

# Harmony of Eschatological Meanings: Between Christian Concept and Manggarai Culture in Indonesia

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## Abstract

The Catholic Church is over 100 years old in Manggarai, Flores, Indonesia. The teachings of the Catholic Church are readily accepted by local people, partly because the beliefs of the local people of Manggarai are compatible with the instructions brought by the Catholic Church. This is especially evident, for instance, in the understanding, belief and appreciation of the local community regarding eschatology. Employing an ethnographic-theological study, this article reflects a contextual approach to theology. The method used is an ethnographic-theological study. The data was obtained by direct observation, interviewing traditional Manggarai leaders who are Catholics, and studying some documents related to this article's subject. This study addresses the following question: how does the vision of the Manggaraian people's future help the inculturation of Catholic eschatology? According to the research question, this article explores the basis of hope for the end of the Manggaraian people and simultaneously compares it with the existing Christian eschatology. This study shows a harmony between the eschatological meaning of the Manggaraian local beliefs and that of the Catholic Church. This harmony facilitates the inculturation of Catholic eschatological beliefs into the local culture of the Manggaraian community.

Keywords: Harmony, eschatology, the Manggaraian people, Catholic Church, inculturation.

## Introduction

Indonesia is known as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. But in the Southeast part of the country, there is a small island called Flores. Flores is often called the “Catholic Island” because most of the population are Catholics. In the western part of the island, there is a region called Manggarai. This region consists of three different regencies, yet in terms of ecclesial governance, they are all parts of the pastoral territory of Ruteng Diocese, which accounts for the most significant number of Catholics in the Indonesian Bishops’ Conference (KWI – Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia). One of the reasons why the number of Catholics in Manggarai is so significant is because Manggaraian culture is, in many aspects, closely connected with the teachings of the Catholic Church. This is in line with one of the hypotheses of the anthropological approach in developing contextual theology, which explains that culture controls theology (Ceria et al., 2022).

As Stephen Bevans contends, central to the anthropological method in contextual theology is a conviction that in every human culture, there is a dimension of God’s revelation (Bevans, 2002, p. 100). In other words, every culture has seeds of God’s word. This principle remains influential currently because it emphasises the importance of adapting faith to the local culture rather than simply copying European traditions (Tinambunan, 2023). In the context of the Manggaraian people, it can be said that before the Catholic Church came to their region, they already had a relationship with divine beings in their local beliefs and various cultural practices. This confirms the thesis that both local religion (folk religion) and universally recognised religion are all connected with human identity as *homo religious* (Salmin, 2021).

One of the areas in which the relationship between the Manggaraian people and the ultimate being is well reflected in their local belief is the vision of the future of life. Before the Catholic Church entered and influenced almost all areas of life, the people of Manggarai already had an idea of the end of life. This confirms that eschatological concepts and visions do not stem from a vacuum. Instead, in every cultural community, there is an ultimate concept and image of the future, however ambiguous and unclear these concepts and visions may be (Kaunda & Kaunda, 2019). These concepts and visions determine the meaning and purpose of their lives.

Through the ethnographic-theological method, this article attempts to explore the basis of hope for the future of the Manggaraian people while comparing it with the existing Christian eschatology. In so doing, I will elaborate on some aspects in which the local belief of the Manggaraian people can serve as a potential critique of the legacy of classical Christian eschatology, which has reduced human hope for the future to merely following the Western vision. In other words, this study is part of the process of identification, articulation and giving place to the richness of local theology, including eschatology, amid the dominant influence of Western Christian eschatology, which has long obscured the richness of theology, including local eschatology. Thus, this study addresses the following question: how does the vision of the future of the Manggaraian people help the inculturation of Catholic eschatology?

The topic of the meaning of death and eschatological concepts according to Manggarai people has been written by some authors with some focuses. In their research, Yohanes Sehandi and Rosalia Mulia Maju show the religious values contained in the traditional *rowa* ceremony or death ceremony in the Manggarai community in Flores. Their research showed that the conventional *Rowa* ceremony presented several religious values, namely the value of trust, the value of reconciliation, and the value of salvation (Sehandi & Maju, 2022). In his article, Adrianus Jebarus explains *pa’anga bele* as locus and eternal life or situation according to the Manggarain community to answer the question of where the dead people go after finishing life in this world. In the *pa’ang bele*, the human experience of having the fullness of himself in there along with others harmoniously with *Morin agu Ngaran* (Jebarus, 2015).

The other writers are Kanisius Rambut and Fabianus Selatang. Kanisius Rambut explains the meaning of the parallel expressions found in the death ceremony of the Manggaraian people. Similar expressions found in the text of the death ceremony in Manggarai are closely related to cultural activities, such as leave-taking, protection, and consolation (Rambut, 2018). Next, Fabianus Selatang explores the relationship between the living and the dead based on the oral tradition of the *teing hang* (making offerings to ancestors) ceremony. In the frame of the birth concept, the Manggarai have built a relationship pattern with their ancestors or deceased people. Through the *testing hang* ceremony, it can be shown that the Manggarai people believe that there are supernatural forces that are not sufficiently explained by reason as a whole (Selatang, 2020).

The previous articles described above emphasised the concept of death and life after death according to Manggarai culture without being connected to the idea of Christian eschatology. Unlike previous research, this article tries to find a common ground or point of connection between the eschatological concept of the Manggaraian people and the concept of Christian eschatology. Because of that, the novelty of the study lies in its proposal regarding the revival of the belief-based eschatology of the local community of Manggarai as a critical factor in facilitating the inculturation of the concept of Catholic eschatology into the local culture. To develop this argument, this article will focus on essential aspects of indigenous Manggarai eschatology, which parallels some of the vital elements of Christian eschatology. These important aspects include the temporal dimension of life in the eschatological beliefs of the Manggarai people, death as a journey to God, and the symbolisation of water in Manggarai's eschatology.

### **Research Methods**

This research is dedicated to integrating theology, predominantly Christian eschatology, into the cultural beliefs of the Manggarai people. Using a qualitative methodological approach, this study explores the eschatological values inherent in Christian teachings and tries to identify similarities with eschatological views reflected in the culture and religious practices of the Manggarai people. Thus, this research aims to deepen understanding of how eschatology can be harmonised and interpreted in a local context rich in cultural traditions and beliefs.

The data was collected first by direct observation because the author is a Manggaraian who also quite often participates in ceremonies surrounding death in Manggarai. With this participation, the author captured the eschatological messages in the local rites surrounding the death. Data was also collected by conducting interviews with Manggarai figures who understand well the rituals surrounding death in Manggarai. They are traditional leaders, and some can be categorised as Manggarai cultural experts. Furthermore, this research data also relies on document studies, especially documents in the book "Dere Serani", which contains a collection of liturgical songs, including death liturgical songs based on Manggarai culture. Dere Serani's book was initiated, among others, by Msgr. Wihelmus van Bekkum – the first Bishop of Ruteng Diocese – to adapt songs in cultural rituals in villages in Manggarai into Christian content (Lon & Widyawati, 2020)

After the data was collected, analysis and interpretation were done using a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2016, pp. 264–267). The interpretation begins by classifying the data into sub-themes according to the research objectives. Next, filtering is carried out for data that is irrelevant or repetitive. Data that is considered inadequate or ambiguous is detailed and clarified. After that, the data that has been coded and reduced is interpreted and analysed, then compiled into a comprehensive descriptive narrative.

## Results and Discussion

### *The Temporal Dimension of Life in the Eschatological Beliefs of the Manggaraian People*

Before adopting the teachings of the Catholic Church, the Manggaraian people already had a deep understanding of eschatology, especially in terms of the temporal dimension of human life, characterised by the following essential aspects.

First, the event of birth. The Manggaraian people call their newborn babies *meka weru* (new guests). They call the world *lino cenggo* (stopover world). This means that from birth, everybody is considered and treated as a guest on this earth. As a guest, everybody is aware that at some point, they must return to their origin, for they are not the owners of this world.

Second, the understanding of the temporal dimension of life is also marked by mentioning houses as *pondok* (hut). The people of *Hamente* (The Designation for the Traditional Government Area of Manggarai Formed by the Bima Kingdom) Kolang in Manggarai, for instance, call the house *he kang* (hut). *Hekang* in the Manggaraian community is a temporary residence on the farm. In Manggarai, on every farm, people make simple structures called *he kang*. In the *he kang*, they rest for a while while working on their farms. But for the people in Kolang, *he kang* is not only a term for a simple building on the farm (*Pondok*) but also a term used to point to their permanent house. For them, a house is *he kang*, a place of temporary staying/residence. This means that they see the world as merely a temporary workplace. When the work is done, they realise they will return to their natural home (Mayor, 2022).

Third, the understanding that the house is only a *he kang* (hut) and this world is only a temporary place for work is confirmed in the Manggaraian people's understanding of death. For the Manggaraian people, death is moving from *he kang* (hut) to a natural home. This can be seen from the words used to call death as *we'e kete*. *We'e* in Manggaraian everyday language is a term used to refer to those returning from farming to their home. This usually happens in the afternoon. However, unlike the daily habit of going home (*we're*), death for the Manggaraian people is more of a definitive return. In the local language, it is called *we'e kete*. That means the person concerned will not return to the farm anymore because death is the last *we'e* for him (*we'e kete*). So, for the Manggaraian people, death is the definitive or final process of leaving the world as a temporary place of work towards their natural home (Mbagur, 2022).

The Manggaraian people's understanding of the transient nature of life is expressed in a song adapted into the liturgical song of the Catholic Church and included in the book *Dere Serani* (Christian songs). The song is entitled *Doing koe ga* (be aware!). The lyrics are as in Table 1.

The song, which existed before the entry of Christianity into Manggarai, was meant to remind the Manggaraian people of their identity as guests in this world. This is indicated by an expression *mose dokong lino ho'o* (our life is only temporary in this world). In the second verse of the song, it says *kaeng dokong dite no'o* (We live temporarily in this place). With this expression, the Manggaraian people realize that they live only temporarily in this world. In another part, there is an expression *ai ite ata one tana* (because we are alien people in this land/earth). This expression manifests the belief of the Manggaraian people that they are not the owners of this land or the earth. They cannot seize this world because they are "alien people" on this earth. Then in the last part of the song it says *O e neka becang Mori Dewa* (do not be separated from God), which is an instruction that everyone should not separate themselves from God, because separation from God has a negative impact, at it is clearly expressed in the line that follows: *Ai eme becang Mori Dewa, oke lau longka taung* (Because if we separate ourselves from God, we will be thrown in a gaping hole). The Manggaraian people believe, if they separate themselves from God, they will be thrown into a situation without salvation.

| Original Text in Manggarai Language |  | English Translation |   |
|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------|---|
| Cako 1                              | <i>Doing koe ga, doing koe o mose de!<br/>O e mose dokong lino ho'o<br/>Doing ko o mouse de</i>  | Verse 1             | Be aware, be aware of our life<br>This life is only temporary<br>Be mindful of our life                       |
| Wale 1                              | <i>Ai makes le mose lewe<br/>Ce'e ce'e Dewa mese<br/>Doing koe o mose de</i>                     | Chorus 1            | Because our life is not necessarily long<br>the Great God is coming closer and closer<br>Be aware of our life |
| Cako 2                              | <i>Doing koe ga, doing koe o mose de!<br/>O e kaeng dokong dite no'o<br/>Doing koe o mose de</i> | Verse 2             | Be aware, be aware of this life<br>We are living temporarily in this place<br>Be aware of our life            |
| Wale 2                              | <i>Ai eme becang Mori Dewa<br/>Oke lalu longka taung<br/>Doing ko o mose de!</i>                 | Chorus 2            | Because if we are separated from God<br>We'll be thrown in a gaping hole<br>Be aware of our life              |
| Cako 3                              | <i>Doing koe ga, doing koe o mose de!<br/>O e ite ata one tana<br/>Doing koe o mose de</i>       | Verse 3             | Be aware, be aware of our life<br>We are alien in this land<br>Be aware of our life                           |
| Wale 3                              | <i>Ai makit le mose lewe<br/>Ce'e ce'e Dewa mese<br/>Doing koe o mose de</i>                     | Chorus 3            | Because we don't necessarily live long<br>the Great God is coming closer and closer<br>Be aware of our life   |
| Cako 4                              | <i>Doing koe ga, doing koe o mose de!<br/>O e neka becang Mori Dewa<br/>Doing koe o mose de</i>  | Verse 4             | Be aware, be aware of our life<br>Don't be separated from God<br>Be aware of our life                         |
| Wale 4                              | <i>Ai eme becang Mori Dewa<br/>Oke lalu longka taung<br/>Doing ko o mose de!</i>                 | Chorus 4            | Because if we are separated from God<br>We'll be thrown in a gaping hole<br>Be aware of our life              |

Table 1. Lyrics of the title song *Doing Koe Ga* (Be Aware!)

The eschatological awareness of the Manggarai people, especially the belief in the temporal nature of life, helps them to construct and reproduce the world better (Moss, 2011). They believe that they must have an awareness that they will never separate themselves from God because only by being united or in union with God will they find salvation. They have a vision of the future which states that only God is eternal, transcending the limitations and temporality of creation, including humans (Mostert, 2011).

When reflected in the light of Christian faith, one may say that the Manggarai people's belief in the temporal dimension of life strengthens the conviction of the nature of the Church as simultaneously a community in the world and as an eschatological reality (Mostert, 2011). In this case, as Todd Walatka pointed out, the Church is a sacrament, that is "a visible sign of what God intends for the world and actually serves as an instrument of this final goal" (Walatka, 2015). To say that the Church is an eschatological community means that the Church is not limited to human ends, for she is also a community of pilgrims moving towards their fulfillment in the *eschaton*. The church is called to manifest God's plan of salvation, but the final fulfillment of this plan cannot be found in this world (Scheffczyk, 2010). The eschatological character of the Church is strengthened in *Lumen Gentium* which affirms the Church as a community of pilgrims (Dopken KWI, 1990, Art. 48). The church is present in the world, but its presence should be seen in an eschatological category because it is oriented towards its fulfillment at the end of time.

As an eschatological community, every member of the Church lives within original limitations, just as all creation is. The original limitation is characterized by mortality and death. So, death is part of the limitations of creation and members of the Church as well (Case-Winters, 2016). Every believer

forms a temporary fellowship in this world where they are waiting for the coming of the Kingdom of God. In this Kingdom, a definitive eternal fellowship will be realized.

The identity of the Church as an eschatological community has an adequate biblical foundation in the Gospels. The gospel is good news with an eschatological dimension. Even the Bible itself is eschatological (Case-Winters, 2016). The truth of the gospel is eschatological for its content is not limited to the work and the good news that Jesus proclaims which was eschatological in character but rather extends to the event of His resurrection from the dead which really showed an eschatological event. Thus, the resurrection is central to the Christian faith.

What follows from such an account is an emphasis that the Church is not a community that only thinks about eschatology, but also becomes an eschatological community itself. From the liturgical perspective, the sign of the Church as an eschatological community is also evident in the celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharist gives the Church a dynamic eschatological dimension, for through the Eucharist she participates both in the cross and death, as well as in the resurrection of the Lord. In the liturgy of the word, the Church proclaims the death of Christ until He comes (1 Cor. 11:26). In doxology, God's marvelous deeds in the past and present as well as the hope for the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation in the future is celebrated (Mostert, 2011).

The Eucharist is an effective presence and mediation of the future of salvation. In the Eucharist, the Church celebrates her identity as an eschatological community. In the Eucharist, the saving future of the Kingdom of God through fellowship with the risen Jesus Christ, who is present in the celebration, is at work. The Eucharist manifests that the Church is not the kingdom of God but is only an early sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God. In this case, it is important to understand the nature of the Church according to *Lumen Gentium* which states that the Church is not identical to the Kingdom of God. The church is only a seed and a beginning of that Kingdom on earth (Dopken KWI, 1990, art. 5). The Church functions as an early sign of the Kingdom of God which will find its fulfillment in the *eschaton*. *Lumen Gentium* states:

The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus and in which through the grace of God we attain sanctity, will reach its completion only in the glory of heaven, when the time for the restoration of all things will come (see Ac 3, 21) and along with the human race the whole universe, which is intimately united to humanity and through it attains its goal, will be established perfectly in Christ (see Eph 1, 10; Col 1, 20; 2 Pt 3, 10-13) (Dopken KWI, 1990, Art. 48).

A good understanding of the eschatological dimension of the Kingdom of God helps the Church to avoid the danger of identifying herself with the Kingdom of God. This happens when church loses sight of her self-understanding as a sacrament, that is sign and instrument of that Kingdom (Hewitt-Horsman, 2004). Basically, the Church is a sacrament, a sign that expresses God's salvation in the world, but the fullness of that salvation must be waited until "the fullness of time" (Scheffczyk, 2010). Thus, the Church is an anticipatory sign of the coming Kingdom of God. As an anticipatory sign of the eschatological reality, the Church is urged to proclaim that people should not be completely attached to the interests of this mortal world. The life in this world is temporary and therefore one must prepare to enter the eschatological world.

### ***Death as a Journey to God***

Manggaraian people's belief in the future of life is supported by an awareness of the existence of the Creator of life. Manggaraian people believe in the existence of a Creator called *Mori Kraeng*. Therefore, for the Manggaraian people, death is the moment when a person returns from the temporary life of this world to God (*Mori Kraeng*) whom they call *Mori agu ngaran ata jari agu dedek* (God the

Owner and Creator). Based on this conviction, when someone dies, people often convey the following messages to the deceased (Mayor, 2022):

| Local Expression in Manggaraian Language | English Translation                                      |
|--|--|
| <i>Molor lako dite ngger olo</i>         | Have a smooth path as you journey ahead                  |
| <i>Uwa ami musu mai</i>                  | May those of us who are left behind continue to flourish |
| <i>Neka lako demeng rabo</i>             | Don't go with anger                                      |
| <i>Neka ngo demeng jogot</i>             | Don't go with revenge                                    |
| <i>Woko ngo agu hae tombom</i>           | Because you go with your interlocutor (ancestor)         |
| <i>Lako agu hae barom</i>                | Walk with people you often talk to                       |

Table 2. A Message that is often said to people who have died

The dead, in the belief of the Manggaraian people, always return to their creator. In addition to the aforementioned messages, in the Manggaraian culture, when someone dies, the following expressions are also stated (Mayor, 2022; Tamon, 2022):

| Local Expression in Manggaraian Language | Translation                            |
|--|--|
| <i>Kole kete le Mori dedek</i>           | Definitive return to God the Creator   |
| <i>Kole beo le Mori embong</i>           | Returning to the home of a loving God  |
| <i>Kole tana le Mori ngaran</i>          | Returning to the land of God the Owner |

Table 3. A phrase often said to people who have died

The Manggaraian belief that death is a journey back to the Creator echoes the Christian eschatological belief that human life ultimately leads to union with God. This unity is manifested when Christ will conquer all His enemies and His Kingdom will be established (McMinn, 2001). For Christians, the resurrection of Jesus is the prototype for the resurrection for all the dead (Moss, 2011). It can even be said that the resurrection of Christ is the key and main pillar that determines the basic identity of Christianity (Schmidt, 2011). This Christian belief is so easily accepted by the Manggaraian Catholics because it can complement and be connected with their own cultural beliefs.

The situation in the world of the dead, where people return to their Creator, is often described as an eternal home and village. This confirms the Manggaraian people's belief that this world is a place of a temporary residence. Thus, the immortal home and village are only found when people leave this world and return to their Creator. This belief can be seen in the expression of the Manggaraian people when they hold a *rampi boa* ceremony (cover the grave). At that time an elderly in the village says the following words:

| Local Expression in Manggaraian Language | Translation                      |
|--|----------------------------------|
| <i>Poli pesek mbaru mese</i>             | A big house has been built       |
| <i>Poli tak mbaru banggang</i>           | A wooden house is already tied   |
| <i>Poli raum mbaru watu</i>              | A stone house has been completed |

Table 4. Saying that are often said during *rampi boa* ceremony (cover the grave)

The situation where the deceased feels an atmosphere of eternal home and village is often also expressed in *kenduri* ceremony which in local language is called *kelas* or *paka di'a*. In the ceremony, the expression often stated is *kudut tanda mbaru, pecing beo* (to the dead that his/her new house is recognized, and your new village is known). In the author's experience as a priest, such understanding makes it easier for the Manggaraian people to understand the Gospel passage often used for the Eucharistic celebration for the dead, where Jesus says, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in

God, believe in Me too. In my Father's house there are many dwellings. If not, of course I will tell you. For I am going there to prepare a place for you" (John 14:1-2). The same cultural understanding makes it easier for the Manggaraian Catholics to understand the words in the Preface for funeral mass which explicitly says; "Since for those who believe in You, Lord, life is only changed, not destroyed, and when the dwelling place on earth is destroyed, there is an eternal dwelling in heaven."

The beliefs of the Manggaraian people are well connected with the Christian belief that humans are always walking towards death. This can be seen, for example, in the lament over the death written by Isaac Watts in *The Presbyterian Hymnal*: "Time, like an ever-rolling stream, soon bears us all away; we fly forgotten, as a dream dies with the opening day" (Case-Winters, 2016). But the lament does not mean that human life is meaningless because it only leads to death. If one dies in the faith in God, death must bring one to the eternal home that God has prepared. The same hymn expresses hope in God as a figure who is: "our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home" (Case-Winters, 2016). Thus, this is consistent with a very basic claim in Christianity that although death is real, it will not be the end. Only God is the ultimate end. As saint Paul says, "For both in life and in death we belong to the Lord" (Romans 14:7-9).

### ***Water Symbolization in Manggaraian Eschatological Understanding***

Water symbolization also plays a significant role in the rite for the death in the tradition of the Manggaraian people. The same symbolization, however, also applies to rites around the birth of a child. In the Manggaraian tradition, before a mother becomes pregnant, she herself or her husband would have dreams of drawing water. In the local language, it is called *nipi teku wae* (dream of drawing water). The dream, for the Manggaraian people, means that the woman will get pregnant. Moreover, *nipi teku wae* for the Manggaraian people always refers to the soul (*wakar*) of the child; that the soul has come to his parents. In the local language, it is called *haeng wakarn* (his soul has been found) (Sutam, 2016). Therefore, if the dream comes, the parents immediately inform the extended family. On hearing such an information, the couple and their extended family must stay away from all forms of disputes and unpleasant things. In the belief of the Manggaraian people, the soul of the child who is present in a dream of drawing water (*nipi teku wae*) comes to observe the condition of his parents and the extended family. If he/she finds that the behaviors of his/her parents and the extended family are bad, then he/she will not come. In this case, the Manggaraian people say, *mai wakarn, landing wekin toe mai* (the soul has come, but the body has not come yet).

The above description shows that the Manggaraian people identifies the human soul with water. Regarding *nipi teku wae* (dream of drawing water), *wae* (water) is a symbol of soul, which could be considered the elder brother/sister of body, because soul comes before the body. In fact, in the birth process, the presence of the water as the symbol of the soul that precedes the body appears in the form of the amniotic fluid that appears first from the baby's body. At the time of birth, people usually ask, *asa kaen bo ga, cai'y ga?* (Did his/her elder brother/sister - amniotic fluid, already arrive?). Thus, *nipi teku wae* (dream of drawing water) and the birth of a baby in which the amniotic fluid appears first, would indicate that before a child is physically present in his mother's womb and is physically present in the birth process, his/her soul, which is symbolized in water, has appeared first (Sutam, 2016; Tamon, 2022).

The centrality of the water symbolization in the life of the Manggaraian people is further confirmed in their view of death. For the Manggaraian people, death is often referred to as *bowo wae* (water has spilled out), *dopo wae teku* (water that has been drawn up to its limit), *kole ulu waen* (water

returns to its source). *Bowo wae* is used if a child dies, while the last two terms are used if the deceased is an adult. From these expressions, it is clear that the Manggaraian people consider water as the soul that sustains the body. Thus, the death of a person means that his/her water or soul has separated from the body, thus the soul's time with the body in its worldly existence has reached its limit or end. Now, the soul (*wae* = water) returns to its source (Sutam, 2016).

The meaning of water as a human soul is quite evident in various rituals surrounding the death ceremony. In the custom of the Manggaraian people, when someone dies, the body is laid down, and the family or mourners touch it. In the local language it is called *asur rapu* (touching or holding a corpse). For the Manggaraian people, holding a corpse is a sign of brotherly/sisterly bonds and love for the deceased. After crying and touching the body of the deceased, the mourners wash their hands with water which is usually placed outside the main door of the house. The water is a sign of *wae inung* (drinking water). It is a symbol of the soul (*wakar*) of the deceased. So, when the mourners wash their hands with water, it is a symbol of holding the soul of the deceased, just as they had held the body. In other words, just as holding a corpse expresses a sign of love, washing hands with water too is a sign of love for the deceased (Sutam, 2016; Mayor, 2022; Terima, 2022).

Furthermore, before the corpse is carried to the burial place, the water that was out in front of the door is stored in a *teong* (a bamboo container). Thus, when the corpse is out of the house, the water is sprinkled from behind. This is a sign that the soul of the deceased person is asked to follow his body or corpse to the other side of the world (in the local language it is called *pa'ang ble*). The soul is not allowed to stay in the house or village, so that he/she cannot disturb those who are still alive. In the morning at the *saung ta'a* (green leaf) ceremony, usually done within 3 days after the burial, there is a rite of *samo lime* (washing the hand) at *pa'ang* (front boundary of the village) as a symbol of farewell to the deceased (Sutam, 2016; Deran, 2022).

In the past, sprinkling water was carried out twice, namely before the corpse was taken out of the house and after the corpse was outside. The first one has the meaning that when a person is born, the first thing that comes out is the amniotic fluid, which in the Manggaraian belief is *ka'e* or *wae tekku* or *wae inung*, which is the elder brother/sister or the soul of a newborn child. Death is seen as a re-birth, and the house and village where someone lived are seen as a womb that gives birth to the dead to the other world (*pa'ang ble*). This is related to the belief in *wae* and *nipi tekku wae* or *wakar* (soul) of the deceased who may come back later to their descendants (grandchildren or great-grandchildren) (Sutam, 2016; Jerubu, 2022).

The symbolization of water that accompanies the idea of life and death in the Manggaraian people's worldview underscores the power of the cosmocentric aspect that also gives meaning to their life and death. This is because for the Manggaraian people, water is one of the vital elements of cosmos, in addition to the other four elements, namely soil, fire, wind, and sky (Sutam, 2016). Water for the Manggaraian people comes from God, becomes an inherent part of Him and represents God's presence. For this reason, the Manggaraian people have a harmonious relationship with water, as they do with other elements of all the created reality. The Manggaraian people believe that humans came from and will return the cosmos that produces water (Sutam, 2016; Mayor, 2022; Tamon, 2022).

The power of the cosmocentric aspect evident in the eschatological beliefs of the Manggarai people is compatible with the concept of Christian soteriology. From the Christian perspective, salvation is understood as a holistic work of God. Such salvation brings all of creation – not only individual human beings – to the destination they hope for (Gonzales, 2005, p. 186). Consequently, all created reality is directed towards their ultimate goal. Avery Dulles calls this “the catholicity of God”, that is the

eschatological fulfillment of God's work salvation. This concept of "the catholicity of God" is used to highlight that at the eschatological moment, God fully permeates all creation and in so doing makes them participate in divine life (Dulles, 1985, pp. 36–37).

It is based on this conviction that Dulles is critical of the concept of salvation as merely expiation of sin. Dulles criticized the idea of atonement as simply a liberation from sin. According to Dulles, "the redemptive action of God ought to be studied not simply in the quasi-judicial categories of creation and re-creation" (Dulles, 1985, p. 51). Such a view is also at the kernel of Karl Rahner's soteriology. For Rahner, God's salvation through Christ must be understood as "the redemption of the world", that is, "the glorification and divinization of all reality" (Rahner, 1974). This view is also shared by Jürgen Moltmann who opposes the anthropocentric paradigm of eschatology. Moltmann argues that in the end, God embraces the entire cosmos, not just humans, even more the redemption of merely their souls. For Moltmann, just as the human soul cannot be separated from the body, and no human being can be separated from nature, so life cannot be separated from the cosmos. There is no redemption of man without the redemption of creation (Moltmann, 2004, p. 260).

The catholicity and relationality of salvation as described above stem from a conviction of the catholicity of creation. The catholicity of creation is expressed in a fundamental belief of what Dulles calls "the impregnation of nature by grace" (Dulles, 1985, p. 8). This idea reflects a conviction of the goodness of creation. It is believed that in all creation there is a quality of goodness. Author like Langdon Gilkey has drawn the implication of such a principle of intrinsic goodness of creation on the principle of non-exploitation of non-human nature (Gilkey, 1994). The goodness of creation is an ontological condition of their existence. Therefore, the value of each creation is in no way determined by its function for human welfare. So, acknowledgment and respect for the intrinsic value of each element of creation becomes a strong basis for rejecting any instrumental approach to non-human creation, in which non-human creation is seen as simply resources for human survival (Deane-Drummond, 2017, pp. 31–32). In the context of the idea of salvation, just like humans, non-human creations are also on their way to *eschaton*, where their participation in divine life and goodness will be completed. Pope Francis confirmed this truth when in *Laudato Si* he stated, "all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things" (Paus Fransiskus, 2015, art. 83).

The idea of the catholicity of creation which has implications for the catholicity of salvation is very important. It can be a counter force to the grand narrative of global capitalism that co-modifies nature, including water resources. The river and the tree of life are not objects of co-modification (Revelation 22:1-2) (Rosising & Buitendang, 2020). In the end, salvation is for all creation, not just for humans. Pope Francis uses such beliefs as the reason to reject all forms of human domination and exploitation over other elements of creation (Paus Fransiskus, 2015, art. 83). Here, the eschatological narrative needs to be correlated with the context of the mission of Christ (*Missio Christi*) which is briefly written in the Gospel of John 10:10; "I came that they might have life and have it in all abundance." The mission of Jesus is the answer to the collapse of the relationality between human beings and the rest of creation (Kaunda & Kaunda, 2019). In other words, Jesus' mission was to bring salvation in its entirety, for humans and the non-human creation. All of these ideas lead to a key point in the Christian faith, which rejects an anthropocentric view of salvation in which only humans are saved by God. Thus, it must be said that all elements of creation are included in God's saving work. This demonstrates that salvation in the Christian perspective is always cosmic in character. It emphasizes the inclusion of all elements of creation in God's work of redemption and salvation.

## Conclusion

In this article we have endeavored to find the “treasure” of faith that existed in the Manggaraian cultural tradition before the Catholic missionaries came. This kind of effort is definitely in accordance with the aspiration of the Second Vatican Council, especially in the decree regarding the missionary work of the Church today (*Ad Gantes*). In it, it is said that as disciples of Christ, missionaries today should “learn from sincere and patient dialogue, what a great treasure God has distributed to the nations. At the same time, they should try to brighten and liberate these treasures in the light of the Gospel and bring them back to the property of God of salvation” (Dopken KWI, 1991, Art. 11).

By highlighting the peculiarities of the local eschatological understanding and belief of the Manggaraian people, in this article we have attempted to prove that the Christian eschatological understanding and belief share some similarities with the understanding of the Manggaraian local eschatology. Before the Catholic Church influenced almost the entire aspects of their lives, the Manggarai people already had a vision of the future of life. This eschatological vision is in many aspects compatible with that of the Christian eschatology. This has made it easier for the Manggaraian Catholics to quickly understand the good news of salvation brought by the Catholic Church. In this way, it is hoped that the sharing of ideas about the vision of the future life between the Manggaraian people and the Catholic Church can further contribute to the process of authentic inculturation of Christian eschatological beliefs into the local culture. A deep understanding of eschatology is no longer perceived as knowledge that comes from outside, but rather a belief that is deeply rooted in the Manggaraian tradition and culture itself. Here, authentic inculturation occurs when faith is no longer lived just as an adaptation of ready-made Christianity, but rather a creative manifestation of the Word of God in the local Church. Inculturation is no longer understood as an evangelistic tactic and technique, but instead a way of understanding and living Christianity more deeply.

More than just simply proving the harmony of understanding between the Manggaraian eschatological beliefs and that of the Christian eschatology, in this article we have shown the contribution of the Manggaraian eschatological understanding and beliefs in the efforts to expand Christian eschatological beliefs. Salvation according to the Manggaraian eschatology not only points to the union with God but also union with the rest of creation. The eco-eschatological understanding and belief of the Manggaraian people justifies the thesis that folk religion or what people perceive as traditional religion is very strong in creating harmony in life. It is evident that to a certain extent, traditional religions unite people with each other and with nature much better than modern religions do, for the latter sometimes tend to separate humans and creation from each other along the line of a binary opposition category. It is therefore fair to say that traditional religion plays a greater consolidative role in bringing harmony to life (Salmin, 2021).

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