

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

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### Abstract

This study explores the interaction between Dani cultural values and Christian ethics, emphasizing how contextual evangelism can be effectively carried out within the Dani community in Papua. Employing a qualitative approach with an ethnographic methodology, the research integrates field observations and content analysis to examine the influence of traditional Dani beliefs, particularly those embedded in *Nabelan-Kabelan* and *Naruekul* mythologies, on Christian ethics and practices. Field observations involve immersive engagement with the Dani people to gain an understanding of their cultural practices and religious expressions, while the content analysis of relevant literature provides a theoretical basis for interpreting these practices within the framework of Christian teachings. The findings indicate that traditional Dani beliefs offer both challenges and opportunities for contextual evangelism, underscoring the importance of a nuanced approach that honors cultural values while introducing Christian ethics. The study concludes with recommendations for evangelistic strategies that effectively integrate cultural insights with biblical teachings to promote ethical transformation and spiritual growth within the Dani community.

### Abstrak

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

## A. INTRODUCTION

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

The objective of this research is to investigate how the Gospel can be effectively communicated to the Dani people in a manner that respects and engages with their cultural values while addressing the ethical challenges posed by their traditional beliefs. The study aims to identify the potential for "re-evangelization" by integrating Gospel teachings with the Dani cultural framework, thus fostering a Christian life that is aligned with biblical ethics.

To achieve these objectives, the research employs a qualitative methodology, including a literature review, field observations, and interviews with local stakeholders. This approach facilitates an understanding of the intersection between Dani cultural practices and Christian ethics, providing a foundation for the development of contextual evangelistic strategies.

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

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

## B. METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach using an ethnographic methodology to examine the intersection of Dani cultural values and Christian ethics. Ethnography is chosen for

its effectiveness in understanding cultural practices and their influence on religious beliefs within the Dani community. The study utilizes two primary methods: field observation and content analysis of relevant literature. Field observation is carried out to gain an in-depth understanding of the Dani people's cultural practices and how these intersect with Christian teachings. Researchers immerse themselves in the Dani community, participating in daily activities and rituals to observe firsthand the influence of traditional beliefs, such as those reflected in the *Nabelan-Kabelan* and *Naruekul* mythologies. This direct engagement allows researchers to gather qualitative data on the community's ethical behaviors and religious practices, providing insights into the practical challenges of contextual evangelism.

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

By combining these methods, the research achieves a comprehensive understanding of the Dani community's cultural and spiritual dynamics. The ethnographic approach provides contextual depth and practical insights, while content analysis offers theoretical grounding to support the formulation of strategies for effective contextual evangelism. Together, these methods contribute to a nuanced analysis of how to integrate cultural practices with Christian teachings, addressing both the ethical challenges and opportunities for meaningful engagement.

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **An Introductory Overview of the Origin of the Name of the Dani Ethnic Group in Papua**

Papua is both the name of a place (*οἰκουμένη/οἰκουμένη*) and a people (*ἔθνος/ethnos* or ethnic groups), previously known as "Nieuw Guinea," "New Guinea," "Nova Guinea," or "Nueva Guinea." This name was given by the Spanish sailor Yugo Ortiz de Retes, who visited Papua in 1545. However, as early as 1521, the name "Papua" referred to the region and its inhabitants, as recorded in a Spanish journal during Spain's control over the Moluccas Islands and surrounding areas.

One hypothesis, once popular among anthropologists, suggested that the term "Papua" derives from the Malay word *pua-pua*, meaning "curly." However, this idea faded with the re-adoption of the name "Papua" after a period when the region was known as "Irian Jaya." As for

the name "Irian" (*Iryan*), used to describe the people of Papua, several interpretations exist. According to Koentjaraningrat, the term *iryen* was proposed by Frans Kasiepo at the Malino Conference in 1946. This post-World War II usage is said to originate from a legend in the Biak Numfor region, where it means "the sunlight that drives away the mist on the sea" or "land that rises from the sea" or "our land," which gave hope to fishermen searching for the mainland. Another view is that Indonesia's first president, Soekarno, popularized *Irian* as an acronym for "Ikut Republik Indonesia Anti Nederland" ("Join the Republic of Indonesia, Anti-Netherlands"). (See Koentjaraningrat, ed. 1994, 4)

The term "Papua" is more likely reflective of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the ethnic groups inhabiting the area from Sorong to Merauke, often labeled as "Melanesian ethnicity." Anthropologists argue that "Melanesia" refers to the people of Papua, believed to have spread megalithic culture from Micronesia eastward toward Polynesia. (See Benny Giay, 1986, 11-12, and Koentjaraningrat, 1994, 29-30)

The researcher agrees with both Benny Giay, a Papuan cleric and scholar (1986, 8), and Agus Alua (2008), who argue that Papua is a uniquely remarkable region. There is no other place in the world where such a diversity of tribes, languages, religions, and cultures coexist within a relatively small geographic area. Papua's distinctiveness also became evident when the Gospel began to reach the Melanesian people, starting with the arrival of missionaries Ottow and Geisler on Mansinam Island on February 5, 1855. From that moment, the Kingdom of God began extending its authority over the Melanesian people in Papua, eventually leading to the establishment of churches and driving cross-sectoral transformation—economic, spiritual, cultural, political, and social—across the region, including among the Balim people in the Central Highlands of Papua.

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

Although commonly referred to as the "Dani people" or "Dani tribe," the Balim people do not identify themselves by these names. Instead, they call themselves "Hubula people" or "Balim people," or in their native language, *akhuni Palim meke*. According to the researcher's

observations, the term "Dani" (or "Ndani") is not actually used by the Balim people for self-identification, and they even dislike it. Some suggest that "Ndani" was originally a derogatory term used by the Yali people to describe those living to the east (See Susanto-Sunario, Astrid, ed. 1994, 11). Others believe the name was coined by anthropologists conducting expeditions in the Central Highlands of Papua during the 1920s (See Frans Lieshout, 2009, 18; See also the various studies on the Baliem ethnic group in Papua that have been published in scientific journals, written by Mawikere over several publication periods).

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

The term "Dani tribe" or "Balim people," as used by the researcher, refers to all Papuan communities living in the Balim Valley and its surroundings. These groups form an ethnic community distinct from others, based on a conscious awareness of their unique cultural and biological identity. This distinctiveness is considered exceptional compared to other communities in Papua and beyond. In this article, the terms "Dani tribe" and "Balim people" will be used interchangeably with the same meaning (See some research findings by Mawikere on the Baliem ethnic group). Since 2023, the entire population of the Baliem Valley has become part of the residents of "Propinsi Papua Pegunungan" (the Mountainous Papua Province) within the Republic of Indonesia

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

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

However, over time, the author observes that the Gospel preached by Western missionaries (from America, Europe, and Australia) and accepted by the Dani people has not deeply taken root in their faith (both conceptually and practically in ethics). This has led to the emergence of nominal Christians, or “Christians in name only,” within the Dani churches. Moreover, Dani Christians have easily converted to Islam (Bensley, 1994).

The researcher suggests that the Gospel as preached lacks a meaningful connection to the cultural values or conceptual framework of the Dani people, particularly concerning the concept of “eternal life,” which is central to the Gospel (John 3:16). The concept of “eternal life” in the Gospel is not well understood or internalized in relation to the Dani's cultural understanding of the afterlife, and vice versa. This has led to many Dani people becoming “Christians in name only” or even converting to Islam, often motivated by material reasons or enticing offers (Bensley, 1994, 91-95). As noted by the German theologian, pastor, and researcher Dr. Rainer Scheunemann, an observation of the history of mission work in Papua reveals that many regions were “Christianized” but not truly evangelized. This Christianization involved large-scale conversions that resulted in many aspects contrary to the Gospel being regarded as “non-problematic.” According to Scheunemann, despite visible development, the influence of traditional beliefs and occult practices remains strong among many Papuan communities that have converted to Christianity (Scheunemann, 2006, 12-13).

As a result, Christian faith has not been fully reflected in the daily behavior (ethics) of Christian communities in Papua. The call to follow Christ should be accompanied by a life that is consistent with that calling. In other words, faith in Christ should manifest in everyday life through words, actions, and behavior, which are the ethical responsibilities of Christ's disciples.

Papua, Indonesia's easternmost province, is distinguished by its vast land, abundant natural resources, and rich cultural diversity, making it a region that is unique, fertile, and full of potential. However, behind these distinctions lies the so-called “Papuan Paradox.” This term refers to Papua's wealth of natural resources contrasted with its lagging development in human resources, education, economy, technology, communication, and healthcare compared to other regions in Indonesia. Similarly, in spiritual matters, despite the majority of the indigenous



population being Christian, the fruit of the Holy Spirit—manifested in ways that glorify God and serve as a light to others—is rarely visible as a consequence of faith in Christ.

It is ironic because this contrasts sharply with the findings of sociologist Max Weber (1971), known for his thesis on “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.” Weber argued that advancements and economic growth in Germany, Europe, and North America—including the Industrial Revolution and the development of technology, information, and communication—were driven by Protestant Christian ethics, particularly the doctrine of “predestination” taught by Calvin (Refer to several research findings by Mawikere, Hura, and colleagues regarding Max Weber and his thematic sociological work). However, despite the Gospel having been present in Papua for over 150 years and in the Baliem Valley for over 50 years, there is no significant evidence of “Christian ethics” within the Christian community of Baliem, Papua, that stimulates economic growth and human resource development.

It is no longer a secret that the Papuan community, and the Dani tribe in particular, remains poor, static, and backward despite their Christian faith. One contributing factor is their tendency toward laziness and dependence on government aid and incoming communities. Many even abandon their faith in Christ and convert to other religions for material or monetary promises (Bensley, 1994, 91-95).

Moreover, there are issues of disintegration among the Papuan people, including the persistence of “tribal wars” as a legacy of old cultural practices. A dichotomy exists within Papuan society, often evident in phenomena such as: “highland Papuans versus coastal Papuans,” “native Papuans versus mixed-race Papuans,” and “Papuan indigenous communities versus Papuan intellectuals,” among others. This reality is indeed ironic, as it contrasts sharply with European societies, which, despite their barbaric backgrounds and penchant for warfare since the Greek-Roman era, became unified and strong through the spread and development of the Gospel of Christ. Why does the transformative essence of the Gospel seem to have little impact on Papuan society?

Therefore, this article explores “A Study of the Worldview in the Mythology of the Dani Ethnic Group in Papua and Its Ethical Implications.” It will demonstrate that the cultural concepts of societies strongly influenced by animism and occultism have shaped a “worldview” that is incorrect, and these views have become “living values” manifesting in ethical behaviors similar to those of pagan societies, despite their Christian affiliation. Ultimately, the author advocates for cultural transformation among the Dani people of Papua through contextualized Gospel preaching that engages and empowers their cultural values. Based on the author's observations and experiences living in the Baliem Valley, Papua, and interacting with its people for nearly three

years, it is evident that after more than 50 years of evangelization, there is a need for reevaluation and renewed evangelism. This ministry effort should rely not on methods and human strength but on the liberating power of the Holy Spirit. With the transformation of life brought about by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, it is hoped that the Dani people of Papua will experience faith growth and develop a Christian ethic that aligns with God's will as revealed through the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Dani Ethnic Group's Mythology Concerning God**

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

The Dani people's belief in God as an abstract reality is also reflected in their belief in and fear of the "supernatural realm." This realm is seen as an invisible force controlling mountains and forests, which can manifest as ordinary human beings; both men and women are referred to as Kugi Erimbo/Kwewanakwe, while rulers of rivers and grass are called limbu. Simeon Itlay and Benny Hilapok (Susanto-Sunario, 25-26) describe this reality through various categories: a. Special places: *ma ima, seyhma, wutalo, abulakma, sinakma, wio agamua, omarikmo, watlaku, watikam*, etc. b. Trees/rivers: *o sin, o wele, o win, o isiwat, o werap, o poum, o huba, o kuwo, o petel eka*, etc. c. Lakes/rivers: *I palim, I parim, I uwe, I yugunopa, I siekelek, I lantik*, etc. d. Animals: *walo palu (patola snake), suwe iwiwilo (iwiwilo bird), suwe uwene (duck), yeke (dog), wam duaga (duaga pig)*, etc. e. Cosmic elements: *o mulikin (sun), o sud/tugi/he elabohge (moon), o miyo (rain), o pogot (sky), o ogat (earth)*, etc.

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



In Wamena, despite the presence of formal religions (Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism), there are still places of worship for the dead or spirits called *wakunmo*. A *wakunmo* is a small structure used to place symbols representing the spirits of the recently deceased or can be found in certain caves. The presence of these spirits is recognized through natural phenomena and symbolic representations such as specific sacred objects (Alua, 2006, 12). According to Niko Asolokobal (see Susanto-Sunario, 53-54), the rituals performed by the Balim people generally express solidarity or relationships with God, fellow humans, and the universe, including: *nesok aii* (to strengthen balance with humans, animals, plants, and the universe), *wako* (to combat illness), *agat wesa* (for soil fertility and crop harvest), *oka isago* (human relationship with territorial boundaries), *syilo, paw*i (specific prohibitions), and *he yoke*l (honoring women in relation to marital purity).

In conclusion, the Dani people of Papua have a unique "concept of God" within the worldview of traditional Melanesian religions characterized by animism-dynamism. God is viewed as an abstract cosmic ruler who is not personal but possesses power exceeding that of humans, as He governs both the spiritual and empirical worlds. The traditional Dani people refer to God with the term *Walhowak*. When Christianity entered and developed in the Baliem Valley, the name of Jesus was translated as *Nakmarugi* or *Naruekul*. According to Dani understanding, these names are highly secret and should not be known by children, women, or other groups, especially enemy alliances. This is because, in their view, their group might possess "something" more accurate, while other groups are mistaken. Similarly, other groups should not learn the secret of their truth to prevent retaliation using the correct names *Nakmarugi* or *Naruekul*. The Balim community is very concerned if the secret names *Nakmarugi* or *Naruekul* are used in church teachings (Alua, 23-24). Thus, the Dani people's belief in God, whom they refer to as *Walhowak* and is also often called *Nyopase Kain*, resembles the concept of a "vague God" or a "God who is not personally known," similar to the concept of ἄγνωστος θεός / *agno to Theos* in ancient Greek mythology (See Acts 17:23).

### **Ethical Issues Arising from the Dani Ethnic Group's Animistic Worldview of God**

The Dani ethnic group's animistic worldview conceptualizes God as an abstract cosmic force rather than a personal deity. This understanding of God as an impersonal force significantly shapes their ethical framework and behavior. In this context, the concept of God does not necessitate personal accountability or moral responsibility to a personal deity. Consequently, this influences how the Dani people interpret and respond to ethical issues.

In Dani animistic beliefs, deviant or sinful acts are perceived as disruptions in the natural order, which may manifest as cosmic disturbances such as natural disasters or suffering. The

notion of sin or transgression is not seen merely as a violation of divine law but rather as an imbalance or disturbance in the natural world. Because their understanding of God is impersonal and abstract, the Dani people lack a distinct concept for personal sin or transgression. Their moral framework does not include a personal deity to whom they owe direct accountability, leading to a different interpretation of ethical behavior.

For the Dani, sin is viewed primarily in terms of its impact on human relationships and interactions with nature rather than in relation to *Walhowak*, their term for God. The belief that they do not sin against an impersonal cosmic force means that their ethical considerations are more focused on maintaining harmony within their community and natural environment rather than seeking reconciliation with a personal deity.

To address deviations from acceptable behavior or sins, the Dani perform rituals of reconciliation, such as sacrificing a pig (known as *Wam*). These rituals are not intended as acts of atonement to appease an angered deity but rather as means to restore social harmony and balance within nature. Thus, unethical actions, including adultery, theft, laziness, murder, tribal warfare, and occult practices—which are classified as sins in Biblical terms—are perceived by the Dani as disruptions of social or natural harmony. These behaviors are considered problematic primarily within the context of human and environmental relations, rather than in the context of offending a personal God.

In summary, the Dani's animistic worldview leads to an understanding of ethical issues that emphasizes the restoration of balance and harmony within the community and the natural world, rather than focusing on personal accountability to a deity. As a result, their approach to addressing and rectifying deviant behavior reflects a different set of priorities and concerns compared to those with a theistic conception of God.

### **The Dani Ethnic Group's Mythology Concerning Life**

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

Generalizations about the Melanesian/Papuan society's reverence for "life" are reflected in their concept of "eternal life," as experienced by the Dani people of Papua. Consistent with broader Melanesian/Papuan beliefs, the Dani understand "life" in relation to messianic hopes or future expectations often referred to as "cargoism" (cargo cult). According to Benny Giay (1986, pp. 26-27), the characteristics of cargoism expectations in Papua include: (a) Hope for social, economic, status, and environmental changes; (b) Hope for a new order of life, akin to a past golden age; (c) Demand for religious rituals to expedite the arrival of cargo, a new world, and new life; (d) Expectation that ancestors who have passed away will return with the Messiah or a prophet bringing cargo, food, clothing, money, economic and technological progress, freedom from oppression, knowledge, peace, social justice, status, and all that is considered beneficial for a successful life. As will be discussed below, the Dani people's cargoist (cargo cult) expectations are articulated through two main myths: "the *Nabelan-Kabelan* myth" and "the *Naruekul* myth."

### ***The Nabelan-Kabelan Myth***

The *Nabelan-Kabelan* myth, also known as *Nabutal-Habutal* or *Nanggonok-Kanggonok*, meaning "the changing of our skins and your skins" or "old skin replaced with new skin," is a legend among the Dani people that recounts a time when "eternal life" existed in human history. Initially, life is described as peaceful, harmonious, fertile, healthy, abundant, and prosperous, with humans enjoying good relationships with one another and harmony with the universe.

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

In their hope for the return of the "Garden of Eden" and its beautiful and peaceful state, the legend of *Nabelan-Kabelan* or *Nabutal-Habutal* or *Nanggonok-Kanggonok* arose. According to the legend, the ancestors of the Balim people regretted the bird *Ibibilo* or *Pirigobit*, which always outpaced the snake *Bonon*. Despite never shedding its skin and dying, the bird could fly faster than the snake, which, although it shed its old skin for a new one, was slower in comparison. The snake could only crawl on the ground and follow from behind but was outpaced

by the bird with its short lifespan. The ancestors regretted this situation, believing that if the snake *Bonon* had outpaced the bird *Ibibilo* or *Pirigobit*, humans would have continually shed their skins and lived forever. This would mean achieving an ideal, beautiful, peaceful, and harmonious state with one another, as a synthesis of the legend of the bird *Ibibilo* or *Pirigobit* and the snake *Bonon*.

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

Thus, the myth of *Nabelan–Kabelan* or *Nabutal–Habutal* or *Nanggonok–Kanggonok* offers insight into the concept of eternal life among the Balim people of Papua. This concept is not philosophical or doctrinal but more existential and practical, focusing on existence and experience. The conclusion is that since ancient times, the ancestors of the Balim people have longed for an ideal, beautiful, peaceful, and harmonious condition both within themselves and in relation to others and their environment. Although this ideal has not yet been realized, it remains a hopeful aspiration for the "future," to be fulfilled with the arrival of *Nabelan–Kabelan* or *Nabutal–Habutal* or *Nanggonok–Kanggonok*, reflecting their cargo cult beliefs.

The *Nabelan–Kabelan* or *Nabutal–Habutal* or *Nanggonok–Kanggonok* mythology provides profound insight into the concept of eternal life among the Balim people of Papua. This legend underscores the belief that in the past, humans experienced an ideal state of peace, harmony, and prosperity, which later deteriorated due to conflicts and divisions among them. In this context, "relational sin" led to the loss of abundance and peace and the severance of the previously existing harmonious relationships. In their effort to restore this ideal state, there is a belief that the "Garden of Eden," which has been damaged and destroyed, needs to be restored, reflecting the aspirations and life goals of the Dani people. This concept is not merely philosophical or doctrinal but more existential and practical, focusing on everyday experience and existence. The Dani people believe that through the symbolic change from "old skin" to "new skin," they can achieve the harmonious and peaceful state they desire. Although this ideal state has not yet been realized, the belief in the arrival of *Nabelan–Kabelan* or *Nabutal–Habutal* or *Nanggonok–Kanggonok* remains a hopeful aspiration for the future. This belief reflects their cargo cult faith, emphasizing a deep desire to repair and renew their relationships with others, the environment, and the universe. Thus, this myth is not just an ancient story but also a reflection of the values,

hopes, and aspirations of the Balim people of Papua, who continue to strive to achieve and realize the ideal and peaceful state they envision.

### **The Naruekul Myth**

For the Dani people, the Naruekul myth is another legend imbued with cargo cult elements, similar to the *Nabelan–Kabelan* legend. In ancient times, the ancestors of the Dani lived in peace and harmony with one another and their environment. However, a man named *Naruekul* emerged, whose appearance was different from everyone else. During his lifetime, *Naruekul* traveled from village to village and from region to region, becoming well-known. This notoriety led many people to fear him, concerned that they would fall under his influence and power. According to Ibrahim Peyon (2012, p. 124), the Hubula people in the Balim Valley referred to *Naruekul* as *Nakmarugi*. The Yali people in the eastern part of the Balim Valley called him *Alabungi*, *Nalabungi*, *Limlangi*, and *Yeli*. The Mek people in Korupun referred to him as *Murummah*, *Nalaponge* and *Yelu*. Amidst the fear and notoriety surrounding *Naruekul*, a secret conspiracy arose to kill him. The plan was executed, and *Naruekul* was killed. His body was then dismembered and distributed among the community. The distribution of *Naruekul's* body parts led to a scramble among people from all walks of life, who fought over the pieces. According to Agus Alua (2006, 32-33), the Balim people revere *Naruekul's* body parts and personify them in certain objects and plants, such as: (a) *Kaneke*-sacred stones, ancestral heirlooms believed to be taken from *Naruekul's* bones; (b) *Ye*-similar to *kaneke*, used as a form of bride price and debt payment, also taken from *Naruekul's* bones; (c) *Hepiri nesok ukut*-meaning "my heel scraper," *hepiri okenpalek*-meaning "scraper of his blood clots," *hepiri wimoak*-meaning "a piece of bamboo used to kill and cut *Naruekul*, growing into a scraper," *hepiri ab ella*-meaning "scraper of his forehead veins (male)"; (d) *El tellu*-dark red sugarcane, from *Naruekul's* blood; (e) *Saikbb*-red fruit symbolizing *Naruekul's* blood; (f) *Haki tob*-a type of banana representing *Naruekul's* heart; (g) *Mulikin*-the sun, believed to be the warmth of the cosmos originating from *Naruekul's* fat dispersed into the sky when his body was cut up, thus becoming the sun. The distribution of *Naruekul's* body parts created inequality among the community, with some receiving parts while others received nothing. Eventually, those who had sought the distribution of *Naruekul's* body parts returned to their villages, hiding the parts they had obtained as personal property.

One day, while a group of people were walking through the place where *Naruekul* had been killed, *Naruekul* appeared to them. Those who saw him were frightened, stunned, and confused. However, *Naruekul* introduced himself, affirming that he was indeed the one who had lived, been killed, had his body dismembered, and was hidden away as personal property. According to Agus Alua (2006), after revealing himself, *Naruekul* delivered a message as a

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

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

With the *Naruekul* myth, the Dani people's understanding of eternal life has evolved from a hope for an ideal situation (as seen in the *Nabelan–Kabelan* myth) to a hope in a "person or figure," in this case, the figure of *Naruekul*. Despite experiencing an ideal and renowned life and a tragic end, *Naruekul* is seen as a powerful being who reappears after death, with his body dismembered, distributed, and hidden as personal property. *Naruekul*, as a powerful "figure" or "individual," reveals himself to certain people and delivers a message or promise for the ideal condition or situation of the present society and its descendants. Consequently, *Naruekul* is believed not to be an ordinary man but *Walhowak* or God who created the earth and everything on it.

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

The *Naruekul* myth, much like the *Nabelan–Kabelan* legend, reflects a profound cargo cult influence among the Dani people, illustrating their evolving conception of eternal life. This myth recounts *Naruekul's* tragic end and the subsequent reverence for his dismembered body parts, which are imbued with sacred significance and transformed into symbols of power and life. *Naruekul's* reappearance and message to his witnesses signify his divine status as *Walhowak*, revealing him not merely as a powerful individual but as a deity. The myth thus embodies a shift



from an idealized vision of eternal life to a belief in a divine figure whose suffering and promises offer both a messianic hope and a guiding principle for the Dani people and their descendants. This reflects a broader cultural narrative wherein the intersection of personal sacrifice and divine promise shapes their understanding of existence and continuity.

### **Ethical Issues Arising from the Worldview in the Dani Tribe's Mythology of Life**

The crisis arising from the *Nabelan–Kabelan* myth stems from the misunderstanding of the concept of “old skin replaced with new skin.” This has been interpreted as an expectation of an immediate transformation in the current context, or more broadly, that with the arrival of *Nabelan–Kabelan*, the Dani people would no longer face death and that death would vanish from the earth. When missionaries preached the Gospel, the Dani misunderstood this as a way to achieve *Nabelan–Kabelan* through baptism (Alua, 2006, p. 104). The community hurried to be baptized and even sought to resurrect recently deceased individuals through the missionaries, believing that their ancestors would be revived with the missionaries' arrival. A more problematic issue was the translation of *Nabelan–Kabelan* as the “replacement of old skin with white skin,” influenced by the appearance of Western missionaries (Wenda & Wenda, 2009, pp. 45-47). Consequently, the Dani mistakenly believed that the luxurious items and prosperous lifestyle of the missionaries would soon descend from heaven as a fulfillment of the *Nabelan–Kabelan* cargo cult event (Alua, 2006, p. 104). This misunderstanding led to issues regarding the mass conversion of the Dani people through the missionaries' ministry. The question arises whether the Dani people's decision to become Christians (marked by baptism) is a valid way for them to come to Christ, given that their faith is based on a collective rather than personal decision, influenced by a misinterpretation of the cultural value of *Nabelan–Kabelan*. As a result, Jennifer Bensley aptly describes the Dani Christian community as “card-carrying Christians!” (Bensley, pp. 91-95).

Understanding the *Nabelan–Kabelan* or *Nabutal–Habutal* or *Nanggonok–Kanggonok* myth, which implies a “mechanical” or “instant” change in life, has led to an ethical problem for the Dani people of Papua: a “static life.” The community awaits or expects a magical change or renewal without engaging in struggle or hard work. This is evident in the daily life of the Balim people, who possess rich agricultural land and natural resources but do not utilize them due to a relatively static, lazy, unmotivated, and overly dependent lifestyle (Scheunemann, 2006, pp. 191-192). This contrasts sharply with Max Weber's *Verstehen* thesis, which links Christian ethics to participation in economic growth. Weber argues that faith in God leads to meaningful and industrious behavior in work (Weber, 1971). Conversely, the Christian Dani community remains impoverished due to

their lack of work (Scheunemann, 2006, 191-192; see also several research findings on various topics from Max Weber's sociology of values by Mawikere, Hura, and colleagues).

The crisis related to the Dani people's belief in the *Naruekul* myth involves the sacred pieces of *Naruekul's* body, known as *kaneke*, which are considered both sacred objects and a legacy/message from *Naruekul* following his tragic death. *Kaneke* has evolved from being a mere "sacred item" or "charm" to symbolizing power or superiority among certain groups or clans within the Balim/Dani community, as *Naruekul's* message intended. Consequently, both *kaneke* and *Naruekul* are perceived as "idols" within the Balim/Dani society. *Kaneke* has become integral to "tribal warfare" and a symbol of victory over neighboring groups (Alua, 2006, 36-38). This belief in *kaneke*, as part of *Naruekul's* body, which has turned into a form of "occult" power or individual and community idols, affects claims of personal and group superiority. This is reflected in the division of missionary areas and the presence of churches among the Dani people, where evangelical services and church presence are often categorized based on territorial claims. This categorization, driven by settlement patterns and communal living (*silimo*), reflects an individual claim of superiority that has evolved into a community claim and eventually into inter-church rivalries. This issue is not acknowledged by the Christians from the Dani tribe in the Baliem Valley, as it involves spiritism or occultism influenced by *Naruekul* mythology and the concept of *silimo kaneke*.

Despite this crisis, there remains potential for the Gospel to engage with the cultural values of the Dani people. The research identifies a pathway for contextual Gospel proclamation to the Dani, leading to a form of "Christian ethics" that aligns with the values of the Kingdom of God.

### **Cultural Values of the Dani People**

The cultural values of the Dani people, or the Balim society, can be observed within the context of their residential layout known as *silimo*. *Silimo* refers to a spacious, square-shaped courtyard. Within this courtyard, there are distinct areas including men's houses called *honai* or *pilamo*, women's houses known as *eweai* or *ebeai*, kitchens (*hunila* or *disela*), pigpens (*wamaila* or *lawula* or *dabula*), courtyards (*hakiloma*), and cooking ponds (*hakse-silimo*). Through *silimo*, the traditional Balim community engages in daily interactions and processes that reflect their way of life and true values (Mansoben, 1994, 120; Alua, 2006, 44-46).

Generally, the Dani people's way of life includes an open attitude where they never close their houses (*honai/pilamo/eweai*) or their residential area (*silimo*) to others. A *silimo* should be open to receive and embrace everyone, as life is understood to be a stance of openness, inclusion, wholeness, and harmony with all people (*lopologo* or *lapolik*). A *silimo* should not be closed or selfish but open to anyone, including enemies (*ap silimeke*) seeking refuge during times of war

(*tek mekogo walo kinogo ilik*). The Dani people have a cultural principle called *ikuni-akuni hinakmouphogo*, which means to love everyone who comes. They greet others with the term *netaiken*, meaning "you are in my heart/you are part of my heart," to signify their sense of brotherhood. The Dani people live not in isolation but in community with others. Thus, "value of openness" is an important aspect of Dani life (Alua, 2006, 47; Susanto-Sunario, 1994, 46).

The Dani people's openness to everyone is also evident in the "shared meal" value, or *nan* or *nuok*, which appears in their daily life. For the Dani, it is considered inappropriate to say "this is my food," but rather "this is our food" (*yimeke timeke nekarek meke*). If a child eating pork (*nuok wam*) does not share with a friend (*nayak*), the mother (*nausah*) will reprimand the child with *ilimeke-timeke nukunembe inowasi-weak, inayaklah inombe weat ilihik-lihik nekarek*, meaning "enjoying something alone makes one's body smell bad; instead, enjoy food with a friend, even if it is small." Furthermore, within the silimo community, the saying *all usigiluk asokneat lagarek, ilimeke-timeke nagalukhe akuniat unom motok ape nagalukhe hano, etaiken werek* means "a person with a good heart in a silimo is one who cleans up alone, but when it comes to eating, they must share to enjoy together with others." This shared meal value demonstrates the Dani people's openness in daily life, viewing the presence of others as a blessing within a silimo, thus counteracting selfish and closed attitudes (Alua, 2006, 50).

Living together within a silimo also serves as a place for learning, where older generations share both sweet and bitter life experiences with younger members. In both men's houses (*honai* or *pilamo*) and women's houses (*eweai* or *ebeai*), the process of teaching and learning occurs, with young people gaining much experience from elders. Stories of life experiences are shared, including information about ancestors and Dani beliefs, how to engage in warfare, start a family, procure food, and relate to others, among other topics. Specifically, in the *eweai* and *hunila*, a mother (*nausah*) will teach young girls (*homarugih*) various skills, such as *agosaak nyane ikenem holek* (obedience to mother's words), *ai yasusak elok* (ability to plant yams), *wam tasusak elok* (ability to raise pigs), *agosaak yimi yamak elok* (ability to help mothers), *hopuru tasusak nen isasusak elok* (ability to dig yams and cook), *hele owa luwu lawasek* (how to be a friendly girl), and others. Similarly, in the *honai* or *pilamo*, a father (*nopaseh*) teaches young boys (*eaututek*) skills such as *opaselak nyane ikenem asuk holek* (obedience to father's words), *yawu leget elok* (ability to clear land for farming), *hali wasusak elok* (ability to gather firewood), *apuni yimi yamak* (ability to help others), *wenekak egarek elok* (good communication skills), *aweuk ewelek* (skillful action), *owa isosek/isago* (becoming a friendly man), and others. Therefore, the effective approach for teaching and learning in Balim society is within a *silimo* rather than formal classes or meeting halls (Yelipele, 2008, 45).

Another significant cultural value for the Dani people is the principle of *meeting together* (deliberation) as part of their communal life within a *silimo*. Deliberations are held in the *honai*, with the fundamental philosophy being *wenekak umanen at egarek, honainen at egarek, bunilanen egarekdek, itikmanen egarekdek*, which means that discussions should occur inside the house, not outside. Thus, every individual's opinions and ideas are heard, valued, and respected, and through deliberations in the *honai*, the Dani people also express their respect for and veneration of ancestral spirits (*ame*). Work is a crucial aspect of Dani culture. In a *silimo*, parents (*nopaseh/father* and *nausah/mother*) teach their children how to farm (*yabu maniklago*), gather firewood (*o werasin*), build fences (*leget*), construct houses (*oma*), cook (*isasini*), raise pigs (*kulik lago wam*), and hunt (*apuni sue hageg watarek mek*), ensuring their livelihood. For the Dani people, work (*yabu hagatarek*) holds significant meaning: First, it represents self-worth, as an individual is valued when they work. Second, work is seen as a necessity for life, as survival requires it. Third, work provides an opportunity for individuals to discover their talents, interests, skills, strengths, and endurance. Fourth, it serves as a means to strengthen unity within a *silimo* or village (*ouku*) (Alua, 2006, 51; Susanto-Sunario, 1984, 56).

The cultural values described above indicate that the Dani people have *hinekerogo* or *ninom hutik* or "relationship values" based on the philosophy that humans have no meaning without the presence of others (Alua, 2006, 53). However, the author has observed that these "relationship values" are gradually fading. Accumulating social changes, particularly related to social and political contexts as previously discussed, have influenced the Dani people to increasingly reject the presence of outsiders, particularly those they refer to as "Melayu people." Consequently, the Dani people now stand with one foot in their traditional culture, which demands openness and acceptance, and the other in a social and political context that fosters exclusivity, leading to polarization between "Melanesians/Papuan people" and "Melayu people."

Although the Dani people do not have formal leaders, they still respect leaders known as *ap kain* who possess strength, authority, charisma, wisdom, experience, and exemplary behavior. The Dani people often refer to *ap kain* with the phrase *kan ati yawu hano mare agoromi hano wogosek waga*, meaning "because of this leader, we have succeeded today." To such leaders, the Dani people show loyalty. The community's loyalty to their leaders influences their behavior towards religion and their desire for progress. Thus, the openness of the Dani people to external influences also depends on the openness of their leaders. If an *ap kain* is open, the community will follow the leader, be open to change, and readily accept and assimilate newcomers without being overly constrained by religious factors (See the research findings from Mawikere on the Baliem people).

Today, the Dani people are open to change or cultural value transformations while still adhering to previous cultural values, practices, and understandings. Social and political aspects also influence the Dani people to distance themselves from newcomers, whom they refer to as "Melayu people." In other words, any external change (acculturation) will be given a chance to be integrated if it aligns with their cultural values. However, social and political aspects, considering their identity as "Melanesians/Papuan people," have become significant factors in their acceptance of such changes.

### **Efforts to Transform Gospel Culture and Establish New Ethics for the Dani People of Papua**

What is the Gospel? According to Yakob Tomatala, the term "Gospel" is used in Romans 1:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 and is derived from the Greek word *euaggelion* (εὐαγγέλιον), meaning "good news" or "message of joy" from God about Jesus Christ and His redemptive work for the world. Tomatala operationally defines "evangelism" as the proclamation of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to sinners with a message delivered with conviction, so that sinners may repent, accept Jesus Christ as Savior, and become members of the church responsible for discipling others to win the world for the glory of Christ, thus bringing glory to God (Tomatala, 2007, 17-19). "Contextual evangelism" refers to proclaiming the Gospel within the cultural framework of a specific culture, achieving a balance that reflects a biblically sound theological understanding of that framework so that Jesus Christ is accepted as Lord and Savior. This approach aims for communicators to present the Gospel in a culturally sensitive manner to reach as many people as possible (1 Corinthians 9:18-23).

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

The *Nabelan-Kabelan* and *Naruekul* mythologies suggest that the Dani people of Papua anticipate a messianic or cargoist hope, seeking both an ideal and peaceful situation through the "old skin replaced with new skin" event (*Nabelan-Kabelan*) and an ideal individual or divine figure who provides life and promises of salvation to the community, represented by *Naruekul*. Both the *Nabelan-Kabelan* situation and the figure of *Naruekul* are believed by the Dani people to originate from outside their society, making them open to external cultural influences, including "Gospel

culture." This has been demonstrated over decades by the arrival of Western missionaries who have preached the Gospel to them, as well as other Melanesian outsiders who have also shared the Gospel of Christ. The process of cultural acculturation and assimilation between missionaries and foreign servants in Papua has occurred without erasing the Dani people's original culture.

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

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

The process of inculturating the Gospel also involves engaging with the *Naruekul* mythology, which depicts *Naruekul* as both human and divine (*Walhowak*). *Naruekul* is said to have died through being killed but remains powerful and maintains an eternal covenant. This mirrors the core of the Gospel, which centers on Jesus Christ as both human and divine, who died on the cross for human sins and rose again on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), establishing a "new covenant" for believers. This New Covenant promises "eternal life" in the Father's house or the Kingdom of Heaven (John 14:2-3). Similarly, the work of Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross is a substitutionary sacrifice for human sins (John 1:29; Ephesians 1:7), parallels *Naruekul's* death and resurrection, and the promise he provides as understood by the Dani people.

Thus, the "Gospel culture" aligns with certain Dani cultural values regarding a figure who is both human and divine, who sacrifices Himself and provides a covenant. This alignment allows the Gospel to be integrated into Dani culture without implying that the Gospel is equivalent to the



culture itself. The aim is for the Gospel to be heard and understood within the Dani people's cargo cult worldview.

To prevent deviations in Gospel teaching or syncretism, a process of deculturation is necessary when the Gospel confronts the cultural values of the Dani people. As discussed, the concept of eternal life in the *Nabelan-Kabelan* and *Naruekul* mythologies involves elements of animism, dynamism, and spiritism, which are opposed by the Gospel and the Bible. Therefore, aspects of the *Nabelan-Kabelan* and *Naruekul* myths must undergo deculturation to enable the Gospel to be preached and understood within Dani culture. Beliefs in ancestral spirits, often practiced through ceremonies or rituals, and seeking occult guidance in daily life need to be replaced with a new worldview. The Dani must learn that what they regard as ancestral spirits—such as the supernatural rulers called *Kugi Erimbo/Kwewanakwe* and *limbu*—and *kaneke*, parts of *Naruekul's* remains, are actually evil spirits that oppose Jesus Christ and seek to destroy (John 10:10). Thus, contextual evangelism among the Dani people involves not only addressing concepts or truths but also engaging in spiritual warfare.

The Dani must also be assured that ancestral spirits and sacred objects like *kaneke*, which claim superiority over others, are powers of darkness or “gods of this age” that obscure the light of the Gospel about the glory of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4). Similarly, the reverence for *kaneke*, which has historically incited “tribal warfare” and may still do so today, must be addressed. The superior peace brought by the Gospel of Jesus Christ should be emphasized (2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Ephesians 2:13-14). Deculturation must also address the *Nabelan-Kabelan* myth concerning the *Ibibilo* or *Pirigobit* bird and the *Bonon* snake. The Dani must understand that the “replacement of old skin with new skin” or “replacement of death with life” does not depend on the power of living creatures or the universe, including animals like birds and snakes. Instead, transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit, who changes every believer into the character of Christ (Romans 8:26; Ephesians 2:10). Ultimately, the Gospel, as the highest authority over all cultures, must engage in cultural transformation or reculturation. This process should occur within the context of eternal life among the Dani people, related to the *Nabelan-Kabelan* and *Naruekul* myths.

To introduce God to the Dani people, a “translation model” or “cultural adaptation model” can be utilized. In relation to the Dani's ancient belief in *Walhowak* or *Nyopase Kain* (the Almighty God), an evangelist might use the term *Walhowak* while conveying the Gospel with a different meaning than what the Dani understand. This can be achieved through functional substitution, retaining familiar terms or forms but replacing their meaning with the transformative Gospel (Tomatala, 2007, 41-42). For introducing Jesus Christ to the Balim people, an evangelist might

use terms like *Walhowak*, *Nakmarugi*, or *Naruekul*, but must clarify the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as *Walhowak*, who became human to redeem and save humanity from sin as described in the Bible. To explain the work of *Walhowak* Jesus Christ in saving humanity, the sacrifice of His death on the cross to atone for sin through the power of His blood must be emphasized. It is not about achieving ideal conditions like those in the *Nabelan-Kabelan* myths or using sacred objects like *kaneke*, but about the grace and power of *Walhowak* Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 5:9).

The core message of the Gospel about the Person of Jesus Christ can also undergo "cultural transformation" in relation to the Dani belief in *Naruekul*. *Naruekul*, who is both human and *Walhowak*, is depicted as having died and been killed but remaining powerful, manifesting Himself, and rising to heaven. This bears resemblance to *Walhowak* Jesus Christ, who truly died on the cross for sinful humanity, rose on the third day, revealed Himself to His disciples, established a "new covenant" of eternal life, ascended to heaven, and will return as the King of Glory. This emphasizes the Gospel message that must renew the cultural values of the Dani people.

Similarly, the *Nabelan-Kabelan* concept should be reinterpreted to represent salvation or eternal life, a special grace and gift for those who believe in *Walhowak* Jesus Christ as both *Walhowak* and Savior, specifically the eternal Kingdom of God. Eternal life is received and experienced through belief in Christ, with its full realization occurring when *Walhowak* Jesus Christ returns as the true *Naruekul*. Thus, *Walhowak* Jesus Christ requires the Dani people, both individually and as a community, to believe in Him as *Walhowak* and Savior and to "hold fast" to Him as the true *Naruekul*. Regarding the role of an evangelist, the "incarnational model" can be applied. An evangelist contextualized to the Dani people must serve as a role model for the community, akin to *Naruekul*, who sacrificed himself for the benefit of humanity and future generations. The proclamation of the Gospel is closely linked to the personality of the messenger. Generally, the Dani people seek a leader they can trust and be loyal to. Therefore, the presence of a culturally contextual evangelist is as crucial as the contextual nature of the Gospel message itself. The evangelist's life should reflect trustworthy personality and character (credibility), consistency between words and actions (integrity), a well-regarded family within the community, and honest behavior.

A crucial aspect that must not be overlooked is the importance of spiritual warfare. Evangelistic ministry, with the ethical implications of Christian teaching resulting from repentance, involves more than "conceptual debates" or "cultural transformation"; it is primarily about liberating people from all forms of darkness and sin. The Gospel proclamation aims to transition

sinful humanity from a state of darkness and eternal condemnation to the marvelous light of the Lord. The Balim people must be made aware that the demons, whom they worship and fear as depicted in the myths, are enemies of God and humanity, and can only have their power broken by the Holy Spirit. By utilizing the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18), Balim Christians must be prepared to abandon their old lifestyle bound by occult powers and resist all forms of temptation from demonic forces, relying solely on the grace and power of Jesus Christ.

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

Regarding the dichotomy or polarization inherent in the ancient culture of the Dani people of Papua, which often leads to "tribal warfare" and competition between individuals and groups, such issues must be addressed. The worldview derived from *kaneke-silimo*, which tends to include occult elements, must be dismantled by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, "uniting the children of God and all creation/cosmos in Christ" becomes a reality as the ethical implication of the Gospel. Consequently, the Gospel is not only theoretical or related to wisdom/insight but, as Schleiermacher puts it, it touches human experiences and communities (Mawikere, 2019).

Based on the above discussion, the study of the worldview in the mythology of the Dani ethnic group in Papua and its ethical implications through a Christian perspective reveals that the integration of the Gospel within the Dani cultural context requires careful adjustment. Cultural contexts such as the *Nabelan-Kabelan* and *Naruekul* myths, which contain elements of messianic hope and concepts of salvation, provide a potential foundation for understanding and communicating the Gospel message. By reinterpreting the meaning of these myths in light of Christian teachings—such as linking the concept of "old skin replaced with new skin" with the doctrine of "new creation in Christ"—the Gospel can be articulated in a manner that is both relevant and meaningful to the Dani people. This approach not only aids in the process of acculturation but also helps avoid syncretism, with an emphasis on the importance of spiritual warfare and a correct understanding of the character and work of Jesus Christ.

The Dani people, also known as the Balim society, in Papua are renowned for their rich cultural values and communal lifestyle, as reflected in their traditional residential layout, the *silimo*. *Silimo*, a spacious, square-shaped courtyard, includes various functional areas such as men's houses (*honai* or *pilamo*), women's houses (*eweai* or *ebeai*), kitchens (*hunila* or *disela*), pigpens (*wamaila* or *lawula* or *dabula*), courtyards (*hakiloma*), and cooking ponds (*hakse-silimo*). This design fosters daily interactions and embodies their core values of openness, communal sharing, and harmony (Mansoben, 1994, 120; Alua, 2006, 44-46).

Central to the Dani way of life is their open attitude towards others, symbolized by the unclosed nature of their homes and communal space. This openness, grounded in their cultural principle of *ikuni-akuni hinakmouphogo*, signifies a profound commitment to inclusivity and acceptance, even towards enemies seeking refuge. Their greetings, which convey deep brotherhood and inclusion, reinforce this ethos of welcoming and communal harmony (Alua, 2006, 47; Susanto-Sunario, 1994, 46).

The value of shared meals (*nan* or *nuok*) further illustrates this openness. The Dani practice communal sharing of food, signified by the phrase "this is our food" (*yimeke timeke nekarek meke*), rather than claiming ownership. This practice, taught from a young age, emphasizes generosity and collective support, reflecting their commitment to communal well-being and shared responsibility (Alua, 2006, 50).

Education and learning within the *silimo* are pivotal for preserving cultural values. Elders pass down essential life skills and knowledge to younger generations, encompassing various aspects such as farming, cooking, and social conduct. This informal educational process underscores the significance of communal living in effectively transmitting cultural practices and values (Yelipele, 2008, 45).

A fundamental cultural value for the Dani is **meeting together**, or deliberation, which is central to their decision-making process. Discussions within the *honai* reflect their belief in inclusive and respectful dialogue, demonstrating reverence for ancestral wisdom and collective decision-making (Alua, 2006, 51). Incorporating the Gospel into the Dani cultural context requires a nuanced approach that respects and aligns with their existing values. The transformative power of the Gospel, centered on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, offers a profound opportunity for life change and new ethical living. The message of the Gospel should resonate with the Dani's cultural practices, emphasizing transformation through Christ's redemptive work while enhancing their values of openness, communal sharing, and ethical living.

However, integrating the Gospel into Dani culture involves addressing challenges such as the erosion of traditional "relationship values" and increasing exclusivity towards outsiders. The

Dani's complex interaction with modernity and external influences necessitates a thoughtful approach to ensure that the Gospel message is not only compatible with but also transformative within their cultural framework.

To effectively establish new ethics through the Gospel, it is essential to engage deeply with the Dani people's values, fostering an environment where Christian teachings enhance and enrich their traditional practices. This approach involves a careful balance of respecting cultural identity while introducing transformative principles of the Gospel, aiming to achieve a harmonious integration of new ethics grounded in the redemptive power of Jesus Christ.

Additionally, contextual evangelism models that adopt an incarnational approach and cultural adaptation, such as using the term *Walhowak* to refer to Jesus Christ, enable the Gospel message to be delivered in a culturally sensitive manner while preserving its theological essence. This process involves decolonizing and adjusting the Dani worldview, which may conflict with Christian teachings, such as beliefs in ancestral spirits and other occult forces. Thus, evangelism among the Dani people aims not only to win souls but also to produce an active, dedicated Christian community living according to Christian ethics that glorify God. Ultimately, the Dani people, or the Balim ethnic group, will experience a complete transformation, both spiritually and socially, as they are liberated from the bondage of sin and idolatry by the redemptive power of Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit transforming their character and ethics to align with the identity and dignity of those redeemed by Jesus Christ.

## D. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the Dani people, or Balim society in Papua, have their cultural values reflected in the *Nabelan-Kabelan* and *Naruekul* mythologies. This situation presents both crises and opportunities impacting the ethics of the Dani people, including the Christians among them. The crisis emerges from the influence of animism and occultism on ethical behavior, despite the majority identifying as "Christians." Conversely, this cultural backdrop offers an opportunity for contextual "re-evangelization," which could lead to a more fruitful Christian life for both God and others.

As a contextual evangelist for the Dani people in Papua, one should serve as a role model or figure for the community to ensure that the Gospel is received with conviction. An evangelist can apply the "incarnational model" in their efforts. Contextual evangelism also aims to affirm the superiority of Gospel values over cultural values, which requires the deculturalization of erroneous cultural elements related to the *Nabelan-Kabelan* and *Naruekul* myths. The author proposes the "transformation model" or reculturation as an approach to contextual evangelism, focusing on empowering cultural values within these myths. By leveraging the cultural transformation model

through the Gospel—specifically, the redemptive power of Jesus Christ as the sole Savior and the restorer of all creation and life—it is hoped that this approach will resonate with Dani cultural values and serve as an effective alternative for contextual evangelism.

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

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