

From *Pen Fini* to the Holy Eucharist: Bridging *Atoin Meto*'s Sacred Traditions

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Abstract

This study addresses the intersection of cultural identity and Christian faith among the *Atoin Meto* people of Timor regarding Eucharistic theology. The research aims to construct a contextual theological language that enables the community to understand the Eucharist through indigenous frameworks. Employing ethnographic fieldwork and theological reflection, this study examines the traditional *pen fini* ritual as a cultural-religious foundation. The findings reveal that *pen fini* is a practical preparatory framework for Eucharistic understanding, providing familiar symbolic elements that facilitate theological comprehension. The analysis demonstrates how indigenous practices bridge traditional worldviews and Christian sacramental theology. This study contributes to local theology development by establishing a model for maintaining *Atoin Meto* Christian cultural identity while fostering authentic Catholic sacramental engagement, offering insights into theological inculturation methodologies. The research provides a framework for contextualizing Catholic sacraments within indigenous cultures, contributing to broader discussions of inculturation in contemporary Catholic theology and pastoral practice.

Keywords: *Atoin Meto*, contextual theology, Eucharist, inculturation, *pen fini*

Introduction

The Second Vatican Council's declaration that the Eucharist constitutes “the source and summit of the entire ecclesial life” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11) reflects a fundamental theological principle that positions this sacrament at the center of Catholic spiritual existence. This centrality derives from the Eucharist's unique capacity to contain “the entire spiritual richness of the Church manifested concretely in the body and blood of Christ” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 2). The objective reality of Christ's substantial presence in the consecrated elements represents an established doctrine of Catholic faith (*fides qua*), affirmed consistently throughout the Church's magisterial teachings and liturgical traditions.

However, the translation of this doctrinal truth into lived experience (*fides quae*) presents ongoing pastoral and theological challenges. The gap between theological understanding and experiential appropriation of the Eucharist has prompted extensive scholarly inquiry and pastoral innovation. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in contexts where Catholic communities encounter diverse cultural frameworks that may either facilitate or complicate Eucharistic comprehension. The challenge becomes more complex when considering indigenous communities whose traditional worldviews and ritual practices operate within distinctly different symbolic universes from those historically associated with Christian sacramental theology.

The *Atoin Meto* people of Timor represent one such community where the intersection of indigenous cultural identity and Catholic faith creates both opportunities and challenges for Eucharistic understanding. Their traditional *pen fini* ritual embodies a rich theological and anthropological framework that merits serious academic investigation, particularly regarding its potential contribution to contextual Eucharistic theology. This cultural-religious practice offers unique insights into how indigenous conceptual frameworks might serve as preparatory foundations for understanding Christian sacramental mysteries. Contemporary scholarship on Eucharistic theology demonstrates increasing attention to the relationship between local cultural practices and sacramental understanding. This body of literature reveals diverse methodological approaches and thematic emphases that collectively illuminate the complex dynamics between traditional cultures and Catholic sacramental life.

Manggala and Nugroho (2024) provide significant insights through their investigation of the relationship between Javanese Slametan ritual and Eucharistic theology. Their research establishes important precedents for examining indigenous Indonesian practices as potential bridges to Christian sacramental understanding. The study reveals how traditional communal meals can function as cultural-theological preparation for Eucharistic participation, though their focus remains primarily on Javanese cultural contexts rather than Eastern Indonesian communities. Ajang and Sulistiyo (2022) contribute to this discourse through their examination of the Eucharist's impact on faith development, emphasizing the sacrament's formative dimensions within Christian spiritual growth. Their work provides methodological frameworks for assessing how Eucharistic participation influences believers' spiritual maturation, though it does not specifically address the role of pre-Christian cultural practices in facilitating this development.

International scholarship offers additional perspectives on Eucharistic contextualization. Rubin (2012) analyzes popular behaviors within Eucharistic contexts, revealing how ordinary believers appropriate and express Eucharistic devotion through culturally influenced practices. Power (2006) explores the connections between Eucharistic celebration and social justice commitments, demonstrating how sacramental theology can address contemporary ethical concerns. Phillips (2017)

investigates the relationship between Eucharistic symbolism and everyday food experiences, providing insights into how daily sustenance practices can illuminate sacramental meaning.

The social dimensions of Eucharistic theology receive attention from Igboanusi (1996) who examines the Eucharist as a foundation for social justice advocacy. Hellwig (1997) focuses specifically on the relationship between Eucharistic celebration and responses to hunger, while Martasudjita (2013) provides comprehensive analysis of Karl Rahner's understanding of the Eucharist's connection to daily life experience.

These studies collectively demonstrate theological scholarship's commitment to bridging doctrinal understanding and lived experience. However, significant gaps remain in the literature, particularly regarding the potential of indigenous ritual practices to serve as preparatory frameworks for Eucharistic understanding. Most existing research focuses on post-baptismal appropriation of Eucharistic meaning rather than pre-Christian cultural foundations that might facilitate initial comprehension of sacramental mysteries.

This research addresses several critical areas of contemporary theological and pastoral concern. First, it contributes to the growing field of contextual theology, particularly as it relates to sacramental understanding within indigenous communities. The increasing recognition of cultural diversity within global Catholicism demands sophisticated theological reflection on how local traditions can inform and enrich universal sacramental practices.

Second, the study responds to ongoing calls for theological inculturation that respects indigenous wisdom while maintaining doctrinal integrity. The Second Vatican Council's encouragement of legitimate cultural adaptation in liturgical and theological expression creates space for examining how traditional practices might prepare communities for fuller participation in Catholic sacramental life.

Third, this research provides practical insights for pastoral ministry among indigenous communities. Understanding how traditional cultural practices relate to Christian sacramental theology can inform more effective evangelization and catechetical approaches that build upon existing cultural foundations rather than replacing them entirely.

Fourth, the study contributes to broader discussions about the relationship between particular and universal elements in Catholic theology. By examining how specific cultural practices might illuminate universal sacramental truths, this research engages fundamental questions about theological methodology and cultural adaptation. Finally, this investigation offers insights relevant to contemporary discussions about decolonizing theology and recognizing indigenous contributions to Christian understanding. Rather than viewing traditional practices as obstacles to Christian faith, this research explores their potential positive contributions to sacramental comprehension.

Despite extensive scholarly attention to Eucharistic theology and growing interest in contextual approaches to sacramental understanding, limited research has examined how specific indigenous ritual practices might serve as preparatory foundations for Eucharistic comprehension. The *pen fini* tradition of the *Atoin Meto* community represents a particularly rich cultural-religious practice that has not received adequate scholarly attention, despite its potential theological significance.

The absence of systematic investigation into the relationship between *pen fini* and Eucharistic themes represents a significant gap in both contextual theology and Timorese religious studies. This gap limits both theoretical understanding of how indigenous practices might contribute to sacramental theology and practical approaches to pastoral ministry among the *Atoin Meto* community.

Furthermore, existing research on similar topics has not developed adequate methodological frameworks for assessing the theological compatibility between indigenous practices and Christian

sacramental understanding. This methodological limitation restricts the development of rigorous approaches to theological inculturation that might benefit other indigenous communities facing similar challenges.

This research aims to examine the *pen fini* ritual of the *Atoin Meto* community as a potential preparatory framework for understanding Eucharistic theology. Specifically, the study seeks to: (1) analyze the theological and anthropological dimensions of the *pen fini* tradition; (2) identify thematic connections between *pen fini* practices and Eucharistic theology; (3) assess the potential of *pen fini* concepts to facilitate *Atoin Meto* understanding of Eucharistic mysteries; and (4) develop recommendations for pastoral approaches that honor both indigenous cultural identity and Catholic sacramental tradition.

The fundamental questions guiding this investigation are: Can the *Atoin Meto* understanding of *pen fini* serve as preparation for comprehending Eucharistic themes? Which specific themes within *pen fini* tradition correspond to elements of Eucharistic theology? How might these connections inform pastoral strategies for Eucharistic catechesis within the *Atoin Meto* community? What broader implications does this research hold for theological inculturation among indigenous Catholic communities?

Through systematic examination of these questions, this study contributes to the development of contextual Eucharistic theology while providing practical insights for pastoral ministry among the *Atoin Meto* people of Timor.

Method

This study employs a comprehensive theological methodology integrating phenomenological and semiotic approaches to examine the intersection between theological concepts and *Atoin Meto* local culture. The research methodology follows three distinct phases: cultural analysis, data collection, and theological reflection.

This investigation utilizes phenomenology and semiotics as primary methodological approaches. Semiotics elucidates how local communities comprehend their cultural expressions, while phenomenology reveals inherent meanings embedded within cultural practices. The semiotic framework adopts Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model, positing that the universe consists entirely of signs (Nöth, 1995). Peirce's framework extends to understanding culture as a complex sign system requiring systematic interpretation.

Peirce articulated three sequential stages of sign comprehension, termed semiosis (Hoed, 2010): perception of an external object (representamen/R), formation of human consciousness regarding the object (object/O), and interpretation of the representamen by the interpreting subject (interpreter/I) (Deledalle, 2001).

The phenomenological dimension employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine subjects' interpretation of signs. IPA emphasizes interpretation as its central paradigm, focusing on lived experience from a first-person perspective. The analytical process involves the researcher's interpretation of how participants interpret their direct experiences.

Data collection employs multiple approaches ensuring comprehensive understanding and validity. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with recognized traditional authorities to gather authentic information regarding corn (*pen fini*) and its cultural significance within the *Atoin Meto* community.

Participant selection employs snowball sampling technique, whereby initial key informants recommend subsequent participants who possess deep cultural knowledge and community recognition.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) provide balanced perspectives from the broader *Atoin Meto* community concerning *pen fini* practices and meanings. This methodological triangulation enhances data validity and reliability while providing multiple perspectives on the cultural phenomenon.

The analytical framework follows systematic progression. Cultural themes undergo analysis through semiotic methods grounded in Peirce's triadic model, followed by theological reflection utilizing Bevans' Translation Model. This model emphasizes translating the essential intent of Christian messages into specific cultural contexts (Bevans, 2003), prioritizing gospel content conveyance rather than literal conceptual transfers. This approach aligns with Catholic theological principles recognizing Gospel universality while acknowledging cultural adaptation necessity in theological expression, consistent with Church understanding of inculturation as articulated in conciliar documents.

The operational technique establishes connections between cultural themes and Eucharistic theological themes. Cultural themes serve as hermeneutical keys for understanding Eucharistic concepts through *Atoin Meto* cognitive patterns. The presentation incorporates systematic observations illuminating convergences and divergences between *pen fini* practices and Eucharistic understanding.

This methodology facilitates authentic theological dialogue between indigenous cultural expressions and Catholic sacramental theology, ensuring scholarly rigor while contributing to contextual Catholic theology development within Indonesian cultural contexts.

Findings and Discussion

This section provides a theoretical framework of Inculturation, examining its nature as the dynamic process of integrating Gospel values into cultural contexts. The discussion encompasses both the theological foundations of inculturation and the practical challenges of its implementation in Indonesian Catholic communities

The Inculturation Concept

Inculturation is a distinctive term employed within the Catholic Church to designate the process of encounter between the Gospel and various local cultural contexts (Doyle, 2012). This concept bears a close relationship to other terminology with specific emphases used by researchers in anthropology and sociology (Udjan, 2006). The term inculturation derives from the anthropological concepts of enculturation and acculturation (Chia, 2021). Enculturation denotes encounter with one's own culture, while acculturation signifies interaction between two different cultures. Thus, inculturation may be defined as the process of integrating Christianity within local cultural paradigms through sustained engagement between Christian faith and indigenous cultures (Chia, 2021).

Within Catholic theology, the term inculturation originated in the discipline of missiology (Martasudjita, 2021; Udjan, 2006). Joseph Masson, a Belgian Jesuit professor at the Gregorian University in Rome, popularized this terminology (Martasudjita, 2021). Masson employed inculturation to emphasize how the Christian message can penetrate and establish roots within local cultures lacking Christian historical foundations (Chia, 2021). While Asian bishops had utilized this term since 1970, its initial application did not align with contemporary theological understanding (Martasudjita, 2021). In ecclesiastical documents, inculturation first appeared in *Ad Populum Dei Nuntius* (article 5)

(Martasudjita, 2021). Subsequently, in 1979, Pope John Paul II employed this term in his Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, article 53 (Chia, 2021).

Several scholarly definitions illuminate inculturation's theological significance. Inculturation generates new cultural expressions while considering transcultural biblical and liturgical imperatives (Mariyanto, 2004). O'Collins and Farrugia (1996) contend that inculturation is essential for contextualizing the Christian message and way of life within diverse human cultures. Three fundamental principles undergird inculturation (Chupungco, 1997): First, the encounter and interaction between Christianity and culture must constitute a mutual dialogue characterized by reciprocal exchange. Gospel values must critically examine local cultural components, recognizing that not all cultural elements conform to evangelical principles. Second, this integration may transform or purify culture to align with evangelical values. Third, the dynamics operative in inculturation neither eliminate nor diminish Christianity's nature as a divine-human institution but rather enrich it.

Robert Schreiter (1985) has declined to employ this terminology, arguing that as a neologism within social science, it could impede dialogue with the social sciences. He advocates for "local theology" to emphasize the local church's role in theological discourse (Schreiter, 1985). Conversely, Bevans (2003) favors "contextual theology" because this term encompasses broader aspects of the social phenomena within which believers live and minister. Aylward Shorter endorses inculturation, emphasizing how Gospel values resonate within particular local cultures (Doyle, 2012). This research employs the concept of inculturation to facilitate dialogue between Eucharistic themes and local community expressions, seeking to discover Eucharistic values within local culture from a particular cultural perspective.

Theological Inculturation and its Issues

The imperative to contemplate the Gospel within the contextual reality of particular peoples constitutes a fundamental ecclesial necessity. This was evident when Christianity, originally rooted in Jewish culture, encountered Greek civilization. Paul's missionary experience provides paradigmatic illustration of this phenomenon (Acts 17:22–23). The Church Fathers likewise demonstrated this theological endeavor. Clement of Alexandria maintained that Greek philosophy could purify hearts and prepare believers to receive faith through authentic knowledge (Aquilina, 2013). This effort manifests the desire to articulate Christian faith within particular societies' intellectual frameworks.

This inculturation imperative intensified when European-based Christianity encountered Asian and African contexts. Around 1950, a movement emerged to reexamine theologies grounded in North Atlantic communities within the Asia-Africa region (Schreiter, 1985). Third-world theologians' recognition that numerous themes and expressions within mainstream theology were not readily accessible to Asian and African modes of thought and feeling catalyzed this effort.

Awareness of inculturation's significance received ecclesial legitimacy during the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The Council Fathers affirmed a positive understanding of cultures. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church declares that among the Church's missionary tasks is the discovery of cultural good, its elevation, and purification for God's glory and human flourishing (*Lumen Gentium* 17; *Ad Gentes* 9). However, this endeavor presents considerable challenges. Jürgen Moltmann identified the dilemma confronting Christians: the tension between relevance and identity (Moltmann, 1993).

Efforts to preserve Christian identity rooted within one particular culture risk eliminating Christianity's relevance for other cultural contexts. Conversely, attempts to achieve theological consensus may erode the Christian identity that has developed historically. Nevertheless, the search for

cultural language to express Christian faith must be pursued, for the Church maintains that within cultures exist good and holy values that God has implanted since the world's foundation.

Martasudjita (2021) identifies eight complexities surrounding inculturation, encompassing terminology, meaning, theological foundations, cultural conflicts, and the dangers of plurality emerging from intercultural encounter. The principal challenge involves the tension between Christian identity developed within one particular culture (Jewish-Greek, European) and its relevance for other cultures. This complexity intensifies when confronted with the question: Was the encounter with Greek culture a successful and irreplaceable inaugural inculturation process? According to Pope Benedict XVI, the New Testament was composed in Greek from its inception, accompanied by Greek soul and spirit (Doyle, 2012).

The distinction between expression and expressed content requires careful consideration within the inculturation process. While these elements may be distinguished theoretically, they remain complex in concrete reality. Expressions invariably relate to their contexts, maintaining inherent uniqueness. Difficulties arise when Christian revelation emerges within particular cultural frameworks, becoming “characteristic” expressions of Christianity. Modifying Christian expressions may generate problems, including questions regarding these expressions' universality.

Bevans articulates this process as encounter or dialogue between past Christianity's context (contained within Scripture and Tradition) and contemporary Christianity's context within particular locations (Bevans, 2003). More extensive efforts may occur when elevating beneficial values from culture into local theology that enriches Christianity. Therefore, inculturation efforts must transcend discourse level and advance toward concrete implementation, despite attendant risks (Bevans, 2009).

Inculturation in Indonesia

Understanding inculturation as any effort to establish Christian faith within particular cultures, the inculturation process in Indonesia commenced when indigenous Indonesian believers began implementing Catholic missions under missionary guidance. According to Boelaars, efforts toward ecclesial independence began around 1940–1961 (Boelaars, 2010). Boelaars documented concrete inculturation development through vernacular translation of sacred texts, encounters between Scripture and tradition, tradition and liturgy, Church and indigenous arts, and theology within Indonesian contexts (Boelaars, 2010).

Several missionaries and Indonesians endeavored to construct distinctively Indonesian theology. Boelaars noted various efforts, predominantly research for theses and dissertations since 1974, including studies on the Toba-Batak High God and evangelization among East Kalimantan Dayaks (Boelaars, 2010). Contemporary efforts to establish Christian faith within Indonesian contexts continue. Experience demonstrates that liturgical inculturation efforts are more prominent than theological endeavors. This is evident in various scholarly concerns, such as Martasudjita's observation that inculturation is frequently associated with liturgical participation (Martasudjita, 2021) and Singgih's assertion that the Roman Catholic Church employs inculturation as technical terminology describing Catholic liturgical indigenization (Singgih, 2000).

Herman Punda Panda's research revealed that liturgical inculturation efforts in Sumba remained superficial. He argues that liturgical inculturation must courageously engage theological inculturation levels and strive for authentic local theology (Panda, 2006). This discovery provides foundation for theological inculturation efforts in Indonesia, essential considering the principle *lex credendi, lex orandi*—what is celebrated represents what is believed.

Such endeavors remain notably scarce within the Indonesian Catholic Church. Kirchberger's (2013) observations in "Blood Sacrifice, Blood of Christ" demonstrate theological inculturation's significance in Indonesia. He advocates for theological exploration of comprehensive research on blood sacrifice within Indonesian cultures to strengthen the faithful's understanding of Christ's sacrificial blood. The endeavor to study indigenous beliefs represents an urgent necessity for rooting faith within Indonesia's local cultures.

***Atoin Meto* Community and Research Location**

The *Atoin Meto* community is a group of people who inhabit the western part of the island of Timor. Timor Island is one of the islands in East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. The western part of this island is part of Indonesia, while the eastern part is Timor-Leste. Today, many people call this community *Dawan*. The language is also known as the *Dawan* language. However, in everyday life, the *Dawan* people call themselves *Atoin Meto* (defined as dry people, but better understood as local people who speak *meto*). Their language is also called *uab meto*. In this study, we use *Atoin Meto* and not *Dawan* because *Atoin Meto* better expresses their identity.

The *Atoin Meto* community is spread across the districts of Kupang (Amarasi), South Central Timor (*TTS*), and North Central Timor (*TTU*) and partly in the Oekusi-Timor-Leste region. Even though almost everyone has adopted Christian beliefs (Catholic and Protestant), this group still maintains the customs they inherited from their ancestors. Their rituals or customs have received a touch of Christian belief. One that we can mention here is the ritual related to their staple food of corn *pen fini*. Notes by H. G. Schulte Nordholt (Nordholt, 1971) show that two essential rituals of the *Atoin Meto* people are related to corn, namely the harvest of short-lived corn (the first corn) and long-lived corn. According to Nordholt, the first crop that must be collected when the *Atoin Meto* harvest short-lived maize is given to the *Uis Pah* (Lord of the Earth) by the traditional elder (*tobe naek* or *kapitan*) on a hallowed stone altar (*fatu le'u*) (Nordholt, 1971). Today, they always offer the harvest in the Eucharist celebration. The prayers related to this ritual already use the sign of the cross and mention the name of the Lord Jesus.

Kuale'u Village, *Fatulunu* Village, and *Koko'i* Village are the study settings. These villages are part of the South *Amanatun* sub-district (13 villages), South Central Timor district, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province, Indonesia. Long ago, the king divided two groups in these villages, *Neobunu* and *Noebana*. According to several informants, villages in *Noebone* still maintain special treatment for *pen fini* to this day. This information became the basis for choosing the three villages mentioned above as research locations.

Pen Fini

Corn (*pena*) is the staple food of the *Atoin-Meto* people, apart from rice and tubers. We will briefly describe the cycle of planting, harvesting, and storing *pena* or *pen fini* (In this paper, we will maintain the use of the word *pen fini* to refer to corn or *Atoin Meto* corn seeds). The right time to plant is usually around October or November. After preparing the garden, they called *achapel religious teacher* or *traditional elder* to pray. This prayer aims to bring down the corn seeds (*pen fini*) from the attic of the *ume kbubu* (a circular building at ground level with a thatched roof that *Atoin Meto* is often used for the preparation and storage of corn and grain). There are some tribes or families who choose to place the seeds they want to plant in front of the altar during Sunday mass. After that, they planted. There are several guidelines they need to adhere to once they plant. One taboo they strictly adhere to is abstaining from eating all fruit, vegetables, or new garden produce. When the corn has grown, they pray it will

quickly grow and become whole, keeping it away from attacks or pests. After the corn has borne fruit, they will carry out a ceremony to eat the young corn.

According to one of our informants, they must gather in the tribal house to pray and eat young corn. They will pray first before picking young corn in the garden. They will also pick areca nuts and betel. This Siri areca nut (young) is used to welcome new corn and is considered king. They inserted this *betel* into the *okomama*. The rectangular holder known as the *okomama* is beaded. *Atoin Meto* uses this *okomama* to welcome prestigious guests. After this ceremony, they will eat young corn together as a tribe. This activity indicates that each tribe member can pick corn and other garden produce to eat. The second harvest period is the dry or old corn harvest. They call again the religious teachers of the chapel and parents who are worthy to run their jobs. After praying, they can harvest. After harvest, they tied and shelled the corn and stored it in the *ume kbubu*. They called the religious teachers of the chapel or worthy parents again to pray before they stored the corn in the *ume kbubu* attic.

The *Atoin Meto* people believe that the corn they received from their ancestors is wealth and life. The expression clearly shows it: *Pena na teu bon, Osa ma maus, Maus tol atoni ma nal atoni*. This expression means that *corn changes and becomes wealth and people*. When we asked them to explain this expression, their explanations were more or less the same. They say that corn is our staple food source. This food will give us the strength to work and generate wealth. This expression is the teaching of their ancestors. This phrase also gives them instructions on how to behave towards their food. They also believe that if a young couple does not have children after marriage, they can create a ritual in their relationship with *pen fini* so that the couple can have children. Below will be presented a prayer for procreation:

Tabel 1. *A Prayer For Procreation*

A Prayer for Procreation	
<i>Meto language</i>	<i>Translation</i>
<p><i>Usi ama nekat ama maut, nah un hom loim ma fe mnahat mam ninut Neu hai be im ma hai ma tanem Mes tabu leku'i, ho ate kai ka mui fa tol atoni Es o na ne, haim bai seu neu kit Usi Mu sanu mu nebe Ho kuasa tnau nok haim nahat ma haim ninut He nait mbo ma mbait kai tol atoni ma nal atoni.</i></p>	<p><i>O Allah, the most merciful, has previously given blessings through food and drink. As a power for our physical bodies now, we, your servants, do not have any control (to have child). Therefore, we surrender to Allah as our source of life. O Allah, send down Your power through the food and drink that You give us so that we can get a new life for ourselves through children as our descendants.</i></p>

The content of this prayer clearly shows that God's grace was given to them through the corn. It is a straightforward way of thinking but holds excellent value. Humanly, they believe that through the physical food they receive from God, they can produce something else, namely life. Submission to Allah also characterizes this prayer. They surrender everything to God's providence. If *Meto* people carried out this ritual and had no children, then *Meto* people believed that biologically, they were not allowed.

This ritual emphasizes “the mistakes” or “sins” they have committed, which prevent them from having children. One of our informants said that this ritual was successful for his family.

Themes About *Pen Fini*

The author presents several theological themes that emerged from the field research below. These themes will be examined in dialogue with theological themes from the Christian tradition.

Pen Fini is the Man/King

If we pay close attention to how the *Atoin Meto* people treat *pen fini*, we can conclude that they have a distinctive interpretation of the corn their ancestors gave them. Corn, as a real object or representamen (*R*), appears as an object in their understanding (*O*) and is interpreted as a person and even a king (*I*). This interpretation is undoubtedly related to the context and their lives. In interviews with several people, we discovered that for them, food is considered human and even kingly because of their experiences when performing rituals around corn. According to them, if they treat their *pen fini* well, their lives will run normally and be safe. Meanwhile, when they do not run it well, it will cause problems in their lives.

There are several stories about the obstacles or suffering they experienced when they did not follow the applicable taboo rules. If we follow the flow of *IPA* analysis, their experience of interacting with *pen fini* makes them conclude this. When they told us about this experience, we felt how they tried to convince us that what they experienced happened in their lives. Suppose we put aside the theories and cultural views that talk about the relationship of Asian-African people with their ancestors. In that case, we will find that these experiences helped them form a tribal identity and a view of the world. This group identity is essential to maintaining balance in their lives.

In my view, the perception of *pen fini* as both human and king represents a collective memory preserved by the *Atoin Meto* tribes to safeguard their food sources inherited from their ancestors. It appears that the contemporary *Atoin Meto* community's treatment of *pen fini* as human and king is primarily motivated by fear of curses or negative experiences they might encounter. This is evidenced by their emphasis on these curses or adverse events that would occur if they fail to treat the *pen fini* with appropriate reverence.

Pen Fini as a symbol of communion

Pen fini (*R*) is present in the memories of the *Atoin Meto* people as something distinctive (*O*) that differentiates it from other corn. *Pen fini* for them is a symbol of unifying the tribe (*I*). *Pen fini* makes them feel like one tribe and brothers. The ritual of eating young corn proves it. According to them, during the ritual of eating young corn, they must gather together in the tribe's house. It applies to all those in the village and those outside it. For those outside the village, this rule applies if they plant corn in the village. Based on the results of interviews and *FGD*, we found that *pen fini* can be a symbol that calls them back to the village to gather with family and tribe members. It is possible because *pen fini* is a treasure inherited from their ancestors. They believe that *pen fini* gave their ancestors life to have the life they do today.

The tribe's *communio* is evident when they gather to eat the first harvest of the *pen fini*. This feast represents a communal tribal celebration signifying their permission to consume the harvest from their gardens. Before this celebration, they are prohibited from eating any harvest from their gardens, including corn or betel nut from neighbors or other places. They gather for this tribal feast because they

feel a sense of ownership over the *pen fini* inherited from their ancestors. In this sense, *pen fini* serves as a symbol that binds them together or provides them with a specific identity within the social order.

If we pay close attention, obedience to family and ancestral ties becomes a source of strength for unity. We often find this when they say, “If our parents have said so, then we children have to follow it, because our parents have experienced it before”. This expression gave them a basis for obeying their elders and ancestors. They believe their parents have already experienced life's bitterness, so their command is the truth based on life experience. This attitude of respect and obedience made them agree to unite under the call of *pen fini* as a legacy from their ancestors that binds and forms their identity.

In relation to ceremonial feasting practices, the *Atoin Meto* community observes a communal dining ritual following the harvesting of *pen fini*. This collective commensality functions as a symbolic manifestation of familial and tribal communion. Community members congregate within the tribal dwelling to partake of the first harvest, specifically the *pen fini* and supplementary agricultural yields. This tribal feast establishes social cohesion through the shared consumption of the *pen fini*—a food source bequeathed by their ancestral lineage. Consequently, *pen fini* may be interpreted as a material symbol of tribal solidarity, ritually enacted through the communal consumption of its first harvest, thereby reinforcing collective identity through symbolic commensal practices.

In my view, the experience of *pen fini* as a tribal bond presents an opportunity to explain unity in a broader scope. The provision of a symbol as a unifying element aligns with their lived experience. However, it becomes quite apparent that when they discuss *pen fini*, there is a tendency to emphasize tribal uniqueness. I observed this indication in the FGD [Focus Group Discussion]. Although they agree on certain aspects, such as curses or suffering as consequences of mistreating the *pen fini*, they still strive to demonstrate their tribal distinctiveness by negating aspects that don't belong to them. Nevertheless, I believe the opportunity to adopt the concept of 'one symbol' as a community binding element presents a chance to discuss a single symbol of faith that unifies the entire community.

Pen Fini is a Treasure of Wealth and the Seed of Life (Human being)

Pena na teu bon, Osa ma maus, Maus tol atoni ma nal atoni: Corn changes, becomes wealth, and people. According to our informants, they received this expression from their parents. Their answers were the same when we asked what they understood from this expression. They explain it very simply. “If we eat corn, we will gain strength and water (sperm). Strength helps us to work and obtain wealth in the form of food and other necessities, while sperm helps us produce offspring”. All of this comes from the *pen fini* that we eat. *Pen fini* (*R*) is present as a distinct food in their understanding (*O*), and they interpret it as the *origin* or *source* of the strength and life they receive (*I*). The interpretation of *pen fini* as a source of wealth and power is their belief. The explanations given to us as researchers were their attempts to convince us of what they believed to be accurate. The power gained through *pen fini* (food) is evident to them. Their conviction that *pen fini* has given birth to children and grandchildren and kept their ancestors alive underscores this bond.

In my view, their understanding of *pen fini* as a source of life and wealth constitutes a belief system. Within the realm of belief, things cannot be measured by rational explanation. This belief is part of the wisdom that has been formed since their ancestors' time. For them, food is a source of strength for work and also a source of power for procreation. They also believe that if they haven't conceived children after marriage, they need to perform a simple

ritual in the round house where the *pen fini* is stored. Interestingly, this round house is referred to as the women's house (*ume bife*).

From Pen Fini to Heavenly Bread

After finding several themes in the *Atoin Meto* people's appreciation of their *pen fini*, in this section, we dialogue these themes with themes in Christian reflection on the Eucharist. One of the essential themes that will be referred to is Jesus, the Bread of Life, in the Gospel of John 6:25–59. If this text is seen as a whole as a unified narrative (narrative analysis), then the coverage of this text starts from John 6:1–71 (Joihin, 2010). Narrative analysis is part of the literary approach. This approach assumes that the text must be seen as a unified whole. This approach focuses more attention on the *final form* of the text to find the overall meaning of the text (Barus, 1999). The feeding of 5000 people can be seen as a preparation for teaching about the bread of life (Joihin, 2010; Perkins, 2000). John used miracles as preparation to show who Jesus was (Perkins, 2000). By feeding physical bread to 5000 people, Jesus showed that physical bread alone was not enough. Believers must go further to seek the Bread of Life (Harun, 2015). The miracle is closely related to Eucharistic theology (Flanagan, 2002).

“The primary substance that the human body requires is physical food”. Without food, humans cannot do anything. However, for humans, food is not about material things that fulfill their physical needs. However, it is also a symbol containing specific values that are lived in their culture (Nurti, 2017). For humans, food is related to the way humans build relationships. Food and how to eat are two things integrated into human life. Through food and eating, humans can transcend themselves and others around them. The ability to transcend physical things into values that can be held as strengths is one of the basic abilities of humans that differentiates them from animals. This ability allows humans to interact through symbols (Dillistone, 2002). Through symbols, humans form communication networks among their social groups. The symbols in human life are closely related to physical matter and everything humans can sense. For example, “wind” contains certain qualities, such as giving life and cooling. Humans can transcend these qualities as a force that moves and destroys while still using the wind as a symbol. Thus, the meaning of a religious symbol (the transcended divine) always connects with a secular (worldly) symbol. However, a symbol may have no meaning at all (dead) when the symbol is sufficient for itself (Dillistone, 2002). The symbol dies when humans are reluctant to transcend the physical and material world that colors their lives.

Nevertheless, symbols remain a part of human life. Humans are always looking for new symbols to build communication between fellow humans. However, it must be admitted that the instrumentalist-mechanical way of thinking has conditioned humans to ignore the values behind a particular symbol. In a world that ignores transcendental issues more and more, efforts to bring back and spread habits and beliefs related to self- or group transcendence through symbols need to be paid attention to.

The framework presented by the evangelist John in presenting the teaching about the bread of life could be the framework or method for today's theology and pastoral. Jesus first gave physical food to the people (John 6:1–15). John presents several vital messages in this narrative to prepare the discourse on Heavenly Bread. John emphasized Jesus' initiative to feed the people (Harun, 2015). This initiative provides an overview of the preparations to reveal Jesus' identity. Philip's answer and Andrew's words show that they did not know who Jesus was (Harun, 2015). To prevent food waste, Jesus further instructed the disciples to gather the “extra” pieces of bread rather than the “leftovers” (John 6:12). The Indonesian translation and several translations use the word “remainder” to translate the word *ἀπόληται* (*apolētai*). At the same time, other translations translate it with the word *lost* so that it becomes *so that*

nothing is lost (cf. The Thomson Chain: Reference Bible, King James Version). The word *ἀπόληται* (*apolētai*) comes from the word *ἀπόλλυμι* (*apollumi*): kill, destroy, eliminate, destroy (Kittel, 2006). (https://biblehub.com/greek/strongs_622.htm). If translated as “so that nothing is lost”, we can conclude that the excess of bread symbolizes the eternal life that cannot be destroyed.

The disciples are asked to be responsible for the availability of this bread for the people in the future (Harun, 2015). Next, John presents a long conversation about the bread of life (John 6:25-71). An essential part of this narrative is when Jesus rebukes the crowd who followed Him with worldly motivations (John 6:26). Jesus invited them to work for food that cannot perish, namely, food that gives eternal life. Here, Jesus begins to refer to Himself as the Bread of Life. Up to this point, what is meant by the term “Bread of Life” is all of its mission, words, and work that congratulate us (Harun, 2015). Then, Jesus declared himself to be the “Bread of Life”, which was his own “flesh” that would be given to give life to the world (Harun, 2015). The Jews who took this statement literally found it so strange and disgusting that many of them withdrew (John 6:66). For Christians, these words of Jesus are a guarantee of union with Him in the Holy Eucharist. When a Christian receives the sacred host, he welcomes Jesus and unites with Him. This union brings salvation (eternal life). There is a movement pattern from bread, or physical food, to bread, or spiritual food. The experience of eating barley bread doubled by Jesus becomes an essential experience for believers to experience and understand Jesus as the Bread of Life.

We can transfer this framework or teaching method to the perspective of the Atoin people, using the *pen fini* as the basis for teaching about the bread of life. *Pen fini* is physical food, which gives them strength and life. This meaning is contained in *Pena na teu bon, Osa ma maus, Maus tol atoni ma nal atoni*. *Pen fini* provides security for their lives, just like the barley bread that Jesus multiplied. Many people seek Jesus because there is an *experience of being full*. At this point, the experience of being complete with worldly bread becomes a stepping stone to talk about the *experience of spiritual satiety* in the teachings of the Bread of Life. *Pen fini* is the food that brought life to their ancestors. *Pen fini* is also the food that sustains them now. However, they all died in the end. At this point, *pen fini* guarantees their physical life. *Pen fini* is the source that gives them life. *Pen fini* does not guarantee eternal life. As Christians, they must seek that heavenly food. They must go deeper from earthly food to heavenly food. The *pen fini* must lead them to the *eucharistic bread*.

In interviews and FGD, the Atoin Meto people said that the planted *pen fini* would grow in three nights and four days. They interpreted it as something similar to the resurrection of Jesus. It can not be taken for granted because, as a science, this conclusion must come from systematic and logical reasoning. Nevertheless, from a phenomenological point of view, this experience deserves attention. They seek an understanding that satisfies their thirst. They want to reconcile what they received from their ancestors with the Christian faith they now live by. However, suppose theology is widely seen as an activity of believers seeking to understand their faith. In that case, this simple conclusion already points to the fact that they are trying to understand their faith through concrete experiences. Suppose humans' concrete experiences are one of the *loci theologici* (Bevans, 2003), then their concrete experiences above need to be considered by a theologian as an entry point to their understanding. The Atoin Meto experience of being “full” and “sufficient” relates to local food as the basis for theologians and pastoral practitioners to speak of the Eucharist as “food that gives life to body and soul” both on earth and in heaven.

In the context of *missio ad intra*, local terms are used to indicate the uniqueness of the Eucharist in the Christian tradition, which has its opportunities. It was apparent when we asked them about the

phrase “from the Eucharistic Bread, Heavenly Treasures, and Life”. There are several expressions they give, including: (1) *nako u tunu honis nem mu`if neno tunan ma honis*; (2) *mnaht neno tunan nem neo-Mansian mbin pah pinan tal nal bal bal*. Meanwhile, from the *missio ad extra*, the contribution of their unique understanding and treatment of their staple food to the Universal Church is respect for food as *living*. Respect for food is essential to interpreting heavenly food spiritually. A religious or divine symbol always takes a human form. Understanding and appreciation at the physical level lead to understanding and appreciation at a higher level. From the perspective of Abraham Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs, the need for self-transcendence begins when physiological needs have been fulfilled. The Eucharist takes the form of food and communion (related to eating) to reveal the mystery of Christian salvation. If the attitude towards eating and banqueting on a human level is no longer appreciated, then the move towards transcendence stops because the symbol has become self-sufficient and has been corrupted at the most basic level.

Based on the results of interviews, we found that special treatment for local food differs from foreign food (hybrid corn and foreign rice). The older generation and married people treat *pen fini*, and food is generally better. Unmarried young people should have paid more attention to treating food well. Children are also influenced by instant food. There is a paradox between their actions and words. We have the impression that there is a “fear” of a “curse or bad experience” that will befall them as an incentive for them to respect the *pen fini*. They try to convince us about the ritual's effects, which brings them good things if they do it right. According to Taylor, this way of thinking is magical because it is built on the assumption that if a ritual is carried out by its members correctly, it will produce the desired desires (Pals, 2006). The fear of “disease” and “death” caused by magical thinking can be explained by the offer of a “new way of thinking”, namely doing works that bring eternal life (John 6:27). This approach can be a finding for pastoral work among the *Atoin Meto* community. It also emphasizes one of the tasks of the gospel, namely, to illuminate cultures.

Several notes as conclusions from the dialogue are as follows: first, these two elements, both *pen fini* and the Eucharistic bread, cannot be simply equated. The fundamental reason is that *pen fini* functions as a preparation for explaining the Eucharistic bread (bread of life). The difference between the two also lies in the realm of effects from receiving these elements. *Pen fini* affects only earthly life, while the Eucharistic bread encompasses both earthly life and heavenly life. Second, the similarity between these two elements is the fact that both are signs of grace for humanity, although their scopes differ. *Pen fini* relates only to tribal members, while the Eucharistic bread is for all faithful believers from various tribes and races.

From Tribal Communion to Universal Communion

Generally, each tribe has a *pen fini*. It was confirmed in interviews and *FGD*. Each tribe claims to keep and preserve *pen fini* based on tribal traditions. According to them, the treatment of *pen fini* is generally the same; there are only a few minor differences in each tribe. *Pen fini* symbolizes tribal unification. It can be seen in several activities. Parents will pass on the *pen fini* to the eldest child. These *pen fini* would be distributed to family and tribal members when they had cleared land for planting. They gather at the tribal house to receive *pen fini* from the eldest son, who has been given the right to rule by the previous parents. For them, *pen fini* unites them because *pen fini* was a gift from their ancestors. The *pen fini* they received has given wealth and life to their ancestors, including today's children and grandchildren. *Pen fini* is the symbol that unites them.

The theme of tribal communion is the basis for discussing church communion in the Eucharist. For this reason, we try to show Paul's theology of *bread* and *wine* in the Eucharist, which are symbols of communion (*koinonia*) with Christ and with the congregation. Paul emphasizes in 1 Cor. 10:16: *Is not the cup of thanksgiving communion (κοινωνία (koinōnia)) with the blood of Christ? Is not the bread we break communion (κοινωνία (koinōnia)) with the Body of Christ?* There are two important notes for this text (Martasudjita, 2005), *first*: fellowship (*κοινωνία*) in the text above emphasizes the aspect of participation. If participation is the emphasis in the word *κοινωνία*, then the fellowship that Paul means here is, first of all, participation. Through participation, this fellowship exists and is visible. *Second*, this text can also be read as a basis for belief in the real presence (*realis praesentia*) of Christ in the Eucharist and as a symbol of the *koinōnia/κοινωνία* of the people with Christ and the people with all other people. In Paul's perspective, communion in the Lord's Supper (Eucharist) is through participation. Paul's teaching about communion (*communio/koinōnia*) responds to the congregation's attitude in Corinth. The congregation there makes divisions based on groups when they hold banquets (*agape*) (1 Cor. 11:21, 22) (Martasudjita, 2005). Paul rebuked them and taught them about true fellowship.

In *Atoin Meto* community life, participation is an integral part of the elements that form a community. They even expanded this element of participation to cover everything related to life. It can be seen in the ritual of eating young corn for the first time. According to our informant, tools to help them manage the land (*tofa*) are given special treatment. When we asked, "Why is that? Isn't a tofa an inanimate object?" They answered, "For us, "tofa" also has a "role" to help us prepare the land for planting". From an insider's perspective (*emik*), this awareness is about the importance of participation in human life. From an outsider's perspective (*Ethics: Researchers and the Secular World*), this might be seen as an act of deviation (inanimate objects made to appear alive). If we put this perspective in value discourse, this awareness hides what they (*Atoin Meto*) experienced, namely that all elements must function well to achieve something. This fact is emphasized when they say, "Can you imagine? If the "tofa" is damaged, can we work well?". They want to emphasize the importance of participation for the success of an action.

The lesson to be learned from this study of *Atoin Meto* about the Eucharist's appreciation (*missio ad intra*) is that the faithful's participation in the Eucharist and all of its components are the primary prerequisites for the Eucharist's implementation, which is based on Jesus' command. About participation with Christ and the People, the message that can be given is that if eating *pen fini* emphasizes one's communion with members of other tribes, then by eating *Eucharistic bread*, the faithful affirm unity (*communio*) with Christ and the People of God. If *pen fini* symbolizes tribal unity, the Eucharist symbolizes union with Christ and the whole church. The outgoing message (*missio ad extra*) that the *Atoin Meto* community can contribute to the Universal Church is that participation in the Eucharist is the main requirement for celebrating the Eucharist effectively by God's commands. To reach a consciousness of community, one must first gain "awareness" of the *role* that each component plays in the total. The *Atoin Meto* Society stresses to all church members that everything, even the most minor thing or tool, significantly impacts the total and should be regarded as such. Just as *pen fini* symbolizes uniting tribes, in the church, bread and wine are symbols of unifying church universality that must be maintained. Maintaining certain symbols that have taken root and become part of the Church Tradition must bind all people (the Universal Church) in one unified sign. The language regarding this symbol can be analogous to the local cultural context to unite local and universal horizons.

In interviews and *FGD*, it was clear how each ethnic group tried to assert their identity. They try to show the uniqueness of each tribe. It offers one of the characteristics of humans when speaking from

their perspective (*emic*), namely the tendency to strengthen their identity within a particular ethnic group (Schreier, 1985). From an outsider's perspective (*ethics*), this kind of identity assertion can potentially divide defenses. Thus, theologically, the formation or expansion of identity is a necessity. Expanding symbols will help form a broader alliance. If *pen fini* symbolizes tribal communion, then the Eucharistic Bread and the Eucharist are symbols of the communion of all people who believe in the risen Christ.

Conclusion

The findings in this research are: (1) The *Atoin Meto*'s understanding of *pen fini* can serve as preparation for understanding several themes in Eucharistic theology. This is based on the Gospel narrative of John 6:25-59. John prepares the discussion about the Bread of Life by presenting the narrative of Jesus feeding physical bread to His followers. The experience of being satisfied by physical bread is preparation for the teaching about the bread of life. (2) The cultural themes found are that *pen fini* is a human or king who must be respected, *pen fini* symbolises tribal unity and *pen fini* represents wealth and the seed of life. These cultural themes can serve as preparation for discussions about Eucharistic theological themes such as heavenly bread and *communio*. The discussion of these two themes can be briefly formulated as follows: the experience of *pen fini* as living, source of life, and property forms the basis for discussing Eucharistic bread as a source of life and invaluable spiritual treasure. Furthermore, the experience of tribal communion (*communio* of the tribe) through eating *pen fini* together can serve as preparation for communion in the Eucharistic feast. Additionally, *pen fini*, as a symbol of tribal communion, can become a reference for explaining the one Eucharistic bread that becomes a symbol of communion with the risen Christ. (3) Based on these findings, I recommend further research to explore the possibility of an inculturation Eucharistic celebration that embraces *pen fini* in one of its ritual parts. Whether it is the blessing of *pen fini* before planting or harvest thanksgiving celebrations. However, what needs to be seriously considered is the magical way of thinking that still appears to be embedded in the understanding and consciousness of the *Atoin Meto* community.

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