

A Study of the Worldview in the Mythology of the Dani Ethnic Group in Papua and Its Ethical Implications Through the Lens of Christian Perspective

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Abstract

This study investigates the interplay between Dani cultural values and Christian ethics, focusing on how contextual evangelism can be effectively implemented within the Dani community in Papua. Utilizing a qualitative approach with an ethnographic methodology, the research combines field observations and content analysis to explore the impact of traditional Dani beliefs, particularly those encapsulated in the Nabelan-Kabelan and Naruekul mythologies, on Christian ethics and practices. Field observations involve immersive engagement with the Dani people to understand their cultural practices and religious expressions, while content analysis of relevant literature provides a theoretical foundation for interpreting these practices within the context of Christian teachings. The findings reveal that traditional Dani beliefs present both challenges and opportunities for contextual evangelism, highlighting the need for a nuanced approach that respects cultural values while introducing Christian ethics. The study concludes with recommendations for effective evangelistic strategies that integrate cultural insights with biblical teachings to foster ethical transformation and spiritual growth within the Dani community.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menyelidiki hubungan antara nilai-nilai budaya Dani dan etika Kristen, dengan fokus pada bagaimana penginjilan kontekstual dapat diterapkan secara efektif dalam komunitas Dani di Papua. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metodologi etnografi, penelitian ini menggabungkan pengamatan lapangan dan analisis konten untuk mengeksplorasi dampak kepercayaan tradisional Dani, khususnya yang terkandung dalam mitologi Nabelan-Kabelan dan Naruekul, terhadap etika dan praktik Kristen. Pengamatan lapangan melibatkan keterlibatan mendalam dengan masyarakat Dani untuk memahami praktik budaya dan ungkapan religius mereka, sementara analisis konten literatur yang relevan memberikan dasar teoretis untuk menafsirkan praktik-praktik ini dalam konteks ajaran Kristen. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa kepercayaan tradisional Dani menghadirkan tantangan dan peluang bagi penginjilan kontekstual, menyoroti perlunya pendekatan yang cermat yang menghormati nilai-nilai budaya sambil memperkenalkan etika Kristen. Studi ini diakhiri dengan rekomendasi untuk strategi penginjilan yang efektif yang mengintegrasikan wawasan budaya dengan ajaran alkitabiah untuk mendorong transformasi etis dan pertumbuhan spiritual dalam komunitas Dani.

Kata kunci: budaya Dani, penginjilan kontekstual, etika Kristen, Papua, etnografi

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Introduction

The Dani people, also known as the Balim society in Papua, have a rich cultural heritage deeply rooted in the mythologies of Nabelan-Kabelan and Naruekul. These mythologies significantly influence their ethical behaviors and societal norms. This study aims to explore how these cultural values interact with Christian teachings, particularly in the context of contextual evangelism. The primary research problem is the presence of animistic and occult influences within these mythologies, which affect the ethical practices of the Dani people, despite their majority identifying as Christians. This creates both a crisis and an opportunity for contextual evangelism.

The objective of this research is to examine how the Gospel can be effectively communicated to the Dani people in a way that respects and engages with their cultural values while addressing the ethical issues posed by their traditional beliefs. The study seeks to identify the potential for “re-evangelization” by integrating Gospel teachings with the Dani cultural framework, thus promoting a fruitful Christian life that aligns with biblical ethics.

To achieve these goals, the research employs a qualitative methodology, including literature review, field observations, and interviews with local stakeholders. This approach helps in understanding the intersection of Dani cultural practices with Christian ethics and provides a foundation for developing contextual evangelistic strategies.

The results of this study reveal that the Dani people's adherence to traditional myths such as Nabelan-Kabelan and Naruekul presents significant challenges due to their animistic and occult elements. These elements influence ethical behavior and create a need for effective contextualization of the Gospel. The findings suggest that applying a “transformation model” or reculturation approach can bridge the gap between traditional beliefs and Christian teachings. This involves deculturalizing erroneous cultural practices and empowering cultural values that align with the Gospel. The study also emphasizes the importance of addressing “spiritual warfare” as a key factor in transforming the Balim community towards ethical practices that are consistent with biblical teachings.

In summary, this research contributes to the understanding of how to effectively engage with the Dani people through contextual evangelism, addressing both cultural and spiritual challenges. It highlights the need for further research and practical applications in similar contexts both within Papua and globally.

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach with an ethnographic methodology to explore the intersection of Dani cultural values and Christian ethics. Ethnography is chosen due to its suitability for understanding cultural practices and their impact on religious beliefs within the Dani community. The study involves two primary methods: field observation and content analysis of relevant literature. Field observation is conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of the Dani people's cultural practices and how these interact with Christian teachings. Researchers immerse themselves in the Dani community, participating in daily activities and rituals to observe firsthand the influence of traditional beliefs such as those encapsulated in the Nabelan-Kabelan and Naruekul mythologies. This direct engagement allows researchers to gather qualitative data on the community's ethical behaviors and religious practices, providing insights into the practical challenges of contextual evangelism.

In addition to field observations, the study utilizes content analysis of several key books and relevant literature. This analysis includes theological texts, anthropological studies, and cultural assessments that provide background on the Dani's traditional beliefs and their implications for Christian ethics. By examining these sources, the researchers aim to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the Dani's cultural and spiritual values. This literature review helps in framing the contextualization of the Gospel within the Dani cultural framework and informs the development of effective evangelistic strategies.

Combining these methods allows for a comprehensive understanding of the Dani community's cultural and spiritual dynamics. The ethnographic approach provides contextual depth and real-world insights, while content analysis offers theoretical grounding and supports the development of strategies for effective contextual evangelism. Together, these methods contribute to a nuanced analysis of how to bridge cultural practices with Christian teachings, addressing both the ethical challenges and opportunities for fruitful engagement.

Results And Discussion

An Introductory Description of the Origin of the Name of the Dani Ethnic Group in Papua

Papua is the name of a place (οἰκουμένη/oikoumenē) and a people (ἔθνος/ethnos/ethnic groups) that in the past was called "Nieuw Guinea" or "New Guinea" or "Nova Guinea" or "Nueva Guinea" ("New Guinea"), a name given by the Spanish sailor Yugo Ortiz de Retes, who visited the land of Papua in 1545. Prior to this, in 1521, the name "Papua" referred to the region and its inhabitants, as recorded in a Spanish journal during the time Spain controlled the Moluccas Islands and surrounding areas.

A hypothesis that the term "Papua" comes from the Malay word pua-pua, meaning "curly," was once popular among anthropologists. However, this notion faded with the re-adoption of the name "Papua" after a period of using "Irian Jaya."

Regarding the name "Irian" (Iryan) used for the people of Papua, there are several opinions. According to Koentjaraningrat, the term iryan was proposed by Frans Kasiepo at the Malino Conference in 1946. The post-World War II usage originates from a legend in the Biak Numfor region, meaning "the sunlight that drives away the mist on the sea" or "land that rises from the sea" or "our land," which gave hope to fishermen seeking to reach the mainland. On the other hand, Indonesia's first president, Soekarno, is said to have popularized the word Irian as an acronym for "Ikut Republik Indonesia Anti Nederland" ("Join the Republic of Indonesia, Anti-Netherlands", See Koentjaraningrat, ed. 1994, 4)

The term "Papua" more likely reflects the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the communities (ethnic groups) inhabiting the area from Sorong to Merauke, who bear the label "Melanesian ethnicity." According to anthropologists, the term "Melanesia" refers to the people of Papua, who are considered to have spread megalithic culture from Micronesia eastward toward Polynesia (See Benny Giay, 1986 11-12, and Koentjaraningrat, 1994, 29-30).

The researcher agrees with what has been expressed by both Benny Giay, a Papuan cleric and scholar (1986:8), and Agus Alua (2008), that Papua is a uniquely remarkable region. There is no other place in the world where such a diversity of tribes, languages, religions, and cultures exists within a relatively small geographic area. The distinctiveness of Papua also became evident when the glory of the Gospel began to reach the Melanesian people and the land of Papua, when God sent Ottow and Geisler, who set foot on Mansinam Island on February 5, 1855. From that

moment, the Kingdom of God began to extend its authority and influence over the Melanesian people in the land of Papua, eventually giving birth to churches and bringing about cross-sectoral transformation (economic, spiritual, cultural, political, and social) throughout the region, including among the Balim people in the Central Highlands of Papua.

The Dani people, or the Balim (also spelled Baliem or Parim) community, are an indigenous group living in the Baliem Valley (Baliem Grand Valley) in the Central Highlands of Papua, which is now part of Jayawijaya Regency and its neighboring regions, such as Puncak Jaya Regency, Puncak Regency, Yahukimo Regency, Tolikara Regency, Nduga Regency, Yalimo Regency, Central Mamberamo Regency, and Lanny Jaya Regency. These areas are inhabited by around seven major tribes. The western area is home to the Lani tribe; the southern and southwestern regions are inhabited by the Mek and Nduga tribes; the northern area is home to the Walak tribe; and the eastern region is inhabited by the Yali tribe. The Baliem Valley, from Kurima to Pyramid, is inhabited by the Hubula tribe, which later became more widely known as the "Dani people."

The Balim people are commonly referred to as the "Dani people" or the "Dani tribe," although they do not refer to themselves in this way. Instead, they call themselves "Hubula people" or "Balim people," or in their native language, akhuni Palim meke. According to the researcher's observations, the term "Dani" (or Ndani) is not actually used by the Balim people to identify themselves, and they even dislike it. There are several opinions regarding the origin of the term "Ndani." Some suggest it was used as a derogatory term by the Yali people to the west, directed at the people in the east, with a hidden meaning (see Susanto-Sunario, Astrid, ed. 1994, 11). Others believe that the name was used by anthropologists who conducted expeditions in the Central Highlands of Papua in the 1920s (see Frans Lieshout, 2009, 18).

In this paper, the author does not focus on the origins of the people or conduct an in-depth ethnological study of the name and identity of the ethnic group. Instead, the emphasis is on the worldview within the mythology of the Dani tribe based on their socio-cultural-religious context. Therefore, the author uses the term "Dani tribe" in this paper for practical reasons, specifically to discuss the worldview in Dani mythology and its ethical implications.

What the researcher means by the "Dani tribe" or the Balim people refers to all the Papuan people who live in the Balim Valley and its surroundings, forming an ethnic group that distinguishes itself from other ethnic groups based on a conscious awareness of their unique cultural and biological identity. This distinctiveness is considered exceptional compared to other communities in Papua and elsewhere. In this article, the terms "Dani tribe" and "Balim people" will be used interchangeably with the same meaning.

By the grace of God, on April 20, 1954, the Gospel began to take root in the Balim Valley through the arrival of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CAMA) mission. Gradually but surely, the Dani tribe responded and began to accept the Gospel, which eventually gave birth to the Evangelical Tent Church (Gereja Kemah Injil). God continued to open doors for the expansion of His Kingdom through the proclamation of the Gospel, followed by the arrival of Catholic mission organizations (on February 5, 1958), which gave rise to the Catholic Church. This was then followed by the Australian Baptist Missionary Society (ABMS), which founded the West Papuan Baptist Church, the Asia Pacific Christian Mission (APCM), the Regions Beyond Missionary Union (RBMU), The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM), and the Unevangelized Field Mission (UFM), which later gave birth to the Evangelical Church in Indonesia (GIDI). Additionally, the presence of the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft (RMG) in the Baliem Valley expanded the ministry of the Evangelical Christian Church (GKI) in Wamena, Yalimo, and Yahukimo.

The presence of these churches, as a result of the proclamation of the Gospel since 1954, has undoubtedly been a great blessing to the Balim people. The message of the person and work of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior—whose death on the Cross redeems and grants eternal life to every sinner who believes in Him—has transformed many of the attitudes and actions of the Dani people. In Christian teachings, this is known as “repentance” (Alua, 2006, 105-107).

However, after some time, according to the author's observations, the Gospel that was preached by Western missionaries (from America, Europe, and Australia) and accepted by the Dani tribe did not take deep root in the life of their faith (both in concept and practice/ethics). As a result, it gave rise to nominal Christians, or “Christians in name only,” within the Dani churches. Moreover, Dani Christians have easily converted to Islam (Bensley, 1994).

The researcher observes and speculates that the Gospel that has been preached lacks a connection with the “cultural values” or “concepts” (framework) of the Dani tribe, particularly regarding the concept of “eternal life,” which is a central theme of the Gospel (John 3:16). The concept of “eternal life” according to the Gospel is not well understood or internalized in relation to the Dani tribe’s cultural understanding of eternal life, and vice versa. This has resulted in many members of the Dani tribe becoming “Christians in name only” or even converting to Islam, often driven by material reasons or various tempting offers (Bensley, 1994, 91-95). As expressed by the German theologian, pastor, and researcher Dr. Rainer Scheunemann, an observation of the mission history in Papua generally leads to the conclusion that many areas were only “Christianized” but not truly evangelized. This method of Christianization represents a large-scale people movement that has resulted in many aspects that are actually contrary to the Gospel but are considered “not problematic.” According to Scheunemann, even though development has occurred, the influence of old beliefs and occult practices remains significant among many Papuan communities that have become Christian (Scheunemann, 2006, 12-13).

This has resulted in Christian faith not being implemented in the daily behavior (ethics) of Christian communities in Papua. The call to follow Christ should be accompanied by a life that aligns with this calling. In other words, faith in Christ should be reflected in daily life through words, actions, and behavior, which are the ethical responsibilities of Christ's disciples.

Papua is the easternmost province in Indonesia, distinguished by its vast land area, extraordinary natural resources, and rich culture, making it fascinating, unique, fertile, and full of hope. However, behind the various distinctions of Papua, there is the term “Papuan Paradox.” The “Papuan Paradox” refers to Papua's wealth of natural resources while lagging behind in human resource development, education, economy, technology, communication, and health compared to other regions in Indonesia. Similarly, in spiritual matters, despite the majority of the indigenous population being Christian, the fruit of the Holy Spirit that glorifies God and becomes a light to others as a consequence of faith in Christ is rarely evident.

It is ironic because this contrasts sharply with the findings of sociologist Max Weber (1971), known for his thesis on “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,” which asserts that advancements and economic growth (including the Industrial Revolution and the development of technology, information, and communication) in Germany, Europe, and North America were driven by Protestant Christian ethics, particularly the doctrine of “predestination” taught by Calvin. However, despite the Gospel having entered Papua for over 150 years and the Baliem Valley for over 50 years, there is no significant evidence of “Christian ethics” in the Christian community of Baliem, Papua, that stimulates economic growth and human resource development. It is no longer a secret that the Papuan community in general, and the Dani tribe in particular, are poor, static, and backward despite being Christian. One of the causes is their tendency to be lazy

and dependent on the government and incoming communities. Many are even willing to abandon their faith in Christ and convert to other religions for material or monetary promises (Bensley, 1994, 91-95).

Furthermore, there are issues of disintegration among the Papuan people, including the persistence of "tribal wars" as a legacy of their old cultural practices. There is even a dichotomy within Papuan society itself, often evident in phenomena such as: "highland Papuans versus coastal Papuans"; "native Papuans versus mixed-race Papuans"; "Papuan indigenous communities versus Papuan intellectuals," and so on. This reality is indeed ironic, as it contrasts sharply with European societies, which, despite their barbaric backgrounds and penchant for warfare since the Greek-Roman era, became unified and strong through the spread and development of the Gospel of Christ. Why is it that the transformative essence of the Gospel does not seem to have an impact on Papuan society?

Therefore, in this article, the researchers are interested in exploring "A Study of the Worldview in the Mythology of the Dani Ethnic Group in Papua and Its Ethical Implications." This study will demonstrate that the cultural concepts of societies strongly influenced by animism and occultism have shaped a "worldview" that is incorrect, and these views have become "living values" that manifest in ethical behaviors similar to those of pagan societies, despite their Christian affiliation. Ultimately, the author will advocate for cultural transformation among the Dani people of Papua through contextualized Gospel preaching that engages and empowers their cultural values. Based on the author's observations and experiences living in the Baliem Valley, Papua, and interacting with its people for nearly three years, it is evident that after more than 50 years of evangelization, there is a need for reevaluation and renewed evangelism. Of course, the primary factor in this ministry effort should not rely on methods and human strength, but on the liberating power of the Holy Spirit. With the transformation of life brought about by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit for the Dani people of Papua, it is hoped that they will experience faith growth and develop a Christian ethics that aligns with God's will as revealed through the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

The Dani Ethnic Group's Mythology Regarding God

Similar to traditional Melanesian societies and those that adhere to animism-dynamism in general, the Dani ethnic group understands "God" in an abstract manner as an "absolute reality" (Walhowak). Although God is considered a "reality," traditional Dani society does not perceive Him as an "entity" or "person" (such as the Father God or Jesus Christ). Instead, God is viewed as something abstract or hidden that manifests through symbols such as sacred objects like *kaneke*, *hareken*, *su kepu*, *tungan*, *tugi*, and certain places like mountains, forests, traditional houses, trees, or caves that are believed to be inhabited by spirits (Susanto-Sunario, 1994:20; see also Alua 2006, 12).

The Dani people's belief in God as a reality, yet abstract, is also reflected in their belief in and fear of the "supernatural realm." The supernatural realm is seen as an invisible force that controls mountains and forests and can manifest as ordinary human beings; both men and women are referred to as *Kugi Erimbo/Kwewanakwe*, and rulers of rivers and grass are called *limbu*. Simeon Itlay and Benny Hilapok (Susanto-Sunario, 25-26) describe this reality as follows: a. Special places: *ma ima*, *seynma*, *wutalo*, *abulakma*, *sinakma*, *wio agamua*, *omarikmo*, *watlaku*, *watikam*, and so on; b. Trees/rivers: *o sin*, *o wele*, *o win*, *o isiwat*, *o werap*, *o poum*, *o huba*, *o kuwo*, *o petel eka*, and so forth; c. Lakes/rivers: *I palim*, *I parim*, *I uwe*, *I yugunopa*, *I siekelek*, *I lantik*, and so

on; d. Animals: walo palu (patola snake), suwe iwiwilo (iwiwilo bird), suwe uwene (duck), yeke (dog), wam duaga (duaga pig), and so on; e. Cosmic elements: o mulikin (sun), o sud/tugi/he elabohge (moon), o miyo (rain), o pogot (sky), o ogat (earth), and so forth.

For the Dani people, the perception of God is rooted in the past and is expressed through symbols as well as manifested through beliefs in ancestors/spirits of the dead, similar to what is often found in ancient animistic-dynamistic belief systems and various ceremonies or rituals. Thus, although the Dani people understand the “concept of God” as Walhowak, which is abstract and not personal, they still view “God” as a real or tangible reality. Consequently, the Dani people often call upon or pray to God with phrases such as: Li meke ti keme ero ete make (Source of all sources) and Pogot-Agat eki Legerek Make (King of heaven and earth/that which underpins the heavens).

In Wamena, even with the presence of formal religions (Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism), there are still places of worship for the dead or spirits called wakunmo. Wakunmo is a small structure used to place symbols representing the spirits of the recently deceased, or it can be found in certain caves. The presence of these spirits is recognized through natural phenomena and through symbolic representations such as specific sacred objects (Alua, 12). According to Niko Asolokobal (see Susanto-Sunario, 53-54), the rituals performed by the Balim people generally express solidarity or relationships with God, fellow humans, and the universe, including: nesok aii (to strengthen balance with humans, animals, plants, and the universe), wako (to combat illness), agat wesa (for soil fertility and crop harvest), oka isago (human relationship with territorial boundaries), syilo, pawu (specific prohibitions), and he yokel (honoring women in relation to marital purity).

It can be concluded that the Dani people of Papua have a unique “concept of God” within the worldview of traditional Melanesian religions characterized by animism-dynamism. God is viewed as an abstract cosmic ruler who is not personal but possesses power exceeding that of humans, as He governs both the spiritual and empirical worlds. The traditional Dani people refer to God with the term Walhowak. When the Gospel/Christianity entered and developed in the Baliem Valley, the name of Jesus was translated as Nakmarugi or Naruekul. According to Dani understanding, the names Nakmarugi or Naruekul are highly secret and should not be known by children or women, nor should they be heard by other groups, especially enemy alliances. This is because, in their view, our group might possess “something” more accurate, while other groups are mistaken. Similarly, other groups should not learn the secret of our truth to prevent them from retaliating using the correct names Nakmarugi or Naruekul. The Balim community is very concerned if the secret names Nakmarugi or Naruekul are used in church teachings (Alua, 23-24). Thus, the Dani people's belief in God, whom they refer to as Walhowak and is also often called Nyopase Kain, is akin to the concept of a “vague God” or a “God who is not personally known,” similar to the concept of agno to Theos in ancient Greek mythology.

Ethical Issues Arising from the Dani Ethnic Group’s Animistic Worldview Regarding God

By understanding God in an animistic context as an abstract cosmic force rather than a personal deity, the Dani ethnic group's worldview is shaped in a way that “does not necessitate personal accountability to God.” This directly influences their living values and behavior, or ethical actions. For example, deviant or sinful acts are seen as causing disruptions in the natural order, which have cosmic implications such as natural disasters and suffering. Sin or transgression is not viewed merely as a violation of God's law, but rather as a disturbance in the natural order.

Because they believe in an impersonal God, they lack a clear concept for understanding sin or transgression.

The Dani's animistic concept of God leads them to not recognize to whom they are sinning. They do not acknowledge that they sin against Walhowak. Sin is seen as affecting only human relationships or interactions with nature, not affecting one's relationship with Walhowak.

Therefore, to address deviant actions or sins, rituals of reconciliation are performed, such as sacrificing a pig (Wam). However, this is not intended as atonement with an angered God due to sin but rather aims to restore harmony with others and balance within nature. Ultimately, unethical actions such as adultery, theft, laziness, murder, tribal warfare, occultism, and other behaviors categorized as sins by the Bible are only considered as "disharmony" and can continue with the assumption that they will eventually only become problems with fellow humans and nature, but not with God.

The Dani Ethnic Group's Mythology Regarding Life

As is commonly believed by the entire Melanesian community, for the Dani ethnic group, the most fundamental and central values for their culture and religion are the "continuation of life," "protection of life," "maintenance of life," and "celebration of life." According to Agus Alua, all activities of the Papuan/Melanesian people are directed towards sustaining and enhancing life. Life must be preserved, continued, and continually renewed. It must be protected from various threats and maintained harmoniously within the entire cosmos, and periodically renewed through rituals. For the Papuan people, the focal point of the cosmos is the existence of human beings themselves. Although humans are the center of the Papuan worldview concerning the universe, they do not exist in isolation but live in interdependence with plants, animals, stones, rivers, and the spirits of ancestors (Alua, 2006, 14).

Generalizations about the Melanesian/Papuan society's reverence for "life" are reflected in their concept of "eternal life," as experienced by the Dani people of Papua. Similar to the broader Melanesian/Papuan belief, the Dani conceptualize or understand "life" in relation to messianic hopes or future expectations often referred to as "cargoism" (cargo cult). According to Benny Giay (26-27), the characteristics of cargoism expectations in Papua are as follows: (a) Hope for a social, economic, status, and environmental change; (b) Hope for a new order of life, a new world akin to what was experienced in the past; (c) Demand for religious rituals to hasten the arrival of cargo, a new world, and new life; (d) Expectation that ancestors who have passed away will return with the Messiah or a prophet bringing cargo, food, clothing, money, economic and technological progress, freedom from all forms of oppression, knowledge, peace, social justice, status, and all that is considered beneficial for a successful life.

As will be discussed below, the Dani people hold cargoist (cargo cult) expectations through two main myths: "the Nabelan-Kabelan myth" and "the Naruekul myth."

The Nabelan-Kabelan Myth

The Nabelan-Kabelan myth, also known as Nabutal-Habutal or Nanggonok-Kanggonok, meaning "the changing of our skins and your skins" or "old skin replaced with new skin," is a legend among the Dani people that believes "eternal life" once existed in human history. Life in the beginning is described as peaceful, harmonious, fertile, healthy, abundant, and prosperous. Initially, humans had good relationships with each other and harmony with the universe.

This ideal state deteriorated when humans began to argue, fight, wage wars, and become hostile towards each other. This “relational sin” led to the loss of abundance and peace among humans and the dissolution of the harmonious existence that once prevailed. Now, humans face the problem of broken relationships with each other, the environment, and the universe (horizontal rifts) without direct connection to God (vertical). Amidst this disharmony between humans and their surroundings, a longing arose to recreate the initial ideal and peaceful state of human history, hoping to bring this atmosphere back to the present. The Dani people believe that the struggle to restore the “Garden of Eden” on the ruins of destruction and rift is their need, aspiration, and life goal. Consequently, the traditional idiom *Yogotak hubuluk motok hanorogo* (tomorrow will be better than today) emerged as a contemporary motto for the Dani people in the context of cross-sectoral development.

Amidst the hope for the return of the “Garden of Eden” and its beautiful and peaceful state, the legend of Nabelan-Kabelan or Nabutal-Habutal or Nanggonok-Kanggonok arose. According to the legend, the ancestors of the Balim people regretted the bird Ibibilo or Pirigobit, which always outpaced the snake Bonon. Despite never shedding its skin and dying, the bird had wings and could fly faster than the snake, which often shed its old skin for a new one but was slower compared to the bird. The snake could only crawl on the ground and follow from behind, but was outpaced by the bird, which had a short lifespan. The ancestors regretted this situation, believing that if the snake Bonon had outpaced the bird Ibibilo or Pirigobit, humans would have continually shed their skins and lived forever. This would mean that humans would achieve an ideal, beautiful, peaceful, and harmonious state with one another forever as a synthesis of the legend of the bird Ibibilo or Pirigobit and the snake Bonon.

Ultimately, a prophecy arose about the coming of Nabelan-Kabelan or Nabutal-Habutal or Nanggonok-Kanggonok at a time in the Dani people's lives when there would be “a changing of old skin for new skin.” In other words, the Pirigobit symbolizing “death” would be replaced by the Walo Mbonon symbolizing skin shedding or resurrection. The Dani people do not know how to achieve this “skin changing” (Nabelan-Kabelan), but their ancestors have believed, hoped for, and prophesied the coming of Nabelan-Kabelan.

Thus, the myth of Nabelan-Kabelan or Nabutal-Habutal or Nanggonok-Kanggonok provides insight into the concept of eternal life among the Balim people of Papua, which is not philosophical-doctrinal-dogmatic (teaching) but more existential-practical (existence and experience). The conclusion is that since ancient times, the ancestors of the Balim people have longed for an ideal, beautiful, peaceful, and harmonious condition both within themselves and in relation to others and their environment. Although this condition has not yet been realized, it remains a hope for the “future” that will soon materialize with the arrival of Nabelan-Kabelan or Nabutal-Habutal or Nanggonok-Kanggonok, which reflects cargo cult beliefs.

The Naruekul Myth

For the Dani people, the Naruekul myth is also a legend imbued with cargo cult elements, similar to the Nabelan-Kabelan legend. In the early times, the ancestors of the Dani lived in peace and harmony with one another and the surrounding environment. However, a man named Naruekul emerged, whose appearance was different from everyone else. During his lifetime, Naruekul often traveled from village to village and from one region to another, becoming well-known. As a result, many people became afraid of him, fearing that they would fall under his influence and power. According to Ibrahim Peyon, (2012, 124), the Hubula people in the Balim Valley referred to Naruekul by another name, Nakmarugi. The Yali people in the eastern part of

the Balim Valley called him Alabungi, Nalabungi, Limlangi, and Yeli. The Mek people in Korupun referred to him as Murummah Nalaponge and Yelu. Amidst the fear and notoriety surrounding Naruekul, a secret conspiracy arose among several people to kill him. This plan was realized, and Naruekul was killed. His body was then dismembered and distributed among the community. The distribution of Naruekul's body parts led to a scramble among people from all layers and corners of society, who fought over the pieces. According to Agus Alua (32-33), the Balim people venerate Naruekul's body parts and continue to personify them in certain objects and plants, such as: (a) Kaneke - sacred stones, ancestral heirlooms believed to be taken from Naruekul's bones; (b) Ye - similar to kaneke, used as a form of bride price and debt payment, also taken from Naruekul's bones; (c) Hepiri nesok ukut - meaning "my heel scraper," hepiri okenpalek - meaning "scraper of his blood clots," hepiri wimoak - meaning "a piece of bamboo used to kill and cut Naruekul, growing into a scraper," hepiri ab ella - meaning "scraper of his forehead veins (male)"; (d) El tellu - dark red sugarcane, from Naruekul's blood; (e) Saikbb - red fruit symbolizing Naruekul's blood; (f) Haki tob - a type of banana representing Naruekul's heart; (g) Mulikin - the sun, believed to be the warmth of the cosmos originating from Naruekul's fat dispersed into the sky when his body was cut up, thus becoming the sun. The distribution of Naruekul's body parts created unfairness among the community, with some receiving parts while others received nothing. Eventually, those who had sought the distribution of Naruekul's body parts dispersed and returned to their respective villages, hiding the parts they had obtained as personal property.

One day, while a group of people were walking through the place where Naruekul had been killed, Naruekul appeared to them. Those who saw Naruekul were frightened, stunned, and confused. However, Naruekul introduced himself, saying that he was indeed the one who had lived, been killed, had his body dismembered, and was hidden away as personal property.

According to Agus Alua (2006), after revealing himself, Naruekul delivered a message as a promise to those who witnessed him: (a) Do not hide what has been taken, namely the pieces of his body, as personal property; instead, make it the property of the group/community/clan. (b) The parts of Naruekul's body that were seized should be called kaneke (sacred objects), meaning "you have a beloved child" or "you have a cherished body." (c) The parts of Naruekul's body will become the source of your life and the life of your descendants for all time. (d) The parts of Naruekul's body will become kaneke, and kaneke will be a source of inspiration. (e) Each group/community/clan will be divided due to disagreements among them and will form kaneke.

According to the legend, after delivering his message or promise, a strong wind blew, and Naruekul was lifted into the sky. The witnesses of this event were terrified and fled. They gathered and questioned what they had experienced during Naruekul's appearance. The news of Naruekul's appearance and promise spread throughout the region. The people became afraid, realizing that Naruekul, who had been tragically killed, was not an ordinary man but Walhowak or God who created the earth and everything on it. Therefore, the people declared: "Now we must hold firmly to everything he (Naruekul) has promised and make it our guiding principle, passing it on to our descendants."

With the Naruekul myth, the Dani people's understanding of eternal life has evolved from a hope for an ideal situation (as seen in the Nabelan-Kabelan myth) to a hope in a "person or figure" in this case, the figure of Naruekul. Despite experiencing an ideal and renowned life and a tragic event, Naruekul is seen as a powerful being who reappears after death, with his body dismembered, distributed, and hidden as personal property. Naruekul, as a powerful "figure" or "individual," reveals himself to certain people and delivers a message or promise for the ideal condition or situation of the present society and its descendants. Consequently, Naruekul is

believed not to be an ordinary man but Walhowak or God who created the earth and everything on it.

Thus, the Balim people have a messianic hope known as “cargo cult,” encompassing both the ideal situation of old skin being replaced with new skin or the transformation from a bad old situation/death to a new peaceful and living situation (as seen in the Nabelan-Kabelan myth) and the hope in a human as well as God (Walhowak) who suffered to death but provides promises and hope for humanity and its descendants.

Ethical Issues Arising from the Worldview in the Dani Tribe’s Mythology Regarding Life

The crisis or problem arising from the Nabelan-Kabelan myth is the misunderstanding of the “old skin replaced with new skin” event. This is interpreted as a simultaneous change in the current context, or more broadly, that with the appearance of Nabelan-Kabelan, the Dani people will never die again, and death will disappear from the earth. When the Gospel was preached by missionaries, the Dani misunderstood how to attain Nabelan-Kabelan through the act of baptism (Alua, 2006, 104). The community rushed to be baptized, even seeking to have the recently deceased resurrected by the missionaries. They believed that their ancestors would be revived with the arrival of the missionaries. A more dangerous issue was the translation of Nabelan-Kabelan as the “replacement of old skin with white skin,” as seen in the Western missionaries' appearance (Wenda and Wenda, 2009, 45-47). Consequently, the community also wrongly believed that all luxurious items and the prosperous lifestyle of the missionaries would soon descend from heaven as a fulfillment of the Nabelan-Kabelan cargo cult event (Alua, 2006, 104). This led to questions and problems regarding the mass conversion of the Dani people through the missionaries' ministry. Is the Dani people's decision to become Christians (marked by baptism) a valid way for them to come to Christ? In other words, the Dani's faith is based on a collective decision rather than personal decision and commitment, influenced by a misinterpretation of the cultural value of Nabelan-Kabelan. As a result, Jennifer Bensley aptly describes the Dani Christian community as “card-carrying Christians!” (Bensley, 91-95).

Understanding the Nabelan-Kabelan or Nabutal-Habutal or Nanggonok-Kanggonok myth, which indicates a “mechanical” or “instant” change in life, has led to an ethical problem for the Dani people of Papua: “static life.” The community is merely waiting or expecting an event to bring about magical change or renewal, without any struggle or hard work. This is evident in the daily life of the Balim people, who actually have rich and extensive agricultural land and natural resources but do not utilize them due to their relatively static, lazy, unmotivated, and overly dependent lifestyle (not on indigenous resources). This issue is not only present among the Dani but almost across all societies in Papua (Scheunemann, 2006, 191-192). As previously stated, this is quite ironic, as it contrasts with Max Weber's *Verstehen* thesis, which connects Christian ethics with participation in both theory and practice of economic growth. Weber argues that faith in God results in meaningful and solid behavior in work (Weber, 1971). Conversely, the Christian Dani community is impoverished due to their lack of work (Scheunemann, 2006, 191-192).

The problem or crisis arising in connection with the Dani people's belief in the Naruekul myth is related to the pieces of Naruekul's body, known as *kaneke*, which are considered sacred objects and a legacy/message from Naruekul following the tragic event of his death. *Kaneke* has become more than just a “sacred item” or “charm” for the Balim/Dani people; it has become associated with certain groups/communities/clans, symbolizing power or superiority over other groups/communities/clans as Naruekul's message had intended. Thus, both *kaneke* and

Naruekul himself are perceived as “idols” for individuals and groups within the Balim/Dani society. Kaneke has become an inseparable part of “tribal warfare” and a symbol of victory over neighboring groups in such conflicts (Alua, 2006, 36-38). The Dani's belief in kaneke (as part of Naruekul's body), which has turned into a form of “occult” power or individual and community idols, impacts claims of personal and group superiority over others. This is also evident in the division of missionary areas and the presence of churches among the Dani people. There has emerged a categorization that separates or distributes evangelical services and church presence based on territorial claims. The service, based on settlement patterns and communal living (silimo), is a direct or indirect consequence of the basic concept of kaneke or silimo kanekela, initially an individual claim of superiority that later evolved into a community claim. Eventually, this has developed into claims of superiority between churches. This is indeed not recognized by the Christians from the Dani tribe in the Baliem Valley, as it concerns issues of spiritism or occultism influenced by the Naruekul mythology and the concept of silimo kanekela.

However, amidst this crisis, there is still potential or opportunity for the Gospel to engage with the cultural values of the Dani people. Through the researcher's study of the two myths, a way or bridge for contextual Gospel proclamation to the Dani people has been identified, as will be outlined below. Ultimately, this will lead to “Christian ethics” that align with the values of the Kingdom of God.

Efforts to Transform Gospel Culture to Establish a New Ethics for the Dani People, Papua

What is the Gospel? According to Yakob Tomatala, the term “Gospel” is used in Romans 1:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, derived from the Greek word euaggelion (εὐαγγέλιον), which means “good news” or “message of joy” from God regarding Jesus Christ and His redemptive work for the world. Thus, Tomatala operationally defines “evangelism” as Proclaiming Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to sinners with a message delivered with conviction, so that the sinner may repent and accept Jesus Christ as Savior, become a member of the church responsible for discipling others to win the world for the glory of Christ, thereby bringing glory to God. (Tomatala, 2007, 17-19). “Contextual evangelism” refers to the method or effort of proclaiming (explaining) the Gospel within the cultural framework of a particular culture, thus achieving a balance that is reflected in a biblically sound theological understanding of that cultural framework, so that Jesus Christ is accepted as Lord and Savior. Using this method, it is hoped that a communicator will understand and present the Gospel in a culturally sensitive manner to win as many people as possible (1 Corinthians 9:18-23).

It is unlikely that “ethical actions” or the “Christian character” referred to in the Bible as the “fruit of the Spirit” will occur naturally or on their own without the influence of God through the Gospel of Christ, which transforms sinful humans (total depravity) into new creations. There needs to be a “divine nature” within humans to manifest divine character or true Christian ethics. Conversely, the ultimate result of evangelism is not merely “winning souls” but producing Christians who diligently do good (Ephesians 2:10) or exhibiting ethical actions that please and glorify God as the salt and light of the world.

The Nabelan-Kabelan and Naruekul mythology suggests that the Dani people of Papua are anticipating a messianic/cargoist hope, both for an ideal and peaceful situation through the “old skin replaced with new skin” event (Nabelan-Kabelan) and an ideal individual or divine person who provides life and promises of salvation to the community. This individual or figure is Naruekul. Both the Nabelan-Kabelan situation and the figure of Naruekul are believed by the Dani

people to originate not from within their society but from outside it. Thus, the Dani people are essentially open to external cultural influences, including "Gospel culture." This has been demonstrated over decades by the arrival of Western missionaries who have preached the Gospel to them, as well as other "Melanesian outsiders" who have also shared the Gospel of Christ. The process of cultural acculturation and assimilation between missionaries and foreign servants in Papua has occurred without erasing the Dani people's original culture.

Therefore, contextual evangelism among the Dani people has a pathway through giving new meaning to the Nabelan-Kabelan and Naruekul mythology, in line with the essence and meaning of the Gospel according to the Bible. Through this process of inculturation, the Gospel is integrated into the culture and adjusted to the context of Dani culture. Regarding the concept of eternal life as understood by the Dani in the Nabelan-Kabelan mythology, the Gospel message about "new creation or new life given to everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior" (2 Corinthians 5:17) should be inculturated in a manner harmonious with the Nabelan-Kabelan expectation of "old skin replaced with new skin."

Similarly, the Gospel teaching about "eternal life" given as a gift to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (John 3:16; Acts 16:31) should be inculturated into the Dani's understanding of "eternal life" according to the Nabelan-Kabelan. The Christian teaching about the "resurrection of the dead" and the hope of "resurrection and new life" in the Kingdom of God/Heaven as an ideal, peaceful, and eternal situation (Philippians 3:20) can also be harmoniously inculturated with the Dani's cultural values, which long for a future harmonious, peaceful, safe, happy, and prosperous situation as depicted in the Nabelan-Kabelan myth. However, the primary focus remains on the Person and Work of Jesus Christ as the "resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

The process of inculturating the Gospel also has an entry point through the Naruekul mythology, which is understood as both human and divine (Walhowak), who died by being killed but remains powerful and has an eternal covenant. Isn't the core of the Gospel about the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is both human and divine, having died on the cross for human sins, but rose again on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), and established a "new covenant" for those who believe in Him? This New Covenant is "eternal life" in the Father's house or the Kingdom of Heaven (John 14:2-3). Likewise, the work of Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross is a substitutionary sacrifice/redemption for human sins (John 1:29; Ephesians 1:7), bears similarity to the figure of Naruekul, who also died but rose and manifested Himself, providing a message/promise as understood by the Dani people.

Thus, the "Gospel culture" in a certain degree has harmony with the Dani cultural values concerning a figure who is both human and divine, who sacrifices Himself and provides a covenant. This allows for the Gospel to become a "local culture" of the Dani people without compromising that the Gospel is equivalent to the culture. The emphasis is that the Gospel can be heard and understood within the Dani people's cargo cult worldview.

To prevent deviations in the teaching of the Gospel with absolute authority or syncretism, a process of deculturation is necessary when the Gospel is confronted with the cultural values of the Dani people of Papua. As previously discussed, the concept of eternal life in the Nabelan-Kabelan and Naruekul mythologies involves a crisis because both legends contain elements of animism-dynamism-spiritism or idol worship/powers of darkness, which are strongly opposed by the Gospel and the Bible. Therefore, a process of deculturation is needed for specific aspects of the Nabelan-Kabelan and Naruekul myths if the Gospel is to be preached and understood within the cultural context of the Dani people. Belief in ancestral spirits, often practiced through certain

ceremonies or rituals and seeking occult guidance in daily life, needs to be replaced with a new worldview. The Dani must be taught that what they regard as ancestral spirits, such as the supernatural rulers called Kugi Erimbo/Kwewanakwe and limbu, as well as the belief in kaneke as parts of Naruekul's remains, are actually evil spirits that are enemies of Jesus Christ and humanity, and only seek to destroy (John 10:10). Thus, contextual evangelism among the Dani people concerning their ancient beliefs involves not only the confrontation of concepts or truths but also spiritual warfare.

The Dani must also be assured that ancestral spirits and sacred objects like kaneke, which claim superiority over other individuals or groups, are actually powers of darkness or "gods of the age" that blind them to the light of the Gospel about the glory of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4). Similarly, the presence of kaneke, which is revered both individually and collectively as a symbol of superiority over others, must undergo a process of deculturation. The reverence for kaneke, which has historically incited "tribal warfare" among the Dani and may still have the potential to do so today, must be addressed. The superior peace brought by the Gospel of Jesus Christ should be emphasized (2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Ephesians 2:13-14). Deculturation must also occur concerning the Nabelan-Kabelan myth in relation to beliefs about the Ibibilo or Pirigobit bird and the Bonon snake. The Dani must be taught that the "replacement of old skin with new skin" or "replacement of death with life" does not rely on the power of living creatures or the universe, including animals like birds and snakes. Instead, the process of transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit, who changes every believer into the character of Christ (Romans 8:26; Ephesians 2:10). Ultimately, the Gospel, as the highest authority over all cultures, must conduct a process of cultural transformation or reculturation. This can occur within the concept of eternal life among the Dani people related to the Nabelan-Kabelan and Naruekul myths.

To introduce God to the Dani people, a "translation model" or "cultural adaptation model" can be used. Concerning the Dani's ancient belief in Walhowak (the Almighty God), an evangelist may use the term (form) Walhowak while conveying the Gospel with a different meaning (meaning) than what the Dani understand. This is possible through functional substitution, which involves retaining terms or forms known in the local context but replacing their meaning or content with the transformative Gospel (Tomatala, 2007, 41-42). Specifically, to introduce Jesus Christ to the Balim people, an evangelist might use terms like Walhowak, Nakmarugi, or Naruekul, but must also clarify the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Walhowak, who became human to redeem and save humanity from sin as stated in the Bible. To explain the work of Walhowak Jesus Christ in saving humanity, the sacrifice of His death on the cross to atone for sin through the power of His blood must be explained. It is not about achieving ideal conditions like in the Nabelan-Kabelan myths or with the help of sacred objects like kaneke as in the Naruekul myth, but through the grace and power of Walhowak Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 5:9).

The core message of the Gospel about Jesus Christ's Person can also undergo "cultural transformation" in relation to the Dani belief in Naruekul. Naruekul, who is both human and Walhowak, who died and was killed but remains powerful, manifested Himself, and rose to heaven, is akin to Walhowak Jesus Christ, who truly died on the cross for sinful humanity. On the third day, Walhowak Jesus Christ rose again, revealed Himself to His disciples, and established a "new covenant" of eternal life, ascended to heaven, and will return as the King of Glory. This is the emphasis of the Gospel message that must renew the cultural values of the Dani people.

Similarly, the Nabelan-Kabelan concept should be given a new meaning as salvation or eternal life, which is a special grace and gift to those who believe in Walhowak Jesus Christ as Walhowak and Savior, namely the eternal Kingdom of God. The status of eternal life is received

and experienced when one believes in Christ, but its full realization will occur when Walhowak Jesus Christ returns as the true Naruekul.

Therefore, what Walhowak Jesus Christ requires from the Dani people, both individually and as a community, is to believe in Him as Walhowak and Savior and to "hold fast" to Walhowak Jesus Christ as the true Naruekul. Finally, concerning the role of an evangelist, the "incarnational model" can be applied. An evangelist contextual to the Dani people must become a role model for the community, similar to Naruekul, who willingly sacrificed himself, yet whose life was of "benefit" to humanity and future generations. The proclamation of the Gospel is closely tied to the personality of the messenger. Generally, the Balim people look for a leader whom they trust and are loyal to. Therefore, the presence of a culturally contextual evangelist is as crucial as the contextual nature of the Gospel message. The life of an evangelist as a leader should be reflected in trustworthy personality and character (credibility), consistency between words and actions (integrity), a well-regarded family in the community, and always honest behavior.

One crucial aspect that must not be forgotten is the importance of spiritual warfare. Evangelistic ministry with the ethical implications of Christian teaching resulting from repentance is not merely about "conceptual debates" or "cultural transformation" but primarily about liberating people from all forms of darkness and the chains of sin. The proclamation of the Gospel is an effort to move sinful humanity from a state of darkness and eternal condemnation to the marvelous light of the Lord. The Balim people must be assured that the demons (whom they both worship and fear) appearing in the above myths are enemies of God and humanity who destroy people and can only have their power broken by the Holy Spirit of God. By utilizing the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18), Balim Christians must be willing to abandon their old lifestyle bound by the powers of darkness (occultism) and must resist all forms of temptation from demonic forces by relying solely on the grace and power of Jesus Christ.

Ultimately, the Christian community among the Dani people will grow and produce fruits of repentance through the work of the Holy Spirit, reflecting Christian ethics that glorify God and become a blessing to many people and all creation. With the contextual approach previously discussed, the Christian community among the Dani people of Papua must be taught about the "new life" that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, evident in daily living. They must learn that work and diligence are not burdens but a "calling" (as Max Weber terms it in German, *beruf*) to be performed as children of God redeemed by Christ. Laziness and a static life, under any pretext, are not acceptable to Jesus Christ. The community must also be taught to live honestly (without deception) to receive results that will meet their needs as blessings from God. Ultimately, diligence in work and honest living are responsibilities to God and stewardship for real life.

Regarding the dichotomy or polarization inherent in the ancient culture of the Dani people of Papua, which often leads to "tribal warfare" and competition between individuals and groups, such issues must be eliminated. The worldview derived from *kaneke-silimo*, which tends to have occult elements, must be broken by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, "uniting the children of God and all creation/cosmos in Christ becomes a reality as the ethical implication of the Gospel. Thus, the Gospel is not only theoretical or related to wisdom/insight, but as Schleiermacher puts it, the Gospel touches human experiences and communities

Conclusion

This study reveals that the Dani people or Balim society in Papua have their cultural values reflected in the Nabelan-Kabelan and Naruekul mythologies. This leads to both crises and

opportunities that impact the ethics of the Dani people, including Christians among them. The crisis arises from issues of animism and occultism that influence ethical behavior despite the majority claiming to be “Christians.” On the other hand, this potential can serve as an opportunity for contextual “re-evangelization” leading to a fruitful Christian life for both God and others.

As a contextual evangelist for the Dani people in Papua, one should serve as a role model or figure for the community, ensuring that the Gospel is received with conviction. Therefore, an evangelist can apply the “incarnational model” in evangelistic efforts. Contextual evangelism also aims to affirm the superiority of Gospel values over cultural values, necessitating the deculturalization of erroneous cultural elements related to the Nabelan-Kabelan and Naruekul myths. The author proposes the “transformation model” or reculturation as an approach to contextual evangelism, focusing on empowering cultural values within the Nabelan-Kabelan and Naruekul myths. By utilizing this cultural transformation model through the Gospel, which leverages and empowers aspects of Dani culture, it is hoped that this approach will serve as an alternative contextual evangelism that resonates with cultural values.

The issue of “spiritual warfare” is also a primary and significant concern for transforming the Balim community towards ethical behavior consistent with the Bible. Finally, the author acknowledges the limitations of this study. It focuses solely on one aspect of Christian theology, namely Ethics, and is limited to the socio-cultural context of the Dani people or Balim society in Papua. Therefore, it is hoped that the findings of this study will serve as a basis for further research in this field, both within the community (ethnos) and in various other locations (oikoumene) in Papua and around the world.

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