

ECOTHEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ROKO MOLAS POCO IN THE TRADITION OF MAKING TRADITIONAL HOUSES OF THE MANGGARAI COMMUNITY - NTT

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Abstract:

This article aims to show and introduce ecotheological values of “roko molas poco” ritual in the tradition of making traditional houses of Manggarai people – west Flores – East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). The approach used in collecting information about these rituals is qualitative, using the ethnographic method. The result of this research is that the “roko molas poco” ritual in the tradition of making traditional houses of Manggarai people has vibrant messages and ecotheological values. They symbolize the integrity of the Manggarai people’s lives, who have the task to build harmonious relations with all dimensions of life, including creation, ancestors, and God. These values can be used as essential themes for the inculturation of environmental theology in Manggarai people, who are mostly Catholics and generally still adhere to their ancestors’ traditions and culture. It is believed that by strengthening ecotheological inculturation, the church can easily carry out its ecological pastoral efforts in preventing a massive influx of environmental destruction.

Keywords:

ecotheology, inculturation, roko molas poco, traditional house, Manggarai people

INTRODUCTION

Ecotheological study based on local culture is one of the important contributions for saving the environment. In simple terms, ecotheology is a theological reflection that explains the need for a fully responsible human relationship to the environment.¹ This stand stems from a conviction that the natural environment is created by and belongs to God. In the realm of creation, the justice and omnipotence of God are depicted.² Through concern for nature, humans show their identity as partners of God in managing and maintaining nature.³

One of the local cultural rituals which gives a strong ecotheological message is “*roko molas poco*” ritual. This ritual is an integral part of the entire ritual contained in the tradition of making traditional houses for the Manggarai community - East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). *Roko molas poco* can be described as the process of moving logs from the mountain or forest to the village where “*mbaru gendang*” (traditional house) is made.⁴ In the Manggarai tradition, the logs that are paraded are called “*molas poco*” (mountain girl or girl who comes from the mountain). The logs, which are said to be *molas poco*, will then be used as *siri bongkok* (main pillars) in the Manggarai community’s *mbaru gendang* (traditional house) building system. This tradition, according to the author, has a very deep ecotheological dimension and is very helpful in efforts to protect and preserve the environment in the Manggarai region, which has recently been in a great crisis phase.

It must be admitted that the environmental crisis is caused mostly by an anthropocentric and short-term development orientation. The crisis has even led to ecological suicidal behavior. Jared Diamond in his book, *Collapse; How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, found 12

¹ C Deane-Drummond, “Eco Theology,” *www.Smp.Org.*, x.

² Chamamah J Kaunda and Mutale M Kaunda, “Jubilee as Restoration of Eco-Relationality: A Decolonial Theological Critique of ‘Land Expropriation without Compensation’ in South Africa,” *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 36, no. 2 (April 16, 2019).

³ Marthinus Ngabalin, “Ekoteologi : Tinjauan Teologi Terhadap Keselamatan Lingkungan Hidup,” *CARAKA: Jurnal Teologi Biblika dan Praktika* 1, no. 2 (September 28, 2020).

⁴ Yohanes S Lon and Fransiska Widyawati, *Mbaru Gendang, Rumah Adat Manggarai, Flores* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2020), 191.

environmental mismanagements that can be categorized as a form of ecological suicide.⁵ The mistakes are include intensive deforestation and habitat destruction, soil destruction, salination and barren land, water mismanagement, over-hunting, uncontrolled fishing, uncontrolled population growth, excessive exploitation of natural resources, climate change which is dominated by human feat, act of dumping toxic chemicals into the environment, uncontrolled use of energy resources, and overuse of the earth's photosynthesis.

In the Catholic Church, Pope Francis through the Encyclical *Laudato Si* points out several fundamental issues related to the degradation of nature as a 'common home'.⁶ First, pollution and climate change significantly impact the survival of the poor who depend on natural reserves and ecosystem services such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry. Second, shortage and low quality of water resources. All these are caused by the uncontrolled mining industry and waste accumulation. Moreover, there is a tendency of water privatization which makes it a merchandise subject to market laws. Third, the loss of biodiversity due to increased deforestation. In fact, biodiversity is a very vital resource for future life, not only for food, but also for the healing of various diseases, including creating a certain balance in the universe.

According to the results of the study of Ruteng Diocese Synod III 2013-2015, in Manggarai (Diocese of Ruteng), the locus of this research, the ecological destruction can be seen in three main things, namely mining industry which clearly destroys environmental balance, forest destruction due to unsustainable management models, and poor refuse management which causes environmental pollution and endangers public health.⁷ All forms of ecological degradation lead to a decline of the quality of human life. In such a situation, there is an urgent need to bring an ecological theology, or what is commonly called ecotheology into ritual practices and local culture.

⁵ Jared Diamond, *Collapse; How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (USA: Penguin Books, 2005), 486–496.

⁶ Fransiskus, "Laudato Si" (Jakarta: Departemen Dokumentasi dan Penerangan KWI, 2015), 16–24.

⁷ Panitia Sinode III, *Dokumen Sinode III 2013-2015 Keuskupan Ruteng Pastoral Kontekstual Integral* (Yogyakarta: asdaMEDIA, 2017), 242–245.

Ecotheological contextualization or inculturation is an actual theme in the ecological crisis. Many theologians have written on this theme. Several names will be mentioned here. First, regarding the inculturation of Catholic theology and rituals into Manggarai culture. A complete study of Maribeth ERB shows that the interest in the inculturation of Catholic theology and rituals into Manggarai culture is still limited and depends on the interests of Church leaders: bishops and local priests.⁸ Mgr. Wihelmus van Bekkum, the first bishop of Diocese of Ruteng (1961 – 1972), was known as a bishop who was zealous in pursuing inculturation. He even got a nickname the “bishop of the buffalo” because he introduced and practiced Eucharistic celebration combined with “*tudak kaba*” ceremony (the traditional prayer on sacrificing a buffalo) in an important ritual of Manggarai culture. In addition, Mgr. van Bekkum was also known as the one who gave birth of “*Dere Serani*” (Christian songs), a book containing collection of songs used in cultural rituals of the villages in Manggarai which have been adapted into Christian content. The book is still used frequently now and is a very popular book in the liturgy of Catholic Church in Manggarai.

Even though Mgr. van Bekkum had laid a strong foundation for inculturation efforts, the enthusiasm for inculturation was not so vivid in the following periods. In fact, many indigenous church leaders and community leaders consider local rituals as non-Catholic practices. This stand is exacerbated by the education system for priest candidates which immediately brings a child who has graduated from elementary school into an educational institution for priest candidate (minor seminary). As a result they lose touch and sensitivity to their own culture. Until now, the practice of inculturation of the Catholic Church into Manggarai culture is still artificial and limited in using traditional songs and dances in liturgical celebrations; celebrating the Eucharist in Manggarai language every 3rd Sunday of the month.

Second, regarding ecotheology. A.S. Webber’s article which is titled “*Haitian Vodou and Ecotheology*” shows the contribution of local religions, in this case the Vodou religion based in West Africa, in the efforts to save the environment from ecological degradation.⁹ According

⁸ Maribeth Erb, “Between Empowerment and Power : The Rise of the Self-Supporting Church in Western Flores, Eastern Indonesia,” *SOJOURN: Journal of Social in Southeast Asia* 21, no. 2 (2006): 204–229.

⁹ A. S. Weber, “Haitian Vodou and Ecotheology,” *The Ecumenical Review* 70, no. 4 (December 2018).

to Webber, the theological framework of the Vadou ritual significantly points to a message of respect and the importance of establishing a harmonious relationship with the environment, where the spiritual world lives (the supernatural being). More or less similar findings were also conveyed by Cate Williams who examined the practice of “Forest Church” groups in several countries, especially in England. According to William, the practice of “Forest Church” clearly shows nature as a place of encounter with the highest being or God.¹⁰ Furthermore, Erin Green in an article entitled: *Sallie McFague and an Ecotheological Response to Artificial Intelligence*, emphasizes the need of an ecotheological response to the negative impact of artificial intelligence development which actually leads humans to become the center of cosmos, marginalizes and oppresses others, and strengthens robotization of consumption which ultimately damages the environment.¹¹ By referring to McFague, Green shows the importance of developing a kenosis spirituality to oppose the spirit of destroying environment. In the context of the ecological crisis, what is needed is the vanishing of expensive, greedy and oppressive lifestyles and social structures that actually encourage and strengthen environmental destruction. In addition, Erin Green also goes along with Sallie McFague’s idea of contemplating the whole world as the body of God; that God was incarnated in all creation in the world, not only in the flesh. Thus, there is a deep appreciation of the nature’s sanctity, the connection between all elements of life and respect for biological and social diversity.

This paper intends to show a down to earth ecotheological model by raising certain local culture practices that have ecotheological meanings and messages. In a specific way, the author raises and introduces one of the cultural rituals carried out by the Manggarai indigenous people, which is commonly called “*roko molas poco*”. The Manggarai people on the one hand are Catholics, but on the other hand they still carry out cultural rituals, including the “*roko molas poco*” ritual which is usually performed in the context of establishing a new “*mbaru gendang*” (traditional house). In various traditional rituals, including in the “*roko molas poco*” ritual, it can be seen and read that Manggarai people actually have an integral relationship with the Supreme Being, with each other and

¹⁰ Cate Williams, “Brueggemann, the Land and the Forest: A Forest Church Perspective on the Theology of the Land,” *Practical Theology* 11, no. 5 (October 20, 2018).

¹¹ Erin Green, “Sallie McFague and an Ecotheological Response to Artificial Intelligence,” *The Ecumenical Review* 72, no. 2 (April 23, 2020).

with the environment. This cultural belief is very important in enriching ecotheological conviction, as well as facilitating acceptance of Catholic ecotheology in the local communities. Thus, theological inculturation basically occurred in Manggarai indigenous communities, especially in the area of ecotheology. Moreover, this research is also intended to strengthen pastoral efforts in the field of integrity of creation, especially in Manggarai, Ruteng diocese region.

THEORITICAL REVIEW

Basic Ideas Regarding Ecotheology

There are many definitions of ecotheology. However, the author chooses the meaning proposed by Deane-Drummond as reference in this paper. According to him, ecotheology “is reflection on different facets of theology in as much as they take their bearings from cultural concerns about the environment and humanity’s relationship with the natural world.”¹² Deane-Drummond wants to reject a partial view of the relationship between man and God and man and his environment. He showed that there is an integral relationship between God, man and the created world. The basic conviction is that there is connectivity between various elements in the created world; that in the visible world of creation there is a divine element that accompanies it.¹³ Each dimension is sophisticated and is infinitely expressed.¹⁴ Nevertheless, ecotheology still recognizes the important position of human beings. Ecotheology only rejects the existence of a dominant human relation to the natural environment.

Thus, ecotheology rejects the accusation that Christianity actually strengthens anthropocentrism which is the basis for acts of destroying the environment. On the other hand, ecotheology seeks to provide a theological basis for all efforts to preserve the environment and the integrity of creation. In the Catholic Church tradition, Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) is known as a saint who has authentic concern for nature. He rejected the idea of placing human beings in the highest hierarchy,

¹² Deane-Drummond, “Eco Theology,” x.

¹³ Islah Gusmian, “Gempa Bumi Dalam Pandangan-Dunia Orang Jawa: Studi Atas Dua Manuskrip Primbon Jawa Abad Ke-19 M,” *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 17, no. 2 (February 20, 2020).

¹⁴ Green, “Sallie McFague and an Ecotheological Response to Artificial Intelligence,” 183–196.

but he saw human beings as part of creation that had the same degree as other creations.¹⁵ In Francis' view, God is truly present in all creation and it is essential to see the created nature as a brother to man.

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that ecotheology is an attempt to reflect the environment in the light of faith and revelation. It can be firmly said that ecotheology wants to reflect God's intention concerning the created world on the one hand, and to reflect the created nature with all its beauty and damage on the other hand, not merely as worldly facts, but in the light of revelation and faith in God.¹⁶ In the Catholic Church context, ecotheology is seen and explained through the Scriptures and the teachings of magisterium of the church.

Ecology in Christian Scriptures

There are allegations that the Christian Scriptures, in a certain sense, actually strengthen and become the basis of legitimacy for the existence of dominative relation of humans to the nature. This accusation is rooted in the writings of the Bible, especially in the Book of Genesis 1:28. In that text, it is stated that God blesses mankind and says; "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it, be master over the fish of the sea and the birds of heaven and over all the animals that creep on the earth". This text seems to provide legitimacy for human beings to dominate and conquer nature. Another biblical text that is often seen as justifying man's domination over nature is John 1:14. The text defines the incarnation as; "The Word became flesh". This definition seems to provide the basis that the incarnation, God became human only in the body of Jesus Christ and that the incarnation only carries out a soteriological mission for humans alone.

The above criticism can be responded by providing an authentic interpretation of the Scriptures. First of all it can be emphasized that the environment has a noble dignity from the Scriptures' perspective.¹⁷ God truly wills the world and everything in it. As the consequence, all of them are good (Gen. 1:31). In the first place, the created world is really good because God Himself created it. He is "the beginning and the

¹⁵ Thomas Celano, *Santo Fransiskus Asisi: Riwayat Hidup Yang Pertama* (Jakarta: Sekafi, 1981), 50.

¹⁶ Stephen B Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 1.

¹⁷ Georg Kirchberger, *Allah Menggugat Sebuah Dogmatik Kristiani* (Mauwere: Ledalero, 2007), 258.

end, the origin and destination of the entire created world.”¹⁸ The God who is believed in the Bible is Triune God. Thus, “creation is the work of the Triune God”.¹⁹ The Christian Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, consider the physical world really good and that this nature reflects its creator. The world of creation is a self-proclamation of God or the first revelation of God. By looking at the world with all its wealth, humans can contemplate God as reflected by various natural religions that recognized God through creation.²⁰

Thus, all creatures, with all their diversity and uniqueness, truly represent the majesty and omnipotence of God. The psalmist acclaims, “The glory of the Lord is in the work of his hands and in his law. The heavens tell the glory of God and the firmament announces the work of His hands” (Psalm 19: 1-2). However, apart from the glory of God, creation also aims for all beings to be happy. “The glory of God and the happiness of spiritual beings are two purposes of the work of creation and actually are not two, but twofold purpose.”²¹ Thus, God’s Word in Genesis 1:28 should not be interpreted as a form of legitimacy as if human beings were allowed to enslave nature. On the contrary, the text is actually a mandate or duty for human beings to care for the earth. The term “overpower” is interpreted as maintenance. Humans have a soteriological mandate. He sought not only personal salvation, but also the salvation of all of God’s creation.²²

In short, the view of the Christian Scriptures regarding creation and human responsibility in it converges into two important aspects, namely the ownership of God and human stewardship. These two critical aspects show that God as the Creator places man as His creation to live

¹⁸ Berthold A Pareira, Guido Tisera, and Martin Harun, *Keadilan, Perdamaian Dan Keutuhan Ciptaan* (Jakarta: Lembaga Biblika Indonesia, 2007), 136.

¹⁹ Hannas Hannas and Rinawaty Rinawaty, “Apologetika Alkitabiah Tentang Penciptaan Alam Semesta Dan Manusia Terhadap Kosmologi Fengshui Sebagai Pendekatan Dalam Pekabaran Injil,” *DUNAMIS: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 4, no. 1 (October 25, 2019).

²⁰ Kirchberger, *Allah Menggugat Sebuah Dogmatik Kristiani*, 259.

²¹ Kirchberger, *Allah Menggugat Sebuah Dogmatik Kristiani*, 259.

²² Kalis Stevanus, “Pelestarian Alam Sebagai Perwujudan Mandat Pembangunan: Suatu Kajian Etis-Teologis,” *Jurnal Kurios* 5, no. 2 (2019): 94–108, <https://www.sttpb.ac.id/>.

with His other creatures.²³ Of all creation, human beings are the only creatures made in God's image (Gen. 1:27). As God's image, human beings have dignity as individuals who are able to recognize themselves, realize their own company with others, and are responsible for other creatures. Essentially, humans are partners of God who must participate in maintaining, managing, conserving and developing the created world. God entrusted to human beings the task to care for and wisely cultivate this universe and strive to create a harmonious relationship between all existing creatures (Gen. 2:15).²⁴

The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ wanted to express His deep love for humans and all creation. Furthermore, the redemptive work of God carried out by Christ also wants to reach all creation. By the blood of crucified Christ, all things on earth and in heaven were reconciled by God (Colossians 1: 19-20). Apostle Paul emphatically stated that God's saving work is not only for sinful human beings, but includes all creatures and the entire universe. Therefore, self-giving accompanied by human humility towards others as practiced by Jesus Christ (Phil. 2: 1-11) must be extended to all creation. For in the end all creatures and created world find their purpose only in the redemptive act of Christ.²⁵

The Teachings of the Catholic Church on Creation

There are several key considerations from church teaching regarding environmental management. These considerations will be briefly described in the following points:

Creation as a Sacrament and the Need for Repentance from Anthropological Errors

It has been explained earlier that the Bible places the created world as a sign of God's presence and grace to the world and human beings. Meanwhile, all forms of corruption in the created world are the fruit of human crave and greed. In other words, environmental degradation is more the result of ecological sin, which is marked by a chaotic relationship

²³ William Chang, *Moral Lingkungan Hidup* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2001), 46.

²⁴ Fransiskus, "Laudato Si," 41–43.

²⁵ Denis Edwards, *Ecology at The Heart of Faith (The Change of Heart That Leads to A New Way of Living on Earth)* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 84–85.

between human beings and God, human beings and others, and human beings and created nature. There is a kind of anthropological slip especially with regard to the context and original purpose of creation.²⁶ Human being has been misunderstanding himself as if he was allowed to conquer the earth without reservation. Instead of acting as God's partner in protecting and saving the created world, humans have instead taken God's place. As a consequence, this attitude gave birth to the resistance of nature which God had set in order since the beginning.²⁷

By realizing the widespread destruction of created nature, human beings are called to respect and follow the original purpose of creation. The Catholic Church through its social teachings teaches that God has given everything (creation) to human beings and they are called to respect and be responsible for God's goodness. In this regard, Pope John Paul II said; "God not only gave the earth and all property to human beings, but man himself is a gift from God. Therefore, human beings are also obliged to respect the natural and moral structures they receive from God".²⁸ Or in the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Pope John Paul II emphasized; "The dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to "use and misuse," or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to "eat of the fruit of the tree" (cf. Gen 2:16-17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity."²⁹

The Need of Cross-Generation Responsibility and Solidarity

The Catholic Church through its social teachings is aware that the environment is a shared wealth, not only for the current generation, but also for future generations. Therefore, there must be a responsibility to prevent anyone from destroying the nature of creation, including

²⁶ Fransiskus, "Laudato Si," 89–91.

²⁷ Yohanes Paulus II, "Centesimus Annus" (Jakarta: Departemen Dokumentasi dan Penerangan KWI, 1992), 50.

²⁸ Yohanes Paulus II, "Centesimus Annus", 52.

²⁹ Yohanes Paulus II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis" (Jakarta: Departemen Dokumentasi dan Penerangan KWI, 1988), 53.

accumulating wealth motive. The responsibility for saving the environment is so crucial because next generations also need a comfortable living environment. Precisely here lies the importance of the responsibility to save the nature of creation as a form of solidarity across generations.

Regarding the importance of an attitude of responsibility as part of solidarity across generations, Pope Paul VI in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* said; “We become heirs of generations before us and we reap the benefits of the efforts of our contemporaries. We have an obligation to everyone. Therefore, we cannot ignore the welfare of those who will come to be to develop human nations.”³⁰ By so doing, we should be solidier and fair for future generations by leaving a sustainable nature of creation for them.

An Economic Development without Damaging the Environment

It happens very often that large-scale economic enterprises actually forfeit the integrity of creation. Therefore, through its social teachings, the Catholic Church hopes that programs of economic progress and development must also take into account environmental balance. Economic endeavors need to respect the integrity and rhythms of nature wisely. This is because natural resources are limited and some of them cannot be renewed. So, it is necessary to oppose exploitative economic development patterns that actually endanger the natural resources availability, both for present and future generations.

The Catholic Church believes that an economic system that respects creation’s integrity certainly does not place profit maximization as the only goal. It is rooted in the conviction that protection of the environment can never be guaranteed solely based on financial calculations, related to costs and profits.³¹ Therefore, a balance is urgently needed between economic development efforts and the need to protect the integrity of creation. It can be said more firmly that any economic development effort that makes use of natural resources must also care about how to save the environment. In this context, it is very important to be attentive not to let market forces dominating the economic system. The nature of

³⁰ Yosef Maria Florisan, Paul Budi Kleden, and Otto Gusti Madung, *Kompendium Ajaran Sosial Gereja* (Maukere: Ledalero, 2009), 320–321.

³¹ Yosef Maria Florisan, Paul Budi Kleden, and Otto Gusti Madung, *Kompendium Ajaran Sosial Gereja*, 323.

creation is a common property that cannot be adequately protected and developed by market forces and laws.³²

Considering the Fate of Indigenous Peoples (Local)

All efforts to protect and save the integrity of creation are connected to the fate of local communities. This is because the quality of life of local communities with all their customs is also determined by the fact that the nature of creation is kept intact. For this reason, the Catholic Church through its social teachings tries to call for protection for local communities from the gigantic industrialization process and economic currents that destroy the relationship between local people and the nature in which they live. The Church understands the relationship between indigenous tribes and the land and natural resources around them is a fundamental expression of their identity.³³ Thus, indigenous peoples' protection is very important because neoliberal economic currents that dominate the world are very strong in expelling indigenous peoples from their land, their identity.

Local communities and indigenous tribes need to be protected because they provide an authentic example of a life model that is lived out in harmony with the nature of creation.³⁴ The Catholic Church through its social teachings considers the living experience and example of local communities and indigenous tribes regarding a harmonious relationship with nature is an irreplaceable richness and resource for all human beings. However, the existence of these indigenous tribes is certainly at risk of eradication if ecological degradation occurs in the name of short-term human interests.

RESEARCH METHODS

In conducting this research, researchers used a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods. The reason for using this approach and method is that this study intends to provide a detailed and in-depth description of the life of Manggarai people who performs their cultural rituals. Here the researcher describes a number of facts that

³² Yohanes Paulus II, "Centesimus Annus," 54–55.

³³ Florisan, Kleden, and Madung, *Kompendium Ajaran Sosial Gereja*, 324.

³⁴ Florisan, Kleden, and Madung, *Kompendium Ajaran Sosial Gereja*, 324.

have occurred, and tries to collect the same information from various key informants. Thus, researchers can deepen the participants' understanding of cultural aspects they live and believe in.³⁵

Through the ethnographic method, the writer tries to get into Manggarai culture, collecting various information about their lives, especially when they perform the “*roko molas poco*” ritual. The data are acquired and collected in various ways. Firstly, direct observations were made by the writers themselves. The authors do this efficiently because the authors themselves were born and brought up as Manggaraians. The writers are part of the culture in which this research were conducted. The writers' position as a Manggarains is a plus because he can understand and interpret more carefully and closer understand reality. Secondly, in addition to direct observation, the writers also conducted in-depth interviews, especially with key informants, such as traditional leaders who know Manggarai culture well. Besides, the authors are also involved in various activities related to the “*roko molas poco*” ritual.

After the data is collected, both from observations and in-depth interviews, the authors conduct a qualitative analysis and interpretation. Stages of the interpretation as following, firstly, the author groups the data into sub-themes according to the direction the author is going to. Furthermore, these data are selected to exclude irrelevant and overlapping data. Data that were deemed inadequate or unclear were sought and deepened again. Then the codified and reduced data are interpreted or analyzed and finally compiled in the form of a descriptive narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Definition of “*Roko Molas Poco*”

“*Roko*” in the Manggarai language refers to a ceremony of delivering or parading a bride from the bride's side (parents and family of the bride) to her husband's village or tribe. Meanwhile, the term “*molas*” in Manggarai means girl. Then the word “*poco*” means mountain where the forest grows. So “*molas poco*” literally means a girl who comes from

³⁵ FX. E. Armada Riyanto, *Metedologi: Pemantik Dan Anatomi Riset Filosofis Teologis* (Malang: Widya Sasana Publication, 2020), 85–90.

or is imported from a mountain or forest.³⁶ In addition to the term's interpretation as a place for forest growth, "poco" is also understood as a high place distinguished from a flat area.

Manggarai people usually perform "roko" rituals as a rite of parading and accept a bride from her husband's family. This ceremony is actually an initiation rite, in which the bride unties her family of origin and then merges with her husband's tribe. Meanwhile, the "roko molas poco" ceremony is only carried out when there is a construction of a "*mbaru gendang*" (traditional house) from one particular village or tribe. In that context, "roko molas poco" is interpreted as a ceremony to deliver or parade a girl (future wife or future mother) from the mountains (forest) to the village where the "*mbaru gendang*" (traditional house) is built.³⁷ However, the girl from this mountain is actually represented by a wooden beam from a strong/sturdy straight tree which will then be used as the main or middle pillar or support pillar of the traditional house under construction. This main pole in local designation is called "*siri bongkok*". More than as a physical support for the "*mbaru gendang*" (traditional house), "*siri bongkok*" is a symbol that indicates the presence of a 'mother' for the tribe or village resident who owns the traditional house. As a mother, she is believed to provide protection and good fate of the people of the tribe or village.³⁸

The Order of Rites for "Roko Molas Poco"

"Teing Hang" Ceremony (Giving Offerings) to the Ancestors

The series of "roko molas poco" ceremonies usually starts from "*teing hang*" ceremony (giving offerings) to the spirits of the ancestors of the tribe or village that owns the traditional house. This event is usually held on the night before the "roko molas poco" ritual. On this occasion, the tribesmen or villagers presented one raw egg and two white chickens. This ceremony's main purpose is to invite the ancestors to participate in the "roko molas poco" ritual. With these ancestors' involvement, it is hoped that the entire series of events can run well, without any obstacles

³⁶ Paulus Mahu, "Wawancara" (Wae Mbeleng, October 15, 2020).

³⁷ Paulus Mahu, "Wawancara" (Wae Mbeleng, October 15, 2020).

³⁸ Viktor Mayor, "Wawancara" (Beo Rahong, October 10, 2020).

or hindrances. By this purpose, a “*tudak*” (traditional prayer) conveyed in the ritual are as follows;³⁹

<i>Tudak</i>	<i>Translation</i>
<p><i>Denge lite morin agu ngaran, tanan wa, awang eta, par awo kolep sale. Denge kole lite sanggen taung empo. Agu sanggen ase kae pa'ang b'le. Wie ho'o kut pande manuk bakok undang ite. Kudut pu'ing wie ho'o dengkir diang te cama laing ngo we'e eta molas poco te pande siri bongkok. Landing hitu hoo de tuak agu manuk kut bantang ite. Tegi dami; nai ca anggit koe ite tuka ca lelung, tegi kamping morin agu ngaran. Kudut neka koe manga ronggo do'ong, watang lamba, latang ami te kawe haju molas poco le puar. Nahe arong koe salang lako te cumang molas poco.</i></p>	<p><i>Hear God, the owner of everything: the owner of the heavens and the earth, from the rising of the sun to its setting (God the owner of time). Hear also, O our ancestors on the other side. Tonight a white chicken will be sacrificed to invite all of you. Because from tonight until tomorrow, all of us will go to the mountain girl's place, which we want to make him the main pillar of our traditional house. For that purpose, here is “tuak” and chicken to invite you. We ask that we will be united, so that no destructive plants will get in the way, the stumbling block will hinder us, for looking for the mountain maiden tree. Hopefully it will be given ease in the journey to find mountain girls.</i></p>

“Cola-Dali Kope Racang” Ceremony (Sharpening axes and machetes)

This ceremony is a preliminary rite before the community delegation goes to look for wood used as “*poco molas*” in the mountains (forests). In this ceremony, usually all tribe or village residents gather at the location where the traditional house is built. According to their respective customary positions, this ceremony is technically intended to inform all villagers that the process of working on a new traditional house will begin immediately. In this rite, all working tools, especially the “*dali agu kope*” (axes and machetes) that will be used in the process of cutting wood used as “*poco molas*”, are well prepared. The preparation was in the form of sprinkling the tools with the blood of the sacrificial animals.⁴⁰

Still in the same ritual, the community leaders are divided into two groups: the first group is assigned to go to cut and collect wood called “*molas poco*” in the forest; the second group was assigned as a team to pick-up the wood at the village gate. More than just a technical interest, the “*cola-dali kope racang*” ceremony basically wants to ask for

³⁹ Viktor Mayor, “Wawancara” (Beo Rahong, October 10, 2020).

⁴⁰ Petrus Jemalu, “Wawancara” (Golo Rutuk, September 9, 2020).

the ancestors' blessing so that the process of working on the erecting traditional house can run smoothly. The spirit of the ancestors is expected to protect the traditional house construction workers from accidents. The animal that was sacrificed in this ceremony is a rooster. Apart from that, "*tuak bakok*" (white tuak) produced by palm tree was provided. In the main part of this ritual, while holding chicken and "*tuak bakok*", a traditional leader will say the following "*tudak*" (traditional prayer);⁴¹

<i>Tudak</i>	<i>Translation</i>
<p><i>Denge lite Morin agu ngaran, nggitu kole sangged taung empo ata pa'ang ble. Hoo ami reje ite mori, agu sangge's meu empo ata pa'ang ble. Kudut cama laing ite dali kope, racang cola te dampu molas poco le puar. Dasor gelang ita agu tiban. Kudut gelang daden molas le mai poco. Hitu de tegi dami...</i></p>	<p><i>Hear God, the owner of everything. Likewise all of you our ancestors in other world. We invite you to sharpen these machetes and axes to cut the mountain girl tree in the forest. Hopefully it will be quickly seen and accepted. So that it can be delivered quickly. That's our request</i></p>

Ritual of Requesting Permission Before Cutting Wood

When the team assigned to find and chop wood arrives in the forest, they perform a short ritual. The ritual's main intention is to inform and ask for the blessing or permission of the spirits inhabiting the forest where one of the woods will be cut to be used as "*molas poco*" or the main pillar in the traditional house. This event was created because of the belief that every place, especially in the "*poco*" (the mountain where the forest grows), must be a guarding spirit inhabiting that place.⁴² With this ritual, it is hoped that the guarding spirits or the one inhabiting the forest will not be angry and will not let out their anger by punishing the villagers. Such punishments can be in the form of bizarre diseases, including plagues that kill domestic livestock and pests of crops.⁴³

People usually offer rooster and a chicken egg in this ritual. In this ritual, a traditional leader holds chickens and eggs, then conveying the intention of their arrival as mentioned above. Then the chicken offered

⁴¹ Mayor, "Wawancara."

⁴² Lon and Widyawati, *Mbaru Gendang, Rumah Adat Manggarai, Flores*, 190.

⁴³ Bone Man, "Wawancara" (Sirimese, August 28, 2020).

was slaughtered. Meanwhile, the eggs are placed next to the tree which is about to be cut. When the ritual completed, the wood is cut and processed into blocks which are then used as “*siri bongkok*” (main pillar). After the wood is processed and turned into blocks, the workers then take it to the village gate or in the local language it is called “*pa’ang beo*”.

Giving Betel Nut (“Teing Cepa”) and Parade (“Roko”)

When the logs that were used as “*molas poco*” approached the village gate (*pa’ang beo*), the assigned pick-up team was ready there. They are obliged to wear traditional costumes. A woman from the welcoming team will step forward and serve betel nut to “*molas poco*”. This event in the local language is called “*teing cepa*” (giving betel nut). This event has a deep meaning. For Manggarai people, only important guests are picked up and welcomed at the village gate especially when the guest is welcomed by offering him/her betel nut (“*teing cepa*”). By being picked up at the village gate and given betel nut, it would be stated that the “*Molas Poco*” was a special guest and his arrival was warmly welcomed by all the villagers.⁴⁴

As soon as the “*teing cepa*” ceremony ends, it is followed by an appeal for the parade. At that time a girl with complete traditional clothes was seated on the block which made her “*poco molas*”. The point is to say that the block being paraded is “*poco molas*”. While the parade was going on, people sing a welcoming poem called “*renggas*”. “*Renggas*” in many places in Manggarai has different versions. However, the kernel point is only one thing, a strong desire to invite all residents to express their joy in welcoming “*Molas Poco*”. The usual “*renggas*” sounds like this: *hu..... mai taung ga, main naka lite molas poco, ai kudut jiri siri bongkok.....* (meaning: come on, let’s us be merry together with the arrival of the mountain girl, because she will be the main pillar of our traditional house). Simultaneously with the parade, gongs and drums are also sounded. After that, the whole group sings a song with meaning, although a very short poem: *rewung kole le... Rewung kole le* (meaning: fog, go back there ... back to the mountain). People sing it repeatedly until “*molas poco*” arrived near the court where the traditional house was built. The main purpose of this song is to express hope that all the evil influences (dark) represented by the word “*rewung*” (fog) do

⁴⁴ Robertus Saldi, “Wawancara” (Sano, August 29, 2020).

not accompany “*molas poco*”. “*Rewung*” is expected to return to its place of origin.⁴⁵ The following image shows how “*roko poco molas*” is implemented:⁴⁶



1. A block called “*poco molas*”. 2. The girl who claims to be sitting on the “*poco molas*” block.
3. The team to pick up “*renggas*” (traditional poem) and songs. 4. The bearing team.

Furthermore, when “*poco molas*” arrived in front of “*compang*” (altar of sacrifice) which is usually in the middle of the village, a “*kapu molas poco*” event was held (thank the mountain girl). On that occasion, a traditional leader conveyed the following words to “*Molas Poco*”: *Denge lite molas poco. Ho’o kali ite caid ga, kudut jiri siri bongkok mbaru gendang dami. Tegi dami, neka koe ba lerongs runus agu renggong, neka dolong le lobo agu neka lut le pu’u. Na’a les ngasang ata kolang agu ata mendo’d. Ba ce’es ata geal’d agu ata mut. Hitus tegi dami.*⁴⁷ (The translation: *Listen attentively, O mountain girl. Now you have arrived to be main pillar of our traditional house. We ask that you do not take the destructive plants with you, do not be chased by the end and followed by the bottom. Keep there all that is hot and heavy, but bring here the light and warm. That’s our request*)

The above expression means that “*poco molas*” which becomes the main pillar of the traditional house will truly bring protection and warmth to the villagers. He is expected not to bring along the various destructive and evil influences represented by the words “*runus*” and

⁴⁵ Lon and Widyawati, *Mbaru Gendang, Rumah Adat Manggarai, Flores*, 193.

⁴⁶ “Roko Molas Poco; Tradisi Unik Membangun Rumah Adat Di Manggarai,” <https://kumparan.com/>.

⁴⁷ Adrianus Jemadu, “Wawancara” (Wae Mbeleng, October 15, 2020).

“*renggong*” – types of parasitic plants that live on certain trees. “*Poco molas*” is expected to keep all villagers away from the evil influence and various types of diseases. This request was submitted to “*Molas Poco*” since she is believed to be the mother of the tribe or village that owns the drum house.

After the ceremony done, then the “*poco molas*” block is slowly lowered. When lowered the base, the lowest part of the block must touch the free-range chicken eggs until they break. This moment in the local language is called “*gerep ruha*” (stepping on or piercing or breaking eggs).⁴⁸ In Manggarai culture, “*gerep ruha*” moment is actually one of the bride’ initiation rites when she enters her husband’s family. So when “*Molas Poco*” also performs the “*gerep ruha*” ritual, it means that she was also initiated to become a mother for all the villagers. Thus the acceptance of “*poco molas*” used as a “*siri bongkok*” is almost the same as that of the bride to her husband’s family.

“*Siri Bongkok*” Erection (Main Pole)

After performing the “*gerep ruha*” ritual (stepping on the egg), it is followed by the “*poco molas*” erection event. This event in Manggarai custom is called “*hese siri bongkok*” (standing on the main pillar). At that time all the villagers were present, including representatives of the existing customary groups. Representatives of the customary family in Manggarai are the family of the woman called “*anak rona*”, the family of the male party called “*anak wina, ase kae neteng panga*” (residents of each ethnic family), and “*ase kaeng pa’ang agu ngaung*” (younger sibling brother and sisters in the front and backcourt of the house, meaning the entire village residents).

The animal that is offered in the “*hese siri hongkok*” ceremony is a pig. The pig is usually placed at the door. At that time, an appointed familiar figure submitted a request to “*Molas Poco*” with the basic core expression: *porong neka koe lut le pu’u, agu neka dolong le lobo*. The expression means that hopefully not followed by roots and not chased by ends. The full expression is:⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Adrianus Jemadu, “Wawancara” (Wae Mbeleng, October 15, 2020).

⁴⁹ Mayor, “Wawancara.”

<i>Tudak</i>	<i>Translation</i>
<p><i>Denge lite Morin agu ngaran, denge kole lite sanggen empo pa'ang ble. Ho'o de leson cai ce'n enu polas poco. Roko lami ce'e mbaru. Ho'o lami baro kampong ite Morin agu ngaran, agu sangged ite empo ata pa'ang ble. Ho'o derek lami bongkok mbaru gendang boto goro, agu gege siri leles. Porong neka manga lut le pu'u, dolong le lobo. Dasor caler koe ngger wa, bembang koe ngger eta. Dasor bombong koe neho wela lokom, golo, wela neho wakas. Conda koes kolang, tadang koes darap. Neka ligot siong, neka wengko menes, neka curu le buru, neka cala le warat.</i></p>	<p><i>Hear God, the owner of everything, and also all of you our ancestors beyond there. This is the day the mountain girl arrives. We take her to the house. That's why we report to you. We make her the main pillar of this traditional house, so she must be sturdy. Hopefully she is not followed by roots and not chased by ends. May she have strong roots and broadleaf. Hopefully it will continue to bloom. Get rid of all forms of "heat". Don't collect cold, don't get covered by cold, don't welcome wind, don't be bothered by a strong wind.</i></p>

The above expressions mean that the parts of the tree, especially “*pu'u*” (base) and “*lobo*” (tip) do not look for and accompany the wood that has been used as a “*siri bongkok*” in a traditional house. When “*tua adat*” (the elder in the village) finished saying the traditional prayer as written above, the pig is immediately slaughtered. Usually the pig’s blood is smeared on the “*poco molas*” pole which will become a “*siri bongkok*”. The rest of the pig’s blood is placed in the hole where the “*siri bongkok*” will be staked.

The series of “*poco molas*” rites ends with the process of staking the “*poco molas*” in the prepared holes. At that time the head of the tribe and his helpers, including the craftsmen, stake the “*siri bongkok*”. Furthermore, the craftsmen continue the process of working on the traditional house in question. In Manggarai people’s belief, all the order of rite and animals that are offered in “*roko molas poco*” ritual must be followed correctly and consistently. Mistakes and all forms of neglect are believed to bring problems for communal life, especially the members of the tribe or villages where the traditional house in question belongs to.⁵⁰ These problems vary: it can be in the form of diseases that are difficult to be cured, or it can be pests that damage crops and starvation, including epidemics that attack their domesticated livestock. The following picture shows “*poco molas*” which has become “*siri bongkok*” (main pole) in the

⁵⁰ Mayor, “Wawancara.”

traditional house of the Manggarai people.⁵¹



1. The “*siri bongkok*” (main pole) of the drum house (“*rumah gendang*”) derived from “*poco molas*”.

2. The position of traditional group in the Manggarai community at the moment of placing “*siri bongkok*” at the center.

The Ecotheological Meaning of the “*Roko Molas Poco*” Ritual

The ecotheological dimension of the “*roko molas poco*” ritual can be described in three perspectives. *Firstly*, from the context of the origin of “*poco molas*”. As the name implies, “*poco molas*” comes from “*poco*”. “*Poco*” is a place where the forests are situated. Moreover, for Manggarai people, “*poco*” is also believed to be the residence of the spiritual world or supreme being called “*Mori Kraeng*” or God since Manggarai people believe that “*Mori Kraeng*” lives in a high place.⁵² Therefore, when the tree that is used as “*poco molas*” is to be cut, it must be preceded by a traditional prayer asking for the blessing from the guardian spirit in the “*poco*” or forest.

This belief is almost the same as the findings in the practice of “Forest Church” written by Cate Williams, which views nature as a place of encounter with the Supreme Being or God.⁵³ Therefore it is very

⁵¹ Leonardus Nyoman, *Ritual Penti Dalam Budaya Manggarai-Flores-Nusa Tenggara Timur* (<https://www.youtube.com/>, 2013).

⁵² Lon and Widyawati, *Mbaru Gendang, Rumah Adat Manggarai, Flores*, 190.

⁵³ Williams, “Brueggemann, the Land and the Forest: A Forest Church Perspective on the Theology of the Land,” 462–476.

important to respect and establish a harmonious relationship with nature because it is the spiritual world's dwelling place, a supernatural being.⁵⁴ The psalmist says; "The glory of the Lord is in the work of his hands and in his law. The heavens tell the glory of God, and the firmament announces the work of His hands "(Psalm 19: 1-2).

For Manggarai people, "*poco*" as a high place is always distinguished from a flat or low place where humans live. It is from the "*poco*" or high place that Manggarai people believe they get a mother who brings fortune for the tribe or the whole village, symbolized in "*poco molas*" which in reality is used as the main pillar in their "*mbaru gendang*" (traditional house) building.

Secondly, Manggarai people perceive that "*poco*" (where the forest grows) has status as "*anak rona*", the giver of a mother. In such belief, the "*anak rona*" has a very central position. First of all, "*anak rona*" is respected as an intermediary for "*Mori*" or "*Jari agu dedek*" (the creator God) who gives offspring to "*anak wina*" or the family of the recipient's wife.⁵⁵ For this reason, Manggarai people often refer to "*anak rona*" as "*ende agu ema*" (mother and father) because Manggarai people believe that the offspring is given by "*Mori Kraêng*" through the family of "*anak rona*". Therefore, the family of "*anak rona*" is given the title "*ulu wae*" (river or spring), from which flows the water of life, in this case in the form of offspring. In this case "*anak rona*" gives birth to children for the family or tribe to maintain the generation of that family or tribe exists.⁵⁶ For Manggarai people, childbirth is not only seen as a biological process, but it should be thanked as the fruit of trust and blessing from "*Mori Kraêng*" (God) for the continuation of their generation. Longing for offspring is a theme that is constantly being prayed for. In the context of the forest as a "*anak rona*", it can be concluded that like "*anak rona*" (wife-giving family) is an extension of God's creator and descendant-giver, thus the forest is seen as "*anak rona*", namely an extension of God's hand that gives the mother of life for the tribe or village that owns the drums house symbolized in the form of "*poco molas*" used as the

⁵⁴ Weber, "Haitian Vodou and Ecotheology," 679–694.

⁵⁵ Valerian Caritas, "Makna Teologis Ungkapan Tentang Anak Rona Dalam Sastra Lisan Ritus Kelas Di Manggarai Dan Relevansinya Terhadap Karya Pastoral Gereja Dalam Bidang Perlindungan Martabat Dan Hak Asasi Manusia Di Keuskupan Ruteng" (STFK Ledalero, 2020), 138.

⁵⁶ Valerian Caritas, "Makna Teologis Ungkapan Tentang Anak Rona...", 138

main pillar or support pillar of a traditional house.

Furthermore, “*anak rona*” is also seen and respected as the party who participates or assumes the role of “*Mori Kraêng*” who looks after, protects and gives blessings to the families of the “*anak wina*”. Manggarai people believe that the “*anak rona*” is an intermediary who brings God’s protection and blessings to “*anak wina*”. In almost all traditional rituals, the role of “*anak rona*” as protector and bearer of this blessing is obvious. In funeral ceremony, for example, “*anak rona*” is asked to give an “*ela pangga*” (guard pig) and to conduct a pray “*tudak pangga*” (prayer of protection). The point is that “*anak rona*” sacrifices a pig for the ancestors praying that the family of “*anak wina*” will not receive sorrow anymore and will always be protected and receive protection from God and from the spirits of the ancestors.

In the context of the role of “*poco*” or forest as a protector, it can be paralleled between the role of “*anak rona*” for “*anak wina*” and the role of “*poco*” for the village or “*mbaru gendang*”. Therefore, when the block of wood called “*molas poco*”, which is later used as “*siri bongkok*” (main pillar) arrived at the village, a welcoming greeting is conveyed to “*anak rona*”. The “*anak rona*” here is the “*anak rona*” from the tribe or village that owns the traditional house. The “*anak rona*” who speaks is the representative of “*poco*” (forest) as the owner of the “*molas*” (girl) who will be used as “*siri bongkok*” (main pillar) in the “*mbaru gendang*” (traditional house). The welcoming speech is the following: *Yo ngong ite ende ema anak rona, ai ho’o cain anak Dite molas poco, boto manga hena le siong agu menes, yo..... lite koe teing wengko kudut riwok kaeng kilo, agu rewo kaeng beo.* (the translation is: *Yoo Dear sirs and madams “anak rona”, since your child has arrived, that there is sickness and evil influences, then give a protective cloth to provide warmth and peace in the family and village*). At that time, the representative of “*anak rona*” gives “*towe songke*” (traditional cloth) as a symbol of protection saying: *Ho’o widang lami towe wengko, rantang hena le siong agu menes, darap agu kolang. Dasor riwok kaeng kilo, rewo keong beo.* The meaning is: *We provide this cloth as protection from all diseases and evil spirits, hopefully it can provide warmth in family life and bring peace to community life.*⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Mayor, “Wawancara.”

Thirdly, in the context of “*poco molas*” as “*siri bongkok*” (main pillar) in the “*mbaru gendang*” (traditional house) of the Manggarai people. The main pillar here is a pole that stands upright located in the middle of “*mbaru gendang*” connects the floor with the highest top or ridge of the traditional house. So the position of “*poco molas*” is very central, not only physically supports or becomes a buffer for the whole house, but also has a very deep meaning for all residents of the “*gendang*” (drum). Its meaning is mainly connected to their relationship with God as the Supreme Being, the created world, as well as with others.⁵⁸ The “*siri bongkok*” whose origin is “*molas poco*”, is a symbol of the integrity of life of the Manggarai people who has the task to build harmonious relations with all dimensions of life, including creation, ancestors and with God. This main pillar exists in “*go’et*” (literary) circle of Manggarai people: *gendang one Lingko Peang, natas bate labar wae bate teku, compang bate takung* (the translation is: *traditional house in the center, garden outside, yard for playing, spring water to draw, and there is an altar for offerings*).

This expression has a very basic meaning that for the Manggarai people there is a substantial relationship between “*gendang*” (traditional house) and “*lingko*” (communal garden). Likewise, there is a close relationship between “*gendang*” and “*natas*” (common playground), “*wae teku*” (spring water) and “*compang*” (altar of sacrifice). The “*siri bongkok*” also manifests deep relationship between the tribe or village that owns the traditional house with the Supreme Being. Whenever there is a traditional ritual, the conductor of “*tudak*” (traditional prayer) always sits near the “*siri bongkok*”. With such a description, it is very clear that Manggarai people live out an integral relationship between God, humans and the created world. They believe that there is a connection between various elements in the created world that support their life.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Iwantinus Agung, “Peran Rumah Adat Mbaru Gendang Bagi Masyarakat Lentang – Manggarai Dalam Perbandingan Dengan Konsep Gereja Sebagai *Communio* Serta Implikasinya Terhadap Karya Pastoral Gereja. Tesis” (STFK Ledalero, 2020), 66–67.

⁵⁹ Green, “Sallie McFague and an Ecotheological Response to Artificial Intelligence,” 183–196.

CONCLUSION

From the description of the “*roko molas poco*” ritual and its ecotheological message, it can be said that the Manggarai people really live a life that is in harmony and one with the natural creation. They perceive and treat nature not only as a physical reality, but have a spiritual dimension that greatly determines their identity and survival. The Manggarai indigenous people perceive nature not as mere economic property, but they see it as a gift from God and their ancestors. In this context, the world of creation is considered a sacred reality, in which the Supreme Being resides and reveals itself. Besides, the nature of creation is also a place for Manggarai people to maintain the nobility of their identity and the basic values of their life.

Thus, it can be said that the Manggarai people do not view nature in an antagonistic and exploitative relationship. Cultural values place them in a harmonious relationship with nature. This is different from the anthropocentric paradigm which views and treats nature instrumentally. The Manggarai people always see themselves being in a unity of basic relations, namely the relationship with God, the relationship with the spirits of ancestors, relations with fellow humans and relations with the earth, namely the created world. Based on this meaning, inculturation efforts in the field of ecotheology should be carried out in Manggarai indigenous community. Christian ecotheology also views nature truly expressing and reflecting the presence of God. Meanwhile, human beings are seen as partners of God in organizing, maintaining, sustaining and developing the entire universe. God gave man a soteriological mandate, so that he would not seek personal salvation, but also the salvation of all creation. The author believes that all pastoral ecological efforts in Manggarai - Ruteng Diocese - will be more powerful and easily accepted if accompanied by empowering cultural-based ecotheological understanding and local wisdom of the Manggarai people themselves.

However, although the “*roko molas poco*” ritual has a very deep connection and ecotheological message, critical notes need to be disclosed regarding this practice. The most basic critical note is that Manggarai people view the Supreme Being (God) as a figure who punishes or imposes sanctions, not highlighting a merciful and good God. This can be clearly seen in the practices and beliefs of Manggarai people in the “*roko molas*

poco” ritual. As previously explained, in the “*roko molas poco*” ritual, all rite processes must be carried out diligently following the correct steps. In addition to the steps, animals and objects used in ceremony must also be strictly followed. Since Manggarai people believe that mistakes and all forms of neglect in making traditional houses can cause problems in living with all the people who stay in the traditional house. The problems in question can be in the form of illness suffered by tribal or village residents, diseases that cause crop failure and starvation, including in the form of epidemics that attack their domesticated livestock.

Thus, Manggarai people believe that blessings come from the Supreme Being or God, but God or the same Supreme Being is believed to curse or punish human transgressions. All disasters and suffering are believed to be God’s punishment. This conviction certainly contradicts the Christian belief that God is truly good and merciful, “... who raises the sun on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45).

The next very basic critical note relates to the central position of God and the sole intermediary role of Jesus Christ. Generally, Manggarai people view ancestral spirits almost the same as God; the same as spirits that live in springs or in forests or in swamps. So, they believe that certain ancestors and spirits in a spring or forest or marsh can give them blessing or curse. They do not see the existence of God behind the spirits of their ancestors or spirits that they believe live in various places. Therefore, they often say “*tudak*” (traditional prayer) only to the their ancestors’ spirits or other spirits, as if the spirits of their ancestors and other spirits are able to answer their prayers or determine their fate. Examples of pronouncing “*tudak*” (traditional prayers) are: “*Denge dia lemeu Ceki ata pa’ang ble*” (Listen carefully you, our ancestors) or *denge dia lemeu ata lamin wae ho’o ko puar ho’o, ko temek ho’o* (Listen carefully you, the guardian spirit of this spring or the guardian spirit of the forest, or the guardian spirit of these swamps). The mention of spirits in the traditional prayer is not preceded by a title usually referred only to God. Thus, they cannot see that the spirits of their ancestors or other spirits that exist in nature are only those who participate with them in prayer to God, as the only source of mercy and salvation. There is also a practice that seems to place the spirits of the ancestors and other spirits as having the same intermediary role as Jesus Christ. This can be seen in

the greeting of “*tudak*” (traditional prayer) as follows: *denge dia lemeu ceki..... ba koe tegi dami ngger le mori dedek.....* (Listen carefully you, the spirits of the ancestors, please send our prayers to the Creator).

Due to the influence of strong teachings of the Catholic faith in recent developments, such beliefs and practices have begun to be abandoned. There are many conductor “*tudak*” (traditional prayer) who have started their prayers with the title God first, as written in the previous section of this article: *Denge dia lite mori jari agu dedek.....* (Listen carefully you, God the creator of everything....); Then the call to the ancestors: *Denge dia kole lemeu ata pa’ang ble....* (Listen carefully you too, O those who have passed away ...). In spite of these facts, many are still following the old pattern as previously described. According to the author, it is very important to carry out continuous catechesis in Manggarai in order to clarify theological concepts of the central position of God in their lives. The catechesis should also touch the mediating function of Christ as the only way to God, the Father. Thus, an authentic inculturation of theology and ecotheology can occur in the beliefs and practices of church life in Manggarai. In addition, it is very important to exercise catechesis regarding the position and role of ancestral spirits and other spirits in the Catholic faith. According to the author’s opinion, the encounter between the basic teachings of faith and the contradicting beliefs and practices of local culture as mentioned above are concerned, a continuous catechesis is urgently needed so that an authentic dialogue can occur between cultural beliefs and Christian theology. Thus, the Catholic faith becomes more cultural in its forms (Manggarai culture) and Manggarai culture becomes more deeply imbued by faith (Catholic).

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