

Binocular vision and archaic religiosity in Minahasa



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The encounter between Christian culture and religion in Minahasa has attracted attention because it reflects various resonances and fluctuations. Furthermore, culture contains strong social and religious values, and both aspects are scrambling to confirm the identity of each other's traditions. Therefore, this study aims to find the Minahasa cultural religiosity value that can be an object for conversation with Christianity. By using a descriptive qualitative approach and interviews with several sources, the cultural values were adopted and communicated with Christianity through Stephen Bevans's contextual approach. Hence, the awareness of the supernatural, belief in life before and after death and the celebration of *foso rummages* reflect the religiosity value that can be discussed with Christianity.

Contribution: Through the examination of religiosity in Minahasa, its expressions and values, the study provides alternative contribution to Christian missiology. The result shares rich insight that leads to a specific meeting point for contextual study. Minahasan cultures and Christianity could engage in harmony.

Keywords: religion; culture; Christianity; Minahasa; Stephen Bevans.

Introduction

Both religion and culture co-exist and intersect as well as need each other. Jaco Beyers (2017) emphasised that these two aspects have a close relationship in displaying aesthetics and ethics. Furthermore, it has been stated that to study religion, cultural exploration is an obligation, and it emphasises three things that become the hypothesis. Firstly, there is a wide cultural migration, and secondly, the boundaries between both aspects are blurred; hence, it is difficult to label their identity. Lastly, the existence of religion in society has become a cultural guardian (Beyers 2017). This argument emerges from the expectation of synergy and integration of culture and religion. However, the wrong approach will fall to an attempt at syncretism. On the other hand, inculturation and acculturation efforts have been carried out by theologians and sociologists who are better known for contextual studies. Bevans (1992) emphasised that theology does not exist without context. Emanuel Martasudjita (2021) highlighted cultural existence as the basis of theological extension. Bayers stated another dimension of the cultural concept, which showed that culture contains spiritual values with similarities to ancient or modern religions, including Christianity. Therefore, the boundaries between religion and culture have become blurred because their existence grows, lives and develops together.

The correlation between religion and culture is clearly described. Vassilis Saroglou and Adam Cohen (2011) explained the potential that religion is part of and influenced by culture. Religion also performs interactions that affect cognitive, emotional and cultural actions. Therefore, it is difficult to separate the values of both aspects. This is because integration has merged, and each identity cannot be independently displayed. Embracing the archaic values of people's lives will be able to separate culture from religion, hence providing an affirmation of a cultural society. Also, the excessive integration and synergy between both aspects were expressed by Kunawi Basyir. The dependence between these two aspects causes the value boundaries to become hazy. Religion is considered an entity capable of providing ethical awareness; hence, cultural expressions become more meaningful and ideal. On the other hand, religion requires cultural media to appear in society, because reality and actualisation can only be presented by cultural life. As a result, religion carries out syncretism, and cultural values are eroded and converted to the religious form. The strong integration between the two causes religion to become more exclusive, while culture is considered an ancient and *alifuru* belief that is insignificant compared with modern civilisation (Basyir 2017). In line with Basyir, Laode Bauto (2014) revealed that religion and culture are not independent but are interconnected in their dialectics and harmony in affirming life

values. Religion is seen as a direct creation of the Creator, while culture is a way of life that is formed and inherited by humans based on the spiritual experience of creativity, taste and intention. Bauto (2014) explicitly stated that their relationship causes mixing of values, even though both dimensions are not always the same, and they even have the potential to contradict each other. The cultural portraits in Indonesia have experienced a shift in meaning because of the mixing of religious and cultural values. With this reality, the spiritual dimension of culture needs to be separated and presented as a social identity. Moreover, displaying the cultural life value will open up space for the community's emic appreciation that has been modified by religion.

Culture contains life values that can become theological objects for society. For example, Bruri Wutwensa found religious values in cultural wisdom in Biak. Also, a totem is an expression of religiosity created from local struggles and is understood as the highest reality of society or lived with as a helping god. This idea facilitates the formation of harmonious living because it helps to display a strong dimension of solidarity.

This cultural reality has not undergone transformation or contextualisation with Christianity, but it is emic of the original community culture. Wutwensa (2020) asserted that this value reflects the same characteristics as religion and can be used as an object of theology. Also, Toraja has a *Ma'nene* culture, which practises changing the clothes of dead bodies and drying corpses that have long died. Pitriani Padatu (2021) explained that *Ma'nene* reflects the value of hospitality that can be used as material for religion. Meanwhile, in Java, Pudjio Santoso (2013) revealed that the *unduh-unduh* ritual is an expression of community gratitude for harvest. This cultural heritage is also material for the Javanese religion.

The encounter between religion and culture in Minahasa has caused reactions and clashes. For example, the presence of the Evangelical Christian Church (Gereja Masehi Injili di Minahasa, GMIM) (History of GMIM 2021) is considered an important factor that should be responsible for the massive exploitation of wild and exotic animals. Furthermore, the presence of the Seventh Day Adventist Church (Gereja Masehi Advent Hari Ketujuh, GMAHK), with its fundamentalist and conservative food dogmatics, has obscured the true identity of the people in Minahasa. In terms of divinity, the Christian concept has confused the idea of respecting ancestors for the Minahasa community, as embodied in the practices of Kampetan, Mukur and others. On the other hand, religious groups denounce ancient practices as part of idolatry and have led to the actualisation of syncretism. Christianity also considers the religious concept of the Minahasa people to be ancient or *alifuru*; therefore, it has no significance to modern civilisation. This fact has pushed marginalised indigenous peoples to become part of a second-class community. Also, the rights of indigenous peoples are not respected, and the existence of their cultural heritage has been eroded by the religious presence that appears arrogant to throw away the

noble values of the ancestors. The State's recognition of cultural existence and indigenous peoples who still hold the concept of ancestor- veneration have received discrimination in the form of administration recognition, verbal crimes and others. Iswan Sual, a Minahasa customary holder who is a religious leader and believes in God Almighty, said that the persecution received by this traditional group was because of negative perceptions and stereotypes about culture as well as people who still practise it in connection with spiritualism. Therefore, there is not enough space for conversation and interaction between religion and culture in Minahasa. This requires an effort to find opportunities and potentials to be used as integration objects between the two contexts.

Rikson Karundeng (2021a, 2021b) emphasised that Minahasa people have high spiritual values, in recognition of how all dimensions of life are related to spiritual values. Therefore, it can be interpreted that the ancestors are very religious. This fact shows the cultural emic has a special religiosity concept without having to mix or integrate with Christianity. However, this requires an effort to pick up cultural concepts that reflect religious values. Karundeng gave an example of how Christianity carries out cultural acculturation because it finds religious values in the Minahasa culture. In the belief relating to death, dead people's souls separate from their bodies. For three days after death, the souls do not know that they have died. It is only after the third day that the souls become aware. Therefore, the *mumper* ritual is held as a memento for the souls of the dead to know the reality of their death. This practice expresses a strong religious value because, in the *mumper* ritual, there is appreciation and magical interaction between the living or close relatives of the deceased (Karundeng 2021a). Furthermore, the tradition of *foso rummages* or thanksgiving reflects spiritual values, where this practice is held in appreciation to the Almighty for giving good weather for farmers to harvest abundantly (Pamantung 2019; Tongotongo, Rumampuk & Mulianti 2021). This practice has been used by Christianity to build communication and contextualise culture; hence, *mumper* and *foso rummages* have become part of religious practice. Therefore, mixing between religion and culture occurs, and the value of this practice becomes blurred. The effort in this study certainly does not have the intention of acculturation or inculturation. Instead, it is an attempt to find religious values in customs and traditions that can be discussed with Christianity. Stephen Bevans (1992) proposed a model to bridge Christian culture and tradition from the perspective of intercultural theology – anthropological, praxis, translation, transcendental and synthetic. Also, several models can potentially be used to build interactions between Minahasa culture and Christian values. However, the community has customs and beliefs from their ancestors with the potential to become objects in religion and theology. This requires an effort to find religious expression from cultural sources.

Considering the cultural expressions, there is a potential religious dimension that can become the theological object.

Bringing out the original values of culture helps to understand the peculiarities of the community's cultural footprint. Furthermore, there will be a cultural appreciation followed by a sense of responsibility to preserve and respect ancestral heritage. In the end, cultural values expressed in religiosity will provide space for religion to interact with culture. The problem formulation in this study is: what religious values can be obtained from Minahasa culture that can be the conversation object with Christianity from the perspective of Stephen Bevans's contextual theology studies?

Method

This study used a qualitative-ethnographic approach, and the arguments about religion and culture are built based on library data and academic literature. Furthermore, Minahasa cultural values were collected from interviews as well as discussion group forums and then articulated into various indicators, thereby creating cultural values with a religiosity dimension. The awareness of the supernatural, the meaning of *tou* and the concept of family ties as well as life before and after death were the studied topics through special interviews with traditional elders, believers, culturalists and academics. Moreover, the religious values of the culture were processed and interpreted as an object for theology and religion.

Discussion

Supernatural consciousness

The divinity concept of the indigenous Minahasa community has attracted a lot of attention because it exudes spiritual values with a unique character. Meanwhile, *Sang Khalik* or God is consistently mentioned in daily practice. Various titles are assigned to God as a representation that describes the divine personality and how it relates to humans. Therefore, the mention of God is very heterogeneous among the community. For example, on the one hand, *Opo Empung* is an expression describing the Most High (Sopacoly, Lattu & Timo 2019), where the religious community interprets it as the highest God in the Christian tradition. On the other hand, *Opo Empung* can punish and express anger over disobedience (Saruan 1991). Other terms are often used besides *Opo Empung* among indigenous peoples, including *Opo Walian Wangko* (Maukar 2018), *Empung Walian Wangko*, *Kasuruan Wangko*, *Empung* and *Rengarengan*. These titles refer to the Almighty as Creator, source of life (long life, good luck, health and prosperity), guardian and protector. However, among the diversity of the Minahasa people in mentioning the Almighty, *Opo Empung* is the most popularly used term in community practices and activities. Furthermore, there is no significant difference between the terms of the Almighty that are understood by the people; therefore, the use of *Opo Empung* has accommodated other pronunciations. The interesting thing is that the term *Sang Khalik* in the Minahasa tradition is not singular but plural. Hence, society relates to God based on personality and character or divine authority, which is described in various ways. This diversity shows the attitude of supernatural awareness and submission to powers beyond human logic.

Furthermore, Iswan Sual, the leader of God's believers, also known as the *Lalang Rondor Malesung* group (Adhitama 2021) in Minahasa, emphasised that God in the original view of the ancestors is a figure that cannot be comprehensively understood. This is because God has spiritual and supernatural powers beyond human reasoning. The vast difference between God and humans causes the adherents of beliefs or tribal religions to greatly appreciate the sacredness of God. Sual (2021) also emphasised that in worship practices, the Malesung community only performs the ritual once a month, which is believed to be during the full moon. This fact shows that the mention of the Creator with various titles is only accomplished once a month. Furthermore, sacredness is highly recognised by the cultural community; hence, there is respect and appreciation for God. The people believe that God cannot be fully understood but can only be approached to get an imperfect picture of divinity. Therefore, awareness of divine power that has been practiced for generations is a reflection of the supernatural awareness of beliefs in Minahasa.

The culture does not rely on ancestral domination, but there is a supernatural awareness in the worship centre. Furthermore, ancestors are respected as predecessors with various kinds of knowledge and magic, who have passed down ideologies and life systems. The media that connect the Minahasa people with their ancestors are manifested in various rituals such as *kampetan*, *mumper* and others. In practice, *kampetan* is an activity to summon ancestral spirits with a mediator. This activity is usually carried out to ask for instructions and advice from the ancestors who have certain wisdom and supernatural powers. This ritual is led by a *tonaas* and a translator. The people believe that the ancestor who possesses the mediator or one of the people who have been chosen, usually *tonaas*, will then speak and give advice to the community in the Makatana language or the original Minahasa language that is then translated by the translator (Tumbelaka, Lattu & Samiyono 2020). Therefore, the spirits of the ancestors can connect with the modern world. When viewed from the kinship perspective, this practice exudes a dimension of unity and fellowship between the ancestors and their descendants. In other words, the *kampetan* ritual has a prominent family dimension. This can also be seen in the *mumper* practice, where family members who have died first will be served food and drinks at a separate table. Denni Pinontoan (2015) explained that the table that was prepared was part of an appreciation for family members who had died to still enjoy the dishes being served. Rice, fish, vegetables, coffee, tea and cigarettes are usually a variety of dishes for the dead spirits. Rikson Karundeng (2021b) emphasised that in the family-owned plantations, a special tent is often made for food preparation. The close kinship connection displays a system of familial power where the community respects their dead ancestors or families. Karundeng revealed that the tradition of lighting candles and singing at the scene of an accident where people died is a part of the cultural heritage that is passed down from one generation to another to accompany *mukur* (Pinontoan 2015:7). In the Minahasa tradition, it is believed that during

the first three days, the deceased is not aware that the *owak* [bodies] and *gegenang* [human souls during life] have separated; hence, assistance is needed during the transition between life and death. Furthermore, the tradition of lighting candles continues to be carried out on major holidays such as Christmas, New Year, *foso rummages* and others (Karundeng 2021b). This shows the kinship and strength of the people's respect and appreciation for their ancestors.

However, relations with ancestors are not the main focus. The ancestors are believed to have supernatural abilities that can intervene in the next life; hence, they are respected. Nevertheless, the main centre of supernatural power lies in the Creator, who is described in various ways. The interesting thing is that the highest God in Minahasan belief is *Opo Empung*, and other designations have the meaning of being the oldest ancestor. Pinontoan (2015:5) stated that *Opo Kasuruan Wangko*, another term for the Creator, means the oldest and most high ancestor. The word *suru* is the seed, and *opo* is an ancestor. Literally, it means the Great Ancestor, God the Most High or the Giver of Life. It is on this eldest ancestor that all the respect and appreciation of the people are centred. Also, God is considered a supernatural being with high sacredness and has abilities beyond human reasoning and logic. For example, Freddy Wowor (2021) showed the saints asked for rice seeds with an empty jar, and it was given by the Creator who was sent down from the sky. Sual (2021) told other supernatural stories about God's presence by miraculously providing food and drink. These stories were an intuitive experience that is closely embedded in the collective memory of the community. This fact emphasised that the indigenous Minahasa culture has a supernatural consciousness attached to the ancestors and the Creator. Also, the people are not subject to science that can be logically managed, but there is another metaphysical dimension involved in the cosmological system; hence, they respect supernatural powers.

Charity and the post-death dimension

The Minahasa people believe that death is a transition from one phase of life to another. Karundeng explained that the physical body will perish, but the souls of the deceased will live and lead another life. Therefore, death in the view of society is understood as the transfer from the world's realm or passing through the current world to another. It is believed that people who have died just passed through life in this world and will continue another chapter in the afterlife. The *Mukur* will go to a place of peace at the top of a hill, where the journey will be taken, and then arrive at the peak with a sense of calm with no more complexities like the previous life. The peak of life after death is called *kasendukan*. However, the journey of humans during life will greatly affect life after death. People who do charity and benevolence will be referred to as *mukur leo* or good souls and have the right to go on in humility. Meanwhile, those who commit crimes during their lifetime are referred to as *mukur leos (kaleleran)* or evil souls and will wander around disturbing humans who are still alive. These souls will wander because there is no place in the desert, thereby living to disturb the community

(Karundeng 2021b). It can be seen that there is a close correlation between the present life and the afterlife from the Minahasa perspective. The people who are alive are unconsciously required to do good towards others; hence, they do not accept the consequences of a bad life after death. On the other hand, all forms of goodness during life will be reaped in a beautiful place called *kasendukan*. Therefore, cultural heritage and way of life have been arranged without written codification and passed down orally from one generation to another. The awareness related to the order of life and morals is concrete evidence that the Minahasa tradition greatly respects religious values without having to rely on Western religions. Scriptures and religion are not described and articulated in a narrative or text but are actualised and lived in daily practice. The relationship between fellow creatures is maintained through collective memory that encourages the people to maintain good deeds throughout life. Therefore, the next phase of life can be a blessing for *mukur leo* who will take another trip to *kasendukan*.

The linkage of present and future life represents a sustainable living system. This explains that the position of Minahasan spiritual beliefs is far from the hedonism or atheism concept that is widely rejected by the world's major religions. This culture teaches social responsibility that has futuristic consequences. Accordingly, various good deeds are practised to live a good life in humility. This can be seen from other perspectives, such as environmental responsibility. Furthermore, the people are required to protect the environment as part of their moral responsibility towards nature inherited from their ancestors. Rinto Taroreh (2021) showed there is a tradition of casting a certain spell when slaughtering animals for consumption; hence, the human souls who slaughtered will not be responsible when there is a procedural error. In terms of taking plants for consumption, Pinontoan (2015:6) stated that there are personal rituals or special prayers to be offered in order to avoid violating the laws of nature. This is in addition to preserving the environment, and it has a correlation with life after death. Social and environmental responsibility includes two dimensions. Firstly, all good deeds carried out will be inherited by other descendants, and secondly, the deeds and responsibilities carried out in accordance with customary beliefs cause the souls to get a place in *kasendukan*. Consequently, the charitable deeds of humans have significance for the afterlife.

Foso rummages: Expression of social values

The tradition of giving thanks known as *foso rummages um banua* has been practised since the time of the ancestors as a form of gratitude for the blessings bestowed by the Creator. The ancestors ritualised thanksgiving for agricultural harvests by presenting offerings such as *rerumetaan* [offerings and special gifts to God] and *ja se weteng* as symbols of respect. The peak of the ritual of *foso rummages* is carried out before sunrise. This habit is carried out for the purpose of gaining new spirit and passion after the completion of work. Furthermore, when the sun rises, the ancestors open up and even invite other people from outside the *wanua* or *roong*

[village]. In the original tradition, the *tonaas* are responsible for timing the start of the growing season; hence, a great harvest can be prepared. The early period of the growing season also requires the implementation of *foso* or rituals. The *tonaas wangko* is a representation of the community in determining the time of planting and harvesting, as well as the leader of the *foso rummages* ritual. The main motivation for this practice is based on gratitude for the harvest obtained, whether abundant or not. This is carried out because the implementation of the ritual will determine harvest in the following season (Tongotongo et al. 2021). This practice manifests the vertical and horizontal relations of the Minahasa community. Also, dependence on the Creator is reflected in gratitude for the harvest that is given. The people put their full hope in God, wishing that the next harvest season will yield good results. This is marked by traditional rituals carried out before planting and after harvest. On the other hand, social relations are well constructed because of the participation of the local community in this ritual. Delly Pusung (2020) revealed that *foso rummages* will become increasingly popular when it is overflowing with crops. However, harvesting with minimal yields is still celebrated, because gratitude is usually in harmony with the harvests obtained. According to historical records, this ritual was carried out as an expression of gratitude to God for the success of agricultural harvests in the form of rice, fruit and other products. Furthermore, Josef Saruan (1991) stated that in general, the ritual of *foso rummages* becomes a medium that manifests Minahasa culture into social and individual binding functions. In line with Saruan, Wolter Weol, Heydemans and Langi (2021) showed that this ritual became an object of social unification in the context of the *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* state.

Minahasa cultural religiosity: Objects of cross-religious conversation

Bevans provided various models of contextual theological studies. The main purpose of this study is not to build a theology with Minahasa values or to construct a new formulation that can be accepted by the culture. This study aims to find the religious values in a culture that can be discussed in the Christian context. Therefore, it is necessary to briefly describe Bevans' contextual ideas with the opportunity use them as a bridge for interaction between culture and religion. For example, the anthropological model promotes finding Christian values in every culture. Religious expressions can be found in language, rituals, behaviour and intuitional experience (Bevans 1985:187–202). In approaching the Minahasa culture, it can be concluded that various local traditions radiate strong Christian religiosity values. The supernatural awareness of the Creator shows how society has respect and appreciation for divine powers beyond human reasoning. They have an unwritten belief that there is a supernatural power as the oldest ancestor that needs to be worshiped with awe. People's behaviour towards the Creator reflects their intimacy, but also vice versa, performing deep gaps between the sacredness of *Opo Empung* and ordinary people. The traditional rituals that are carried out every month show how these worship practices contain the value of the

Almighty. Consequently, it can be concluded that the cultural heritage has religious values that accommodate Christianity.

Furthermore, the closest model to the anthropologist in Bevans' view is praxis. This model is an extension of anthropology because it views social and economic situations as realities that need to be involved in discussing culture and religion. Also, culture should be viewed as a necessity that needs special analysis and attention. Bevans (1985:198–199, 2018) underlined the dynamics in a culture where there is a harmonious relationship between cultural knowledge and Christian practice. This refers to Karl Barth, who believes that good actors are good listeners. This model penetrates sight and hearing, which are sensitive to cultural existence, but it focuses on the development of social and economic situations. Furthermore, the practice of *foso rummages* involves strong social and economic activities. The kinship that exists between a local community and another shows there is a built vertical relationship. This ritual does not require the personal identification of foreign guests who wish to participate. In fact, the practice has experienced various shifts in meaning such as determining celebrations, ritual meanings and social perceptions (Pusung 2020; Tongotongo et al. 2021; Weol et al. 2021). Similarly, this celebration involves economic activity. In the ancient context, a good harvest period was determined by the rituals performed by the community. Meanwhile, in the modern context, there are negative stereotypes that link this activity to a hedonistic lifestyle (Zelika et al. 2017). Accordingly, this practice can be discussed with Christianity using a praxis approach.

Another model that can be used in this discussion is transcendental, which focuses on the individuals who experience and live in the context of that culture. The starting point of this model rests on personal experience and reflection (Bevans 1985). However, belief in life after death cannot be proven by science, but it is embedded in the collective memory of society, and it is believed to be a hereditary reality. Living in a different world is an experience that is told and should be respected as part of a unique cultural identity. Also, the existence of *mukur leos* or evil souls cannot be proven by any study, but it is the personal experience of people who have interacted with other realms. Therefore, the existence of *kasendukan* and other worlds that are believed in by the Minahasa community need to be respected as a living culture. The findings of this study are expected to be an alternative to religious and cultural discussions. Bevans (1985:194–196, 2018) used the model synthesis term to describe how the uniqueness of a culture can be developed and applied to other broader contexts and dialogued with other traditions. The characteristics on the cultural identity of *foso rummages*, life before and after death and the awareness of the supernatural power of the Creator are options for interaction, synergy and conversation for Minahasa culture and Christianity.

Conclusion

Awareness of the supernatural, the view of life before and after death and the *foso rummages* celebration show

the Minahasa community's religious values, which can potentially be discussed with Christianity. Furthermore, the theory outlined by Bevans helps the culture to be connected with Christian traditions. Therefore, this study can be the basis and reference for developing models of cultural and religious discussions in other contexts.

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Authors' contributions

C.A.R. constructed the main idea and defined the sensitive research principles. In other words, the research design and idea came from C.A.R. H.H. reviewed the manuscript and added significant ideas to the text. J.S. validated the results, supervised the writing of the text and significantly reviewed and edited the manuscript drafts.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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Data availability

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Disclaimer

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