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Kôwelidē: An Inculturative Ecotheology A Study of Postcolonial Theology in the Death Rites of the Yei People in South Papua, Indonesia

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Abstract: *Understanding and engaging with culture is essential for developing local theology. Every culture contains unique traditions and practices that embody noble values, some of which align closely with Christian teachings. Many cultural rituals hold deep significance for human life and reflect the community's worldview, ethics, and spirituality. This article explores the noble values embedded in the local culture of the Yei people from South Papua, Indonesia, particularly in relation to their significant efforts to preserve the integrity of God's creation. One crucial tradition, kôwelidē, is performed during death rites and incorporates practices aimed at environmental preservation. This study employs qualitative research methods, drawing on a postcolonial theology approach, to uncover the ecological wisdom of the Yei people. The research findings highlight a deep-rooted concept of environmental stewardship, which is then developed into a framework of inculturation of ecotheology. This approach integrates the lived experiences of the Yei people with theological reflections on nature conservation, emphasising a harmonious relationship between faith, culture, and environmental responsibility.*

Keywords: *Local Culture; Inculturation; Yei People; Kôwelidē; Ecotheology*

Introduction

As God's unique creation, humans play a central role in environmental preservation. However, they are also significant contributors to the ecological crisis. According to a 2014 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), human activity is primarily responsible for global warming. [1] This crisis stems from anthropocentrism, which, while contributing to environmental

[1] Batara Sihombing and Desri Maria Sumbayak, "Ecological Disaster and Role of the Church in Indonesia," in *Religion and Social Comunication*, ed. Anthony Le Duc, vol. 20 (Bangkok: Asean Research Center for Religion and Social Comunication, 2022), 320–333.

degradation, can also serve as a crucial instrument for addressing it.[2] The key to addressing this crisis is the active participation of all individuals in shifting their perspectives on their relationship with nature.

One approach to fostering a nature-centred outlook is through exploring the richness of local cultures and belief systems. Many indigenous traditions emphasise the role of humans as co-creators with nature, advocating for a harmonious relationship between humanity and the environment. Le Duc, for example, proposes the humanist aspects of Buddhism as a means to cultivate a more profound love for nature. Similarly, Prajapati and Nath,[3] highlight ethical and spiritual principles that support environmental stewardship in their study of eco-spiritualism in Vedic texts. Meanwhile, Baffoe[4] and J.M. Luetz[5] emphasise the significant role of indigenous spiritual beliefs in ecological conservation. Likewise, Mpofu presents the concept of societal harmony in South Africa in relation to its natural environment as an expression of love for the world.[6] This research introduces a local cultural perspective by examining death rituals as a means of reinforcing environmental responsibility.

Throughout the development of Christianity, the richness of local cultures has served as a valuable resource for theology. Over time, theological thought has come to recognise and embrace human life experiences as an essential part of its discourse. Bevans emphasises that any theological reflection must consider both past experiences—rooted in the faith of ancestors as recorded in Scripture and Tradition—and present experiences, including the cultural wealth found in local communities.[7] Building on Bevans' insights, Martasudjita has significantly contributed to the field with his inculturation theology, outlining a framework for engaging in the inculturation of theology in Indonesia. The first step in this process is listening to culture, which aims to break away from a history of paternalism and, in doing so, create space for encountering Christ within the cultural context.[8]

For this study, listening to culture means bringing to light the richness embedded in the lived traditions of local communities. Among the Yei people, this cultural wealth is intricately woven into their death rituals. One particularly significant aspect of these rituals is an extended period during which the community allows nature to regenerate naturally. This practice is observed in the ritual of designating certain places as taboo or sacred, known as *kôwelidē*. In the Yei tradition, *kôwelidē* refers to the ceremonial

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[2] Anthony Le Duc, "Buddhist Environmental Humanism: A Humanistic Spirituality to Promote Ecological Growth," in *Religion and Social Communication*, ed. Anthony Le Duc, vol. 20 (Asean Research Center for Religion and Social Comunication, 2022), 269–292.

[3] Akanksha Prajapati and Rajakishore Nath, "Understanding Vedic Texts Through the Lens of Eco–Spiritualism," *Obnovljeni Zivot* 79, no. 3 (July 1, 2024), 281–294.

[4] Clement Baffoe, "Ecological Conversion: What Can We Learn from African Traditional Religions?," *Religion and Social Communication* 20, no. 2 (2022).

[5] Johannes M. Luetz, "Can Indigenous Ecotheology Save the World? Affinities between Traditional Worldviews and Environmental Sustainability," *Climate and Development* (Taylor and Francis Ltd., 2024), doi:10.1080/17565529.2024.2305883.

[6] Buhle Mpofu, "Pursuing Fullness of Life through Harmony with Nature: Towards an African Response to Environmental Destruction and Climate Change in Southern Africa," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021), doi:10.4102/hts.v77i4.6574.

[7] Stephen Bevans, *Teologi dalam Perspektif Global* (Maumere: Penerbit Ledalero, 2016), 229-230.

[8] Emanuel Martasudjita, *Theology of Inculturation - The Celebration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ on Indonesian Soil* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2021), 228.

act of releasing arrows, marking the initial prohibition against hunting and gathering in the deceased's hamlet for an extended period. This deeply symbolic tradition offers valuable insights into the community's relationship with the natural world. Recognising the significance of this practice, this research is undertaken with the hope of fostering collective awareness and nurturing a love for the natural environment, rooted in the wisdom of local cultural traditions.

Numerous studies have examined the richness of local culture as a subject of theological inquiry, including the role of death rituals in indigenous traditions. These studies seek to explore the deeper meanings embedded within these rituals and their significance for local communities. In reviewing existing research on death rituals, scholars generally categorise their findings into two major themes. First, the fate of the spirit of the deceased. Panda highlights the significance of death rituals in the Merapu faith on Sumba Island, emphasising their role in leading the souls of the departed toward the afterlife with utmost respect and reverence.[9] Siong, in his research on the Dayak Barai people, examines the concept of *Sebayatn* — the state of the soul awaiting redemption — and explores its compatibility with Christian eschatology. Labu et al. investigate death rituals among the Ngada people of Flores, where the interpretation of death varies depending on its cause, whether due to old age, illness, or an unnatural event such as an accident (*mata golo*).[10] Unnatural deaths are believed to bring misfortune and lingering fear among the bereaved family.

Second, the symbolic meaning inherent in the ritual itself. This classification helps clarify how different cultures perceive death and its spiritual, social, and ecological implications. Maulana et al., in their study of the *Rambu Solo* death ritual in Toraja, identify several core values embedded within the ceremony. These include religious values that reflect a spiritual connection with ancestors as well as social values, emphasising cooperation, communal harmony, and the strengthening of familial bonds.[11] Similarly, Niko et al., in their exploration of the symbolic theology of the *Ma' Bambangan To Mate* ritual in Tondon—an event honouring long-deceased parents—highlight the Rambu Solo ritual's dual religious and social significance.[12] A key message that emerges from this tradition is the importance of solidarity and collective cooperation in ensuring the successful execution of the ceremony.

These studies show that research examining the ecological values embedded in death rituals across different cultures remains scarce. Therefore, this study examines the environmental significance of the *kôwelidē* ritual, a vital component of the Yei people's death ceremonies in South Papua, Indonesia. The ecological values identified in this ritual will serve as a foundation for further discussions on Christian inculturative ecotheology. This research is guided by three key questions: What is the *kôwelidē* ritual? How

[9] Herman Punda Panda, "Perjalanan Jiwa ke 'Kampung Leluhur': Konsep Kematian Menurut Kepercayaan Asli Masyarakat Sumba (Merapu) dan Perjumpaannya dengan Ajaran Katolik," *Lumen Veritatis: Jurnal Filsafat dan Teologi* 10, no. 2 (April 1, 2020), 197–220.
[10] Norbertus Labu, Waldetrudis Leo, and Paskalis Lina, "Konsep Masyarakat Ngada-Flores tentang Mata Golo dan Tanggapan Iman Kristiani," *Jurnal SMART (Studi Masyarakat, Religi, dan Tradisi)* 9, no. 2 (December 31, 2023), 162–174.
[11] Abdullah Muslich Rizal Maulana, Kholid Karomi, and Nur Afifah R Arman Ahyadi, "Christian Funeral Rites and Rambu Solo in Tana Toraja," *Harmoni* 22, no. 2 (December 28, 2023), 287–308.
[12] Sipra Meilani Niko, Yuliana Salili, and Yela Natalia Mendila, "Kajian Teologis Simbolik tentang Acara Ma' Bambangan To Mate Di Tondon," *In Theos : Jurnal Pendidikan dan Theologi* 3, no. 6 (2023), p. 183–190.

can it serve as a basis for inculturative ecotheology? And what are its implications for ecological human life? By addressing these questions, this study aims to contribute new perspectives to the ongoing discourse on ecology, particularly within the context of theology and local traditions.

The Church's recognition of creation as a vital and habitable space for humanity has given rise to various theological reflections. Over time, ecotheology has emerged and continues to develop as a significant field, driven by the aim of fostering a deep love and care for the earth as humanity's shared home. In his analysis of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* (LS), Wilfred highlights that this encyclical employs a theology-from-below approach. Unlike traditional teachings derived primarily from Scripture, Tradition, or the reflections of past Popes and theologians, LS is rooted in contemporary global realities.[13] The encyclical's initial data were gathered from local Church synods, providing insight into the world's environmental crises and their underlying causes. Wilfred's commentary highlights the need to develop Christian theology grounded in human experience, thereby making it more responsive to the pressing ecological challenges of today.

Human experience throughout history plays a crucial role in theological reflection. It also serves as a means for fostering Christian awareness of specific issues. In this discussion, the article embarks on an intellectual exploration, examining the significance of the Earth for human life through the lens of local wisdom embedded in human experiences. This inculturative ecotheology approach is a theological framework that integrates ecological concerns with cultural traditions. Every culture holds noble values that contribute to human survival and well-being. By exploring and reinterpreting these values in a new light, it becomes possible to foster a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature. In this study, the authors highlight the cultural wealth of the Yei people in South Papua as an example of how local traditions can offer valuable insights for developing an inculturative ecotheology.

Using the theoretical framework of postcolonial hermeneutics,[14] this discussion will focus on three key points. First, it examines the origins of anthropocentrism in Christianity, exploring how anthropocentric views have shaped Christian theology, particularly in relation to humanity's perceived dominance over nature. This section explores historical influences that contributed to this perspective, including theological and philosophical traditions. Second, it discusses the rediscovery of cosmocentric views in Christian history, highlighting theological traditions that emphasise a more holistic, cosmocentric worldview and acknowledging the interconnectedness of all creation. It revisits early Christian perspectives and contemporary theological efforts to restore a balance between humanity and the natural world. Third, it analyses ecotheological values in the culture of the Yei People. This section, which will receive the most in-depth discussion, explores the ecological wisdom embedded in Yei's death rituals. It will analyse these rituals through the lens of the hermeneutics of resistance, demonstrating how they challenge dominant anthropocentric narratives and offer insights for developing a Christian inculturative ecotheology. The

[13] Felix Wilfred, *Theology for an Inclusive World* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2019), 154-155.
[14] Daniel Franklin Pilario, "Mapping Postcolonial Theory: Appropriation in Contemporary Theology," *Hapag* 3, no. 2 (2006), 9-51.

authors will present the specific practices within these rituals and their implications for a theological framework that is both ecologically conscious and culturally rooted.

The Development of Ecotheology

Ecology has become a widely discussed topic in this century, driven by growing global environmental concerns. Efforts to promote a love for nature have gained momentum, supported by numerous non-governmental organisations, environmental groups, and religious communities. The efforts have raised awareness about the importance of preserving the earth as humanity's shared home. The discussion of ecotheology in the history of modern thought began to gain serious attention through the contributions of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who is regarded as one of the pioneers in this field. Nasr was among the first thinkers to draw attention to the environmental crisis from a spiritual and religious perspective. He initially presented his ideas in a 1965 essay, which he later expanded upon in a series of lectures at the University of Chicago.[15] Nasr argued that the ecological crisis is not merely a scientific or technical issue, but is deeply rooted in a spiritual crisis within modern humanity — a crisis stemming from the loss of a sacred connection with nature. This perspective positions spirituality as a vital component of theological reflection on environmental destruction, paving the way for interfaith engagement in addressing the global ecological crisis.

The relationship between theology and the environmental crisis became a subject of intense debate in Western academic circles following the publication of Lynn White Jr.'s influential and controversial 1967 article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." In this work, White critiques the Western Christian tradition, arguing that it fostered an anthropocentric and exploitative attitude toward nature, which ultimately contributed to the modern ecological crisis. He attributed this attitude to a specific interpretation of the Bible that promotes human dominion over the natural world. White's claims provoked significant responses from theologians, one of which can be seen in Jack Rogers' 1973 article, where he examined the works of approximately twelve theologians who responded to White's thesis. These theologians sought to develop a more nuanced and responsible theological framework that adequately engages the biblical witness concerning the relationship between God, humanity, and the created world. In this context, ecotheology emerged as both a corrective and a renewal of theological thought—one that had long been criticised for its neglect of environmental stewardship.

The term "ecotheology," a shortened form of "ecological theology," emerged within the broader framework of ecojustice, also known as ecological justice. In ecumenical discourse, ecojustice emphasises the need for a comprehensive vision of justice—one that encompasses not only economic inequality but also environmental degradation and the interdependent relationship between the two. Coined by William Gibson and later popularised by Dieter Hessel, the concept emphasises that ecological concerns cannot be separated from issues of social justice. Consequently, the term "ecotheology" signifies more than

[15] Julian Chukwuemeka Ibe and Adams Kumbo Anthony, "Understanding Ecotheology: Towards an Authentic Dominion Theology," *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 9, no. 1 (2023), 116.

environmental awareness; it represents a theological paradigm that integrates the struggle for social justice with the call to safeguard creation, offering a unified expression of faith in response to the ecological crisis.

The terminological foundation of the word "ecotheology" is rooted in the etymological origin of the Greek term *oikos*, meaning "household." Three key concepts within this discourse—ecology, economy, and ecumenism — are all derived from this common root. Ecology pertains to the household's *logos* (logic or underlying principles); economy relates to the *nomoi* (rules or norms) for managing the household; and *oikoumene* refers to the whole inhabited world, understood as the global household of humanity. Within an ecclesial context, this vision is also expressed through the term *ecodomy*, which refers to the building up or structuring of the shared household.[16] In this light, ecotheology is not simply a theological reflection on environmental issues, but rather a comprehensive theological approach that envisions the world as a common home—one that must be stewarded with justice, responsibility, and a deep sense of moral motivation to uphold the principles of faith.

In the Catholic Church, Pope Francis addressed this issue in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, emphasising the responsibility of humans to care for the planet. Prior to this, several popes had also issued documents underscoring the importance of responsible environmental stewardship. From a Protestant perspective, Borrong traces the development of reformist views on ecology since the 1960s, culminating in the World Council of Churches' (WCC) call to action in 1961. The formulation of Christian theology, influenced by Lynn White's thesis, has led to an anthropocentric interpretation that often overlooks Christianity's cosmological dimension.[17] This anthropocentric worldview was further reinforced by Western philosophy. Descartes exemplifies this perspective by claiming that humans are "masters and possessors of nature".[18] More recently, Maroje Višić, in his study of Herbert Marcuse's thought, argues that environmental destruction caused by anthropocentrism is also driven by economic, social, and political interests.[19]

The Origins of Anthropocentrism in Christianity

The reflection on ecological theology within the Reformed Church tradition began in the early 1960s, particularly with Joseph Sittler's paper, "Called to Unity," presented at the World Council of Churches (WCC) Assembly in New Delhi, India, in 1961. Sittler's call for a renewed theological commitment to environmental responsibility was not just a suggestion, but a moral imperative. However, his call did not immediately gain significant traction until later critiques, particularly from Lynn White Jr.

In 1967, Lynn White Jr. published a seminal essay, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," which directly challenged the anthropocentric tendencies within Christian theology. White argued that traditional Christian teachings, particularly the interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28, had contributed to an

[16] Ernst Conradie, "Ecotheology," ed. Brendan N. Wolfe, St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology, December 16, 2024, 4.
[17] Robert Patannang Borrong, "Kronik Ekoteologi: Berteologi dalam Konteks Krisis Lingkungan," *Stulos* 17, no. 2 (July 2019), 185-212.
[18] Wilfred, *Theology for an Inclusive World*, 155-156.
[19] Maroje Višić, "Herbert Marcuse's Ecology of Liberation," *Obnovljeni Zivot* 79, no. 2 (2024), 151-162.

exploitative attitude toward nature. He asserted that Christianity, by placing humans at the centre of creation with dominion over the earth, fostered an ethos that justified environmental degradation.[20] White's critique sparked widespread debate and led theologians to reassess the Church's role in shaping humanity's relationship with nature. His argument also highlighted the enduring impact of the Enlightenment. This period had shifted theological and philosophical perspectives from a theocentric worldview to one that emphasised human autonomy, rationality, and progress. This modern shift reinforced a sense of superiority over nature while neglecting biblical perspectives that highlight the interconnectedness of creation.

In his insightful analysis, Dister, referring to Berkhof, identifies two fundamental misunderstandings of Christian anthropocentrism. The first misunderstanding, rooted in the biblical command in Genesis 1:28, where the words subdue (*kābaš*) and have dominion (*rādâ*) are often misinterpreted, is a crucial point of discussion. The misinterpretation of these words is a significant issue that warrants attention. The Hebrew term *kābaš*literally means "to place one's foot upon, while *rādâ*has frequently been understood as an unrestricted mandate for human control over nature. This interpretation positions humanity as the central subject, reducing the rest of creation to mere objects for human use.[21] Over time, humanity has justified environmental exploitation, particularly with the rise of modernity and industrialisation, treating nature as an inexhaustible resource for fulfilling human desires.

The second misconception is that God is reduced to a mere facilitator of human needs. Within this framework, God is perceived as a divine provider whose primary role is to serve human interests. This leads to a misinterpretation of God's glory, where divine favour is equated with material prosperity and earthly happiness for those who please Him. This misinterpretation represents a significant departure from the proper understanding of God's glory, distorting the theological interpretation of creation's intrinsic value and shifting the focus from stewardship to self-centred exploitation. This shift urgently needs to be addressed.

The Value of Cosmocentrism in Scripture

Biblical scholars and theologians have widely criticized Lynn White's claim that Christianity bears primary responsibility for ecological destruction. Several academic and theological movements—such as the Green Bible project, the Earth Bible project (Abel et al.), the University of Exeter's ecological research (Horrell), and Marlow and Wright's ecological triangle—argue against White's interpretation. They emphasise that all of creation—humans, animals, and nature—exists in an interconnected relationship and that humans, as the most noble of God's creation, are divinely mandated to protect and care for the environment. This divine mandate underscores the weight of our responsibility.[22]

Several scholars and religious traditions emphasise the idea that human dominion over nature does not imply exploitation, but rather responsible stewardship. Eric Katz highlights that Jewish tradition does

[20] Peter C Aman, "Teologi Ekologi dan Mistik-Kosmik St. Fransiskus Asisi," *Diskurusus* 15, no. 2 (2016), 192; Dominic S. Irudayaraj, "Reading the Bible, Ecologically: Re-Imagining Our Theological Hermeneutics," *Journal of Asian Orientation in Theology* 05, no. 02 (August 1, 2023), 183-200.
[21] Nico Syukur Dister, *Teologi Sistematika 2* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2004), 78-80.
[22] Irudayaraj, "Reading the Bible, Ecologically: Re-Imagining Our Theological Hermeneutics," 189

not endorse human domination over nature. Instead, the Torah and Jewish teachings consistently present humans as guardians and caretakers of the natural world, rather than its absolute owners. In this perspective, God is the rightful owner and ruler of creation, and human beings are entrusted with its care. Pamela Smith similarly stresses that humans do not own nature but are responsible for its preservation and sustainability. She asserts that nature does not possess intrinsic value apart from its connection to God; instead, all its worth flows from God as the ultimate Creator and Sustainer, a key theological concept in this argument.[23]

Recent scholarship has actively sought new ways to read and interpret Scripture in an ecological context. These approaches aim to reclaim biblical texts that affirm environmental ethics while engaging with contemporary ecological concerns. Irudayaraj, in his recent research, urges readers to adopt an environmental hermeneutic when interpreting Scripture. This involves reading biblical texts in conversation with contemporary ecological challenges, ensuring that faith contributes positively to the global movement for environmental protection. Norman Habel and his team employ three key methods when reading Scripture ecologically: Suspicion, questioning anthropocentric interpretations that justify human dominance over nature; identification, recognising the presence and voice of nature in biblical narratives; and appropriation, integrating ecological insights from indigenous peoples and marginalised communities to reconstruct theological perspectives on nature.

David Horrell and colleagues advocate for a broader, more inclusive reading of Scripture by avoiding explicitly religious terminology such as God and creation. This method aims to engage non-religious audiences in environmental discussions while upholding the ethical mandates of faith traditions to care for the planet. They aim to maintain biblical faithfulness while building creative engagement with modern ecological thought. Marlow and her team emphasise the reciprocal relationship between God, humanity, and non-human creation (Marlow's Theological Triangle). Their ecological reading of Isaiah 34-35 reveals the earth's intrinsic significance in proclaiming God's omnipotence. This interpretation suggests that creation participates in divine revelation and is not merely a backdrop for human activity.

The concept of cosmocentrism is steadily gaining recognition, marking a significant shift in theological discourse. In addressing misconceptions about anthropocentrism, Dister clarifies that the term subjugate (*kābaš*) does not merely mean "to put one's foot on" but rather signifies a sense of ownership, care, and stewardship. Similarly, the term rule (*rādâ*) should not be interpreted simply as an act of domination. Instead, considering humanity's dependence on nature (as seen in the pre-Flood narrative), it reflects God's way of governing with love, where the consequence of human sin is not immediate death but exile. Additionally, *rādâ* carries the connotation of a shepherd guiding and protecting his flock, leading them to green pastures while shielding them from harm.

A similar point is made by Ibe et al. in their analysis of Westermann's interpretation. The concept of human power over creation in Genesis 1:28 should not be seen as permission to exploit, but rather as a profound divine mandate to care for creation. Westermann emphasises that the Hebrew words *kābaš* (subdue) and *rādâ* (have dominion over) are drawn from a royal context that signifies authority. However, this authority is not meant to imply oppressive domination, but responsible and caring leadership. Just as a

[23] Aman, "Teologi Ekologi dan Mistik-Kosmik St. Fransiskus Asisi."

king is entrusted with the welfare of his people, humans are entrusted with the responsibility to manage and care for creation, not to destroy it.[24]

Therefore, human dominion over nature is meant to be a form of service, not selfish control. In ancient thought, a king would lose his legitimacy if he harmed those under his rule. In the same way, human authority over creation must be exercised with a spirit of responsibility and compassion, as a participation in God's will for the flourishing of all creation. Any abuse of this power is not just a misuse, but a profound betrayal of the true meaning of dominion as intended in Scripture.

Hallman, in his analysis of the Book of Joel, identifies seven key ecological insights for humanity: (1) awareness of the ecological condition; (2) a call to mourn, lament, and repent by changing values and lifestyles; (3) an invitation for everyone to care for both the environment and their spiritual lives; (4) a warning about impending judgment and destruction; (5) the restoration and renewal of both nature and society; (6) the active participation of all individuals in transforming society; and (7) the interconnectedness of political, economic, and social factors in advancing ecological efforts and global development.[25] These insights emphasise the significance of the Earth as a habitat for human life and progress. The call to mourn and nurture the earth as a sustainable home is deeply rooted in faith, affirming that creation is a divine gift for human well-being and the fulfillment of God's ongoing work of salvation.

God is the Creator and Sustainer of life—the One who creates, redeems, and renews the world. In discussing the theology of creation, Dister references Irenaeus' theology of recapitulation. From the beginning, God elevated humanity beyond mere creaturely existence, making humans bearers of His image, His partners in dialogue, co-workers, and even His friends and children. However, Adam's fall necessitated a renewal of God's trust in humanity. God initiated a process of restoration, repairing and reconstituting humankind. The story of the Flood marks the beginning of this restoration: "The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him" (Gen 6:6). The Hebrew word *nāḥam*, translated as "regret," conveys the idea of changing one's mind or purpose. This divine change of purpose is rooted in God's mercy and culminates in the incarnation of Jesus, the second Adam.[26]

From this, two key conclusions can be drawn: first, God alone is the Saviour, Restorer, and Sustainer of the world, not humanity. Second, the command to "subdue the earth" in Genesis 1:28 must be reinterpreted in light of humanity's post-Fall condition. Even after the fall, God did not punish humanity with finality but continued to love and sustain them. While humanity remains loved, God remains sovereign—He alone rules and governs, not the other way around.

God created the world and everything, including humanity, through His word (*logos*). The biblical narrative of human creation (Gen 1:26-31; 2:7) is described with less detail than the creation of the earth and other living beings. One key conclusion we can affirm is that the identity of the Creator belongs solely to God, while everything else, including humanity, is His creation. Reflecting on Genesis 2:7, Aman highlights two essential points: first, that human life is a divine gift from God, and second, that God also

[24] Ibe and Anthony, "Understanding Ecotheology: Towards an Authentic Dominion Theology", 121.
[25] D. G. Hallman, *Ecotheology: Voices from the South and the North* (New York: Orbis, 1994), 15-27.
[26] Dister, *Teologi Sistematika 2*, 51-53.

provides the resources necessary to sustain human life.[27] This understanding leads to the conclusion that God's command to humanity is theocentric rather than anthropocentric. With this awareness, Aman introduces the concept of ecological egalitarianism—a perspective that recognises humanity as an integral part of creation rather than being above it.

Ecocentrism not only addresses the role of the earth in human life but also highlights the urgent and severe limitations of natural resources. As the earth ages, it faces the risk of immediate and catastrophic crises, as well as resource depletion, threatening both present and future generations. The Church has recognised this concern for centuries. The Popes have consistently emphasised the need for human awareness regarding the finite nature of resources (SRS 1987, 34; GS 69; and Laudato Si').[28] *Populorum Progressio* also calls on humanity to acknowledge its responsibility, not only for the present but also for the well-being of future generations.[29]

Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* 48, reminds us that nature is a gift from God meant for all people and must be managed responsibly for the benefit of humanity.[30] These teachings, strongly advocated by the Church, urge humans to care for and cultivate the earth, not merely to preserve it in an untouched state but to ensure its long-term sustainability. While human beings possess a natural tendency to dominate nature, they must also develop an awareness of the need to allow it time to regenerate.

In *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis underscores the necessity of a comprehensive transformation that integrates ecological preservation with social justice, particularly for the poor. This interconnected approach, advocated by the Catholic Church, is crucial in addressing the global crisis and promoting sustainable life for future generations.[31]

Loving the earth is an expression of love for life itself. When humans learn to restrain their instinct to dominate nature, they are, in essence, safeguarding their own existence. Quoting Thomas Berry, Lake emphasises that destroying the earth means destroying the very foundation of human imagination needed to comprehend God's saving work. Conversely, cultivating awe and reverence for the planet fosters a deeper connection to life, ensuring its continuity.[32]

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[27] Aman, "Teologi Ekologi Dan Mistik-Kosmik St. Fransiskus Asisi," 196.

[28] Pope Francis, "Enciclica Laudato Si'," Libreria Editrice Vaticana § (2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.pdf.

[29] Paul VI, Encyclical Letter Populum Progressio, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (Vatican: https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html, 1967), 37.

[30] Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (vatican.va, 2009), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.pdf, 48

[31] Dalibor Milas, "Climate Change and Socio-Ecological Transformation in the Light of the Social Teaching in the Contribution of Pope Francis to Integral Ecology and Global Solidarity," *Bogoslovska Smotra* 94, no. 4 (2024), 729-743.

[32] Sani Lake, "Memulihkan Keutuhan Ciptaan," *Jurnal Sepakat* 2, no. 2 (2016), 213.

Discovering Love for Nature in Death Rituals

Margot Kässmann, during a meeting with Aboriginal people in Australia in 1991, was struck by their perspective on agriculture. They recounted how Europeans had accused them of lacking knowledge about farming. However, in reality, their ancestors had passed down a tradition of sustainable land management. Their method involved cultivating the land for a few years, then burning the fields and moving to a new area, allowing the soil time to regenerate naturally before returning to farm it again. This approach contrasts sharply with European agricultural practices, which frequently result in soil erosion and desertification.[33]

Kässmann's story serves as a comparison to highlight the profound value of local wisdom in every culture. The people of Papua, for instance, have a deep-rooted tradition of respecting the land they inhabit. Their ecological awareness is not merely theoretical and actively practised in daily life. One such practice is *sasi*, a customary law designed to preserve nature. Sasi is a ritual that indigenous communities perform to protect natural resources by prohibiting their use for a specific period, allowing ecosystems to regenerate and maintain biodiversity.[34] This deep connection between the people of Papua and their land is profound.

The practice of *sasi* is widespread across Papua. Some researchers have suggested that customs from the Maluku region influenced this tradition. However, the discovery of *sasi* within death rituals challenges this assumption. When a tradition is deeply embedded in an indigenous community's way of life, particularly in sacred practices such as death rituals, it is difficult to attribute it solely to external influence. Instead, it reflects a long-standing ecological consciousness that has been passed down through generations.

In the culture of the Yei-nan people in South Papua, the *sasi* tradition is integrated into ritual practices observed after the 40th anniversary of a person's death. The designated *sasi* location is the hamlet where the deceased had lived and earned a livelihood. This area is fenced off and declared a taboo place (*kôwelidē*). The closure of the hamlet lasts for an extended period, often more than a year. During this time, indigenous people strictly avoid entering the area, believing that doing so would bring misfortune upon them.[35]

According to informants, the site closure typically lasts for an extended period, usually more than a year. The criteria for reopening the sacred place are specific. For instance, the area may be reopened for hunting and gathering once all traces of the stove in the hut have disappeared or when the cuts on tree bark, branches, and trees have fully healed. These conditions, set by the family, are significant markers for the community. Once these conditions are met, the site is reopened through a ritual. At the appointed time, the family gathers at the location, bringing food, drinks, and offerings such as betel nut, *wati* (*Piper*

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[33] Hallman, *Ecotheology: Voices from the South and the North*, 33-34.

[34] A. Sumarsono and C. Wasa, "Traditional Sasi Wisdom in Papua-Based Nature Conservation," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, vol. 235 (Institute of Physics Publishing, 2019), doi:10.1088/1755-1315/235/1/012092.

[35] Maximilian Boas Pegan, "Masyarakat Yei-Nan Di Erambu Dan Ritus Kematiannya: Studi Kasus Untuk Menemukan Makna Ritus Kematian Dalam Masyarakat Yei-Nan Di Erambu, Kabupaten Merauke – Papua," *Studi Budaya Nusantara* 1, no. 1 (June 30, 2017), 70-85.

methysticum), cigarettes, and other ritual items. They then kindle a new stove, cook various foods, and share a communal meal at the site. As part of the ritual, they also present offerings to the spirit of the land's owner and communicate with this spirit, highlighting the spiritual beliefs and practices of the community. The essence of this interaction is to formally request permission to reopen the area and allow family members to resume using it for gathering and hunting.[36]

Notably, during the closure period, the forest gradually returns to its natural state, bringing a sense of safety and peace. Small trees begin to grow, and wildlife—such as pigs, deer, cassowaries, and various bird species—feel safe to return, no longer fearing human pursuit or hunting. Similarly, fish in the swamp thrive and multiply in the hamlet designated as *kôwelidē*, undisturbed by human activity.

The concept of *kôwelidē* can be compared to the Jewish tradition of *šabbāt*. *Šabbāt* signifies a cessation or rest for the land, animals, humans, and even God from labour. In Genesis 2:1-3, the term "*šabbāt*" is understood as the culmination of God's creative work on the seventh day. From a theocentric perspective, the pinnacle of creation is not humanity, but *šabbāt* itself.[37] God's act of resting is a sign of divine freedom—the ability to limit boundless activity, a concept that enlightens and inspires. In Exodus 20, the Israelites are commanded to honour *šabbāt*, following God's example by refraining from work and willingly restricting their freedom. Similarly, *kôwelidē* reflects a conscious effort to limit human exploitation of nature. It embodies the local community's way of imitating God, who, despite possessing ultimate power, exercises restraint. The power at His disposal is directed not toward unchecked dominion, but toward renewal and the continuous creation of the common good.

The *kôwelidē* tradition in death rituals also echoes the passion and death of Jesus. Jesus' presence in the world was meant to bring salvation to all humanity and unite all of creation under His divine power. The tearing of the temple veil and the natural signs that accompanied Jesus' death serve as biblical symbols of the end times. Just as Jesus' birth was marked by the sign of a star in the heavens, His death was accompanied by signs from both nature and the underworld, such as the opening of tombs. Jesus' death carried both judgment and redemption, profoundly transforming humanity's relationship with God and reshaping the cosmos.[38]

The events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion—sponges, sour grapes, earthquakes, and the torn temple veil— bear witness to His profound connection with humanity and the universe. This profound bond embodies the divine love that transcends all understanding. God's redemptive act in Christ is all-encompassing. Through His sacrificial death, Jesus reinstated the dignity of creation, enveloping all things in divine love. His death symbolises the ultimate glorification of the universe, where resurrection and liberation are intertwined. In His death, the promise of resurrection shines forth, unveiling that life, even in the face of suffering and death, ultimately leads to the renewal of all creation in communion with its Creator.

From this description, several key insights can be drawn. First, God created the universe; humans were given a special responsibility among all His creations. As the most distinguished of creation, humans

[36] Maximilian Boas Pegan, "Christian Values in Yei-Nan Society" (Parahyangan Catholic University, 2017), 69-70.
[37] Stanislaus Surip, *Taurat Tuhan Sempurna: Kumpulan Esai tentang Taurat*, ed. Albertus Purnomo, Alfons Jehadut, and Anwar Tjen (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2023), 470.
[38] Raymond E. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 202.

are entrusted with a sacred duty to care for themselves and the natural world. As another part of creation, humans must manage it responsibly for survival and, ultimately, to glorify God. This implies that humans cannot truly worship God apart from the nature in which they live.

Second, the relationship between God, humanity, and the rest of creation is interconnected and deeply interdependent. While God is above all, humans and nature exist on a shared level, complementing and depending on each other. Understanding this dynamic requires expanding the traditional notion of anthropocentrism by integrating a transcendental perspective. True human transcendence lies in recognising both God as Creator (theocentrism) and nature as a divine gift (cosmocentrism).

This leads to the proposal of transcendental anthropocentrism as a new paradigm for understanding human existence in relation to God's creation. This concept acknowledges human responsibility within a theological and ecological framework, striking a balance between human dignity and respect for nature. Furthermore, transcendental anthropocentrism becomes an inculturative form of ecotheology, as it emerges from and integrates the ecological values embedded in local cultures.

Conclusion

Transcendental anthropocentrism serves as a middle ground, bridging the gap between anthropocentrism and cosmocentrism. This perspective recognises the unique role of humans while affirming their dependence on and responsibility for the natural world. The transcendental aspect lies in humanity's ability to continually honour God as the Creator while valuing nature as His divine gift, essential for sustaining life. The events surrounding Jesus' death illustrate this balance — revealing both God's supreme authority over creation and the interconnectedness of nature and humanity. Society and the natural world are redeemed in His death, emphasising their shared place within God's redemptive plan and the unity between nature and humanity.

If Pope Francis (LS 14) calls for dialogue and shared responsibility in shaping the planet's future, then this research emphasises the importance of individuals discovering their identity of unity and love for nature through their local wisdom. When people truly value their culture, they will also cherish its rich traditions, which inherently promote the ongoing rejuvenation and sustainability of the natural world in which they live. It is crucial to preserve these traditions, as they play a significant role in the sustainability of the natural world.

The practice of *kôwelidē,* a term that signifies a period of restraint and regeneration, likely emerges from a cultural background deeply intertwined with nature. For the Yei people, nature is not just a backdrop to life but the very foundation of survival. This dependence fosters a strong commitment to conservation, as human well-being is directly linked to the health of the environment. While nature is sometimes utilised for sustenance, there are also intentional periods when it is left to regenerate. This self-renewal process, known as *kôwelidē,* requires human restraint — an interruption akin to *šabbāt* — which the Yei people recognise as a crucial aspect of their cultural sustainability practices.

As the world continues to develop — land being sold, traditional hunting and gathering practices fading, and death rituals becoming less practicable — it remains uncertain what new symbols and rituals

will emerge. Ideally, a meaningful substitute will preserve the ecological awareness embedded in the Yei people's death rituals. This presents a crucial challenge for future research: to explore how cultural expressions can continue to foster a deep connection between humanity and nature in an ever-changing world.

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