroglou, 2011). Further investigation is therefore warranted to examine whether dimensions such as personal life experiences and interpersonal relationships contribute more significantly to the formation of one's *rohani* than institutional dimensions, including religious rituals and places of worship.

Based on participants' narratives, the authors found that perceptions of *rohani* predominantly revolved around God and the divine. This finding supports the argument of Hill et al. (2000), who posited that the concept of religiosity and spirituality ought to be linked to the sacred. Within the personal experience theme, participants generally interpreted *rohani* through their lived encounters of experiencing God's guidance amid life hardships.

The present study's findings align with Thomas's (2010) concept of spiritual pathways, which describes nine spiritual temperaments—including naturalists, traditionalists, caregivers, and others—that reflect individual predispositions in relating to God. This research identified multidimensional themes of *rohani*, several of which correspond to specific spiritual temperaments: interpersonal relationships resonate with caregivers, religious symbols and rituals align with traditionalists, and nature corresponds to naturalists. This implies that the meaning of *rohani* may be shaped by these innate spiritual predispositions. Nevertheless, further research is needed to examine the relationship between individual temperaments and the interpretation of *rohani*.

The authors also noted that participants who did not directly reference the Divine in interpreting *rohani* instead emphasized interpersonal relationships. Such relationships were regarded as part of understanding God, who uniquely created every human being. Participants further interpreted *rohani* in terms of their relationship with others, akin to partners with their similarities and differences.

The finding that the interpretation of '*rohani*' was not associated with the divinity but rather with non-divine elements such as the relationship with others was still in line with the definition of religiosity/spirituality as established by Hill et al. (2000). They argued that religiosity and spirituality may also involve the quest of non-divine purposes, such as self-identity, sense of belonging, existential significance, health, and well-being. These non-divine purposes need to be understood within a context where they facilitate one's quest for the sacred. In this study, the photo narratives provided by the participants on the theme of relationships with other people indicated a contextual factor underpinning one's search for the divine. For example, a large share of the participants

expressed gratitude to God for the relationships they have, where some even saw their relationships with other people as a form of action that follows Jesus' example. The finding on the theme of people-relationships can therefore be explained within the conceptual framework of religiosity/spirituality as put forward by Hill et al. (2000).

In this study, the authors found photographs that had religious characteristics and were also seen from a religious lens by the participants, such as photos of the cross, Bible, bread, wine, and tambourine. One teenager participant mentioned that the photo of a tambourine for her symbolizes her colorful life after knowing God (Teenager 1, female, 18 years old). In addition, several photos featured objects found or mentioned in the Bible, such as trees, plants, animals, lamps. The authors also came across photos that were interpreted through a *rohani* lens by individuals but did not specifically have religious characteristics. The said photographs were visual images of the title of a book, food, photos of famous people, a calculator and buildings, among others. Photographs without religious characteristics seemed to function more as a cue for the individual. In psychology, cue refers to a stimulus, event, or object that serves to guide behavior (American Psychological Association, n.d.). A participant who was reading a book entitled *Home* for example, was made to think about God. This shows how a book title became a stimulus for the individual, which ultimately led to a *rohani* awakening.

The significance of *rohani* found in the symbols and cues of a person's life denotes the importance of a visual context in today's culture in relation to religious life. In a study on religious symbols hung on rearview mirrors, Vassenden and Anderson (2015) found that the symbols indicated the individual's religious conviction. Meanwhile, Bacquet (2017) argued that individuals engage with religious symbols to cultivate a sense of communal belonging. Given the roles of symbols and cues observed in this study, further exploration is necessary to unpack their significance in shaping personal *rohani*, religiosity, and spirituality. Previous study by Bowen and Cheng (2016) discovered that religious language and words have a positive effect compared to secular (non-religious) and neutral language and words on non-cognitive skills such as self-regulatory, academic achievement, and political tolerance. This shows how religious/spiritual symbols contribute to an individual's life. A theologian named Paul Tillich (Tillich, 1958) further asserted that religious symbols possess inherent spiritual power. If religious symbols carry meaningful influence, it raises critical questions: How do mundane, non-religious objects function as cues for interpreting *rohani*? Do these objects possess inherent characteristics that lend them the *rohani* significance, or is such meaning individually constructed? Alternatively, does the *rohani* interpretation arise from an interaction between object characteristics and individual personal traits?

Consistent with Novianty and Garey (2020), this study found that participants often associated *rohani* with nature, perceiving God as the Creator and expressing gratitude for His creations. Nearly all participants valued nature as a spiritual theme, with one participant submitting nine out of ten photographs depicting natural scenery. This pattern suggests participants simultaneously maintain detachment from and connection to nature, signaling a need for further research on individual–nature relationships across urban and rural life contexts.

In this research, the authors also observed another theme in the interpretation of *rohani* that was internally oriented within one’s own perspective. For this theme, the authors did not find any sacred or divine elements in the participants’ narratives. The theme that emerged was related more to one’s quest for health or well-being.

This study also identified self-care or self-love as a small part of participants’ interpretations of *rohani*, which were often accompanied by images and narratives reflecting divinity. This finding suggests that individuals may hold multiple thematic orientations, ranging from the sacred to an inwardly self-orientation. The latter may parallel to the emerging Western notions of non-religious spirituality. Further research needs to be carried out to examine whether this phenomenon has extended to Eastern cultures, such as in Indonesia.

The authors noted moral values were also integral to participants’ understanding of *rohani*. One participant highlighted the importance of wisdom cultivated throughout the lifespan, while another reflected on discipline instilled by parents, exemplified through planting pandan leaves as taught by family. Participants regarded living according to internalized moral values as an essential component of *rohani* maturation, with these values evolving alongside personal growth across the life course.

In this study, the themes that emerged in how participants understand *rohani* varied between teenager and adult participants. The authors observed that the nature theme was more commonly expressed by adult participants than by teenager participants. This raises further inquiry into whether adults are better able to interpret nature from a *rohani* lens compared to younger individuals.

The use of both old and recent photographs ( $n = 260$ ) provided valuable insights into the meaning of *rohani*. Old photos reflected participants’ past experiences, while recent ones offered contextual meaning, particularly in relation to the pandemic context. Notably, the photographs captured a variety of symbols and cues that would have been difficult to articulate verbally, reaffirming the strength of visual methods in religious studies. As Williams (2015) suggests, visual methods can reveal dimensions of religiosity or spirituality that may not be visible in everyday social life. The themes observed in this study on the meaning of *rohani* also seemed to transcend the

denominational affiliations of the participants. However, there was one particular interpretation that was found to be related to one's denominational background. It was when a participant showed a photograph of a prominent figure from her Anabaptist Church. It can therefore be said that participants' understanding of *rohani* in general is not determined by the denominational doctrines that they respectively abide in.

The findings in this study should be interpreted with caution. The study only includes participants affiliated with Protestant Christianity, and as such the meaning of *rohani* as revealed in the study is not necessarily relevant to other religious contexts. Despite the study findings showing less differentiation of visual representation of *rohani* according to participants' denominational affiliations, it is important to note that the participants do not represent all denominations in Indonesia.

Several limitations and challenges were encountered during fieldwork. These included the early withdrawal of several prospective participants due to COVID-19 illness, inability to secure parental consent for teenager participants, and busy work schedules among adult respondents. Interview-related obstacles also included unstable internet connections and submitted photographs that did not meet the study's inclusion criteria. Conversely, the data collection process also yielded positive experiences. Participants demonstrated high responsiveness to research instructions and submitted photographic materials punctually.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

What is the meaning of *rohani*? Based on this study, we conclude that participants generally understand *rohani* as rooted in personal experience and people-relationships. Furthermore, *rohani* is also interpreted through other dimensions, including nature, worship activities, and places of worship. The study additionally identified emerging themes such as religious symbols, moral values, self-care and self-love, and contextual cues.

For theoretical recommendations, these findings offer meaningful insight into the multidimensional ways participants interpret *rohani*, most of which reflect a pursuit of the sacred or divine. Nevertheless, this research also reveals that certain themes in the interpretation of *rohani* are not tied to the quest for the sacred or divine, but rather center on personal well-being. Accordingly, an individual's pathway to spiritual awakening through *rohani* is shaped not only by one's personal relationship with God, but also by the self, relationships with others, and connections to nature.

For practical recommendations, the term *rohani* is recommended when discussing individual religiosity or spirituality, particularly in the Indonesian context. Our findings indicate that personal

experiences and people-relationships are dominant themes of *rohani*. Therefore, Christian communities are encouraged to facilitate deep personal experiences related to their faith, and to strengthen positive relationship among members. These efforts can support individuals in becoming individuals who embody *rohani* values who are both grounded in and actively practicing their faith.

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## **COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARD**

### ***Ethical Statement***

All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its amendments or with comparable ethical standards. The ethical aspect of this study has been reviewed and approved by the Committee for Medical and Health Research Ethics, Faculty of Medicine, Krida Wacana Christian University (Approval number: No. SLKE: 1207/SLKE-IM/UKKW/FKIK/KE/I/2022.). Informed consent has been obtained from all participants in this study.

### ***Conflict of Interest***

There is no conflict of interest.

### ***Data Availability***

The datasets associated in this study are not publicly available because the participants of this study did not give written consent for their data to be shared publicly.

## **USE OF AI SERVICES**

The authors declare that AI services were used solely for grammar correction and minor stylistic refinements. All content was carefully reviewed to ensure accuracy and integrity.

## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

EG designed the study, conducted data collection and analysis. AN reviewed the analysis. EG and AN jointly wrote and revised the manuscript. Both authors approved the final manuscript.

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