




Kairos in Poso: Towards a contextual theology of peace after religious conflict



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The communal conflict that struck Poso, Central Sulawesi, in the early 2000s left deep social and spiritual wounds. This article aims to construct a contextual theology of peace in response to that trauma. Employing a qualitative approach with narrative and reflective analysis of historical accounts, theological literature and local reconciliation efforts, this study interprets the Poso conflict as a *kairos* – a moment of crisis demanding theological response. The study draws on biblical reflection (Is 58; Lk 4), systematic theology (theology of the cross and reconciliation) and contextual theology (local values such as *Sintuwu Maroso*) to build a peace theology rooted in real-life suffering, relational restoration and the Church's active role in justice. The study finds that the local Protestant churches in Poso, especially GKST, have developed a contextual theology of peace by integrating biblical teaching, the lived experience of post-conflict communities and cultural values such as *Sintuwu Maroso*. This integration has shaped a practical framework for reconciliation, interreligious dialogue and community resilience in the aftermath of the conflict.

Contribution: This article not only proposes a framework relevant to the Indonesian context but also enriches global theological discourse on post-conflict reconciliation.

Keywords: *kairos*; theology of peace; Poso; religious violence; contextual theology; reconciliation.

Introduction

Poso, a small town in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, witnessed one of the bloodiest communal conflicts with religious overtones in modern Indonesian history. The violence between Christian and Muslim groups from 1998 to the early 2000s claimed hundreds of lives, caused mass displacement and left deep social, cultural and spiritual wounds within the community (McRae 2013; Schulze 2019; Sunkudon, Juanda & Lepa 2024). Although the conflict has formally ended, its effects continue to shape interreligious relations and theological reflection in the region.

In the aftermath of this tragedy, a crucial question arises: how should faith communities – particularly local churches – respond theologically to such violence and its enduring legacy? This article focuses on the Protestant churches in Poso across denominational lines – especially the Gereja Kristen Sulawesi Tengah (GKST), along with Pentecostal, Evangelical and other non-Catholic Protestant congregations – that were directly engaged in post-conflict reconciliation. While the theological reflections offered here may resonate beyond the local context, the primary concern of this study is the lived experience and theological praxis of these Protestant churches in Poso as they respond to conflict, trauma and the call to peace.

One of the core tensions faced by churches in post-conflict settings is between their *prophetic calling* to speak truth and justice and the *pastoral necessity* of mediating between divided communities. However, this article does not present mediation as opposed to prophetic action. Instead, it argues that *mediation itself can be a prophetic act* – a courageous stance grounded in truth, compassion and justice. Following the example of Christ, who reconciled humanity through both proclamation and sacrifice, the Church is called to bridge divides not through neutrality but through active, justice-oriented peacemaking.

While numerous studies have examined the Poso conflict from socio-political and anthropological angles (e.g. International Crisis Group 2005; McRae 2013; Schulze 2019), few have provided a systematic theological engagement rooted in the local church's lived experience. Reports from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and faith-based organisations have documented peacebuilding activities but often without articulating a theology of peace that emerges

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organically from within the community's cultural and spiritual framework. This study seeks to fill that gap.

Drawing inspiration from the *Kairos Document* (Kairos Theologians [GROUP] 1986) – a prophetic theological response to apartheid South Africa – this article views the Poso conflict as a *kairos moment*: a critical time of crisis that calls for theological interpretation and transformative action. By integrating biblical, systematic and contextual theological reflections and drawing upon local wisdom such as the *Sintuwu Maroso* value of communal unity, this article proposes a contextual theology of peace rooted in the Poso experience (De Gruchy & De Gruchy 2005; Kairos Theologians [Group] 1986). The goal is to offer a theological framework that not only addresses the wounds of the past but also empowers the Church to be an agent of reconciliation, justice and hope in pluralistic societies (McRae 2013; Schulze 2019; Sunkudon et al. 2024).

Amidst Indonesia's religious plurality, which remains vulnerable to intergroup tensions, the Poso experience creates space for developing a theology of peace rooted in the lived realities of local communities rather than in abstract universalisms. Such theology arises from suffering, the search for meaning and local reconciliation practices, drawing from indigenous cultural and spiritual resources as instruments of peace (Banawiratma 2010; Nursyamsi, Tamrin & Bismawati 2023; Puryanto 2024; Schoeman 2017). One of the main challenges is how a theology of peace can engage with religious pluralism without compromising the inclusive and egalitarian values embedded in the teachings of Christ. In this context, the integration of local cultural values – such as *Sintuwu Maroso*, which emphasises social harmony and reconciliation – becomes vital as a resource for long-term peacebuilding.

Accordingly, this article aims to formulate a contextual framework for a theology of peace using an interdisciplinary approach – combining biblical, systematic and contextual theological reflections – while taking into account the social, cultural and religious dynamics of Poso. This reflection seeks to enrich the global discourse on peace theology and to offer contributions from the Indonesian context to the broader international theological dialogue. Through this study, the author hopes to contribute meaningfully to sustained reconciliation and peace in Poso and to demonstrate how theology can function as an agent of transformation in societies fractured and traumatised by conflict.

Understanding Kairos theologically: From scripture to context

In Christian theology, *kairos* is more than a measurement of time – it is a decisive moment in which God's purposes intersect with human history. Distinct from *chronos* [sequential, measurable time], *kairos* refers to a qualitative moment laden with urgency, meaning and divine initiative. Biblically, *kairos* is associated with God's redemptive action in history. Jesus begins his public ministry proclaiming, 'The time [*kairos*] is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near' [Mk 1:15, NRSV]. The Apostle Paul urges believers to

'make the most of the time [*kairos*], because the days are evil' (Eph 5:16), indicating a season that demands ethical discernment and urgent response.

Theologically, *kairos* represents a moment of both crisis and opportunity – a moment when the community of faith is summoned to respond with clarity, courage and conviction. As Jürgen Moltmann notes, 'Kairos is not simply a time of fate, but a time of decision in which the kingdom of God breaks into history' (Moltmann 1993:24). This concept gained renewed relevance in the 20th century through the South African *Kairos Document* (1986), which challenged churches to reject neutrality amidst apartheid and to embrace a prophetic theology aligned with justice and solidarity. In that context, *kairos* named the critical moment when the Church could either become complicit with systemic evil or respond faithfully to God's call.

In light of these theological and historical insights, the experience of violence and reconciliation in Poso can be understood as a *kairos moment* for the Indonesian Church – an invitation to discern God's will within the trauma of communal conflict and to embody a theology of peace that is contextual, prophetic and transformative. Referring to the conflict and its aftermath in Poso as a *kairos* is not to romanticise suffering, but to recognise a divinely appointed moment that summons the Church to respond redemptively in history. This theological framing, rooted in the lived experience of post-conflict communities, will guide the reflections throughout this article.

Research methods and design

This study employs an integrative theological methodology, combining contextual, biblical and systematic approaches within a hermeneutical cycle. The aim is to construct a theology of peace in Poso that is both faithful to Scripture and meaningfully rooted in the lived experiences of local communities after the conflict.

Contextual theology

The contextual approach begins with the *concrete realities* of post-conflict Poso. This involves listening to the testimonies of survivors, observing communal practices of reconciliation and analysing local cultural values such as *Sintuwu Maroso* and *Posintuwu*. In this setting, 'the oppressed' (Lk 4:18–19) are understood not only as victims of physical violence, but also as those who suffered forced displacement, loss of homes and livelihoods, destruction of places of worship, and the breakdown of interreligious trust (McRae 2013:45–46; International Crisis Group 2005:7–9). Contextual theology enables a reading of these realities through the lens of the Gospel while ensuring that theological reflection speaks into the local historical wounds and aspirations for peace (Bevans 2013:3–4; Singgih 2009:56–57).

Biblical theology

Biblical reflection provides the theological and ethical foundations for peace. Isaiah 58:6–12 frames peace as justice-oriented worship that loosens the bonds of injustice and

restores broken communities. Luke 4:18–19 reveals Christ's mission to liberate the oppressed, offering a theological vision that embraces healing, justice and restoration for those wounded by violence. Ephesians 2:14–17 presents the cross as the ultimate basis for reconciliation, dismantling divisions and creating one new humanity. These passages are exegeted and then brought into direct dialogue with the lived experiences of Poso's Protestant communities, demonstrating how Scripture speaks afresh in contexts marked by violence, trauma and the struggle for reconciliation (Wolfe 2024:127–160).

Systematic theology

Within the systematic dimension, *reconciliation* serves as the primary theological framework. *Atonement* is treated as its theological foundation, illuminating how the redemptive work of Christ addresses sin, restores broken relationships and resonates with local practices of restitution such as *giwv*. *Eschatological hope* functions as the horizon that sustains the reconciled community, rooting peacebuilding efforts in God's promised future. Drawing on the Reformed tradition – especially John Calvin's theology of *shalom* and the Church's social mandate (Calvin 2023:1907–1910) – this study articulates reconciliation as the Church's missional vocation in a divided society. Allan Boesak's theological resistance against injustice (Boesak 2016:87–90) and Gustavo Gutiérrez's liberation theology (Gutiérrez 2023:51–55) further shape the ethical contours of this theological construction. The notion of the Church as a reconciled and reconciling community provides the structural core of the systematic reflection (De Gruchy 2002:45–48).

Hermeneutical cycle

These three methods are integrated through a hermeneutical cycle that moves between context, Scripture and doctrine. The process begins with the concrete realities of Poso's post-conflict society, is illuminated by biblical witness and is then deepened through systematic theological categories. Insights gained from this process are reinserted into the local context, allowing theology to emerge as both a response to and a guide for community transformation.

Kairos tradition

The methodological integration is anchored in the Kairos tradition. Just as the *Kairos Document* (Kairos Theologians [Group] 1986:7–9) emerged in South Africa as a prophetic theological response to systemic injustice, this study interprets the Poso conflict as a *kairos moment* – a divinely charged historical crisis that summons the Church to a contextual, faithful and transformative response. In this sense, to name Poso as *kairos* is not to romanticise suffering but to acknowledge a divine summons to respond redemptively in history.

Ethical considerations

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

clearance was granted by the academic board of Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Injili Indonesia (STTII) Palu on 04 May 2025 (No: 016/Ket/STTII-P/V/2025)

Results and discussion

Reading the Poso conflict as Kairos: A theological interpretation of crisis

This section interprets the *conflict that took place in Poso* as a *kairos moment* – a time of crisis and divine challenge, in which the Church is called to discern truth, act justly and embody peace.

The conflict that erupted in Poso between 1998 and 2001 not only resulted in physical violence and material destruction but also shook the social structure, interreligious relations and the spiritual convictions of many individuals. In theological terms, this tragedy can be understood as a *kairos* – not merely *chronos* [chronological time], but divine time that calls the Church to transform and repent. *Kairos* is a moment of divine disclosure, when the suffering of the people becomes a birthplace of spiritual sensitivity and ethical responsibility (Boesak 2016:9–37). This perspective resists viewing the Poso conflict merely as a political or social failure and instead interprets it as a divine call for the Church and Christians to bear prophetic witness amidst crisis.

In many testimonies collected during the reconciliation period, Christian residents expressed that their suffering because of the conflict deepened their understanding of faith. As noted by McRae (2013:189–199), the experiences of displacement and loss created space for believers to re-examine their calling – not merely as individual Christians, but as a community summoned to be light and salt in the midst of society. In the midst of that suffering, the Church functioned not only as a place of physical refuge but also as a spiritual space for cultivating hope, sustaining faith identity and rekindling a vision of peace.

The interpretation of *kairos* is also strongly tied to the spiritualisation of suffering as found in biblical narratives. In Isaiah 58, for example, the people are called to go beyond ritual religion and practise true worship through acts of justice: 'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice ... and to set the oppressed free?' (Is 58:6). This verse reflects the calling of the Church in Poso to repent from apathy, to build solidarity and to become agents of social reconciliation. Conflict-stricken Poso thus becomes fertile ground for the birth of a contextual spirituality – one that emerges from the soil of suffering and responds to the concrete realities of society.

Kairos in Poso also reveals the Church's limitations in anticipating and responding to rapidly changing socio-political dynamics. Before the conflict broke out, many local Protestant churches in Poso – like those in other parts of Indonesia – focused mainly on internal ministries such as worship, teaching and personal piety. This crisis, however,

compelled many churches in Poso to re-evaluate their role and mission – not only within their congregations but also in society at large. This aligns with the perspectives on contextual theology articulated by Gutiérrez (2023) in *A Theology of Liberation*, where he underscores the necessity for the Church to be grounded in the lived experiences and suffering of the oppressed. Gutiérrez argues that theology cannot be abstract or detached from the realities of social injustice and must incorporate social praxis as a fundamental component, directly engaging with the struggles of marginalised communities. This view is further supported by the work of Boff (1997), who also emphasises the importance of integrating faith with social action, particularly in response to the suffering of the poor and oppressed.

Hope in the midst of violence is not an abstract theological category, but a lived reality embodied in the practices of the local church. In Poso, hope was nurtured through concrete actions: congregations opened their doors as places of refuge for displaced families, liturgical gatherings became spaces of collective lament and confession and interfaith dialogues were initiated to rebuild trust with Muslim neighbours (McRae 2013:193–196; International Crisis Group 2007:6–8, 2008:3–5). These practices demonstrate that hope is sustained not by denying wounds, but by facing them in light of the Gospel. To interpret the conflict as *kairos* means precisely this: to see historical wounds as places of divine disclosure, where repentance leads to transformation and where the church is called to embody reconciliation in tangible ways.

Local cultural elements and Sintuwu Maroso

In the effort to rebuild peace in the post-conflict period, it is insufficient to rely solely on theological or political approaches imposed from outside. Authentic and sustainable peace must grow from the cultural roots of the local community itself. Within the cultural context of Poso society – particularly among the Pamona people – an indigenous majority in Poso whose deep-rooted Christian faith, especially within the *Gereja Kristen Sulawesi Tengah* (GKST), has shaped the region's ecclesial and cultural identity. Literally meaning 'strong unity' or 'firm togetherness', the term reflects a spirit of mutual cooperation, solidarity and loyalty within community life (Imran, Dwi Septiwiharti & Nasran 2022).

In the history of the Pamona people, *Sintuwu Maroso* is not merely an empty slogan, but a principle of collective life that unites various villages and extended families. This principle is upheld in numerous traditional ceremonies, village deliberations and cooperative efforts in agrarian life. When sectarian conflict fractured the community, this value was temporarily diminished. However, it was precisely during the reconciliation process that many community and church leaders sought to rediscover and revitalise local values as a means of social healing. In other words, *Sintuwu Maroso* became a cultural bridge for post-conflict peace reconstruction.

By inculturating this indigenous value into their theology of peace, local Protestant churches in Poso have taken a

theologically meaningful and contextually strategic step towards reconciliation. Through this approach, the Church does not merely preach about love and peace in abstract terms but connects these messages to deeply rooted local values. In the spirit of *Sintuwu Maroso*, acts of mutual forgiveness, intercommunity dialogue and interfaith collaboration find a solid cultural foundation. Churches in Poso, such as the Central Sulawesi Christian Church [*Gereja Kristen Sulawesi Tengah*, GKST], have increasingly incorporated local terms such as *mosintuwu* [peace] and *molimbu* [deliberation] into sermon narratives, Christian education and social programmes.

This integration reflects an inculturated theological approach as described by Schreiter (2015), who emphasises that truly grounded theology must speak through the symbols, language and values of the local culture. In the context of Poso, a theology of peace that does not take into account values such as *Sintuwu Maroso* risks feeling alien and irrelevant.

Before the conflict, *Sintuwu Maroso* – which literally means 'unity in togetherness' – functioned as a foundational ethic in village governance, communal work, conflict mediation and the transmission of moral responsibility. It shaped the daily rhythms of life, fostering social cohesion and a shared cultural identity among the Pamona people (McRae 2013; Yakobus, Yahya & Agustang 2019).

After the conflict, the fragmentation of trust and the rise of sectarian fear disrupted this cultural foundation. In response, some local churches began reclaiming *Sintuwu Maroso* as a theological resource for reconciliation – reinterpreting it through the lens of shalom, justice and the cross of Christ (International Crisis Group 2005; Yakobus et al. 2019). When cultural values such as *Sintuwu Maroso* are integrated with the Christian faith narrative, a new, contextual and transformative spirituality emerges.

Furthermore, it is important to note that *Sintuwu Maroso* implicitly aligns with Gospel values. For instance, the principles of bearing one another's burdens (Gl 6:2), living in peace (Rm 12:18) and loving one another (Jn 13:34) are biblical values that find parallels in the local context. In this sense, culture is not viewed as an opponent of faith but as a medium of revelation, enabling a creative dialogue between the Gospel and its context. In practice, this has been realised through various interfaith community programmes in Tentena and Poso – such as youth interfaith activities, conflict mediation training and peace culture festivals – which incorporate local cultural symbols as expressions of reconciliation (Scalici 2018).

Local cultural elements like *Sintuwu Maroso* are not merely social tools but theological resources for constructing a praxis of peace. Among the Pamona people, *Sintuwu Maroso* – literally 'unity in togetherness' – has historically guided communal life through practices such as *mopotu-uma* [cooperative farming] and *mpapolu* [mutual support during bereavement], which fostered solidarity, shared responsibility

and moral accountability [Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2002; Ruagadi 2024].

However, the Poso conflict severely disrupted these cultural foundations, as trust eroded and social cohesion unravelled. In response, local Protestant churches and community actors began to reclaim and reinterpret *Sintuwu Maroso* as a theological resource for reconciliation. Post-conflict platforms like *Posintuwu* emerged as initiatives to rebuild interfaith solidarity and communal healing, drawing on cultural values to ground theological vision and praxis (HRW 2002; Ruagadi 2024). Thus, culture serves as a bridge between faith and real life, between history and hope. Far from being an obstacle, *Sintuwu Maroso* becomes a vital theological treasure when reinterpreted in light of the Gospel, shaping a contextual and transformative theology of peace.

Contextual theology of peace

Contextual theology of peace, in this perspective, does not merely discuss peace as a theoretical concept, but rather concerns how peace is manifested in the social realities faced by the people. In the context of Poso, the theology of peace is not a notion detached from community life; instead, it is the integration of Christian teachings with the concrete experiences of believers who have endured prolonged suffering because of religious conflict. As Sobrino (2002) emphasises in his work *Christology at the Crossroads*, contextual theology of peace seeks to bridge the gap between the narrative of faith and the lived realities of the faithful. By doing so, the Gospel message can become a transformative tool of healing for the wounded body of society.

One way to understand this theology of peace is by integrating biblical principles with the local post-conflict experiences. In the Bible, we find many narratives that speak of peace, reconciliation and restoration. One passage that is particularly relevant to the context of Poso is Isaiah 58:6–12. In this passage, the prophet Isaiah teaches that true worship is not merely expressed through outward rituals but also by siding with social justice, liberating the oppressed and striving for justice for the poor and marginalised. For Christians in Poso, this text offers a powerful perspective: true peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but the presence of justice and well-being for all, especially those wounded by conflict.

Furthermore, the narrative in Luke 4:18–19, which portrays Jesus' mission to liberate the oppressed, is also applicable to post-conflict reconciliation in Poso. In this passage, Jesus declares that He was sent to free the captives, heal the broken-hearted and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. This message is not only eschatological but also socially relevant, inviting believers to actively participate in the mission of liberation through concrete actions: social peace, economic recovery and interfaith reconciliation. Contextual theology of peace in Poso views the Church as an agent of healing for the social wounds caused by conflict, bringing not only words of comfort but also tangible actions that lead to the restoration of interreligious relationships.

The theology of the cross, which lies at the heart of Christian doctrine, also carries a profound dimension of peace. The cross, as a symbol of sacrifice and reconciliation, provides a solid theological foundation for the Church to engage in peacebuilding efforts. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:14–17 that Christ is our peace, who, through His cross, has united two previously divided groups (Jews and Gentiles) into one body. On this basis, churches in Poso are invited to see themselves as the body of Christ that transcends religious and cultural boundaries, embodying reconciliation and unity in diversity.

For Christians in Poso, the cross is not merely a symbol of suffering but also a sign of hope and restoration. Just as Christ's cross unites His once-divided people, so too is the Church in Poso expected to be an agent of restoration, reconnecting communities torn apart by violence. This is a prophetic calling for the Church in a society still grappling with post-conflict trauma.

Contextual theology of peace also involves acknowledging suffering as part of the faith journey. In the Christian tradition, suffering is not the end of the story, but part of the process towards healing and hope. In the context of Poso, the Church plays a role in helping its members overcome trauma, heal social wounds and rebuild a more harmonious communal life. One way of achieving this is through peace education, which not only involves theological teaching but also practical approaches such as conflict mediation training, interfaith dialogue and the promotion of tolerance. The Church is also involved in economic recovery programmes for those affected by the conflict, so that restoration encompasses not only the spiritual but also the social and economic dimensions of life.

Contextual theology of peace in Poso does not emerge as a generic call to avoid conflict but arises from the lived experience of trauma, forgiveness and reconciliation within the Christian communities. Following the violent religious conflict, local churches such as GKST began to reflect theologically not in abstract terms, but through their embodied efforts to rebuild trust across religious and cultural boundaries. Activities such as interfaith youth programmes, trauma healing workshops and community development initiatives became expressions of what Bevans (2002) calls a *praxis model* of contextual theology – 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' (Bevans 2002:70).

In the Indonesian context, this aligns with what Singgih (2000) emphasises as a theology 'that must be open to the realities of society and culture' [*teologi harus terbuka terhadap realitas masyarakat dan budaya*] (p. 5). The Church in Poso, as an integral part of society, does not bring an external theology to the people but rather listens to and learns from their sufferings and hopes – what Singgih calls 'the place where the voice of God must be heard' (p. 10). The result is a theology of peace grounded in justice, dialogue and transformative action.

The Church as an agent of peace

The church plays a vital role as an agent of peace within society, particularly in the aftermath of conflicts involving religious communities. In Poso, where interreligious violence between Muslims and Christians has left deep scars, the church functions not only as a place of worship but also as a centre for reconciliation, healing and peacebuilding (Maluleke 2020). In this context, the church is called not merely to preserve the sanctity of faith but to actively engage in rebuilding fractured social relationships and advocating for justice.

As a peacebuilding agent, the church in Poso bears the responsibility of supporting reconciliation processes and creating safe spaces for interfaith dialogue. Concrete actions have included organising interreligious dialogues and inviting leaders from different faith backgrounds to collectively address societal challenges (Moynagh & Harrold 2012:370–410; Abu-Nimer & Nelson 2021). The church provides a forum in which community members can articulate painful memories from the conflict while also encouraging believers to transform their perceptions of others – regardless of religious affiliation.

Furthermore, the church seeks to educate its members on the values of peace, tolerance and justice as rooted in Christ's teachings. A particularly relevant teaching is that of love for one's neighbour, which underpins mutual respect and peaceful coexistence amidst diversity. In this way, the church serves as a moral compass, reminding its congregation that peace begins within each individual's heart and mind (Healey 2012:45–47).

Peacebuilding initiatives undertaken by churches in Poso often include collaborative efforts with individuals from multiple faiths. In Tentena, for instance, interfaith youth programmes are implemented with the goal of fostering mutual understanding and trust. These programmes also offer training in coexisting peacefully within pluralistic contexts and managing conflict through non-violent means. Christian organisations frequently provide logistical support and moral encouragement to such initiatives (Ruagadi 2024:12–13).

The church's contribution to economic development is also significant in its peacebuilding mission. Churches have extended aid to those affected by conflict, both materially and through vocational training. The church recognises that healing is not limited to spiritual restoration but also involves social and economic rehabilitation. Hence, churches endeavour to create opportunities for individuals and families to rebuild their lives in constructive and harmonious ways (Moynagh & Harrold 2012).

In this regard, the church functions as a healer of social wounds inflicted by past violence. One of the approaches adopted involves empowering members through educational initiatives and skills development aimed at enhancing community well-being. By equipping individuals with

practical life skills, the church aspires to break cycles of poverty and marginalisation that often fuel tensions and hostilities (Healey 2012).

The church also plays a crucial role in equipping its members with the capacity to manage conflicts peacefully. This is achieved through training in conflict resolution and non-violent communication. Church teaching emphasises the importance of listening, understanding different perspectives and seeking solutions that are just and inclusive. In doing so, the church not only proclaims peace as an ideal but also imparts the practical tools necessary for living out peace in everyday life (Maluleke 2020).

Many of the interfaith peacebuilding programmes led by churches in Poso involve cooperation with Muslim institutions. One notable example is a joint initiative between churches and mosques to organise interreligious gatherings celebrating harmony and solidarity. These events encourage participants to share personal experiences, engage in constructive dialogue and embrace the value of coexisting peacefully in a pluralistic society (De Gruyter 2021).

Nevertheless, the role of the church as an agent of peace is not without its challenges. In the face of ongoing social tensions, the church often confronts resistance from individuals or groups still entrenched in sectarianism and religious animosity. For this reason, it is essential for the church to continue building its members' capacity to perceive difference not as a threat, but as a source of enrichment. The church must work tirelessly to overcome lingering prejudice and hatred resulting from past trauma.

Despite these obstacles, the role of the church in peacebuilding remains critical. The church has the potential to serve as a unifying force within divided communities and to guide people towards renewed peace and social cohesion. As an agent of transformation, the church leads the way in processes of healing, justice and genuine reconciliation. As the body of Christ, it is called to be salt and light to the world – proclaiming God's love, which brings peace to all people, regardless of religious, ethnic or cultural identity (Healey 2012; Moynagh & Harrold 2012).

Reflection

Reflection on the Poso conflict and the subsequent peace efforts opens up space for a profound encounter between experiences of suffering and the search for the meaning of faith. In this framework, the church is no longer understood merely as a religious institution standing outside of social reality, but as an integral part of the wounded community, and at the same time, a crucial actor in the collective healing process. As Robert Schreiter emphasises, 'reconciliation is the place where memory and hope meet' (2015:15). In the context of Poso, a theology of peace built from below – shaped by the community's wounds and hopes – becomes essential in moving beyond abstract or disengaged theological frameworks. This contextual theology does not

emerge in isolation but resonates with broader global discourses where churches under oppression have articulated prophetic responses to suffering through faith-informed action.

The South African *Kairos Document* (SAKD), first issued in 1985, was a theological response to apartheid from within the oppressed Christian community. It challenged the church to abandon neutrality in the face of systemic injustice and called instead for a prophetic theology rooted in solidarity with the poor and oppressed. The SAKD sharply distinguished between *State Theology*, *Church Theology* and *Prophetic Theology*, insisting that only the latter could embody God's justice amidst suffering (Kairos Theologians [Group] 1986:2–6).

In light of the Poso conflict, this prophetic framework provides a critical lens for understanding the role of the church. Like the South African context, the churches in Poso faced the temptation to retreat into silence, neutrality or pietistic self-preservation. However, the call of the *Kairos Document* – to stand where God stands, 'with the poor and the broken' (Boesak 2016:88) – resonates deeply in Poso's struggle to build peace amidst trauma and marginalisation. The contextual theology of peace in Poso echoes the ethos of SAKD: it refuses to spiritualise injustice, instead calling the Church into public, incarnational witness and solidarity.

This reflection also reveals that Christian spirituality in the context of conflict must be incarnational: uniting with human suffering and giving birth to hope through solidarity. Desmond Tutu states, 'There is no future without forgiveness' (2009:165) – and this is the foundation of the spirituality of peace that the church must live out: radical forgiveness, not as an escape from justice, but as the way to restore relationships. In this regard, the legacy of Reformed theology about shalom and the church's social mandate becomes highly relevant – that salvation is not only individual and eschatological but also touches the social and cosmic dimensions of human life. John Calvin himself affirms that 'there is no part of our lives that God does not command to be subjected to Him' (Institutes, 3.7.1), meaning that social peace is a part of faithful obedience.

Furthermore, the Poso experience demonstrates the importance of integrating Christian faith with local wisdom, such as the value of Sintuwu Maroso, in building authentic peace. A theology open to interfaith dialogue and local cultural reflection strengthens the church's mission as a peace bringer in a pluralistic society. As Stephen Bevans says, 'all theology is contextual theology' (2002:3) – and it is in the context of Poso that peace theology finds its most authentic form, as it is born from the real struggles of society with violence and reconciliation.

Ultimately, the reflection on Poso invites Christian communities in Indonesia and beyond to ground their theology in concrete historical realities. The violence and reconciliation that shaped Poso's recent past constitute what Scripture and contemporary theology describe as a *kairos* – a

critical moment of divine invitation amidst human crisis (Mk 1:15; Boesak 2016:88). In light of the Gospel, the Church is not merely a bystander but is called to discern and respond to such *kairos* moments with prophetic imagination, public witness and concrete action.

Thus, the *kairos* of Poso is not just a tragedy to be remembered, but a theological opportunity: a moment in which the Church can rediscover its calling to stand in the ruins of history, speak peace amidst violence and embody justice in a fragmented world. From this lived reality, a more sensitive, just and liberating theology may emerge – not imported but born from the ashes of communal trauma and the Spirit's work in the local context.

Conclusion

This article has explored how the churches in Poso – especially GKST and other Protestant communities – responded theologically to the communal conflict that devastated the region. Grounded in the concept of *kairos* as a decisive, God-infused moment, the study has argued that the violence and reconciliation in Poso constitute not only a historical crisis but also a theological opportunity for reflection, reorientation and renewal.

Each section of the article has contributed to this central aim. The theological framework of *kairos* provided a lens for understanding the urgency and depth of the Church's calling in times of crisis. The discussion on cultural values such as *Sintuwu Maroso* demonstrated how local wisdom is not merely a backdrop but a theological resource for peacebuilding. The examination of Church praxis in Poso showcased concrete attempts to embody reconciliation and prophetic witness. Furthermore, the comparison with the South African *Kairos Document* underscored the global resonance of prophetic theology and contextual solidarity.

Through this integrated exploration, the article has shown that a contextual theology of peace must emerge from the lived experience of the community. In the case of Poso, this means a theology that listens to local wounds, draws from local wisdom, and participates in local efforts towards healing and justice. This *kairos* is a call not only to remember the past but to reimagine the Church's mission in a divided world. The findings affirm that theology, when contextual and prophetic, can serve as both critique and catalyst for communal transformation.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

Y.T. contributed to the conceptualisation and theological framing of the article, developed the methodological approach and led the initial drafting process. P.G.O. Sunkudon was responsible for conducting the contextual analysis of the conflict and reconciliation dynamics in Poso, integrating local cultural insights and overseeing revisions and final editing. He also handled all correspondence with the journal. L.M.B. contributed to the literature review, data collection from secondary sources and the refinement of the theological argument within the socio-political context of Indonesia. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Data availability

The author confirms that the data supporting this study and its findings are available within the article.

Disclaimer

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