

A Theological Interpretation of Second Burial (*Makawera*) Traditions in Sumba

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ABSTRACT

This paper is the result of research on the tradition of *makawera* (exhuming and reburying bones of the dead) in Southwest Sumba, especially among those who have converted to Christianity. Some argue that this phenomenon is a symptom of a dualism of belief, or syncretism. However, other theological approaches might help us approach this practice positively. The purpose of this study is to observe the Sumbanese (*Marapu*) practice of exhuming the dead from a theological point of view. Data for this research was collected through literature reviews, in-depth interviews with a number of respondents, and observations of the *Marapu* practice of *makawera* using descriptive qualitative methods. The authors conclude that the purpose of Christians practicing *makawera* is not to ensure the salvation of the human soul, and so Sumbanese beliefs should not be seen as contradictory to Christian teaching. Christians in Southwest Sumba recognize that salvation is entirely granted by God through the redemptive work of his Son Jesus Christ. *Marapu* Christians also hold that this ceremony is critical for respecting the human body, the abode of God's spirit. Even if the bones remain after Jesus causes the soul to depart, these bones are still worthy of respect.

Keywords: *Makawera* tradition, bones, soul, *Marapu* belief, theological review.

INTRODUCTION

Death is a fact of life and has become one of the important topics in various religions and cultures. Every ethnic group has its own traditions and customs related to death. The Sumbanese people in Indonesia perform a number of rituals and follow traditions surrounding deaths and funerals. One of the traditions most widely practiced, both by the adherents of the indigenous religion of Sumbanese (namely *Marapu*) and by Christians is called *makawera*. *Makawera* is the tradition of exhuming the bones of a deceased person for a second burial using a number of ceremonies. The Sumbanese are certainly not the only ethnic group in Indonesia to practice such a tradition. Several other ethnic groups also practice ceremonies around dead bodies, though in different ways and for different reasons. The Toba Batak people in Sumatra, for example, conserve the *mangongkal holi* ceremony (Hutagaol, 2020), while the Toraja people in Sulawesi carry out the *Ma'Nene* ceremony (Rismayanti, 2020). The fulcrum of these two ceremonies are the same as those in Merapu territory, and require the excavation of human bones or skeletons to be reburied according to ancestral ceremonies.

The question that arises is: why do Christians in Sumba still carry on with bone excavation and reburial ceremonies? Such a question has been a topic of discussion in churches where such practices still exist. Churches want to formulate a precise theological position on such a tradition. When discussing the *mangongkal holi* ceremony in Batak, Hutagaol and Prayitno write that church institutions try to monitor and to adapt local ceremonies to the Christian faith because there are several values that need to be preserved, the most important being the value of solidarity (Hutagaol, 2020). Rismayanti and Nusarastriya observed that Christians carried out the Ma'Nene ceremony while being selective about what parts of the ceremony to include (Rismayanti, 2020). Elements that were not in line with Christian values were not included in the ceremony, while those that were appropriate were still practiced.

The *makawera* ceremony in Sumba is basically a *Marapu* rite. *Marapu* followers carry out this ceremony because they believe that upon a person's funeral, respect towards the dead has not been fully completed. For this reason a second funeral is needed, namely *makawera*. People of lower social status who die are often buried with a simple ceremony for economic reasons, because performing the complete ceremony requires a large amount of money. In addition, *makawera* is also held with the aim of uniting husband and wife under one large stone grave which is well prepared by their descendants. *Marapu* adherents also conduct ceremonial practices of reburying every tribal member. These ceremonies are held in one ancestral burial area that is usually located in the courtyard of the tribal traditional house.

The theological problem that arises when Christians also carry out the *makawera* ceremony is dualism in terms of belief or a kind of syncretism. *Makawera* is always accompanied by prayers and songs which are addressed to the *Marapu* (ancestral spirits) and also to the Creator according to Sumbanese traditional beliefs. In addition, there is also a unique understanding of life after death according to the *Marapu* belief that might be interpreted as independent from the visions of the Church. *Marapu* belief systems uphold that people who die still need material goods such as domesticated livestock (buffaloes, pigs, goats, dogs and chickens), as well as food and clothing. The phenomenon of double faith, as might be witnessed in the *makawera* ceremony, is also found in other traditions related to *Marapu* beliefs. A study in East Sumba conducted by Pranata and his team revealed that the tradition of worshiping ancestral spirits is not only carried out by the *Marapu* believers but also by Christians (Pranata, 2021).

There are different moral stances on Sumbanese traditional funeral ceremonies. Selan and Kadiwano, after studying the meaning of several funeral ceremonies according to the *Marapu* belief and comparing them with Christian teachings, argue that the belief in salvation according to *Marapu* is quite contrary to the Christian faith (Selan, 2020). Lu in his commentary on the burial traditions of the people of East Sumba also highlighted the contradictions between Bible teachings and *Marapu* beliefs in many respects (Lu, 2016). On the other hand, Kleden and Nusa acknowledge a number of similarities between *Marapu* and Catholicism in their understanding of death, while

viewing traditional funeral ceremonies as an opportunity for the Church to evangelize *Marapu* followers (Kleden, Konradus Doni, 2019). In short, from the previous studies, two different opinions emerge. First, a number of researchers emphasize the point of separation so that for them, ceremonies related to the *Marapu* belief should not be performed by Christians. Second, those who highlight the similarities argue that these ceremonies can be a way to contextualize the Christian faith. Kleden and Nusa agree on the second opinion, as they not only pay attention to the external form of cultural ceremonies but also to the context of the *Marapu* belief system, which for them also holds a number of social values that are in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church. Meanwhile Kamuri, though not speaking specifically about funerals, offers a second opinion with his emphasis on a moderate biblical transformation of *Marapu* culture (Kamuri, 2020). Kamuri first prioritizes the inculcation of biblical principles in the formation of the congregation, although he is also open to accommodating cultural elements that do not conflict with Christian principles.

This paper focuses on the *makawera* ceremony and attempts to compare this ceremony with the Judaic tradition as found in the Old Testament. This study employs primary and secondary source material on Sumbanese traditional funerals, although few in-depth studies exist on the specificity of *Makawera* practices. In the Old Testament there are a number of texts that provide data on the excavation of human bones reburied in stone graves (Burger, 1992). By examining the messages of the texts of God's Word, this paper provides a theological analysis of *makawera* practices. Thus, this paper offers an alternative for Christians in determining the appropriate and wise theological stance on *makawera*.

RESEARCH METHODS

This paper is the result of research, both library and field study using qualitative-descriptive methods. According to Sonny Eli Zaluchu, qualitative research is carried out to understand empirical phenomena, namely to find meaning behind the phenomena (Zaluchu, 2020). This method is suitable for research on the phenomenon of the *makawera* ceremony which is still carried out by Christians in Sumba. Through this study, we will provide a complete description of the important elements of *makawera* so that its meanings and values can be fully revealed. In addition, the hermeneutic method is also applied to reveal the meaning of the selected biblical texts (Zaluchu, 2021). Furthermore, the messages of the Old Testament Scriptures are used to conduct historical justification behind the practice of *makawera*.

This research underwent several stages. Triggered initially by a spontaneous chance to witness a *Makawera* event in Sumba carried out by Christians, our curiosity arose and we were prompted to conduct an ethnographic study. The study began with library research and then evolved into field research. The main studies came from field's research including observing *Makawera*, and also from in-depth interviews with a number of respondents (both *Marapu* non-Christians and Christians). The field

data was further analyzed using a theological lens based in Christian interpretations of postmodernism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Makawera Tradition in the context of the Marapu belief

The tradition of *Makawera* cannot be separated from Marapu history in Sumba. Through interviews with several Marapu adherents, it was revealed that the core of Marapu belief is the recognition of the existence of a Supreme Being and also of lower spirits called Marapu. The Marapus uphold a hierarchy among the beings of this world, and each tier of society has a different but critical role as an intermediary between man and God. Atop this ladder of created beings is the Supreme Being, the Creator of Heaven and Earth. This Supreme Being is not known by name (*nda patekki tamo – nda panuma ngara*), except for his titles. The main titles of the Supreme Being are *Ina Mawolo – Ama Marawi* (the mother who weaves and the father who creates), *Nduka Ina – Nduka Ama* (the greatest mother and the greatest father). The data as mentioned above has been disclosed by a number of previous researchers, both earlier and more recent (Kapita, 1976; Nudu, 1983; 1986; Djawa, 2014; Kleden, 2019).

Researchers and theologians have long held differences of opinion regarding the Supreme Being according to Marapu belief. Some argue that the Supreme Being is the highest *Marapu* for its adherents (Kleden, Konradus Doni, 2019). Others distinguish between the one Supreme Being and the Marapus as intermediaries (Kapita, 1976: 371; Nudu, 1986: 13,19,29). Based on interviews with our respondents, we favor the second opinion. Prayers are addressed to the Supreme Being but through the intermediaries of the stratified Marapus. Although the Supreme Being is addressed with the title *Ina – Ama* (Mother – Father), this does not mean that the Creator consists of a pair of gods and goddesses, but only one person. The title *Ina – Ama* (Mother – Father) only expresses the nature of the Creator as Almighty and Most Just Father as well as Most Merciful Mother (Nudu, 1986: 13).

Funeral ceremonies according to *Marapu* belief require two ceremonies: a temporary burial and a permanent one. According to some of our respondents, if a deceased person has undergone both ceremonies and the body has been placed in a permanent stone grave (not just excavated soil), then the *makawera* ceremony no longer needs to be performed. The complete implementation of the funeral ceremonies is very important in the *Marapu* belief system because only then can the souls of the dead find their final resting place, which is called *Wano Kalada* (the great village) (Punda Panda, 2020). The completion of funeral stages is marked by the music of gongs and drums as well as by the slaughter of a number of buffaloes and pigs. Meanwhile, for temporary funeral ceremonies, there is no gong and drum music, and there is no buffalo slaughter. These temporary burials are carried out simply, with only a few pigs slaughtered to be offered to the spirits and to feed the mourners.

According to *Marapu* belief, the souls of the dead whose funeral ceremonies have not been completely performed still live around the house and have not yet started their journey to Wano Kalada, the final resting place for dead souls. For this reason, souls hope that their surviving family will carry out the *makawera* ceremony as soon as possible. If for a long time the family does not carry out the ceremony (if the living forget to honor their dead), then the living will face real-life catastrophes representing warnings from above, namely from the highest *Marapu*. This does not mean that the spirits of the dead are evil in character, but rather that the highest *Marapu* punishes humans for neglecting their obligations in carrying out funeral ceremonies for their loved ones. Therefore, bereaved families labor extensively to earn money to facilitate funeral ceremonies according to traditional custom.

Based on interviews with several respondents and observations of *Makawera*, *Makawera* consists of several steps. The first step is a simple ceremony called *li'i pakira* (promise) which is a notification to the soul of the person whose bones will be exhumed, about the plan to perform *Makawera*. The second step is bone excavation. The grave is dug up and bones are collected, cleaned of soil elements and arranged regularly on a piece of cloth (according to the location of each body part). After this step, the skeleton is neatly wrapped with several pieces of cloth and carried by a family member to be escorted to the house in an orderly procession. Arriving at the front of the house, an *opi kapoda* (wiping sweat) ceremony is held, involving the act of sprinkling the skeleton with cold water. The skeleton is then brought into the house and laid in a place prepared for it. The skeleton remains in the family's home for several days and during those days extended relatives come to pay their respects. The music of gongs and drums with a distinctive rhythm for death is sounded from time to time. Some women sing lamentations to show their solidation in mourning.

On the day of the funeral, invited relatives and acquaintances came with their respective donations. They usually bring buffaloes, pigs, hand-woven clothes, rice, betel nuts and money to donate to the family holding the ceremony. After all the invited guests are present, another ritual is held in which the one officiating the ritual recites several traditional poems, essentially calling the *Marapu* to pick up the soul and take it to its final resting place. Then proceeds the slaughter of a number of buffaloes and pigs. The buffalo meat and pork is distributed to the invitees to be brought back to their respective homes. The ceremony is followed by a banquet, which is usually prepared in advance.

After the banquet, the skeleton is carried to its final burial place. The procession to the grave is accompanied by gong music and dances. A woman walks in front of the skeleton while spreading rice along the road. The meaning of spreading rice is to feed the ancestral spirits who have gathered around to pick up the departed soul. After placing the skeleton in the grave, a *kouta mawo* (raising the veil) ceremony is held. Several pieces of cloth are placed on the grave and the sisters and daughters of the deceased person lift one sheet of cloth each to take home. The Sumbanese believe

that these clothes bring good luck to sisters and daughters for the well-being of their respective households.

Makawera for Christians

Until now there is no standard rule regarding whether or not Christians can carry out *makawera*. Some pastoral assemblies in the Catholic church of Weetebula Diocese only discuss general principles regarding the Church's attitude towards culture. Due to the fact that there are no special directives from the Church, the practice of *makawera* is freely carried out by many Christians, leaving laypeople to speculate what is "appropriate" according to their belief.

The implementation of the *makawera* as a rite for Christians has undergone significant modifications. However, some elements of the old beliefs remain tucked away. The role of the *rato* (performer of the *Marapu* rite) has been replaced by a priest or other church official who leads worship and prayer. The content of prayers has changed to fit with Christian teachings so that it is not delivered as it once was by the *rato*: in traditional poetry. The main ceremonial steps are still carried out, but the contents of the preaching and prayers are related to certain Biblical themes and emphasize the request for eternal salvation for the departed soul through Jesus Christ the redeemer. All cultural events such as the slaughter of buffalo and pigs and the distribution of meat to guests are still carried out by Catholics, whereas Protestants have placed limits on this aspect of the ritual.

Some elements of the *Marapu* ritual are maintained without exploring their meaning, resulting in occasional overshadowing of *Marapu* traditions over Christian values. This results in dualism of faith. For example, some people still keep the rites of spreading rice along the road when the skeletons are carried to the burial place. Likewise, the veil-lifting ceremony (*kouta mawo*) is still performed upon skeleton exhumation despite most practitioners not understanding its meaning.

Theological Overview of the Makawera Ceremony

A Theological Perspective of the Phenomenon of Dualism

It has been described above that there are indications of dualism / syncretism in the practice of *Makawera*, namely the mixture of two types of beliefs: Marapu and Christian. People have officially embraced Christianity and they are devout Catholics, but they still practice some Marapu's ceremonies (Punda Panda, 2014). Similar phenomena, although in different contexts, exist in many other places, including Europe. Today there is a theological discussion about "multiple religious belonging." A number of writers view this as a form of religiosity that is an option in the midst of religious pluralism (Koumulainen, 2011). According to such a point of view, the phenomenon of dualism in Sumba can be better accepted within the Christian theological framework.

“Multiple Religious Belonging,” according to Cornille, is not new, but rather has existed in various parts of the world so long as there has been coexistence of two or more different religions (Cornille 2012). There are many names given to this position as noted by Cornille, namely “religious hybridity,” “spiritual fluidity,” “multiple religious belonging,” “multiple religious identification,” and many others (Cornille, 2021). Of all these terms and phrases, the most commonly used is “multiple religious belonging” (Cornille, 2012). One of the main supporters of this concept is Raimon Panikkar. Raimon Pannikar is a theologian who was born in a mixed family of a Hindu father and a Catholic mother. Panikkar is best known for his oft-quoted saying: “I ‘left’ as a Christian, I ‘found’ myself a Hindu and I ‘return’ a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian.” (Panikkar, 1998) Panikkar even claimed to accept secularism in his life, as he said in his 1981 work: “I am at the confluence (sangam) of the four rivers: the Hindu, Christian, Buddhist and Secular traditions” (Panikkar, 1981).

The phrase “multiple religious belonging” is used to describe various levels of identification with more than one religious tradition (Cornille, 2012). In this case, people have embraced one global religion as their “first religion” and at the same time practice a second religion (or more) depending on the criteria of the doctrines, practices, and lifestyle expectations of the religions in question (Goosen, 2011). This phenomenon is seen by Western society as relatively new, namely one of the symptoms that emerged in the postmodern era. In other parts of the world, for example in Asia, this is a tradition that has been going on for a long time (Cornille, 2021). The Netherlands is one location where “flexible believers” have become common, namely spiritual adventurers who are not bound to institutionalized religions such as Christianity. Rather, they are free to choose spiritual elements from various religions, and some of these flexible believers even construct their own ceremonies (Kalsky, 2017). Meanwhile in Japan, as Cornille notes, some people use Buddhist temples for funeral ceremonies and Shinto shrines for other ceremonies, such as for weddings (Cornille, 2021).

The phenomenon of “multiple religious belonging” is certainly a challenging new concept for Christianity and is therefore much debated. The debate is amidst the tension between particularism and pluralism which is basically centered on the issue of differences or similarities between religious traditions (Oostveen, 2017). Particularists focus more on differences by maintaining that Christianity (and most religions) demands a single commitment from its adherents and prioritizes the truth claims of their own religion over other religions. Thus, it is difficult for the particularists to accept “multiple religious belonging” as an option in their religious life. Meanwhile, the pluralists focus more on equality. One of the theologians upholding this position is John Hick, who believes that every religion upholds a transcendent reality that underlies all religious traditions. With this position, “multiple religious belonging” is a necessity, because if religion is only understood as a commitment to one religion, the perspective of transcendent reality as a common basis will be lost (Oostveen, 2017).

Without diving too deeply into the discussion as above, the way of inculturation is arguably the more ethical one. The understanding of the concept of inculturation has developed in the course of history. Previously within the Vatican Council II, there was an oppressive emphasis on one-ended narratives of the Bible perfecting and purifying human culture (Doyle, 2012). In subsequent developments, especially in response to presentations by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), inculturation became perceived as a two-way movement in which encounters and dialogues between the Church and laypeople's culture could mutually enrich each other (Rukiyanto, 2019). So inculturation is understood as a process of interaction and deep encounter between Christianity and culture, in which the authentic values of culture can be organically integrated into Christianity. In this way, Christianity can become truly rooted in the culture that receives it (Rukiyanto, 2019).

One valid concern about the inculturation movement is the danger of unhealthy syncretism. In navigating terms for dialogue between the Church and local belief systems, encounters and dialogues at the core level of faith should not be forced, and non-aggressive forms of dialogue should be used. This dialogue should emphasize the values of religious experiences and co-action (Riyadi, 2016).

Biblical Overview of the Makawera tradition

In conducting a biblical review of the *Makawera*, we try to explore it by looking at the meaning of bones in the Old Testament. This research is based on the Pentateuch texts, namely the *Torah*, and *Nebi'im*. Our basic assumption is that the Pentateuch, i.e. the *Torah*, is the basis and source of all the Old Testament Scriptures. This research does not cover the third 'Book' in Tanakh, namely *Ketubim*. The presence and expression of the meaning of words and sentences regarding 'bones', namely '*etsem*' (Holladay, 1989, p. 280) in the Old Testament Scriptures can be traced in the following paragraphs.

The first occurrence of the expression meaning 'bone' is found in Genesis 2:23 : *Zot Hapa'am 'etsem me'etsamay ubasar mibesary* (Elliger, 1990: 4) = "This is, the bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh". Genesis 2:23 reads in full: "Then the man said, this is it, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She will be called a woman, because she was taken from a man". Genesis 2:23 combines "bones" and "flesh" to express the existence of man, and thereby also expresses the "life" of man. "Flesh and bone" is "he", i.e. "man". The "bones and flesh" represent the "visible dimension" (existence) of man, namely his "body". If *Nefes* (Holladay, 1989: 242), which is "breath", "more presents" in the human existence in terms of "soul and spirit" which cannot die, then "bone and flesh" expresses human existence in its visible "form".

The second occurrence of "bones" is in Genesis 50:25, *Wayasba' Yoseph et-beney Yisra'el le'mor paqod yipeqod'Elohim'etkemweha'elitem 'atsmotay Mizzeh* (Elliger, 1990: 85) = "Then Joseph made the children of Israel swear, saying: "Surely God will take care of you; at that time you must take my bones from here". Joseph's "bones"

had to be brought back to Israel? Joseph's bones at the time of Israel's exodus were likely to have turned to dust. The events related to Joseph took place in Egypt around 1700-1600 BC, and the exodus of Israel from Egypt occurred around 1300-1250 BC (LAI, 2011: 108). The gap of about 300 years makes the 'preservation' of Joseph's bones impossible. Yet Joseph, who lived in Egyptian 'culture', might allow the 'mummification' of his body. And when this happened, then Joseph's "bones" were still "preserved", and thus "brought home". In the first case where Joseph's body is no longer preserved, then the truth of "bringing back Joseph's bones" is not primarily concerned with the carrying of his body. Rather it regards the importance of Israel "perpetuating" the memory, history, story, and "life" of Joseph as "their soul and identity" of his people wherever they go and wherever they are. "Bringing back the bones of Joseph from here", i.e. Egypt, can also mean "bringing back" Joseph to the Promised Land, i.e. the "land of freedom". Joseph's "bones" must not "remain" in the land of oppression.

The book of Numbers presents "bones" in the context of the Jewish Passover meal. *We'tsemlo' Yisberu-bo* (Elliger, 1990: 228) = "And they shall not break a single bone." The complete sentence: "Let them not leave any part of it until morning, and they must not break a bone." According to all the statutes of the Passover, they must celebrate it" (Num 9:12). Our question is why should the Jews not eat the Passover lamb 'not breaking its bones'? To be sure, hard bones cannot be chewed and swallowed. The Jews ate the Passover lamb by eating meat while leaving the bones intact. Why do 'bones' have to remain 'intact'? Does "wholeness of bones" symbolizes "whole of existence" and "wholeness of life"?

The Book of History, II Kings presents the "bones of Elisha" (and not the bones of everyone) as the "power and source" of life. *Wayyiga ha'is be'atsmot 'Elisa wayehi wayyaqam 'al-raqlay* (Elliger, 1990: 645) = "And for the sake of the corpse that hit Elisha's bones, he came to life and stood up". The complete sentence: "Once someone was burying a dead body. When they saw the mob coming, they threw the body into Elisha's tomb and left. And for the sake of the corpse that it touched Elisha's bones, he came to life and stood up" (II Kings 13:21). The corpse that hit or touched the bones of the prophet Elisha, not only came back to life, but also stood up. Here the bones of the prophet Elisha become the 'power and source' of life. Why and how did the prophet Elisha's 'bones' bring to life any corpse that touched or hit him? Maybe because Elisha was a 'holy man of God', i.e. 'one who has the spirit of God'? The name ELISHA (Buttrick, 1990: 91) itself means God is salvation. From this name it can be found, why the "bones" of the prophet Elisha became the "power of life", namely because Elisha is the "bearer of God's salvation".

In the depiction of the prophet Ezekiel, God gives "breath of life" to "dry bones" so that "dry bones come back to life". *Wayyom'er elay hinabe' al-ha'etsamot Ha'elleh we'amarta aleyhem ha'atsamot hayebesot simeyu debar- Yehwah: Koh 'amar Adonay Yehwah le'atsamot ha'elleh hinneh 'Aniy meby' bakem Ru'ah Wiheyitem* (Elliger, 1990: 965). "Then he said to me, 'Prophecy about these bones and say to them: O dry bones,

hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I put the breath of life in you, that you may live again” (Ezek 37: 4-5). In the creation of man as described by Yahwista in the Book of Genesis, the Lord God actually ‘breathed the breath of life’ into man’s ‘nose’ and thus man became a “living being”. *Wayyipah be’apayw nismat hayyim Wayehi ha’adam lenefes hayyah* (Elliger, 1990: 3) = “.. and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; Thus man became a living being.” The full verse: “At that time the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; Thus man became a living creature” (Gen 2:7). Compared to Ezekiel’s text, ‘not into the nose’, but ‘into the dry bones’, God breathed ‘His breath of life’ “and the breath of life entered into them, and they came to life” (Ezek. 37:10). The breath of God’s life that is breathed into both the ‘nose of man, who was made of dust from the ground’ as expressed in the Book of Genesis, as well as into the ‘dry bones’, all make man ‘a living being’ and ‘come to life’. At least, from the prophet Ezekiel, we learn that bones are the ‘place and site’ of God’s breath. Compared to ‘flesh’, the passage expresses that ‘bone’ is a strong substance that reveals the ‘eternity’ of human existence and life.

Bones as a “representation” of human existence and life also present the negative side of the morality life of a faithful man. *Wezabah ‘aleyka et-kohaeney habamot hamaqethirim ‘aleyka we’atsemot ‘adam tisrepu aleyka* (Elliger, 1990: 592)= “.. he will slaughter above you the priests of the sacrificial hills who will burn sacrifices above you, and the bones of men will be burned on top of you” (I Kings 13:2b). Burning human bones on the altar defiled the altar (LAI, 2011: 556). Why did the burning of ‘human bones’ on the altar defile the altar? Perhaps the burning of human bones on the altar of God is a form of punishment and simultaneously a curse. However, it is also possible that the act of burning human bones is an act of crime against humanity, namely an act against life. In this case, bones are “life” and life is sacred, and therefore the act of burning human bones is an act of desecralization to both life and God.

II Kings also repeats and thereby emphasizes again that the burning of bones on the altar defiled the altar. *Wayyipen Yo’siyyahu wayyare’ et-Haqqebarim ‘aser-sam bahar wayyislah wayyiqah et-ha’etsamot min-haqqebarim wayyisrop al-Hamizbeah Wayethame’ehu kidebar yehwah ‘aser Qara’is ha’Elohim ‘aser qara et-haddebarim ha’elleh* (Elliger, 1990 : 668) = “And when Joshua turned, he saw the tombs that were on the mountain there, and sent men to take the bones from the tombs, burn them on the altar and defile them, according to the word of the Lord, which the man of God had called out, cry for these things” (II Kings 23:16). Likewise, it happens that the burning of human bones on the altar is considered a defilement and desecralization of human existence, as well as desecralization of God’s work of creation and salvation.

From a series of brief but representative studies on the meaning of “bones” in the Old Testament, namely the Torah and Nebiim, it can be concluded that the scriptures highly value the human “body” as an integral part of human existence and life. Scriptures indicate that features of the human body, in this case the “bones”, is the

“locus” of the presence and existence of *nepes*, namely the human spirit and soul given by the eternal God.

CONCLUSION

From this theological discussion addressing dualism, it appears that not all theological discussions in Christianity view dualism negatively. “Multiple religious belonging” has recently been adopted by modern societies to open up new insights into how to navigate mutual encounters between faith and culture. Various rituals carried out by Christians who live in indigenous cultures, both rituals originating from ethnic religions and those from Christianity, are expressions of multidimensional human nature. Furthermore, the study of the meaning of bones in the Old Testament emphasizes bones as representations of humans; therefore, treating the human remains with respect is an expression of respect to humans as God’s creations. Of course, the Christians who uphold the *Makawera* ceremony realize that the implementation of the ceremony does not facilitate the eternal salvation of man, which is only achieved through redemption by God’s Son Jesus Christ. However, customs practices and cultures that ‘preserve’ and treat human bones with respect are habits that have a basis also in the biblical tradition. The Catholic Church needs to continue to respect these ceremonies in their liturgy and teachings. *Makawera* should not necessarily be considered an indicator of disbelief. The task of the Catholic Church is to clearly articulate, and thus purify the intent and theology of cultures that the God the giver of life, Nepes, is the Holy Trinity who is the source of our life and salvation.

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