



Mepopoidulu: The encounter of the Bible with the Bada tribes in Poso, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Mepopoidulu is a significant cultural practice among the Bada people in Poso, Indonesia, reflecting deep social and spiritual values. This study aimed to examine how *Mepopoidulu* could be theologically contextualised through the approaches of “Faithful Contextualization” and “Global Contextualization.” The research employed a qualitative, descriptive method with contextual hermeneutics to analyse five core components of the tradition. The findings indicated that values such as the sanctity of life, marital holiness, social ethics, gratitude, and restorative justice, embedded in *Mepopoidulu*, aligned with a Christian worldview. The study contributed to the discourse on indigenous contextual theology by proposing *Mepopoidulu* as a medium for gospel communication that remains faithful to Scripture while embracing cultural integrity.

Keywords: Bada community, contextual theology, Gospel contextualization, Mepopoidulu, tradition and Christianity.

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INTRODUCTION

The Bada indigenous community in Poso, Central Sulawesi, maintains a rich tapestry of cultural traditions that continue to shape communal life, moral reasoning, and spiritual identity. One of the most significant of these traditions is *Mepopoidulu*, a comprehensive ethical system that governs social expectations, religious practices, and relational obligations. Rather than representing a single ritual, *Mepopoidulu* encompasses a wide range of customary expressions, from pregnancy rites and pre-marital customs to land stewardship, harvest thanksgiving, and restorative justice. These practices embody the Bada worldview centred on harmony, honour, justice, and collective well-being, and continue to serve as a moral compass within the community's daily life. In efforts to engage such cultural systems meaningfully, Evangelical theology in Indonesia increasingly recognises the importance of contextual approaches to gospel proclamation. Since the early days of evangelical Protestant missions, conventional missionary efforts have faced challenges in bridging biblical truths with the symbolic, relational, and spiritual structures of local cultures. As scholars have noted, failure to understand and engage indigenous value systems often results in superficial communication of the gospel or unintended cultural dissonance (Dunaetz, 2019; Sanou, 2013; Sinaga et al., 2025). Contextual theology thus emerges not merely as an academic concern, but as a pastoral and missional necessity. It seeks to affirm the integrity of local culture while interpreting it through the lens of Scripture, preserving theological fidelity while enabling cultural resonance (Chia, 2024; Goheen, 2014; Sunkudon et al., 2025).

This study draws upon two principal theological frameworks to explore the contextual significance of *Mepopoidulu*. The first is *Faithful Contextualization* (Goheen, 2014), which emphasises scriptural integrity in engaging culture. It argues that while every culture contains elements of general revelation, Scripture must serve as the final authority in interpreting and reforming cultural values. The second is *Global Contextualization* (De Vries, 2016), which affirms that the gospel is inherently translatable across cultures. This approach assumes that divine truth is both transcendent and incarnational, capable of entering local systems meaningfully without losing its theological core. Together, these frameworks offer a dialectic between cultural accommodation and biblical discernment, enabling the church to engage local wisdom critically, yet respectfully.

Methodologically, this study applies a qualitative-descriptive approach, grounded in contextual hermeneutics. It is structured by Osmer's (2008) fourfold model of theological reflection: descriptive-empirical analysis of cultural phenomena, interpretive engagement with theological themes, normative assessment via Scripture and doctrine, and pragmatic consideration of implications for ministry and witness. This structure allows for a systematic yet flexible evaluation of *Mepopoidulu* in light of Christian theology. In addition, Thiselton's (2009) approach to hermeneutics informs the

interpretive process, emphasizing the dynamic relationship between text, context, and reader, particularly the ways in which Scripture may interact meaningfully with cultural narratives. These combined frameworks are employed to assess how the values embedded in *Mepopoidulu* align with, diverge from, or complement biblical principles.

Although recent scholarship has addressed various contextual expressions of the gospel in Indonesia, such as the *betangkant anak* practice among the Dayak Keninjal (Herwinasastra, 2019), the theology of *Badati* in Hutumury (Sinaga et al., 2025), or the Baliem concept of eternal life (Mawikere, 2021; cf. Susanto & Budiman, 2021), very little has been written about the interaction between Scripture and the cultural system of the Bada people. This article seeks to address that gap. By examining five representative dimensions of *Mepopoidulu* through the integrated lenses of theological contextualization and hermeneutical engagement, the study proposes that *Mepopoidulu* is not a barrier, but a bridge for gospel witness and Christian formation in Bada society. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on indigenous theology in Indonesia, advocating for an approach that is both biblically rooted and culturally attentive.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive method grounded in contextual theological inquiry. Rather than collecting field data through interviews or surveys, the research draws upon secondary sources, such as ethnographic literature, cultural documentation, theological publications, and relevant biblical texts, to construct a comprehensive understanding of *Mepopoidulu* as both a cultural framework and a theological point of engagement. Sources were selected based on their relevance to one or more of the five major dimensions of *Mepopoidulu*, as well as their contribution to theological interpretation (Adékambi, 2023; Cikka et al., 2024; Osmer, 2008; Thiselton, 2009).

This analysis proceeds in three interrelated stages. First, the research identifies and describes five core expressions of *Mepopoidulu*, each representing a distinct domain of Bada ethical and communal life. These included rituals related to pregnancy, pre-marital conduct, land stewardship, harvest thanksgiving, and restorative justice. This stage aligns with the descriptive-empirical task in Osmer's (2008) framework, which aims to understand the cultural practices on their own terms. Second, the values and meanings embedded in each tradition were interpreted through a theological lens, drawing upon scriptural texts and Christian ethical teachings. This involved both thematic comparison and theological reflection to discern areas of resonance and tension between *Mepopoidulu* and the gospel.

Third, each practice was evaluated normatively, guided by biblical principles and doctrinal clarity, to assess whether and how these cultural expressions might be affirmed, corrected, or transformed within a Christian framework. Finally, the pragmatic implications of this theological engagement were considered, especially in relation to

local discipleship, evangelism, and worship practices. This full process reflects the fourfold movement of Osmer's practical theological method: from description, through interpretation and normative assessment, to practical application.

Throughout the study, Thiselton's (2009) contextual hermeneutics provided a conceptual lens for understanding how biblical texts interact dynamically with cultural narratives. This approach rejects both cultural relativism and theological absolutism, instead promoting a dialogical engagement in which Scripture interprets culture and culture, in turn, provokes fresh understanding of the biblical message. This dual hermeneutic posture allows the study to avoid simplistic affirmations or rejections of *Mepopoidulu*, and instead engage the tradition as a living system capable of theological reinterpretation.

By combining these methods, the research aims not merely to describe or categorize cultural practices, but to assess their theological relevance in a manner that honors both scriptural authority and cultural integrity. The goal is to contribute to the ongoing development of contextual Evangelical theology in Indonesia, particularly in relation to indigenous communities such as the Bada people.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mepopoidulu as an Indigenous Ethical Framework

Among the Bada people of Poso, *Mepopoidulu* functions not merely as a ritual, but as a comprehensive moral framework shaping every aspect of life. It embodies a set of interwoven values, reverence for life, purity in relationships, stewardship of land, communal gratitude, and reconciliation through justice, all of which inform daily conduct and communal decision-making. These values are sustained and transmitted through oral narratives, ritual practices, and intergenerational teaching, forming a cultural memory that continues to guide social and spiritual behaviour (Tanuwidjaja & Udau, 2020; Triastanti et al., 2020). Understanding *Mepopoidulu* as a living ethical system provides a crucial foundation for contextual theological engagement. As Goheen (2014) emphasizes, faithful engagement with culture begins with careful observation and deep listening. Similarly, Osmer (2008) advocates a descriptive-empirical approach that takes the lived experience of communities seriously before drawing theological conclusions.

This study identifies five key expressions of *Mepopoidulu*, each corresponding to a major moral domain in Bada life, and interprets them through a biblical lens using contextual theological reflection. The aim is not to idealize or to uncritically accept these traditions, but to explore how they might become meaningful points of contact for gospel proclamation and discipleship. Following De Vries (2016), this approach assumes that the gospel is both transcultural and incarnational: it enters every culture, affirming what is good, challenging what is distorted, and transforming all things in Christ. As Sanou

(2013) warns, contextual theology must avoid both syncretism and cultural erasure, seeking instead a path of faithful discernment and constructive dialogue.

Pousuana Katuwon'na Tauna (First Pregnancy Safety Ceremony)

Among the Bada people, a woman's first pregnancy is not regarded as a private or merely biological event, but an event that carries deeply communal concern. The ceremony of *Pousuana Katuwon'na Tauna*, literally "the guarding of a woman's first pregnancy," involves family members, elders, and neighbours in ensuring the safety and well-being of both mother and unborn child. Ritual practices include the observance of food taboos, communal prayer, and symbolic acts of protection, all of which demonstrate a shared reverence for life and motherhood (Cikka et al., 2024; Herwinasastra, 2019).

This cultural ethic resonates strongly with biblical principles that affirm the sanctity of life. Scripture recognises life in the womb as sacred and known by God (cf. Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:41). Rather than applying these texts in a rigid proof-text fashion, a contextual theological reading allows for parallels to be drawn between the Bada affirmation of life and the Christian doctrine of creation and providence. The communal involvement in this ceremony aligns with biblical notions of covenant community and mutual care (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:26).

From a normative perspective, the values expressed in *Pousuana Katuwon'na Tauna*, such as protection, gratitude, and collective responsibility, are consistent with Christian ethics. However, elements that invoke spiritual forces or ancestral guardianship would require critical evaluation in light of biblical monotheism and trust in God alone. The principle of *faithful contextualization* (Goheen, 2014) encourages the affirmation of moral meaning while reinterpreting spiritual references through Christ-centered teaching.

Pragmatically, this ceremony offers a pastoral opportunity for the church to engage with pre-existing cultural concerns. Teaching on the sanctity of life can be built upon the community's existing respect for childbirth, and reoriented toward the Creator as the author and sustainer of life. Church leaders can affirm these values while gradually reframing them in biblical language and theology, opening doors for contextual discipleship and maternal pastoral care.

Pompetimbali Poadakana Tauna (Manners in the Stages Leading to Marriage)

In Bada culture, courtship and the period preceding marriage are marked by a strong emphasis on moral discipline, familial supervision, and social readiness. The tradition known as *Pompetimbali Poadakana Tauna* refers to a structured code of conduct guiding young couples towards marriage, involving communal oversight, behavioural expectations, and preparation for family life. Elders and family members provide counsel, and there is a collective expectation that individuals entering marriage will demonstrate

self-control, economic preparedness, and relational maturity (Alipa & Nuraedah, 2023; Sinaga et al., 2025; Woensdregt, 2022)

This cultural framework echoes biblical concerns for sexual purity, relational holiness, and covenantal responsibility. Rather than immediately referring to texts such as Ephesians 5:22–23, which presuppose marital roles, the more fitting starting point for contextual interpretation is 1 Thessalonians 4:4: “that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable.” Proverbs 24:27 likewise advises careful preparation before household formation: “Put your outdoor work in order and get your fields ready; after that, build your house.” From a theological perspective, the emphasis on restraint, accountability, and readiness demonstrates an ethical alignment with Christian teachings on discipleship and family life. Faithful contextualization in this case involves affirming the communal wisdom present in *Pompetimbali Poadakana Tauna* while offering deeper instruction on the biblical view of marriage as covenant, grace, and spiritual union.

A normative evaluation requires discernment regarding certain cultural practices, such as pressure for conformity or patriarchal expectations, which may at times conflict with the gospel’s call to mutual respect and dignity in relationships. However, the overarching orientation of this tradition towards responsible preparation aligns well with Christian virtue ethics and the goal of forming godly households. Practically, churches working among the Bada people may develop marriage preparation programmes that integrate traditional values of readiness with biblical principles of grace, covenant, and love. Local leaders and elders can play a mentoring role, bridging cultural norms and Christian instruction. The pre-existing cultural honour given to marriage and moral integrity thus becomes a foundation, not a hindrance, for contextual discipleship and family ministry.

Poparewa (Property Ownership and Rights)

Within Bada society, land is far more than an economic asset; it is considered sacred, ancestral, and entrusted to communal care. The concept of *Poparewa* governs the use, inheritance, and preservation of land and forest, embedding a deep moral responsibility to steward creation wisely. Land is often named according to function, with boundaries respected not only legally but spiritually. Exploiting land carelessly is viewed as an offence not merely against community norms, but against the inherited order entrusted by ancestors (Sanou, 2013; Saturi, 2013).

This understanding of land as a sacred trust resonates strongly with biblical teachings on stewardship. In Leviticus 25:1-2, 23, the Israelites are reminded that “the land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers.” This vision of creation care, where humans act as stewards rather than owners, finds common ground with *Poparewa*, especially in its emphasis on restraint, responsibility, and sustainability.

Theologically, the alignment between *Poparewa* and biblical stewardship creates a fertile space for contextual engagement. The church need not reject this indigenous framework, but rather reinterpret it in light of God's ownership of the earth and the calling of humanity to care for creation as a divine vocation (cf. Genesis 2:15; Psalm 24:1). Such re-interpretation reflects the logic of faithful contextualization, where gospel truth enters a culture and affirms what is good, while also redirecting its theological meaning.

Normative assessment may require a cautious examination of spiritual beliefs surrounding ancestral spirits or land taboos, ensuring that respect for the land is grounded in the worship of the Creator rather than traditional cosmologies. At the same time, the ethical force of *Poparewa*, its insistence on humility, intergenerational accountability, and care for creation, offers strong theological parallels with Christian ecological ethics.

In practical terms, this tradition presents opportunities for churches to engage in ecological discipleship and land-based theology. Contextual preaching, community gardening projects, and teachings on creation care can be rooted in *Poparewa*, offering a theological vocabulary that is both biblical and culturally resonant. In doing so, the church affirms that caring for the earth is not a foreign imposition, but a fulfilment of an ancestral calling, now re-centered in the Creator God revealed in Scripture.

Maroro'u: Gratitude and Worship in the Harvest

Maroro'u is one of the most joyful and anticipated celebrations in Bada society. Marking the close of the harvest season, it brings together families and communities in communal meals, singing, ritual offerings, and festive gatherings. Though not framed in explicitly Christian terms, *Maroro'u* serves as a collective expression of gratitude for provision, affirming the cyclical rhythm of giving and receiving within the natural world (Cikka et al., 2024). This tradition bears striking similarity to biblical patterns of thanksgiving. In Exodus 23:16, the Israelites are instructed to celebrate the "Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year," acknowledging the Lord as the source of their agricultural bounty. The Psalms are filled with songs of praise for God's provision and faithful care (cf. Psalm 65:9-13). Similarly, in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, believers are exhorted to "give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." In both the Bada and biblical contexts, thanksgiving is not merely a private act, but a communal affirmation of divine generosity.

Theologically, *Maroro'u* provides an accessible entry point for engaging the community in worship that is both culturally meaningful and scripturally grounded. Within the framework of faithful contextualization, the church is called not to replace or suppress such traditions, but to affirm their ethical and spiritual intentions, redirecting their focus toward the Triune God as the true Giver of life and sustenance (De Vries, 2016; Goheen, 2014). A normative theological reading requires careful attention to the object of gratitude. If *Maroro'u* involves invocations to ancestral spirits or nature deities,

these elements must be addressed pastorally and redirected through biblical teaching. However, the practice of communal celebration, ritual sharing, and gratitude is entirely compatible with the spirit of biblical worship and can be affirmed and reshaped within Christian liturgical life.

Practically, churches in the Bada region could develop contextual liturgies that incorporate *Maroro'u* rhythms into thanksgiving services. Songs, prayers, and symbolic offerings can be contextualised with Christian meanings, allowing the community to express its gratitude within a gospel-centered framework. In this way, the spiritual impulse behind *Maroro'u* is not denied, but fulfilled in Christ, the source of all provision and the one through whom thanksgiving becomes worship.

Mpegiuwu (Restorative Justice)

Mpegiuwu is a culturally embedded system of restorative justice within Bada society, centered on restoring communal harmony following social, moral, or relational transgressions. Rather than pursuing retribution, *Mpegiuwu* aims for reconciliation through confession, mediation by elders, restitution, and public acts of forgiveness. This process often includes symbolic gestures, communal meals, and reaffirmation of social bonds, reflecting the Bada emphasis on healing relationships over punitive outcomes (Cikka et al., 2024; Herwinasastra, 2019).

The theological resonance of *Mpegiuwu* with biblical teachings on reconciliation is substantial. Scripture consistently upholds the value of forgiveness and peacemaking, both as divine imperatives and as expressions of kingdom life. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:14–15 highlights the vital connection between receiving and extending forgiveness. Likewise, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 presents the gospel as a ministry of reconciliation, with God reconciling the world to Himself through Christ, and entrusting this ministry to the church.

While *Mpegiuwu* does not carry the theological weight of atonement as understood in Christian doctrine, it embodies key ethical principles that align with the gospel's relational vision. Faithful contextualization invites the church to recognize these cultural mechanisms of forgiveness not as competitors to Christian teaching, but as platforms for deeper gospel reflection, where communal restoration mirrors divine grace.

Normatively, any spiritual components in *Mpegiuwu* that involve appeasing spirits or invoking ancestral authority require theological evaluation and reinterpretation. However, the overall emphasis on confession, restitution, and restoration offers a strong ethical foundation that complements the church's call to live as a reconciled and reconciling community. The practice reflects a communal ethic of accountability and healing, echoing both Old and New Testament models of restorative justice (cf. Leviticus 6:1-7; Matthew 18:15-17).

In practical terms, *Mpegiuwu* provides a culturally appropriate framework for churches to engage in conflict resolution, pastoral care, and communal healing. Rather

than imposing foreign legalistic approaches to discipline, the church can work alongside traditional structures, offering gospel-centered resources for forgiveness, truth-telling, and transformation. In this way, the church not only affirms what is good in Bada culture, but also bears witness to the reconciling work of Christ in ways that are both theologically faithful and culturally meaningful.

The preceding discussion demonstrates that each expression of *Mepopoidulu* contains cultural values that, to varying degrees, align with core biblical principles. While these traditions arise from within the Bada worldview, they offer ethical and communal orientations that present meaningful points of contact for theological reflection and contextual application. Rather than viewing them as obstacles to gospel proclamation, they can be understood as preparatory bridges for deeper engagement with Christian teaching, provided that interpretation is guided by scriptural discernment and theological integrity.

To summarize the theological correlation between each of the five Bada traditions and corresponding Christian values, the following table highlights their cultural meanings, biblical parallels, and key supporting texts.

Mepopoidulu Tradition	Cultural Meaning in Bada Society	Corresponding Christian Value	Key Scripture References
<i>Pousuana</i> <i>Katuwon'na</i> <i>Tauna</i>	Communal protection of the first pregnancy; reverence for life	Sanctity of life; God as Creator of life	Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:41
<i>Pompetimbali</i> <i>Poadakana</i> <i>Tauna</i>	Moral preparation and relational maturity before marriage	Holiness; relational purity; covenant preparation	1 Thessalonians 4:4; Proverbs 24:27
<i>Poparewa</i>	Stewardship and communal responsibility over land and forest	Stewardship of creation; divine ownership	Leviticus 25:1–2, 23
<i>Maroro'u</i>	Celebration of harvest; communal gratitude and ritual offerings	Thanksgiving as worship; God as provider	Exodus 23:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:18
<i>Mpegiwuw</i>	Restorative justice through confession, restitution, and reconciliation	Forgiveness; reconciliation; healing in Christ	Matthew 6:14-15; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

Table 1. Correlation between *Mepopoidulu* Traditions and Christian Theological Values

Contextualising the Gospel through the Bada Cultural Framework

Theological Foundations for Contextualization

Contextual engagement with *Mepopoidulu* requires a theological foundation that maintains fidelity to Scripture while affirming the cultural realities of the Bada people.

Goheen's (2014), concept of *Faithful Contextualization* asserts that the gospel must remain the interpretive centre in every cultural interaction. While elements of general revelation may be present within cultural traditions, these must be evaluated and reoriented in light of the biblical narrative (Ferguson, 2021; Sanou, 2013).

Complementing this, De Vries (2016) offers a framework of *Global Contextualization*, which affirms the gospel's translatability into any culture. This view holds that the gospel is not bound by cultural forms, but can be meaningfully expressed within diverse contexts without compromising its theological content. This approach resonates with the emphasis in Escobar's (2003) missiology, which frames mission as a global dialogue rooted in the gospel's universal reach.

In the Bada context, these approaches provide a balanced paradigm, where cultural elements are engaged seriously, yet always through the lens of biblical truth. Traditions such as *Pousuana Katuwon'na Tauna* or *Mpegiwuw* reveal moral values compatible with Scripture. However, practices involving spirit invocation or ancestral mediation must be carefully examined. As Dunaetz (2019) and Ferguson (2021) caution, uncritical contextualization risks syncretism and theological confusion.

Strategies for Evangelism and Discipleship

The Bada people maintain a vibrant oral culture in which knowledge and moral formation are transmitted through storytelling, song, and symbolic acts. In this setting, narrative becomes a powerful medium for gospel proclamation (Bowman, 2003). As Dickie (2023) observes, narrative theology and storytelling in oral cultures can function as both pedagogical tools and theological bridges. Biblical stories such as the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) closely resemble the logic of *Mpegiwuw*, where restoration is emphasized over punishment.

Evangelism that builds on such analogies presents Christ not as an external imposition, but as the fulfilment of long-held Bada values. Juanda et al. (2025) demonstrate the significance of oral tradition in gospel proclamation among the Pamona through *kayori*, offering a close parallel to the possibilities in the Bada context.

Beyond initial proclamation, discipleship must adopt cultural learning structures. As Hiebert (2009) argues, contextual theology must be dialogical, engaging both the gospel and cultural logic. Traditions like *Pompetimbali Poadakana Tauna* can be reframed to support Christian instruction on purity, responsibility, and covenant commitment. Similarly, the ethical weight of *Poparewa* can anchor teachings on stewardship and vocation (Wright, 2013).

Contextual Worship and Liturgical Life

Worship in the Bada context must take seriously the forms through which the community expresses reverence, joy, and memory. Dickie (2021) and Lebaka (2015)

show how traditional music and performance in African cultures have been successfully adapted for Christian liturgy without losing theological integrity. Likewise, Duncan (2014) describes inculturation as a dynamic process involving adaptation, innovation, and theological reflection, principles applicable to the Bada setting.

Thanksgiving ceremonies like *Maroro'u* may be reframed within Christian liturgical structures as harvest festivals rooted in biblical theology (cf. Deuteronomy 8:18). Symbols, agricultural cycles, and poetic forms can be redeemed to express covenantal gratitude and dependence on God. Use of the local Bada language in worship echoes the Pentecost paradigm in Acts 2 and reinforces Escobar's (2003) argument that mission involves speaking God's word "from everywhere to everyone."

Participation also matters. As Braulik (2003) notes in his study on Psalms and liturgy, communal involvement in worship sustains spiritual meaning. Including Bada forms such as testimonies, group dialogue, and symbolic blessings can deepen the local church's liturgical life while maintaining scriptural faithfulness.

Recommendations

Based on the theological reflections and cultural analysis conducted in this study, several practical recommendations are proposed for churches, Christian educators, and mission practitioners working within or alongside the Bada community.

For Local Churches

Churches in the Bada region are encouraged to engage more intentionally with *Mepopoidulu* as a cultural resource for discipleship, teaching, and pastoral care. Rather than rejecting traditional practices outright, church leaders can affirm ethical values within these traditions and use them as platforms for introducing biblical teaching. For example, ceremonies such as *Mpegiwuw* can serve as contextual models for teaching about forgiveness, reconciliation, and grace, while *Poparewa* may offer a basis for environmental theology and stewardship.

For Christian Educators and Theological Institutions

Theological education in Indonesia should incorporate modules on indigenous theology, contextual hermeneutics, and cultural anthropology. Training future pastors and lay leaders to read culture theologically, through frameworks such as those developed by Goheen (2014), Osmer (2008), and Thiselton (2009), will enhance the relevance and depth of their ministry. Contextual case studies from various ethnic groups, including the Bada, should be integrated into curricula to encourage a holistic and localized theological vision.

For Mission Practitioners

Missionaries and Christian workers involved in cross-cultural engagement must

approach Bada culture with humility and a commitment to listening. As Escobar (2003) and Hiebert (2009) argue, missions in the global South are most effective when rooted in dialogue rather than imposition. Developing gospel communication strategies that incorporate oral storytelling, local idioms, and narrative logic, building on traditions such as *Pompetimbali* or *Maroro'u*, will foster more sustainable spiritual formation and community transformation.

For Further Research

Future theological studies should explore comparative contextual analyses across ethnic groups in Sulawesi and beyond, to understand how traditions like *Mepopoidulu* relate to broader frameworks of Asian and Oceanic indigenous theology. Empirical studies that involve direct community participation, through interviews, focus groups, and liturgical experimentation, would deepen the practical implications of contextual theology and contribute to a more grounded ecclesiology.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has explored the theological significance of *Mepopoidulu*, a living moral tradition among the Bada people of Central Sulawesi, in light of Christian Scripture and the frameworks of faithful and global contextualization. Rather than viewing Bada customs as obstacles to gospel proclamation, the research has shown that these cultural expressions contain values and ethical structures that align, at various levels, with core biblical teachings. Through detailed analysis of five representative practices, *Pousuana Katuwon'na Tauna*, *Pompetimbali Poadakana Tauna*, *Poparewa*, *Maroro'u*, and *Mpegiwuw*, the study has demonstrated how contextual theology can affirm cultural wisdom while offering Christ-centered reinterpretation.

Each tradition reflects ethical impulses that resonate with Christian convictions: reverence for life, moral formation, stewardship of creation, gratitude in worship, and communal reconciliation. While some aspects require theological evaluation, particularly where ancestral or spiritual forces are invoked, the overarching framework of *Mepopoidulu* offers a coherent vision of social responsibility, harmony, and sacred order. These features do not compete with biblical truth, but rather invite deeper engagement through Scripture's redemptive narrative.

Grounded in the twin frameworks of Goheen's *Faithful Contextualization* and De Vries' *Global Contextualization*, the research affirms that theological engagement must be both biblically anchored and culturally intelligent. The use of Osmer's fourfold practical theological method, alongside Thiselton's contextual hermeneutics, has allowed for a dynamic reading of Bada culture, not as a static background, but as a meaningful space in which the gospel can take root and flourish.

The study contributes to the broader development of Evangelical theology in Indonesia by offering a model for engaging indigenous traditions not with suspicion, but with discernment and grace. It invites local churches, missionaries, and theologians to move beyond Western frameworks of discipleship and to reimagine theological formation in dialogue with local wisdom. In doing so, the gospel becomes not only understandable but truly incarnate in the life and culture of the Bada people.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Author contributions

K.F. conceptualised and designed the study, conducted the theological analysis, and drafted the initial manuscript.

P.G.O.S. contributed to the methodological framework, contextual theological interpretation, and critical revision of the manuscript.

J.S. participated in the data analysis and literature review and provided editorial input during the writing process.

All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

The study did not generate new primary data. All data used in this article were obtained from previously published sources, which are appropriately cited in the reference list. Additional data supporting the findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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