

Hermeneutics of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and Death Rites According to Pamona Culture as a Strategy for Christian Religious Education for GKST Imanuel Taripa

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Abstract

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This research explores the understanding of death based on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, death rites according to Pamona Culture, and Christian religious education strategies for the GKST Immanuel Taripa congregation when confronting death. Utilizing qualitative methods with a descriptive analytical hermeneutic approach, the study employs historical-critical and reader response methods, focusing on the process and meaning of death in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and Pamona cultural death rites. Phenomenological methods were also applied to capture subjective experiences. Data collection involved participant observation, interviews, and documentation studies. Findings reveal that Christ is perceived as the sole foundation and unwavering source of hope in the face of death. Belief in Christ's resurrection is seen as a solid foundation, offering profound meaning and spiritual tranquility. In Pamona culture, death rites play a crucial role in preserving local values, beliefs, and traditions, with deep symbolic meaning expressing love, togetherness, and cultural continuity. The integration of culture as a theological tool connects Pamona cultural values with Bible teachings and church life experiences. Christian Religious Education views culture as an opportunity to understand and appreciate community values, traditions, and wisdom. In facing death, the church implements education by combining Pamona cultural aspects into death rites, enriching these rites with comforting and affirming Biblical teachings. The research underscores the importance of incorporating local culture into Christian religious learning, advocating for conversations about death and culture that involve various generations through the intergenerational method.

Keywords: *Christian Religious Education, Death, GKST, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Pamona Culture*

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INTRODUCTION

The Central Sulawesi Christian Church or Gereja Kristen Sulawesi Tengah (GKST) has congregation members from various ethnic groups, such as Pamona, Napu, Bada, Behoa, Mori, Taa, Kaili, Ulu Uwoi, Tambee, and Karunsi'e. The majority come from the Pamona ethnic group, and in their church life, they are heavily influenced by local culture, particularly in death rites. While the understanding of death in GKST is based on the Bible and conducted through worship ceremonies, some church members feel unfulfilled and seek complementarity in traditional Pamona death rites, such as *Mongkariani*, *Melo'a*, *Montembi ali*, and *Moncaewe*.

The theological and eschatological understanding of the church tends not to fully meet the spiritual needs of its members, who sense a void that can only be filled by death rites in accordance with Pamona culture. Despite conflicts between local rites and church doctrines, many members feel that by performing their traditional death rites, they can remain connected to their ancestors and preserve their cultural identity. However, the church often exhibits an unfriendly attitude toward local culture, prompting members to conduct death rites discreetly to avoid conflict.

Important for GKST to understand that teachings about death are not only theological and eschatological but must also encompass human values and local wisdom. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the hermeneutics of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and Pamona cultural death rites as a strategy for Christian Religious Education for the members of GKST Imanuel Taripa .

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach with an analytical descriptive method in the hermeneutical study, focusing on the understanding of death in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and death rites in Pamona culture. Two hermeneutical approaches are employed: Historical-Critical Hermeneutics to unearth the reality and truth within the text, especially the author's (Paul's) intentions, and Reader-Response Hermeneutics to discover meaning and reflections on the understanding of death in the Bible text and Pamona death rites, involving the participation of church members. Furthermore, researcher also utilizes Phenomenology as an approach to the phenomenon of death rites, emphasizing a profound understanding of the subjective dimensions and meanings inherent in human experience.

This research was conducted in the GKST Imanuel Taripa in the East Pamona Classis, chosen because the congregation still practices traditional Pamona death rites. Additionally, there is a lack of writings by experts on this topic, and the theme is considered important in the context of GKST's ministry. The research took place from February 2022 to June 2023. Data were obtained from the Bible, informants such as church officials, congregation councils, and Pamona traditional leaders/cultural figures, as well as additional sources such as books, articles, journals, official documents, and photographs to enrich the understanding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Death from the perspective of GKST

The Central Sulawesi Christian Church (GKST) exhibits limitations in the understanding and handling of death according to the GKST Church Order Book. This book emphasizes worship and funeral aspects without delving into theological understanding in depth. GKST's understanding of death is mostly focused on the church's responsibilities related to the burial of congregation members and does not encompass deeper theological aspects. This is reflected in the lack of specific theological understanding of death in church documents such as the Church Order, Catechism Teaching, and GKST Worship Order.

The dominance of Western theology has resulted in a low appreciation for local thoughts. This is highly unfair because local thoughts or culture should be elevated and serve as the basis for theology (Setio, Wibowo, and Widjaja (Ed.) 2019: 85-86). Due to the influence of Pietism views in Indonesia, originating from the West with its concern for the salvation of the souls of non-believers, we find a tendency for the face of Christ to be only concerned with the personal face of humans and, in many ways, tends to be anti-cultural (Yewangoe, 1997:283). As a result, pure cultural values, with or without awareness, are consciously erased.

Since the GKST synod in 1947, the support of theologians in the Poso region and the decisions of the GKST have played a role in eroding and eliminating these cultural values (Supradnyana, 2018:54). In connection with this, Rambe notes the attitudes of early missionaries toward the local culture and religion of Sumba, leaving a mark in the history of the journey of the Christian Church in Sumba (GKS) to this day. Even often, GKS reverends, in rejecting elements deemed pagan, are more stringent than the early missionaries (Rambe, 2014:45). Ronald Arulangi notes about Maarten Geleynse, an evangelist in Mamasa from 1931-1950, who diligently evangelized and taught the people of Mamasa about Christianity while demanding full conversion and holding a very negative view of culture (Arulangi, 2019:106-107). In the end, due to the thoughts and attitudes of the missionaries, local wisdom is discarded. However, imported Western theological concepts no longer meet the needs and experiences of faith in many local churches. The church should strive to live out its faith in Jesus Christ within the cultural framework or concrete environmental context. Functional theology for the congregation's faith experience should be an inculturative or contextual theology (Banawiratma, 1997:51). Noble values in culture should be the vehicle for theology. Eka Darmaputera says that theology that does not consider culture will become rootless, isolated from existing thought and value systems. This theology will not be functional (Darmaputera, 1997:17). It is realized that the role of A.C. Kruyt and Adriani for the Pamona ethnic groups to know the Gospel of Christ is significant. However, due to the legacy of Western theology, they have less appreciation and look down on local culture. Gerrit Singgih, as quoted by Wahyu S. Wibowo, says that theology must start from a specific context. However, theology that only takes into account its own context can be imprisoned by its own context. Therefore, to avoid being imprisoned by its own context, what is called intertextuality is offered. This is a meeting between one context and another for mutual dialogue. With intertextuality, theology gets a more or less complete horizon (Wibowo, 2019:117). When the church sees culture as something neutral, the church can find theological concepts that respond to the context.

In practice, the reverends in the congregation are greatly influenced by the church history from the perspective of Western missionaries who came to Indonesia. The reverends describe these rites as part of the culture, even though they have become part of the church's activities. Or, as Schreiter says, Christian literature on syncretism has always taken a negative stance toward this phenomenon (Schreiter, 1991:239). Considering syncretism as something negative that must be eliminated. As a result, all local cultures are legitimized as forms of paganism and therefore must be corrected with Western and/or Christian

culture. The GKST congregation is bound and connected to the culture that is part of their daily lives. If the culture is understood only narrowly by church ministers, then the culture understood by the congregation will remain separated from religion. However, if understood properly, culture can become a bridge to communicate with God.

There is an avoidance of cultural elements in dealing with death, which is a legacy of decisions made by previous Synod Assemblies. The history of the GKST Synod Assemblies shows suspicion towards culture and the rejection of traditional elements deemed contrary to the Word of God. These decisions reflect GKST's radical stance toward culture, considering the Word of God as a force that rejects anything deemed incompatible. However, some members of the GKST church view tradition/culture and Christianity as coexisting, especially in the context of local culture such as birth, marriage, death, and agriculture.

To bridge the gap between death rites, culture, and Christianity, a teaching rooted in the GKST congregation is needed. And this teaching can emerge through proper Christian religious education.

Interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The main reason for writing the First Thessalonians is because there were questions about the dead raised by the Thessalonian congregation, conveyed to Timothy and passed on to Paul (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Their deaths were closely related to the persecution experienced by the church due to the actions of their fellow countrymen, the Greeks (1 Thessalonians 2:14), and the Jews (Acts 17:5-9). They were persecuted because of their faith in Jesus (Marxsen, 2015:26). In addition, this letter is presented to strengthen faith and defend the gospel that Paul proclaimed, due to the upheaval caused by false teachers who propagated various philosophical and religious doctrines (Hakh, 2019:129-130).

For Paul, the Holy Spirit is God's gift to the Thessalonian congregation (1 Thessalonians 4:8). It is the same Holy Spirit that Paul and his missionary companions have received (1 Thessalonians 1:5), providing them with strength from God (1 Thessalonians 2:2). This Spirit enables the Thessalonian congregation, in the midst of persecution, to receive the Word of God with joy worked by the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:6). The strong faith of the Thessalonians - which is the activity of the Holy Spirit - is a recurring theme in 1 Thessalonians. This happens because the Christians in Thessalonica receive the Word with the joy of the Holy Spirit, and their faith is known (1 Thessalonians 1:8) throughout Macedonia, Achaia, and the surrounding regions (1 Thessalonians 1:7-8).

The faith-filled life of the congregation in Thessalonica is evident in the story of their welcome to Paul and his ministry, as they turn from idols to Christ, serve God, and eagerly await the coming of His Son. It is not surprising that those who repent in Thessalonica become Paul's glory and joy (1 Thessalonians 2:20). Indeed, the faith of the Thessalonian congregation is so enthusiastic that it allows Paul to continue living (1 Thessalonians 3:8), a development that reveals how faith is something built together (1 Thessalonians 5:11). More importantly, what God has given (1 Thessalonians 4:8) causes their faith to grow with joy in the

midst of persecution, so the Holy Spirit is not quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19) (Padisson, 2005:170-172).

When in Thessalonica, Paul urged the congregation (those newly acquainted with the Gospel of Jesus) to await the return of the Lord from heaven to gather His people (1 Thessalonians 1:10). However, when Timothy came to Thessalonica, he found them mourning the loss of some members of the congregation. These were unexpected deaths, possibly caused by the persecution the church experienced, leading to some individuals martyred (Eubank, 2018: 153-156). This series of deaths not only caused sorrow among them but also raised various questions about faith in Jesus. On one hand, it was due to the societal context that rejected discussions about death, leaving them without reference to what and how death occurs. On the other hand, according to Schmithals as quoted by Gene L. Green, their grief was deepened by the influence of false doctrine, namely Gnosticism, which had infiltrated the church and threatened their faith in apostolic doctrines regarding the fate of the dead, casting doubt on the reality of the resurrection of the dead. Gnosticism itself was a heretical teaching active in the 2nd century AD, staunchly rejected by the church (Douglas, 2022: 343-344). In the end, the events of death were very unsettling because, within themselves, the Thessalonian congregation assumed that they would all still be alive when the Lord returned. Therefore, questions arose about the fate of those who died before the day of the Lord's coming.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul teaches the Christian perspective on death, offering eschatological hope for those who believe in Christ. Several key ideas emerge in the interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Firstly, Christ is considered the sole foundation and hope in facing death. The use of the euphemism "sleep" conveys that for those who die in Christ, death is rest or sleep. Those who die in Christ will undergo a transformation of the body, yet the soul remains divine and returns to the Divine. The Second Coming of the Lord is accompanied by apocalyptic signs, indicating His redemptive activity. The gathering of the living and the dead serves as evidence that God knows and remembers His entire people. Finally, the comforting and strengthening actions for the grieving congregation are seen as a tangible manifestation of ecclesiology, highlighting the church's role in supporting those experiencing death.

Paul describes death for Christians as a temporary sleep, offering comfort and depicting human activity at the time of the parousia. However, Paul emphasizes that faith in Jesus Christ is crucial, as only those who die in faith will experience resurrection and a meeting in the parousia. This concept transforms the understanding of Christians about death, seeing it as an entrance to a better and eternal life with God. The hope of the parousia also encourages Christians to live according to the teachings of Christ in preparation for the coming day of the Lord.

According to Angus, death in this text does not refer to The Dead who were in Christ but The Dead who are in Christ. This means that both those who have died and those who are still alive (but will experience death) are under the power of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Death does limit the power of the Lord because in Him, He has transcended the limits of death and now has the authority to embrace both the dead and the living (Padisson, 2005:178). The key point here is to die in Christ (τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ; tus kaimethentas dia tu Iesu)),

or to die in faith in Jesus. Thus, this statement presents the paradox of faith in Christ, namely, although humans die, they continue to be saved, remaining alive until the saving resurrection. This is the uniqueness of the death of those who believe in Jesus.

The word "meninggal (TB2)" in verse 14, in the Novum Testamentum, is κοιμηθέντας; koimethentas (Novum Testamentum Graece, 1993:521). This word is derived from the root word "koimao," which means to sleep (Moulton, 1979: 234). Paul describes those who have died in 1 Corinthians 15:6 with the word ἐκοιμήθησαν; ekoimethesan (Moulton, 1979:26), which also comes from the word "koimao" meaning to sleep. In John 11:11, Jesus describes the death of Lazarus with the word κεκοιμήται; kekoimetai, which also means to sleep. This word, κοιμηθέντας; koimethentas, is a euphemistic expression to depict the event of death. For those who have died in Christ, the dreadful and frightening aspect of death is merely a rest.

Furthermore, Paul emphatically states that the condition of being alive or already dead at the time of the Lord's coming is not different. In other words, there is no superiority or advantage of one over the other. This includes the way someone dies, which is not a measure. Because, in the previous verse, Paul says that everyone will be gathered by God together with Him (διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἄξει σὺν αὐτοῖς; dia tu Iesu akhei sun autoi). The Greek word (verb) διὰ; dia, implies leading, bringing, and guiding. Through this word, it is evident that the process of guiding, bringing, and guiding is the act or desire of God. The word "gathered" is rooted in one of the main ideas in the Old Testament.

At the time of the parousia, Jesus gathers both the living and the dead, as He did with Abraham and other ancestors of Israel, and as He entrusted to the disciples, including Paul. This gathering means that God knows and cares for all His creation and does not desire anyone to perish. The gathering of the people that takes place at the parousia demonstrates the eternal love of God for humanity. The concept of gathering is also evident in the Qumran Scrolls, Jewish writings from Palestine that emerged around the 3rd century BC to the 1st century AD. Thus, it is clear that the concept of gathering was known in the Thessalonian community, as it was part of the culture at that time.

In conclusion, the main point of this passage is revolves around Christ is regarded as the singular foundation and unwavering source of hope amid death, based on the belief in resurrection. The use of euphemisms like "sleep" indicates gentleness in describing death, helping Christians face it with peace. The concept of the "descent" of the Lord affirms His sovereignty and active involvement in salvation. The phrase "will be caught up" reflects the transformation of the dead into a higher life. The concept that the dead body undergoes a transformation while the soul remains divine demonstrates a profound understanding of eternity in the context of resurrection. The Second Coming of the Lord emphasizes the uniqueness and grandeur of the parousia, indicating that God knows and remembers His entire people, gathering them as an integral part of His salvation plan.

Death Rites According to Pamona Culture

In Pamona culture, each cultural rite plays a key role in reflecting the identity of this ethnic group, even for those who adhere to Christianity. These rites reflect the values, beliefs, and local traditions that characterize the Pamona community. *Pue mPalaburu*, as the God of Heaven and the Shaper God in the customary context, plays a significant role in traditional rites, more profound than in the church context. Belief in the presence of *Pue mPalaburu* gives meaning to every cultural ceremony, including death rites.

The Pamona ethnic groups believe that humans consist of three elements: koro, *tanoana*, and *Angga*. Death is considered to occur when *tanoana*, which has divine qualities and is a spiritual part of humans, permanently separates from the physical body. This reflects a profound understanding of the separation between the material and spiritual worlds in human life. *Torate*, the realm of the dead in Pamona culture, is seen as a spiritual place where the spirits of the deceased reside, strengthening the bond between the generations that have passed and those still living."

According to the beliefs of Pamona ethnic groups, death is not considered the total destruction of human existence. When *tanoana* (spirit or soul) has separated from the human body permanently, the individual undergoes the process of death. Therefore, the absence of *tanoana* is the cause of human death. When someone experiences death, the *tanoana* of the deceased is referred to as *Angga* (Kruyt J., 1975: 49-52). *Angga* has an existence similar to spirits, being invisible to ordinary people and only visible to specific individuals who have the gift of seeing *Angga*. *Angga* can be recognized because it retains a form resembling how they looked when alive.

Before the introduction of Christianity, Pamona ethnic groups believed that the breath or life of a human originated from the wind and would return to the wind. If a person's death occurred in a proper manner, it was considered a good wind or a good spirit. Conversely, if the death was unnatural or tragic, it would be considered an evil wind (evil spirit) (Hasan, Syamsudin R. Koida, Arif, 200: 24).

Throughout their life, a Pamona individual feels themselves belonging to a fellowship in which they were born. This is not based on their own choice but is a predetermined circumstance. The foundation of their life does not disappear with their death but continues to apply thereafter. With death, a significant change indeed occurs, and the individual must undergo separation from all their loved ones and everything their heart is attached to. The deceased person must embark on a journey to an unfamiliar place, adjusting to a new condition. The most terrifying aspect is that they must undertake this journey alone, without the companionship of a trusted friend. These are all crucial and defining aspects. However, amidst all this, one thing remains untouched, and that is, the deceased person remains bound within a large fellowship together with the living, each depending on the other (Kruyt, J., 1975: 43-44).

Pamona ethnic groups refer to the world of the deceased as *Torate*; the dead do not completely die but reside in the world of the dead. Therefore, on one hand, the living can still remember them, requiring *Metompa* (seeking permission) when organizing specific celebration events (Noort, 2021: 88-89). On the other hand, from the perspective of the deceased, they can visit the living in dreams or smell their fragrances.

Where do the Dead Reside? First: The dead are in graves. The grave is a place visible to the eye, containing the bones of the deceased. Second: Above the world and in its own atmosphere. Before long, after death, the deceased is still near or around the living; circulating among graves and their family homes. Later, after rites conducted by the family, the *Angga* (spirit or soul) of the deceased merges with other deceased individuals in *Torate*. The atmosphere in *Torate* is almost similar to the atmosphere of human life in this world. Third: *Tanangka Loeloe* (the world in between) as a resting place for *tanoana* (spirit) on its way to *Pue mPalaburu*. In this in-between world, the female priest seeks the *tanoana* of the sick through rites and litanies. If the female priest successfully persuades the spirit *Wurake*, the *tanoana* of the sick person will be brought home, and they will recover. If not, then from *Tanangka Loeloe*, that spirit will proceed to the dwelling place of *Pue mPalaburu*. Fourth: In a temple called *Lobo* (Noort, 2021: 88-89). Only the souls of special and distinguished individuals who have contributed to the world are left in *Lobo*. These are known as *Onitu/Anitu*, individuals who are not only important to their relatives but also to the entire community. They are influential figures such as village founders, tribal chiefs, war leaders, and the fathers of large lineages (Kruyt, J., 1975: 52-53).

"Of the various death rites performed by Pamona ethnic group, four death rites are still observed today especially in GKST Imanuel Taripa Church. First: *Mongkariani* Rite. *Mongkariani* is held for one or two nights while the deceased is still at home. During the vigil at home, a ritual called *Pongkariani* is performed. *Mongkariani* signifies a farewell ceremony for the grieving family. It involves comforting prayers, conducted from the first night until the body is buried. While the body is still at home, there is a custom of performing *Taleileta* and *Wora Sinci* (ring game) to entertain the family. The significance of *Popaiwo* for the spirit leaving the living has become less common. The comforting prayers held during the mourning nights are more meaningful as a source of strength for the grieving family rather than for the deceased. Second: *Melo'a* Rite. *Melo'a* is a visit to the grave. Initially, during *Melo'a*, the grieving family brought food, drinks, or favorite items of the deceased. *Melo'a* was performed on the morning after the burial. Nowadays, *Melo'a* takes the form of a religious ceremony, involving singing and praying led by the Reverend/Church Council or the family itself. During *Melo'a*, visiting families no longer bring food, drinks, or household items to be placed on the grave. There are also no more taboos to be avoided. Another related custom is that the grieving family brings and lights a lamp (lantern) every evening for 40 days, turning it off the next morning. This is done to illuminate the grave and guide the spirit to its new home, so it doesn't return to the old one. Third: *Montembi ali* Rite (rolling the mat). This rite is performed on the third or seventh night after the funeral. *Montembi ali* involves cleaning and rearranging the tools and materials used from the time of death to the burial. These tools and materials include mats, candles, photos, mosquito nets, beds, and mourning decorations. The reason behind it is the severing of ties between the deceased and the surviving family. *Montembi ali* is conducted through comforting prayers led by the Reverend/Church Council. Fourth: *Moncaewe* Rite (cleaning the grave). This rite is performed to clean the grave. Twice a year, the community comes to clean the graves of their relatives, usually before the planting season in agriculture

begins. Initially, the purpose of *Moncaewe* was to allow the spirits of ancestors to breathe life into the rice/crops to produce good yields, believed to be blessed by the spirits after this ritual. Kruyt later replaced it by conducting a service at the cemetery location on the Monday after Easter with the theological understanding that it is not the spirits of ancestors that give life to all plants but Christ who is risen and alive.

These rites are still alive and performed by a majority of the church members from the Pamona ethnic group. Although these rites are not directly related to the teachings of the GKST church, they still influence the lives of the congregation. When these rites are not performed, the congregation or the community believes that something bad will happen. Conversely, if the rites are conducted, they are considered a blessing. Therefore, even though times have changed, these ritual practices are still found in the lives of the church members. Observing the phenomena of these ongoing rites illustrates the Pamona congregation or community's understanding of death, the significance of these death rites, and the continuity of the relationship between the living and the dead.

The overall concept reflects the values of local wisdom and profound spirituality in Pamona culture. Death rites serve as a crucial means of expression to convey the connection between the human world, the spiritual realm, and God, while also honoring the journey of the departed spirits. The conduct of death rites is a way to transmit and preserve these values as an integral part of the cultural identity of the Pamona ethnic group. Neglecting or mistrusting these rites can have an impact on the injury of the Pamona ethnic groups's identity and spiritual life, as it appears to disregard their heritage and sense of self.

Christian Religious Education and the Topic of Death

In her book "Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in Church," Maria Harris states that Christian education is the primary task of the church and school, related to koinonia (fellowship), marturia (witness), diakonia (service), kerygma (proclamation), didache (teaching), and leiturgia (liturgy). According to Harris, the church is the center of learning and teaching activities. Therefore, educational ministry begins and originates from the church (Harris, 1989:13). Without this educational task, it is impossible for the church as a local congregation and social group to persist with its distinctive identity and growth.

The term "local congregation" here refers to a fellowship of believers bound within an organization at the local level, as a structured process where members interact to achieve goals. Thus, what is visible in an organization are interactions, and the organizational structure that depicts these interactions, which in turn gives rise to roles, relationships, activities, hierarchy, and objectives. In the context of this organization, the local congregation is a fellowship of believers who interact, depicted with a certain structure that allows for various roles, relationships, activities, and efforts to achieve goals.

One form of interaction and activity within the local congregation is education, aimed at assisting church members in experiencing full growth in Christ. Therefore, the local congregation as the setting for Christian religious education should be seen as a group of believers interacting through various activities to achieve the desired goals set by God for His congregation. It is

acknowledged that Christian Religious Education is no longer confined to the church building or limited to spiritual matters only but extends beyond the church building, into public spaces, and involves cultural values.

If initially, Christian Religious Education was oriented toward the transmission of Bible knowledge alone, now Christian Religious Education is oriented towards connecting what is learned with the current reality, developing critical thinking skills as a Christian, sharpening sensitivity and awareness, and manifesting in behavior within the Christian and multi-religious community (Hattu, 2021:5).

In the context of Sunday worship and catechism classes in GKST Imanuel Taripa, the topic of death is rarely highlighted or emphasized. Categorical worship and evangelization services are more focused on spiritual messages that motivate and build the faith of the congregation in facing everyday challenges. The church's communication about death is more visible in consolation and funeral services, where the atmosphere of mourning supports discussions about death. However, in catechism classes, the understanding of basic Christian faith dominates, while the topic of death is often neglected, even though understanding death as part of eschatological issues can contribute to the nurturing of faith and spirituality. Church discussions on death are more evident in funeral and burial services, where a mourning atmosphere supports discussions about death. However, in catechesis classes, understanding the basics of Christian faith is more dominant, and the topic of death is often neglected, even though an understanding of death as part of eschatological issues can contribute to the nurturing of faith and spirituality. Additionally, death rites according to the Pamona culture receive less attention in the church, mainly because they are considered associated with ancestral beliefs deemed contradictory to Christian faith.

Christian education is currently positioned between the continuity of what is maintained and the changes that need to be made, or what must be adjusted to the demands of the times. This means that the context of Christian education within the church not only reaches categorical aspects but also intergenerational ones (Hattu, 2021:5). Outside the church, the homes of church members (families) become spaces for dialogue among people of different religions, and public spaces become areas for non-violent education, citizenship-based Christian education, inclusive Christian education, and so on. The context of Christian education is not only a physical matter but also emotional and behavioral, involving aspects of hospitality, openness, security, and local cultural values (Hattu, 2021:5). Therefore, models of Christian religious education are shifting from doctrinal learning to more humanistic and liberating models that are participatory, dialogical, and hone critical thinking skills and sensitivity.

Christian Religious Education essentially includes the teaching of religion, ethics, morals, and Christian religious stories in a formal context. However, the scope of Christian Religious Education can be broader, more holistic, and comprehensive, involving various aspects of human life, including family, society, and the surrounding environment. Religious education should reach various aspects of life, bringing religious values into daily life and expanding perspectives into society.

The scope of Christian Religious Education should also include respect for religious diversity, promoting religious pluralism, interfaith dialogue, and strengthening tolerance among various beliefs. Holistic religious education helps students develop an understanding of universal values inherent in all religions. Inclusive Christian Religious Education should encompass various aspects of life, such as culture, ecology, human rights, and entrepreneurship, shaping character, fostering social harmony, and strengthening spiritual awareness.

Christian Religious Education and culture provide opportunities for students to understand the values, traditions, and local wisdom. Integrating religious teachings with local cultural values allows for a deeper and more relevant understanding of faith in their daily lives. By understanding and integrating culture into Christian Religious Education, the church can become more relevant, engaging, and have a positive impact on serving and reaching the community. Culture can be an effective medium for conveying the Gospel message in a way that is understood and accepted by the local community, making cultural richness part of worship and church service.

Strategies for Christian Religious Education in the church's service to those experiencing death should encompass various aspects of human life, including culture. Christian Religious Education needs to enter the cultural context to more effectively fulfill the mission of the kingdom of God, with culture serving as a vehicle to convey religious teachings and bring people to Christ. In this approach, Christian Religious Education can bring the message of Christ closer to daily life while respecting local cultural values and integrating religious teachings in a relevant manner. The importance of eliminating stigma in conversations about death and culture is also emphasized, encouraging open dialogue to prepare communities to face death, and appreciating local cultural values.

Moreover, these conversations should involve various generations or intergenerational dialogues. Intergenerational Christian Religious Education methods can bring adults and children together to explore the presence of God in the midst of the congregation and in service to the world. In this approach, collaborative learning from various generations can strengthen the spiritual nature of the entire community, create awareness of core values such as death, solitude, freedom, and insignificance, and bridge understanding between younger and older generations in passing on cultural values and Christian teachings.

Strategies for Christian Religious Education in the church's service to death involve understanding and integration with the local culture. Christian Religious Education plays an effective role in fulfilling the mission of the kingdom of God by using culture as a vehicle to convey religious teachings and introduce people to Christ. By eliminating the stigma in conversations about death and culture, Christian Religious Education encourages open dialogue, prepares communities to face death, and appreciates local cultural values. Through intergenerational Christian Religious Education methods, collaborative learning from various generations strengthens the spiritual nature of the community, creates awareness of core values such as death and freedom, and bridges understanding between younger and older generations in passing on cultural values and Christian teachings.

Christian Religious Education Strategy based on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and Death Rites According to Pamona Culture

a. Integration of the Melo'a Rite Concept in Christian Teaching

In order to integrate the concept of the *Melo'a* Rite into Christian teaching, the church can begin by incorporating the concept of *Melo'a* as an expression of longing in the context of Christian learning. *Melo'a*, as a symbol of longing and the relationship between the living and the deceased, can be placed in Christian education to strengthen the understanding of the meaning of Christ's love that transcends the boundaries of death. In classes or seminars, the congregation can understand that the practice of *Melo'a* reflects the belief in the continuity of Christ's love through death, providing a profound insight into how Christian faith permeates the reality of death.

The church can organize teaching sessions or seminars specifically discussing the relationship between *Melo'a* and the day of the Lord's coming. Thus, the congregation can understand that *Melo'a* not only creates a sense of longing and togetherness in everyday life but also has a strong dimension. This seminar can encourage the understanding that the certainty of gathering on the day of the Lord's coming strengthens the hope for eternal life and becomes a source of comfort in facing death. In this way, the integration of the *Melo'a* Rite concept can provide a deeper spiritual dimension in Christian teaching, enriching the faith and hope of the congregation.

b. Teaching the Value of Spiritual Support in the Mongkariani Rite

In an effort to integrate the concept of "Death in the Lord" into Christian teaching, the church can incorporate this concept as part of spiritual learning. This concept can be explained as the spiritual support provided by Christian faith to the bereaved family. In classes or seminars, the congregation can understand that the *Mongkariani* rite not only serves as an effort to console grieving families but also as a concrete expression of unity in Christ. Aligning this understanding can help strengthen a sense of solidarity and spiritual comfort in facing death, thus enriching the meaning of Christian belief.

The church can integrate the statement "Do Not Grieve Like Those Without Hope" as a key message in Christian teaching. By emphasizing this message, Christian congregations are reminded to see death as the beginning of a more meaningful life and understand that the resurrection of Jesus provides strong hope. This motivation can help the congregation view death not as an end but as a transition to the promised eternal life in Christian faith. Through the integration of the concept of "Death in the Lord" and statements about hope, the church can provide a strong spiritual foundation for the congregation to cope with death and see it from a deeper perspective of faith.

c. Understanding the Symbolism of the Montembi ali Rite in Christian Education

The church can organize Christian learning sessions specifically focused on the meaning of this symbolism. In this context, the congregation is taught about the symbolism of the *Montembi ali* Rite as the boundary between the mourning period and the steps toward continued life. It is important to emphasize

that this symbolism reflects the view that while we mourn, we also need to know when to stop mourning, considering the promise of resurrection taught by Jesus. In this class or seminar, the reverend or church leader can guide the congregation in understanding the symbols used in the ritual, such as clothing, movements, or other elements that carry profound meanings. The key point is to emphasize that the *Montembi ali* rite is not only an expression of sorrow but also a step toward hope and new life provided by the resurrection of Jesus. Through an understanding of this symbolism, the congregation can go through the grieving process with meaning and embrace the hope of Christ in every stage of life, including facing death.

d. Emphasizing the Relationship between the Death and Resurrection of Jesus in the Moncaewe Rite

In the context of Christian education, there should be a special session focusing on the relationship between the death and resurrection of Jesus, highlighting the role and meaning of the *Moncaewe* Rite in expressing the Christian faith. Through this teaching, the church can provide a profound understanding of how the *Moncaewe* Rite reflects the victory of Jesus over death and directs the congregation's gaze toward the hope of heaven as the ultimate destination. This teaching can include an analysis of Bible verses that support the connection between the death and resurrection of Jesus, such as verses detailing the events of His death and resurrection. The goal is to deepen the congregation's understanding of the meaning of Jesus's victory and the hope of eternal life in His presence. Additionally, it encourages Christians to view the *Moncaewe* Rite as a concrete expression of their faith in the triumph of Christ, strengthening their belief in eternal life and the hope of heaven as the ultimate goal for every believer.

CONCLUSION

It is crucial for the church, especially GKST, to adapt its approach to ministry and teaching to the spiritual and cultural needs of the congregation. This involves recognizing local values, such as the Pamona death rites, as an integral part of the religious life of the congregation members. Thus, the church can become a vehicle capable of integrating local wisdom and the truth of the Christian faith, creating an inclusive and profound space for the spiritual growth of the congregation.

Understanding that teachings about death are not only theological and eschatological but must also encompass human values and local wisdom is essential. This understanding forms the primary foundation for designing Christian Religious Education strategies. The qualitative and descriptive analytical approach in the hermeneutical study conducted in this research provides a strong basis for developing Christian Religious Education strategies that focus on integrating Christian theology with Pamona cultural values. By embracing cultural and spiritual diversity, GKST can enrich its service to the congregation and the broader community. Holistic and inclusive Christian Religious Education strategies that integrate Pamona cultural concepts with Christian teachings can create a foundation for deeper spiritual growth and a more comprehensive understanding of death and the afterlife.

The integration of death into the teaching of Christian Religion in GKST opens opportunities to deepen faith and the meaning of humanity in the context of Pamona culture. A profound understanding of Pamona death rites, coupled with Christian teachings, can strengthen the cultural and spiritual identity of the congregation. The importance of holistic and inclusive teaching will create a solid foundation for spiritual growth and intergenerational harmony within the church, providing a sustained positive impact on society.

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