


From marginalisation to mission: Akit's indigenous ecological knowledge for transformissional ecotheology

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This study introduces the concept of transformissional ecotheology (TE) as a multidisciplinary framework that integrates indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK) with Christian theological discourse to address contemporary environmental challenges. Focussing on the Akit Tribe of Karimun Island, Indonesia, the research explores the tribe's deep ecological wisdom and spiritual practices, which are rooted in a profound interconnectedness with nature. A hybrid-method approach was employed, integrating literature from sociology, theology and environmental studies, and combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, document analysis and surveys. The study investigates how the Akit's ecological practices, such as *ambek secukupnye* [taking only what is needed], *Betabek* [salutary respect], the *Bele* [defending] rituals and other traditional practices can inform and transform contemporary Christian theology. The findings indicate that the ecological knowledge of the Akit Tribe plays a crucial role in addressing environmental challenges. The socio-historical context shapes these challenges and their responses, underscoring the need for a transformative approach that integrates spiritual and ecological perspectives. The study concludes that a cultural approach based on the Akit Tribe's wisdom can strengthen the framework of TE, promoting effective global theological and ecological interventions.

Contribution: This study significantly advances the integration of IEK with theological discourse, offering a framework for addressing local, national and global ecological challenges through culturally resonant and sustainable practices.

Keywords: ecotheology; local wisdom; Akit tribe; ecospiritual; ecocide; transformissional ecotheology.

Introduction

The growing ecological crisis demands not only scientific and political responses but also profound theological reflection. This study introduces transformissional ecotheology (TE) as an innovative framework that addresses the critical intersections between environmental challenges, indigenous wisdom and Christian theology. The Akit Tribe, an indigenous community from the west coast of Karimun Besar Island, Indonesia, serves as a compelling case study for this exploration. The Akit have endured a history marked by layered marginalisation, where their ancestral lands and waters, integral to their livelihood, have been exploited for economic purposes that fail to directly benefit them.

Historically, the Akit in Karimun Island were maritime nomads with deep ecological knowledge, dating back to the late 20th century when their ancestors engaged in coastal and riverine activities (Hall 2022:30; Wileala, Zulkifli & Alimin 2016:48). Tracing their origins to Rupert Island and mainland China, the Akit maintained a nomadic lifestyle around the Malacca Strait, with records from the 15th century showing them living on houseboats and migrating along the coasts in response to environmental and socio-political pressures (Limbeng 2011:34; Syamsidar 2014:97). However, with the advent of European colonial powers, the Akit were increasingly marginalised, derogatorily labelled as pirates and subjected to policies that sought to transform their maritime lifestyle into a sedentary existence (Chou 2016:267; Octaviany & Hadiwono 2022:2861–2862). This marginalisation persisted post-independence, with the Indonesian government's classification of the Akit as 'Komunitas Adat Terpencil' (Isolated Indigenous Communities) in the 1990s, further entrenching their socio-economic vulnerabilities. The revocation of this classification in 2015 stripped them of essential social and economic support, exacerbating their marginalisation

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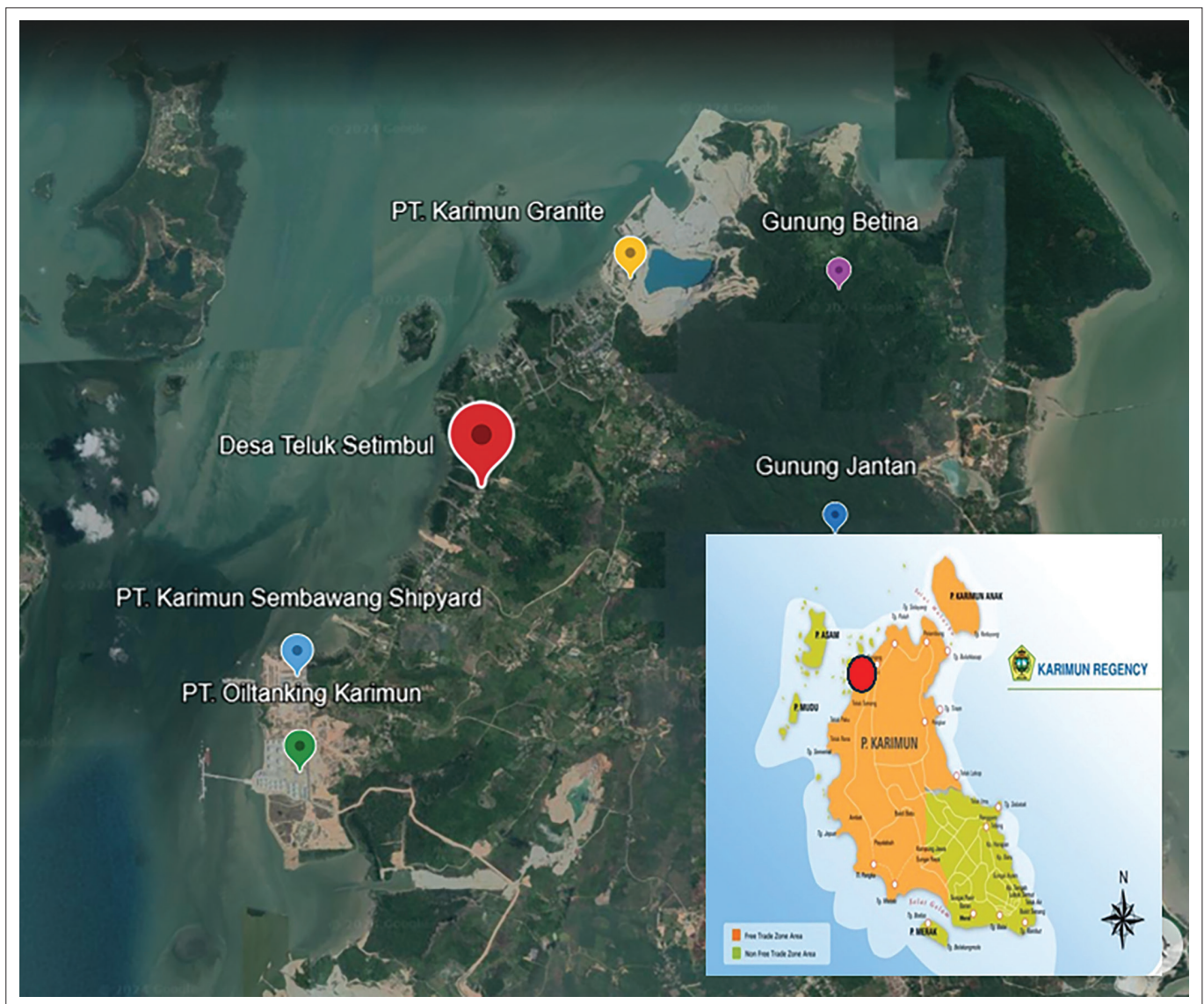
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(Elsera, Afriani & Samnuzulsari 2023:1–2; Elsera, Rahmawati & Valentina 2022:51). Despite these challenges, the Akit have preserved their distinct cultural identity, particularly in Teluk Setimbul Village (Figure 1), where they assert their heritage as ‘Orang Asli Pulau Karimun’ in resistance to ongoing marginalisation (Febbriyandi & Evawarni 2016:24–28). Central to their worldview is a profound interconnectedness with their spiritual and natural environments, a perspective that resonates with the principles of integral ecology as outlined in Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si’* (Pope Francis 2015:LS 137–162). Indigenous communities such as the Akit are increasingly recognised as key actors in environmental stewardship, possessing unique ecological knowledge developed over generations. Yet, despite this vital role, the indigenous people face significant challenges because of environmental degradation and continuous exploitation of the natural resources on which they depend – exploitation that primarily benefits external economic interests, rather than their community.

This study proposes a model that integrates the Akit Tribe’s indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK) with contemporary theological discourse. It aims to address global ecological challenges while contributing to discussions on sustainability, ecology and the transformative role of indigenous wisdom. This approach underscores the potential of TE as a framework for addressing environmental issues at various scales and including marginalised voices in shaping a more just and sustainable world. While prior studies have not thoroughly explored the Akit Tribe’s IEK in combination with Christian theology, this study fills that gap by proposing a multidisciplinary framework that blends IEK, indigenous experience and contemporary theological discourse.

Transformissional ecotheology: Theoretical framework

This article introduces the TE framework, an approach that seeks to bridge indigenous IEK with Christian theology. By



Source: Image created by the authors using data from Google Earth Pro (Version 7.3, retrieved 27th June 2024, from <https://www.google.com/earth>) and the official website of the Regional Government of Karimun Regency (retrieved 27th June 2024, from <http://www.pemkab.karimun.id>)

FIGURE 1: Teluk Setimbul village in Karimun Besar Island, Riau Island Province, Indonesia.

engaging these diverse perspectives in dialogue, the TE framework offers a methodology for addressing the complex and interconnected ecological and social challenges of our time. This framework is particularly valuable when examined through the lens of indigenous worldviews and practices, offering a transformative approach to contemporary theological discourse.

Defining 'transformissional': Reorienting the Church's contextual and inclusive mission

The term 'Transformissional' is a fusion of 'transformation' and 'missional'. In theological and ecclesiological discourse, 'transformation' signifies a profound and fundamental change that reorients individuals, communities or institutions towards a deeper alignment with divine purposes and contemporary realities (Park 2010:4). This transformation necessitates a critical re-evaluation of existing structures and practices, informed by interdisciplinary perspectives, to ensure that the Church remains relevant and effective in its mission (Buitendag & Simut 2017:3; Dreyer 2015:3). Within the missional context, transformation is vital for the Church's engagement with the world, enabling it to act as a catalyst for change. By embodying and enacting the mission of God, the Church has the potential to impact society in ways that reflect its divine calling (Park 2010:4).

The term 'missional', derived from the Latin *missio*, meaning 'sending', reflects a theological framework centred on the *missio Dei* – God's mission to the world through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (Hooker 2009:2–3). The Church, as a divinely established communion, belongs to God and does not exist for itself. It is by its very nature missionary, called and sent to witness in its own life to that communion, which God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the kingdom (World Council of Churches [WCC] 2013:10). Although the ecumenical document from the WCC uses the term 'missionary', I have deliberately chosen the term 'missional' in this framework. This choice is informed by contemporary theological discourse, which emphasises that the Church's identity is not merely to engage in mission as one of its activities, but to be fundamentally oriented towards embodying and continuing God's mission in the world (Dreyer 2015:4). Furthermore, in the Indonesian context, the term 'missionary' is inextricably linked to the history of colonial evangelisation, where the spread of Christianity was frequently accompanied by the suppression or eradication of local cultures and identities (Steenbrink & Aritonang 2008:137–145). Thus, 'missional' encapsulates the Church's role as an agent of transformation and witness within the broader divine mission, specifically highlighting its dynamic nature of being sent or commissioned to participate in God's mission (Goheen 2000:366–367; Hooker 2009:4).

Two pillars of transformissional ecotheology framework

The TE framework is built on two foundational pillars. The first pillar is IEK, which is central to TE as it offers a critical

framework for addressing the intertwined ecological and social challenges faced by communities today. The cultural and spiritual practices of indigenous communities provide sophisticated and adaptive systems of environmental management that have evolved over generations. This study explores how Christian theological frameworks can be enriched by integrating IEK.

The significance of IEK was first highlighted by Darrell Posey in the 1980s through his work with the Kayapó Indians, where he demonstrated that indigenous systems of knowledge are not only ecologically sustainable but also essential for biodiversity conservation (Posey 1985). Building on this foundation, Fikret Berkes emphasised that IEK represents more than just a collection of ecological practices; it embodies a holistic approach to resource management that is culturally embedded and socially just (Berkes 2017). As global environmental crises intensify, the importance of IEK has gained increasing recognition. Scholars such as Das et al. (2022) and Dawson et al. (2021) have underscored the essential role of indigenous communities in biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation, highlighting IEK's ethical and spiritual dimensions as crucial counter-narratives to the extractive practices that have led to widespread ecological degradation. Thus, the IEK referred to in this article encompasses all aspects of indigenous communities, including local wisdom, worldviews, cultural and spiritual practices, and everyday experiences that collectively support ecological and cultural sustainability.

The second pillar of TE is its multidisciplinary approach, which integrates various theological frameworks to address the complex interplay between environmental challenges and indigenous wisdom. For this article, several key approaches have been selected to illustrate this integration effectively. This approach begins with Pope Francis's concept of Integral Ecology, as outlined in *Laudato Si'*, which emphasises the interconnectedness of social, economic and environmental issues (Pope Francis 2015: LS 138–141). Integral Ecology serves as a foundational perspective within TE, recognising that traditional culture and local knowledge are not merely cultural artefacts but vital embodiments of deep ecological consciousness. This consciousness reflects the intrinsic value and interdependence of all life forms, underscoring the importance of sustainable development that respects cultural and spiritual dimensions. Moreover, Integral Ecology emphasises the dignity of every individual and the necessity of respecting their rights, including the right to live in a clean and healthy environment and the right to determine their own future. Protecting these cultural practices and natural habitats is essential not only for the well-being of present generations but also for ensuring justice and sustainability for future generations (Pope Francis 2015:LS 142, 148, 155–159). This perspective aligns with the earlier insights of Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff, who, long before Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, posited that humanity is duty-bound to ensure justice for the Earth, which, along with all its constituents, holds intrinsic dignity

and rights (Boff 1995:87–77, 115). Boff's concept of ecological justice advocates for a renewed human stance towards the Earth, characterised by virtue and a sense of mutual involvement while addressing the injustices perpetrated through the exploitation of science and technology. He contends that the degradation and destruction of the Earth result from the unjust practices of capitalism, which aggressively exploits the planet through a consumerist model of development.

A critical aspect of TE is its engagement with panentheism and sacramental theology, both of which provide profound theological foundations for understanding nature as sacred and infused with divine presence. In the context of the Akit Tribe's worldview, their rituals are acts of reverence that acknowledge the sacredness of creation and respect diverse cultural wisdom and traditions (Boff 1995; Gutiérrez 1973). This approach emphasises humanity's moral responsibility to protect and nurture the environment; using Rozelle Bosch lines, 'opens the possibility for a new language with which to approach Mother Earth as one who is sacred and as one for whom God has an encompassing restorative vision' (Conradie 2006:123; Robson Bosch 2021:22). In addition, within this aspect, Deep Ecology challenges anthropocentric perspectives and promotes a holistic understanding of how the Akit's worldview contributes to global discussions on sustainability and environmental ethics (Naess 1988; Stevens 2018:44–46).

Stephen Bevans' transcendental model of contextual theology further enriches TE by emphasising the importance of engaging with the lived experiences and local wisdom of communities to inform theological reflection and action (Bevans 1985:198–200). Moreover, TE incorporates trauma studies to explore the Akit Tribe's experiences of environmental degradation as forms of ecological trauma. This approach is closely linked to ecological justice, advocating for the rights of marginalised communities and ecosystems harmed by environmental exploitation (Conradie 2018; Hansen 2022). Alongside these frameworks, TE acknowledges the complexity of the Akit Tribe's religious practices and how these diverse theological ideas can be integrated into a cohesive belief system that is both culturally resonant and theologically meaningful.

Finally, TE incorporates other approaches that foster a transformative ecological consciousness that honours the spiritual significance of the environment, offering a framework for a deeper, more spiritually grounded engagement with environmental stewardship. The work of Indonesian theologians such as Monika Hukubun and Joas Adiprasetya further strengthens this framework. Hukubun's Christ-cosmic hermeneutic and Adiprasetya's elaboration of panentheism through a Trinitarian perichoretic model help to analyse the Akit's religious system, which perceives divine presence as pervasive throughout the universe (Adiprasetya 2008, 2017; Hukubun 2023).

These multidisciplinary frameworks collectively provide the analytical tools necessary to examine and reposition

Akit's IEK, experiences and worldviews within a global theological context. Transformist ecotheology uses these frameworks to explore how indigenous narratives and insights can be respected, preserved and integrated into Christian theological discourse, ultimately contributing to a more just and sustainable future.

Research methods and design

This study employs a hybrid-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies with a comprehensive literature review to explore the ecological wisdom and spiritual practices of the Akit tribe on Karimun Island, Indonesia. Grounded in the TE framework, which integrates IEK with Christian theology, the research assesses the TE framework's effectiveness in addressing contemporary ecological crises. Qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews, two focus group discussions (FGDs), observation and document analysis, providing insights into the Akit community's ecological practices. Quantitative data from a survey of 128 Akit tribe members focussed on demographic, socio-economic and ecological aspects, with statistical analysis used for context. Thematic analysis identified key themes from the qualitative data, while quantitative findings were statistically analysed to ensure empirical support. The literature review placed the findings within broader theological and ecological contexts, evaluating the TE framework's capacity to integrate indigenous knowledge into Christian theological discourse, addressing global ecological challenges and promoting a transformative mission.

Ethical considerations

Based on the recommendation from the Investment and One-Stop Integrated Service Agency of Riau Province, the research project titled 'Ecotheological Model Based on Ecocide and Local Wisdom of the Akit Karimun Tribe and Its Implementation in Church Acts' has been approved. This approval was granted at the request of Prof. Nofrizal, M. Si, the Head of the Environmental Science Doctoral Programme at the University of Riau, with the research permit issued by the Government of Riau Province, Indonesia. The Pre-Research Request Letter from the Head of the Doctoral Programme (S-3) in Environmental Science at the University of Riau is numbered: 118/UN19.5.1.2.1/PPs/S3/IL/KM/2023, dated 30 March 2023. Consent was obtained verbally prior to data collection. The data-gathering process was documented using an information sheet written in simple, non-technical language or through recording. Participants' consent was obtained through their willingness to fill out questionnaires and participate in interviews after the researcher explained the purpose and objectives of the study. Participants' confidentiality will be respected, and personal identifiers will be anonymised unless participants explicitly agree to be identified in the research. They were informed from the outset that their information would be used for research analysis and publication, with the aim of amplifying their concerns to a broader audience.

Results and discussion

Listen to their voice! The urgency of a transformative mission

The Akit Tribe in Karimun, comprising 788 individuals across 201 households, is a community deeply rooted in indigenous knowledge passed down through generations, emphasising sustainable living and environmental stewardship through cultural practices. Despite their profound ecological knowledge, the Akit face severe environmental degradation and socio-economic marginalisation, which threaten their very existence.

Extensive field observations confirm widespread environmental degradation because of reclamation, river erosion and mangrove deforestation. These activities have led to increased flooding and pollution, significantly impacting Kampung Baru, Kampung Tengah, and Kampung Laut. Mrs Yati Setom, in an in-depth interview on 16 April 2023, described the escalating severity of tidal floods:

'Now it's not like it used to be. There used to be floods, but now it's unbearable. The front of our house is flooded, like it's going to drown. We put up barriers, but the water still rises. Tidal floods get worse every year, especially around Chinese New Year. Last December [2022], the water rose so high, houses in Teluk Setimbul were hit hard. Many were submerged. The weather seemed different, dark clouds came from Karimun Mountain. Usually, the west wind is strong, but this time the north wind, which never happened like that before.' (Female, 55 years, Fisher)

Mak Kaseh echoed these concerns in an interview on 03 May 2023:

'We never had floods here before; now, we've experienced big floods ... Some houses collapsed. My house was flooded. I swam, and many of our belongings were damaged. The water rose so high, something we've never experienced. This area is low; when the tide is high, we can't handle it. Nearby, at the coastal area, many people are reclaiming land, companies are

reclaiming land near the sea, pushing the water here. Our area gets flooded ... The west wind is strong, but now it doesn't follow the seasons anymore.' (Female, 65 years, Fisher)

Aligned with these experiences, Mr Ronny highlighted the unpredictability of seasons and currents during a 04 May 2023, interview:

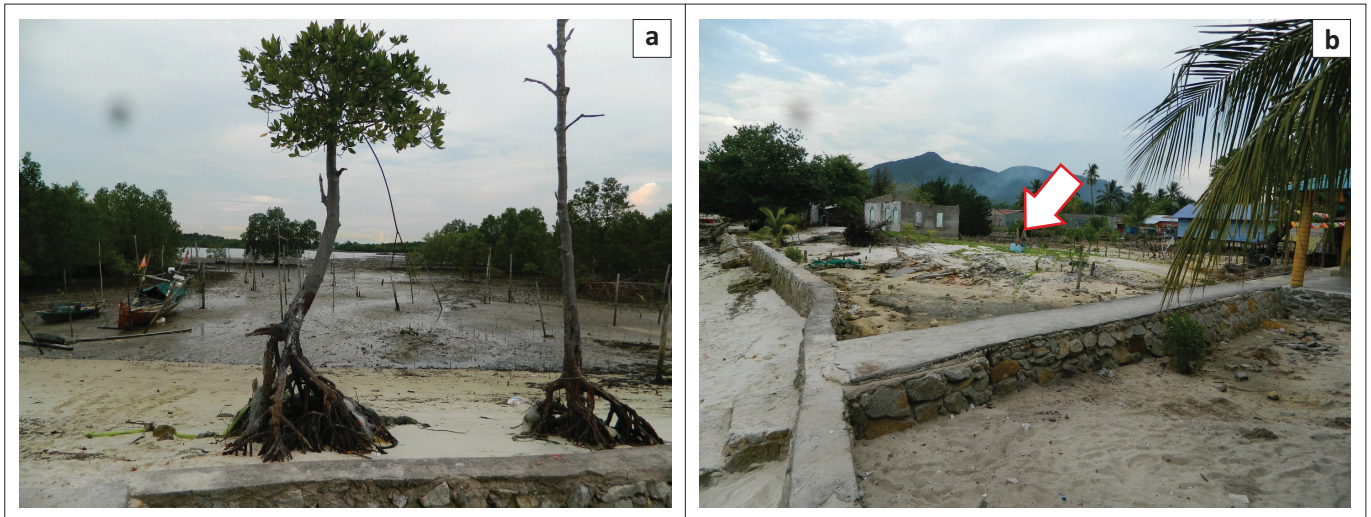
'Weather, season, distance, current direction, day, month, all these we have learned. It should be the southern season now, but due to changing seasons, it goes east or west ... The changing seasons cause us losses. There's more trash ... The wind now changes unpredictably. For the last two years, the west wind lasted five months. Our elders taught us to go to sea at certain hours, cast nets at 4 PM, and wait until 8 PM. Now, it takes much longer to get fish. The difference is huge now.' (Male, 42 years, Fisher)

These interviews illustrate how climate change not only reshapes the coastal landscape but also disrupts the Akit people's knowledge, economy and safety. An analysis of the field findings highlights their vulnerability. With 85.1% of the community engaged in fishing, their economic dependence on this sector is profound yet precarious. Alarming, 64.84% of respondents earn less than IDR 1 million per month (approximately \$66 USD), a stark indicator of the pervasive poverty within the community. This economic marginalisation is further compounded by limited access to education where 46.09% of respondents lack formal education and inadequate healthcare; 88.28% of the population is not enrolled in Indonesia's health insurance programme. Housing conditions also reflect the community's impoverishment, with many still residing in wooden plank houses (Figure 2a). Environmental vulnerabilities, such as frequent flooding during high tides, affect 45.31% of respondents, further exacerbating their living condition. Figure 3 illustrates the coastal conditions of Kampung Laut, where the degradation of the mangrove forest has weakened natural defenses (Figure 3a), and massive waves have devastated several Akit residences. The loss of the mangroves has directly contributed to the destruction shown in Figure 3b.



Source: Photograph taken by Meilanny Risamasu during fieldwork, April 2023 to May 2023, Karimun Regency.

FIGURE 2: The Akit's world in Teluk Setimbul village: (a) wooden plank houses and (b) traditional ceremony site at Rumah Sasangke.



Source: Photograph taken by Meilanny Risamasu during fieldwork, April 2023 to May 2023, Karimun Regency.

FIGURE 3: The coastal condition of Kampung Laut: (a) degradation of mangrove forests and (b) several residences of the Akit community devastated by massive waves.

These data underscore the complex challenges they face, ranging from environmental degradation and erratic climate patterns to severe socio-economic marginalisation. These issues highlight the limitations of relying solely on their IEK for sustainable living. Despite their deep-rooted connection to the land and extensive ecological wisdom, these escalating threats place the very existence of their community at risk. This situation necessitates an urgent and transformative mission by the Church, one that genuinely engages with the voices of the Akit people and integrates their knowledge into a broader, more inclusive strategy to confront these pressing environmental and socio-economic crises.

Sacred Earth, shared wisdom: Reweaving indigenous knowledge

The Akit Tribe's deep ecological wisdom and spiritual practices can be integrated into Christian theology, offering a transformative ecotheology that respects the sacredness of creation while addressing urgent ecological and social challenges. Through the lens of transformative ecotheology (TE), the Church's mission can be reimagined to honour the interdependence of all life and recognize the vital role of indigenous worldviews in fostering a just and sustainable future.

Indigenous ethic for global sustainability: Respect, taking only what is needed, and share

The Akit Tribe in Karimun embodies a worldview that deeply respects the intrinsic value and interests of nature, encompassing all entities, both visible and invisible, that inhabit it. This perspective is evident in their ethical practices, such as the *Denes* ritual, which reflects a profound respect for natural elements and acknowledges the spiritual significance of these practices (Hasbullah et al. 2022:63). The *Denes* ritual, performed on the 15th day of the Chinese calendar, is held collectively every month at Rumah Sasangke, the traditional ceremonial site for the Akit (Figure 2b). It involves the Akit people bringing food and drinks, making offerings, and concluding with a prayer

dance and a body cleansing at *Kolah*, a sacred place with a pond. This ritual is a powerful expression of the Akit's gratitude for divine care, seeking guidance from *Tuhan* (God) and the *Empat Penjaga Alam* (the four Guardians of Nature) while also maintaining spiritual and physical purity (Elsara et al. 2023:4; Risamasu 2024:6).

During the self-purification ritual at *Kolah*, the Akit community, along with others permitted to partake in the tradition, are strictly forbidden from directly immersing themselves in the pool, contaminating it, or taking any fish or other creatures from it. Instead, they must scoop the water and perform the cleansing ritual away from the *Kolah*, mixing the water with lime that has been blessed by the traditional leader. According to oral tradition, polluting the *Kolah* is considered a grave disrespect to the Guardians of Nature and *Datuk Batu Berendam* (Datuk being an honorific title for revered spiritual beings believed to dwell at specific sacred sites) who protect the *Kolah* and ensure the provision of clean water for the village. This bathing ritual symbolises the belief that participants are purified or freed from evil spirits, which are thought to cause illness, misfortune or adverse outcomes in their work. The Akit Tribe recognises the profound interconnectedness between human welfare and the balance of nature, viewing nature as a holistic living system where humans are part of the unity, not its rulers.

This respect for nature is also evident in their sustainable practices, such as *ambek secukupnya* which translates to taking only what is needed. This tradition is reinforced by their traditional fishing techniques that prevent over-exploitation and ensure resource regeneration. At the appropriate times, Akit men, women and children gather at rivers, estuaries and beaches to collect food according to their needs for the day. If there is excess, they share it with family or neighbours, a practice they call *Bebagi*, meaning sharing, which is a common tradition in the fishing community (Adon, Garnodin & Depa 2022).

The Akit's worldview is fundamentally ecocentric, placing intrinsic value on all elements of nature, both living and non-living, and recognising the interdependence of all forms of life. This perspective closely aligns with the principles of deep ecology, a philosophical and environmental movement that challenges anthropocentric (human-centred) views and advocates for a more holistic understanding of the natural world. Deep ecology emphasises that humans are not separate from or superior to nature but are an integral part of a complex, interrelated system. This worldview calls for a profound respect for all living beings and the environment, urging that human activities be conducted with an awareness of their impact on the entire ecosystem (Mathews 2018; Naess 1988; Stevens 2018).

In this context, the Akit's practices, such as sustainable fishing methods and rituals that honour the spiritual significance of natural sites, reflect an understanding that any disruption to the natural world is a disruption to the community itself. This perspective resonates strongly with the concept of 'cosmic spirituality', which posits that the cosmos is sacred and that human beings have a responsibility to care for it as an expression of their spiritual and moral duty (McFague 2013:1–2; Moltmann 2023:4–5). This idea underscores the notion that the universe and all its components are part of a divine creation, deserving reverence and protection. This spiritual framework encourages a shift from viewing nature as a mere resource to be exploited, to recognising it as a sacred entity with which humans must coexist respectfully and sustainably.

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis emphasises the interconnectedness of all creation, highlighting how environmental crises are intrinsically linked to social injustices. He advocates for an 'integral ecology', a perspective that recognises ecosystems as having intrinsic value and rights, not merely as resources for human exploitation but as vital parts of a sacred creation (Pope Francis 2015:LS 139–140). However, these concepts, along with other ideas emerging from Western Christian thought and tradition, are challenging for Asian Christian communities, particularly indigenous peoples like the Akit Tribe, to fully accept and understand. These communities do not need to be taught how to maintain harmony between humans and the natural world; they already understand that disrupting this balance can lead to ecological and social disasters. Long before Christian missions reached remote areas, many indigenous tribes around the world had established rules and traditions guiding social and ecological behaviour. For example, the Akit tribe has a tradition called *Pantang-Larang*, which translates to taboos and prohibitions, based on the belief that neglecting traditional practices and disrespecting nature invites misfortune.

Pope Francis's and Conradie's calls for an ecological conversion, where protecting the environment is seen as a moral and spiritual obligation intertwined with the pursuit of social justice, reflect a similar understanding. They argue that ecological destruction stems from broader social and

moral failings (Pope Francis 2015:LS 154). This approach not only addresses the root causes of environmental degradation but also aligns with a theological framework that views nature as a sacred, interconnected part of creation (Conradie 2020:3–4). Without this ecological conversion, flawed worldviews continue to contribute to such destruction (Conradie 2018:7–8).

Indigenous peoples have long embraced and lived by a perspective that integrates both ecological awareness and social justice. However, I have come to realise that there is a veil that must be lifted from the lens of church missions in Asia, particularly in my country, to build a theological foundation grounded in local experiences. With this awareness, Christian missions in local areas can reframe these global ecological ethics by translating them into local languages. Recognising and embracing indigenous ethical practices not only supports the sustainability of the community but also enriches the Church. As Conradie states, our ecological crisis is deeply rooted in how we perceive and interact with the world (Conradie 2018), including the worldview of indigenous peoples. Therefore, it is crucial for the Church to engage in mission with a positive perception of indigenous ecological ethical practices and to build interactions that could help mitigate these crises.

Indigenous rituals as eco-missional model

The Akit Tribe, with their spiritual beliefs and ecological ethics, represents a marginalised community whose traditional ways of life are increasingly threatened by the overwhelming forces of industrialisation and economic policies that favour large-scale development over sustainable practices. Central to their culture are the *Bele Kampung* rituals, encompassing *Bele Laut* (sea defending) and *Bele Darat* (land defending), which serve as a defence mechanism for both their community and the natural environment they depend on. The term *Bele* derived from the Indonesian word 'bela' meaning 'to defend', reflects a deep-rooted cultural practice aimed at protecting not only their own community but also the integrity of their natural surroundings.

In a world dominated by powerful industrial interests and exploitative economic models, the Akit's rituals, such as *Bele Kampung*, emerge as acts of resistance against the encroachment of these forces. These rituals, vital for the Akit's survival, seek to restore balance both within their community and between their people and the environment. They provide essential social and ecological benefits that counter the destructive impacts of industrial activities that often exploit the land and sea without regard for the traditional ways of life that sustain indigenous communities.

Bele Kampung is more than a cultural practice; it is a profound expression of the Akit's struggle to maintain their identity and way of life in the face of external pressures. The ritual involves the entire community in a collective effort to honour and protect their environment. For *Bele Laut*, men construct a *Lancang*, a symbolic miniature boat made from sago palm fronds, while women and children prepare traditional

offerings, including bananas, eggs, and red and yellow glutinous rice. *Bele Darat* focusses on smaller offerings distributed around the village, at its boundaries, and in the forest. During the preparation, which can last from 3 days to a week, activities such as fishing, cutting wood and harvesting are prohibited, allowing the environment a much-needed period of rest and regeneration.

At the heart of the *Bele* rituals lies a recognition of the interconnectedness of all life. The Akit understand that their survival depends not just on the land and sea, but on maintaining a harmonious relationship with all elements of nature. The Batin (tribal leader) leads the community in prayers of gratitude and protection, directing these to God, the Four Guardians of Nature, spiritual beings and ancestors. The *Lancang* is then ceremoniously carried to the beach and launched into the sea, symbolising the community's hopes for marine abundance and safety. Meanwhile, offerings for *Bele Darat* are placed around the village and in the forest, reinforcing Akit's belief that all life forms – both seen and unseen – are deserving of respect and protection. However, these deeply spiritual and ecological practices are increasingly threatened by external forces that view nature not as a living, interconnected system, but as a resource to be exploited. The Akit's traditional practices stand in stark contrast to the industrial activities that devastate their environment, driven by a linear understanding of progress that disregards the past and the ecological consequences of such development. We recall how the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic halted all industrial activities but had a significant impact on Planet Earth. In the Akit view, all elements of life in Earth's ecosystem demonstrate interdependence and interconnectedness, so this *Bele* tradition should not be interpreted as nature and the environment being weak subjects that must be defended, but rather as giving a resting space to all living actors.

The marginalisation of the Akit and their environment highlights the urgent need for a re-evaluation of how society engages with nature. Leonardo Boff, in *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (1995:104), argues that social and ecological injustices are inseparable. He emphasises the need to globalise values such as solidarity, compassion and respect for cultural diversity and nature, rather than perpetuating market mechanisms that contribute to the marginalisation of communities like the Akit (Boff 1995:105–107). He discusses the requisites of a new global political economy that prioritises human and ecological welfare, grounded in principles like equity and cultural reciprocity (Boff 1995:128–129). This approach insists that technological globalisation must serve these broader human and ecological goals, echoing the values embodied in the *Bele* tradition. Such traditions align with Boff's vision of a world where the sacredness of nature is integral to human liberation.

Jürgen Moltmann's concept of cosmic pneumatology further underscores the plight of marginalised communities like the Akit. Moltmann (2023) highlights the ecological catastrophe driven by unchecked industrial progress and calls for a green transformation that recognises nature as a subject within the

community of creation. He insists that ecological justice must be linked with social justice, emphasising the rights of future generations and the inherent rights of nature (Moltmann 2023:2). This perspective suggests that the *Bele* rituals are not merely cultural practices but are deeply spiritual acts that affirm humanity's embeddedness in the natural world and its interconnectedness with all creation. Moltmann's vision of a new cosmic spirituality – one that sanctifies all life and fosters a deep respect for everything that lives – resonates with Akit's traditional practices. Their rituals embody this spirituality, offering a model for how Christian theology can engage with indigenous practices to promote ecological and social justice. This is not just about integrating indigenous rituals into Christian practice, but about recognising the wisdom they offer in resisting the destructive forces of industrialisation and economic exploitation.

When viewed through Simon Critchley's panentheistic perspective, the *Bele* rituals offer a nuanced understanding of how every part of the universe exists within God, maintaining both the immanence and transcendence of the Creator (Critchley 2018:89). However, this view remains problematic, particularly when questioned in the context of the existence of evil and sin. I also acknowledge that there is limited argumentative space in using, for example, Adiprasetya's critical thinking to bolster the argument that Akit's worldview concerning the interconnectedness between creation and God is relevant to the concept of a perichoretic reality. In this sense, God and creation exist in an interpenetrating relationship, becoming 'all in all,' without God losing his transcendence or being diminished by the universe (Adiprasetya 2008:164, 2017:26, 38–39). Perhaps, by using Sallie McFague's metaphorical theology, we can reimagine how the world, as the Body of God (McFague 1993:30), urges sacramental acts of holistic care, where nurturing and protecting creation is seen as respecting and exalting the very embodiment of God, who sustains the dynamic relationship between God and the rest of creation. This mindset is deeply ingrained in the Akit's understanding, where nature is revered as a sacred entity that sustains all life.

However, integrating these indigenous rituals into broader theological frameworks requires careful consideration to avoid further marginalisation. Gustavo Gutiérrez emphasises that the Church encounters the Lord through the marginalised, whose unique cultural and spiritual expressions must be respected (Gutiérrez 1973). These communities, like the Akit, despite their oppression, bear the true meaning of history and the Gospel. Therefore, their traditions should be honoured, reflecting the Church's commitment to align with the will of the Father as revealed in Christ's identification with the poor (Gutiérrez 1973:202–203). Boff echoes this sentiment, advocating for a profound respect for the original meanings within these traditions, recognising that Christian theology has much to learn from the diverse cultural expressions and wisdom that each tradition offers, which collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of humanity's place within the ecological and spiritual fabric of the universe (Boff 1995:129–130).

A compelling model for the Church's ecological mission is presented, emphasizing a harmonious relationship with nature and the interconnectedness of all life. By integrating these traditions into Christian theology while respecting their integrity, the Church can promote a more just and sustainable world, viewing nature as a sacred, interconnected system that deserves reverence and care.

Indigenous cosmology as a way of reclaiming their sacredness

Indigenous cosmologies, such as those held by the Akit tribe, have long been marginalised and stigmatised by dominant global religions, often dismissed as 'pagan' or 'idolatrous' (Al Qurtuby & Kholiludin 2019). Some Indonesian scholars even mentioned Akit's belief as atheist or pagan. This marginalisation is not only a theological issue but also a cultural and ecological one, where indigenous people's deep connection to the land and their ecological wisdom are frequently devalued. For instance, the Akit tribe's spiritual practices, such as the *Betabek* ritual, are foundational acts of reverence performed whenever they enter sacred or unfamiliar natural spaces, including forests, seas or graveyards. This ritual, which involves reciting a salutation and asking for permission from spiritual entities believed to inhabit these areas, is not merely a cultural formality but a profound spiritual act (Suroyo et al. 2022:179). It underscores Akit's belief in the presence of invisible forces within the natural world. The failure to perform *Betabek* is believed to invite misfortune, illness or spiritual harm, reinforcing the idea that humans must interact with nature with humility and reverence.

The Akit also assign honorific titles such as 'Datuk/Tuk' and 'Nek' to natural elements, including crocodiles (*Nek Suntil*), tigers (*Nek Macan*) and sacred sites such as *Datuk Batu Berendam*, *Datuk Batu Besurat* and *Datuk Batu Belipat*. These titles, typically reserved for respected elders, indicate a deep respect for natural entities as integral members of the community. This belief system intertwines with their understanding of the spiritual realm, which includes both benevolent and malevolent entities. The Akit believe that maintaining harmony with nature through their rituals ensures protection from God through the *Empat Penjaga Alam* (Four Guardians of Nature; water/sea/Yellow Commander, land/human soul/Black Commander, sun/fire/Red Commander and light/purity/sky/White Commander).

What is particularly notable about the Akit's religious practices is their remarkable adaptability. The Akit's IEK does not exist in isolation; rather, it has incorporated elements from various religious traditions, particularly Buddhism, where the concept of divinity is non-personal and non-qualitative (Fattah & Utomo 2023). Unlike the monotheistic views of Christianity and Islam, which conceive of God as a personal creator deity, Buddhism views God as a concept transcending personal attributes and qualities. This syncretism is evident in the Akit's ritual prayers, which blend Islamic, Christian and indigenous elements, exemplifying the integration of diverse theological ideas within their belief system. For instance, during the Akit's annual festival on 20

April 2023, as observed directly, Batin Ewin commenced the traditional ceremony by reciting this prayer:

'Ya assalamualaikum ... Peace be upon you ... a thousand apologies to God. All the spiritual beings and ancestral spirits, to the left and right, we bow in reverence; to the front and back, we bow to God. Blessings as we gather the fruit, blessings of peace, along with the lime offered as a symbol of purification under the prophet's gaze. Forgive us, O God, forgive us, O God.' (Male, 34 years, spiritual leader)

This prayer illustrates how the Akit seamlessly integrate Islamic aspects within their belief system while identifying as Buddhists. Their rituals, such as offerings of *Kepala Jamu* and *Talam Dua*, serve as dioramas of their cosmological knowledge, where God is acknowledged as the 'King of Kings' – a concept derived from Christian theology but adapted to fit within their own cosmological framework.

This adaptive capacity is not just a passive acceptance of external influences but a strategic resilience. By integrating elements of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity into their rituals, the Akit demonstrate a form of cultural resilience that allows them to navigate and survive the pressures of modernisation, religious conversion and environmental change. Rather than abandoning their traditions, they have creatively incorporated new elements while preserving the core of their indigenous beliefs. This resilience is particularly evident as the Akit maintain the sacredness of their practices despite the encroachment of new religions and cultural changes. Their ability to adapt while preserving their identity speaks to the strength of their cultural resilience.

In the broader context, the Akit's IEK, rituals and other cultural expressions are increasingly threatened by modernisation, environmental changes, and the influx of new religions and corporate interests. These factors have altered cultural perceptions and practices, leading to the decline of these traditions and raising concerns about the loss of traditional ecological knowledge that emphasises conservation and ecological balance. The Akit's belief in the sacredness of nature, where divine presence is inherent within the natural world, warrants respect and care akin to familial bonds (De Silva 2023; Vecco 2020). They view nature as a living system integral to their community, emphasising the interconnectedness of all life forms, which collectively require care and stewardship.

The relevance of these practices is underscored in *Laudato Si'*, where Pope Francis emphasises respect because of indigenous cultures and their deep connection to the land (LS 146). He asserts that for indigenous communities, the land is a sacred gift from God and their ancestors, vital for maintaining their identity and values. This sacredness is evident in the Akit's resilience, as they adapt to external pressures while fiercely protecting their cultural heritage and environmental stewardship, even when faced with threats from industrial projects. Boff echoes this sentiment, arguing for the need to respect and integrate diverse cultural perspectives, recognising the profound spiritual and ecological wisdom

they offer. He critiques the modern tendency to marginalise indigenous knowledge in favour of technological progress, advocating instead for a theology that honours the contributions of all cultures to our collective understanding of humanity's place within the ecological whole (Boff 1995:150–154). In this context, A. L. De Silva's critique of Western Christian perspectives becomes highly relevant. De Silva, a prominent figure in Buddhist thought, highlights how Western Christian approaches often dismiss the deep spiritual and ethical values embedded in Eastern religions, including Buddhism (De Silva 1994). He argues that the intolerance shown by Christian fundamentalism towards Eastern traditions not only overlooks but also devalues the significant contributions of these traditions (De Silva 1994:57–58).

Integrating diverse religious traditions, including indigenous practices, is essential to the global theological discourse on environmental responsibility. This integration is crucial for developing a comprehensive approach to ecological crises, where indigenous belief systems, such as those of the Akit, offer unique insights into the sacredness of nature and the necessity of sustainable practices. The Akit's spiritual practices, which reflect their resilience and creativity in adapting to external religious influences while preserving their core beliefs, provide a vital model for reclaiming sacredness. By challenging the historical stigmatisation of these practices as 'pagan' or 'idolatrous', modern theology can advance a more inclusive approach that honours the sacred traditions of all cultures, particularly those that have been marginalised. This not only respects the spiritual heritage of indigenous communities such as the Akit but also strengthens global efforts to address ecological crises by reaffirming the sacredness of nature as a central tenet of transformative ecological theology.

Indigenous advocacy for the wounded Earth

The escalating ecological crisis calls for a profound transformation in theological understanding, a shift increasingly recognised within contextual theology. Stephen Bevans' transcendental model offers a framework for this transformation by engaging both personal and collective experiences of ecological devastation and reframing them within a theological context (Bevans 1985:198–200). This model challenges Christians to rethink their relationship with nature, advocating for a mission that integrates indigenous and Christian spiritualities. John Haught's sacramental approach complements this by viewing the universe as a sacramental expression of divine presence, urging a shift in how humans interact with and advocate for environmental justice (Conradie 2006:123, 133–135; Robson Bosch 2021:22). Incorporating indigenous perspectives, such as those of the Akit tribe, is crucial. Bevans' model, when applied to the Akit context, transforms theological discourse by giving voice to ecological crises through spirituality informed by both indigenous and Christian traditions, aligning with Haught's vision of Earth as sacred, embracing God's restorative mission.

The Akit people's disaster narratives, drawn from interviews and observations, reveal severe environmental challenges such as worsening floods and industrial encroachment, perceived as deeply spiritual issues reflecting broader global environmental degradation. For instance, Mrs Yati Setom and Mak Kaseh describe the increasing severity of floods, attributing them to unprecedented environmental changes (Suhardi, Saraswati & Andanusa 2021). Such narratives, aligned with climate data, underscore the urgent need for action. Understanding these narratives requires appreciating Akit's IEK, which forms the foundation of their mission to live harmoniously with nature. As Akong Siran articulates, the Akit believe that human actions have consequences, and their ecological ethic is deeply embedded in this belief. Siran's insights reflect a profound respect for the environment, which they regard as a living entity that reciprocates human actions.

In the broader context of the Church's mission, the Church must ensure its mission upholds justice for marginalised groups and the environment alike. The Akit's narratives, informed by their IEK, offer valuable perspectives that can enrich global theological discussions. The Church's mission, inherently connected to the *Missio Dei* (God's Mission), must address the ecological marginalisation faced by both communities and ecosystems on the brink of destruction. The WCC emphasises that the Church's mission extends beyond social and economic justice to include ecological concerns, highlighting the interconnectedness of all creation (WCC 2013:6). This broader mission theology is further supported by scholars advocating for a more inclusive and justice-oriented approach. Musa Dube's postcolonial feminist critique of the Christian mission calls for reevaluating the Church's role in addressing the complex factors contributing to ecological injustice (Dube 1997:23, 2020:3). Christian theology, in this light, can interpret the suffering of the Earth as an expression of Christ's suffering, encapsulated in the idea that 'the wounded Earth is the wounded Christ.' While the Akit may not explicitly frame their experiences in these terms, this theological perspective provides a framework for interpreting and responding to environmental degradation. Sallie McFague's work underscores the need for a new paradigm and eyes, the 'loving eyes', contrasted to the arrogant eyes, to embrace others (McFague 1993, 1997).

This approach invites Christians to see the Earth's suffering as deeply intertwined with the suffering of Christ, thereby deepening the Church's understanding of its mission to care for creation. Robert Borrong aligns with this perspective, acknowledging that all creation speaks of divine reality and that listening to nature's voice is integral to spiritual and theological experience (Borrong 2019:9–10; Schaefer 2009). Borrong's view resonates with McFague's organic model, which imagines the universe as God's Body, interpreting disasters as signs of God's woundedness because of human actions. Viewing these theological approaches through the lens of the Akit community emphasises the recognition of nature's voice as a manifestation of the interconnectedness between nature, humans and God. Viewing these theological

approaches through the lens of the Akit community highlights the recognition of nature's voice as a manifestation of the interconnectedness between nature, humans and God. Two Indonesian scholars, Ejodia Kakunsi and Agustina Samosir, drawing on Ivone Gebara and other ecofeminist theologians, present *Ibu Pertiwi* (Mother Earth) as a symbol of Earth's suffering, intricately linked to the exploitation of women and nature and nature (Samosir & Kakunsi 2022). They argue that environmental justice is inseparable from the fight against the oppression of women, especially within indigenous communities. By merging ecofeminist theology with the concept of the Earth as a mother, they underscore the interconnectedness of caring for the Earth and advocating for the marginalised, reinforcing the need for a holistic approach to environmental stewardship. Danielle Hansen enriches this discussion by describing environmental crises as violations against the Earth, akin to violence against God's body (Hansen 2022; McFague 1993). Although the Akit may not frame their experiences in these specific terms, this metaphor is relevant when interpreting their narratives through a Christian lens. In this context, disasters can thus be seen as the Earth's 'wounded voice', echoing the wounds of Christ.

Body metaphors, particularly poignant for indigenous communities and the world, sharpen the understanding of ecocide. Ivan Platovnjak's work on ecological spirituality emphasises the necessity of ecological conversion – a shift in how Christians view and interact with creation, recognising the Earth as a sacred gift that demands care and stewardship (Platovnjak 2019:85–87). Imaginatively, this framework allows us to see disasters not merely as natural phenomena but as the wounded voice of nature itself – the voice of anger, shouting and rejecting oppression and exploitation, thereby wounding her integrity. Disaster narratives enrich ecotheological discourse by highlighting the need to restore ecological communities and consider these complex and dynamic relationships. However, this ecological conversion is essential in fulfilling the mandate to guard, maintain and care for 'Eden' (Gn 2:15), our Mother Earth, our common home.

Indigenous worldviews for a transformative ecospirituality

The reflections of the Akit Tribe, especially from Mak Kaseh and Akong Siran, vividly illustrate the deep connection between their ancestral traditions and the natural environment. In an interview on 03 May 2023, Mak Kaseh expressed the belief that abandoning traditional practices directly leads to environmental disasters, saying:

'Teluk Setimbul always faces disasters because many traditions of our ancestors have been abandoned... If violated, we face disasters. We don't know what kind of disaster, that's nature's power. Are our ancestors angry? Certainly, they are. They get angry if we abandon their traditions. We don't see them, but suddenly disasters come.' (Female, 65 years, Fisher)

This perspective reveals a worldview where nature and spirituality are intricately intertwined, and the neglect of cultural practices is seen as a disruption of ecological balance. Similarly, during a FGD on 02 May 2023, Akong Siran, a

Christian elder who is also known as an Akit's spiritual leader, emphasised the moral dimensions of their ecological practices, highlighting that their daily livelihoods are guided by both ethical conduct and spiritual accountability. He noted:

'Every step we take to seek livelihood is good. If we feed our families, God sees. If we do evil, we go to hell ... Nek Lam [*this ancestor*] taught us not to be evil to others, not to steal... Our scripture say God watches us. We can reach heaven if we are good. The soul returns to God, but our ancestors watch over us here.' (Male, 72 years, Fisher)

This belief system underscores the idea that actions on Earth have spiritual consequences, with ancestral spirits and spiritual entities playing a protective role in the community's well-being.

The Akit Tribe's worldview aligns closely with the theological insights of Monika Hukubun, who re-examines the cultural practices of the Kei people in the Maluku Islands, Indonesia, through a Christ-cosmic hermeneutic approach, based on Colossians 1:15–20. Her initial premises are: (1) Earth as a holistic life system where all elements of life exist, function and are interdependent, (2) Earth as a home (*oikos*), a common dwelling place for all ecological communities (*oikumene*) and a source of life that provides sustainably (*oikonomia*) for these communities, (3) organic and non-organic entities uniquely support the entire natural life system through their interrelated and interdependent roles and (4) Earth accommodates both visible and invisible entities, indicating contrasting living spaces for these entities (Hukubun 2023:195–201). She posits that the Earth is a holistic life system where all elements are interdependent. Her research resonates with Akit's belief that all physical entities, from mountains and forests to rivers and ponds, possess a soul and can be inhabited by spirits (Hukubun 2023:213–214). The Akit's rituals, such as *Bele Laut* and *Betabek*, are therefore essential for maintaining harmony between humans, nature and spiritual entities.

The belief that abandoning traditional knowledge and rituals leads to environmental disturbances is deeply ingrained in Akit cosmology. This worldview emphasises the need for harmony between humans and other creations, with rituals serving as the medium through which this balance is maintained. The Akit believe that the loss of respect for these traditions, exacerbated by the erosion of cultural practices because of the introduction of new religions and modernity, has directly impacted the sustainability of their natural environment. This connection between spiritual practices and environmental health reflects a comprehensive understanding of the interconnectedness of physical health, spiritual well-being and ecological stewardship.

In Akit cosmology, sickness is often seen as a manifestation of a weakened *Semangat* [soul], which becomes vulnerable when the spiritual harmony between humans and nature is disrupted. The Akit believe that it is necessary to restore this spiritual energy through *Betemas* ritual; performed to

rejuvenate the *Semangat*, allowing the individual to regain health, strength and balance by re-establishing harmony with the natural and spiritual world. This belief system reflects a profound understanding of the interconnectedness between physical health, spiritual well-being and environmental stewardship. The *Betemas* ritual, much like other Akit practices, serves as a means of restoring balance not just within the individual but also within the broader ecosystem in which they live.

The theological reflections offered by Joas Adiprasetya provide a profound lens through which to understand the Akit's religious system, particularly in the context of their syncretic practices that blend elements of Buddhism, Christianity and indigenous beliefs. Adiprasetya's concept of *perichoresis*, the interpenetration and mutual indwelling of the divine persons within the Trinity, offers a framework for understanding how the Akit perceive the divine presence as pervasive and all-encompassing throughout the universe. This concept extends beyond the internal life of the Trinity to encompass all of creation, allowing for a dynamic participation in the divine life that does not erase particularity or distinctiveness (Adiprasetya 2008:231–233). In Akit's traditional practices, this dynamic participation is vividly expressed through their rituals. At Rumah Sasangke, the sacred sites and temples of the Akit, empty seats are intentionally left to honour the presence of invisible spiritual entities: God, the four commanders, spirits of ancestors and other spiritual beings (Figure 2b). This practice serves as a tangible expression of the Akit's belief that the divine presence permeates all of creation, resonating with Adiprasetya's view that the entire universe exists within God's loving communion (Adiprasetya 2008:234–235).

However, this complex interweaving of beliefs also reflects broader theological challenges, as explored by Ernst Conradie in his examination of worldview, evolution and ecology from a Calvinist perspective. Conradie argues that Calvinism, as articulated by Abraham Kuyper, presents a worldview deeply concerned with the unity, stability and order of the cosmos, grounded in divine sovereignty (Conradie 2019:6). This perspective critiques reductionist interpretations of evolution that exclude divine action and purpose, warning that such views can lead to moral and spiritual decline. Kuyper's worldview, as described by Conradie, upholds the dignity of the weak and the interconnectedness of all life (Conradie 2019:7), aligning with Akit's belief in the moral consequences of disrupting the balance between humanity and the natural world.

By integrating Akit's IEK with broader theological perspectives, the Church's mission can become more inclusive, addressing not only the social and economic marginalisation of human communities but also the ecological marginalisation of the Earth. Recognising that 'everything is interconnected,' ecological conversion must acknowledge the intrinsic link between social and environmental degradation (LS 49). A transformative mission should emphasise a commitment to

social justice, as 'a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach' fostering a theological praxis that is both spiritually enriching and ecologically responsible (Conradie 2019:7–8).

The concept of perichoretic participation suggests that all of creation, including diverse religious traditions, is embraced within the open communion of the Trinity, respecting the distinctiveness of these traditions while allowing them to contribute to the broader theological framework (Adiprasetya 2008:232). This calls for a holistic and inclusive response that honours both the particularity of indigenous traditions and the universality of the Christian faith, providing a robust foundation for developing a transformative ecotheology. Such a framework demands the active participation of churches, with their various traditions, to respond to the intertwined challenges of environmental degradation, cultural erosion, the historical burden of colonialism and the intersection of diverse indigenous religions (Conradie 2020:2–5). An inclusive mission is essential for the future, ensuring that the Church remains relevant and transformative in addressing the interconnected crises of our time.

Conclusion

The Akit Tribe's ecological knowledge and traditional practices embody a profound philosophy of ecological and spiritual defence. Their rituals, especially *Bele*, reflect a deep commitment to sustaining and harmonising with creation, viewing nature as a living entity integral to their community's identity and well-being. Their wisdom emphasises the participation of all entities, visible and invisible, in maintaining ecological balance. The TE framework offers a way to address global ecological crises by integrating indigenous wisdom and their sacred understanding of the world, highlighting the importance of including marginalised voices in shaping a more just and sustainable future.

Ultimately, this study urges the Church to reimagine its mission, recognising our Earth as deserving of care, justice and respect. In these critical times, the Church must embrace the spirit of *Bele*, defending our common home with the urgency it demands. We have no other planet to turn to!

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