

# Contextual Christology in the phrase 'apo isa elmaseh' and the word 'opo'



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This study examines the Christological meaning of the phrase 'Apo Isa Elmaseh' and the word 'Opo' referring to as the 'Lord Jesus Christ' in catechesis books and Bibles in the Minahasa language with Tontemboan and Tombulu dialects. A translation model approach in contextual theology was used to show that the translation process is a way of determining the contextual theology that occurs dialogically between zendeling missionary, translators and indigenous teachers living in Minahasa culture. The result shows that these phrases and words are used in the Minahasa religion to express the Divinity of Christ, who is believed to be *Apo Kasuruan Wangko* (God of Origin of Life), *Apo/Opo* and the Great Ancestor, who is always close to the community and the universe. This finding has broad implications to other contexts in Indonesia where with a serious contextual approach, genuine theological knowledge could be explored.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** This article supplies a new contribution to the cultural, anthropological and theological discussion of *Apo Isa Elmaseh* to Minahasan-Christian. 'apo' or 'opo' and 'Apo' or 'Opo' expresses the spiritual appreciation of human existence in the continuity of history and community life in this region. Furthermore, the finding encourages other disciplines to investigate any issue that relates to culture, religion and theology.

**Keywords:** *Apo*; Christology; Minahasa; *Opo*; translation.

## Introduction

Theology of Christ is not only a doctrine but also part of the way Christian communities with certain cultural backgrounds express their faith in Jesus Christ. The 'Good News' about Jesus as God and saviour of the world should be communicated and translated because of various histories, cultures and languages. According to David J. Bosch (2006), the Christian faith never exists except as something 'translated' into a culture.

The activity of translating the scriptures has been carried out together with efforts to understand and 'give a meaning' to the content since the time of the Old Testament (OT) (Loba-Mkole 2008). Bosch stated that the transition from the Jewish world to the Gentiles during the early days of Christianity was born from a cross-cultural environment (Bosch 2006).

The strategy used to translate the Bible is not a one-way process but an intercultural phenomenon, which achieves biblical mediation through a give-and-take strategy. Bible translation aims to share information and foster fellowship between senders, messengers and recipients (Loba-Mkole 2008).

Words or phrases in the language system reveal all kinds of emotional and cultural connotations (Bevans 2002). Therefore, based on this understanding, the activity of translating the Bible or Christian books into a particular language is also a process of broad cultural encounter and dialogue, which is a theological attempt. According to Bevans (2002), translation is the first contextual theology model related to efforts to adapt or accommodate a content or message into a culture.

This study examines the reconstruction of Christology in the Minahasa religious-cultural encounter with Christianity introduced by the Europeans through the translation of catechism books and the Bible into Tontemboan and Tombulu languages.<sup>1</sup> It translates the phrase 'Apo Isa Elmaseh' and the word 'Opo' and reveals the contextual meaning of Jesus Christ in Minahasa.

<sup>1</sup>Tontemboan' and 'Tombulu' are names for two sub-ethnics in Minahasa, which although both identify themselves as Minahasa, the first thing that distinguishes them is the dialect of the language and region. There are many common vocabularies between the two, but there are also many differences in spelling or pronunciation. It is culturally recognised that there are nine sub-ethnics in Minahasa Land, including Tontemboan, Tombulu, Tonsea, Tolour, Pasan, Batik, Ponosakan, Tonsawang and Babontehu.

Data were collected through the document study method from several translated texts, such as catechism books and Bibles in Tontemboan and Tombulu languages. Furthermore, to determine their Christological meanings, a contextual theological approach was used to translate the phrase '*Apo Isa Elmaseh*' and the word '*Opo*'.

In terms of reading and translating Tontemboan and Tombulu language texts, one of the authors of this article is a Minahasa speaker. The author found two difficulties in reading these ancient manuscripts: (1) The Tontemboan and Tombulu languages are spoken languages where each word and sentence usually occurs in conversation. However, the manuscripts studied are in written form, so they require careful reading to understand and interpret them. (2) The Tontemboan and Tombulu language manuscripts were written following the writing rules of that time, which were very different from contemporary Indonesian language rules. However, these two difficulties can be overcome by reading carefully and also using the help of a dictionary.

Regarding the Dutch language document, which provides much information about the history of evangelisation and the process of translating the Bible, we, the authors, use the help of translation technology. There are three difficulties that we found in reading these Dutch language documents, namely: (1) We writers are not Dutch speakers; (2) The Dutch language used in these documents follows their era, which may differ from modern Dutch; (3) This can be experienced by all researchers of classical documents, regarding the social and cultural context of the past. Firstly, we overcome this difficulty by using translation technology to obtain text information and understand the meaning and message; we, of course, interpret it by paying attention to context. Secondly, the hermeneutical element that helped us understand the information and message from the Dutch language manuscript was that the narrative was about history and culture that is close to us as writers.

## Minahasa contextual Christology in the phrase '*Apo Isa Elmaseh*' and the word '*Opo*'

### The history of the encounter of Christianity with Minahasa

The Minahasa people had had several encounters with the West since the 16th century when the Spaniards and Portuguese first came into this area. In the 17th century, *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) also visited this area, and even though they brought Protestant priests from the Netherlands, evangelism was mostly conducted in the mountains.

However, evangelism became significant after the mission agency *Nederlandsch Zendeling Genootschap* (NZG), based in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, sent its envoys to the Dutch East Indies, including Minahasa, in 1797. During this period, priests were occasionally sent on non-permanent visits to

this area; therefore, baptised Christians were not served effectively.

In 1817, Joseph Kam visited Minahasa and the Sangihe Islands and stayed for several months. After Joseph's visit, Jan Gerrit Hellendorn was placed in Manado City as the residency centre and only occasionally visited Christians in the mountains.

Protestant Christianity was introduced to the Minahasa people with the arrival of two German NZG zendeling missionaries, namely Johann Friedrich Riedel and Johann Gotlieb Schwarz, in 1831. This was followed by the visit by several other zendeling missionaries until the early 20th century. They opened schools and introduced simple modern medical treatment methods during that time. The *Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap* (NBG) translator envoy carried out translations of certain Bibles and religious teaching books into Malay and the Minahasa mother tongue.

The NZG is more responsible for sending the zendeling missionary while the NBG, a Dutch Bible Society founded in 1814 tasked with translating and distributing the Bible. Although NBG is only concerned with the Bible translation process, in Minahasa, this activity is inseparable from evangelism.

### *Apo* or *Opo* in Minahasa ancestral religion

Before discussing the phrase '*Apo Isa Elmesëh*'<sup>2</sup> in translating the Bible into Tontemboan and the word '*Opo*' to refer to Jesus as God in Tombulu, it is important to describe and reveal the meaning of '*Apo/Opo*', which originated from the old Minahasa religion.

The word '*Apo*' is mainly used in the Tontemboan area, while '*Opo*' is mostly utilised by speakers of Tombulu, Tonsea and Tolour. The linguistic understanding of the word '*Apo*' is found in the Tontemboan language dictionary compiled by Johannes Albert Traugott Schwoarz. In this dictionary, this word is synonym to 'pu', 'mpu', 'ipung' and 'mpung' in Malay, which means 'grandfather, grandmother, sir, and madam'. Schwarz further stated that '*Apo*' with a capital 'A' means a title for 'god', human, lord and leader. Saruan (1991) defined it as the 'ancestor with ties to several families or clans'. It is also used to refer to the Supreme Power in greetings: *Apo Kasuruan*, *Opo Wailan Wangko* and *Empung Renga-rengan* (Saruan 1991).

In Minahasa religion, '*apo-opo*' is especially present in every rite, myth, poem or proverb, song, dance, prayer, relief and symbol in the form of a soul or spirit (Saruan 1991). According to Saruan, '*Apo*' in Minahasa religion means the following: (1) The complete and harmonious relationship with the Supreme Power, ancestors (*Opo-opo/Empung-empung/*

<sup>2</sup>The phrase '*Isa Elmaseh*' comes from two Arabic words to refer to Jesus Christ. The use of Arabic is closely related to contextualisation efforts through translation. The context of the archipelago was a dominant society with Islam in the past. Therefore, to respect the Muslim-majority context, the translators use the word '*Isa Almasih*' to refer to Jesus Christ. cf. Gerrit Singgih, Two Contexts (Singgih, Emanuel Gerrit. Dua Konteks: Tafsir-Tafsir Perjanjian Lama Sebagai Respons atas Perjalanan Reformasi di Indonesia. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2009), 93.

*Kasuruan-kasuruan*), the family, community, kinship and the surrounding environment. (2) It is an operative acknowledgment used to define the role of guards, defenders and protectors of humans as a reflection of the Supreme Power (Saruan 1991).

The word '*apo*' is related to the belief in the Minahasa religion that all elements existing in this nature reside in the spirits of the ancestors, especially those who are respected for their good and bad deeds during their lifetime. Walian or priest can understand the ancestors' language and perform rituals for them. The ancestors as *opo* or supernatural figures are believed to have the highest power known as *Kasuruan*, which is etymologically formed from the word *suru*, meaning the source of life (Supit 1986).

*Apo* religiously and spiritually means the ancestor or *suru* of each individual, family and community. In the typical cosmology of a communal society, this word also reflects the belief in the Divine as *Apo Kasuruan*, *Opo Empung* and *Opo Wailan Wangko*. The religious concepts of *apo* and *Apo* are expressed in the structure and elements of the Minahasa religion, especially in rites (Pinontoan 2019).

### '*Apo Isa Almasih*' and '*Opo*' (Jesus) in translated texts

The encounter of Minahasa religion and Christian theological concepts through zendeling missionary from Europe can be traced in the Bible translated into Tontemboan and Tombulu languages. The translated texts indicate a theological dialogue between the two religious-cultural concepts, which is also a method of contextualisation.

Regarding translation as contextualisation, Emanuel Gerrit Singgih stated that

[H]umans are concerned with three phases of searching for the meaning of words. These are the meaning referred to in the Scriptures, formed in the development of systematic teachings, and understood by the local context. (Singgih 2012)

The translators, especially the NBG envoys, always try to scientifically study the meaning of the text from the Scriptures (first phase). However, zendeling missionary, as Christians, should interpret the text systematically as a church teaching or dogma (second phase). To translate into the local language, part of the scientific work is to understand the context of the target (third phase).

In the translation of the Matthew Gospel into Tontemboan compiled by Karl Traggott Hermann, NZG zendeling missionary, who works in Amurang (southern Minahasa region), the word '*apo*' originally refers to 'ancestor'. In the Tontemboan translation, it appeared in the sentence in chapter 1, verse 1, which reads '*Si papatiken e apo i Jezuz Christum Anak tuama i David, anak tuama i Abraham*' (Hermann 1852). Its literal translation into Indonesian is 'the writings about the ancestors of Jesus Christ, the son of David and Abraham'.<sup>3</sup>

3. Compared with the LAI translation, which reads, 'This is the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham'.

The word '*maapo*' in worship is found in Matthew 4:10, entitled 'The Experiment in the Desert' by the Indonesian Bible Society (LAI). In Matthew 4:1–11, the translation sentence is written as '*Andoro itu kumuaam si Jezus assia: rumesso, e Seitan! Ka aiptekem: 'karengan ko kumundu sumiri asi Tuhan Allahmu, wo maapo ai Siake'*'. In Indonesian, this means literally, 'Then Jesus said to him [*the devil*]: Get out of the way, you Satan! It is written, "You should kneel and honor the Lord God, and worship Him alone"'.

In the catechism book compiled by Hermann in Malay and Tontemboan, published in 1848, the word '*apo*' is defined as 'ancestor' in the original meaning of the teachings and practices of the Minahasa religion. This implies Christians should not give up irrespective of trials and tribulations. In the teaching section on baptism, the book reads as follows:

*Sa kamu anpápa itu kai meen karápi in ka rondoran, ja kamu nisumia wo sumia pakása se waja paemánen wo kanarámen e apo -apo mio kele raitja wána katoróan, wo karápi in sapa si ngaran i llah iparaike? (Malay: Kalu-kalu kamu sebab itu lagi mengakaw dengan kebenaran, bahuwa kamu sudah bowang da nada bowang sa'kali-kali segala keperjajaan dan kabejasaan teteh mawjang kamu sama barang jang tijada berguna dan jang awlehnya nama Allah dehinakan djuga?) Translation: What happens when someone who is walking with the truth, is blasphemed, will God's name also be dishonored?. (Hermann 1848)*

In these two translated texts, the use of the word '*Apo*' was not found, which refers to the title or address of Jesus as God. However, these translated texts suggest an attempt to have a dialogue about the Holy Spirit or the supernatural in the old Minahasa religion. The phrase '*apo-apo*' in the book of Matthew translated into Tontemboan by Zendeling missionary, Hermann uses the concept unilaterally to define Western Christian zendeling, who view Minahasa religious practice from numerous perspectives. However, in another section, the word '*apo*' refers to God's word in chapter 5, verse 27, which in Tontemboan is written as '*Pinalinjamaam-Mio JA aipakuaam ase apo: "siaam ko gumogar - gogar si pamalean!"*' (LAI: You have heard the words: 'Do not commit adultery!').

In the Tontemboan Bible translation published in 1907 with the title '*Koekoea An Ta'ar Oere wo n ta'ar Weroe*', the phrase '*Apo Isa Elmesëh*' refers to 'Lord Jesus Christ'. For example, the preface to the Bible reads as follows:

*Janta'an en oepoesna nimakawangko-wangko', ja in Sia nimë'ë-mai an itjita si Anakna, si Apo Isa Elmesëh. Am pa'pa' i Isa kita inakaterang tambisa wo kita ro'na itjawekar en a mesëa' wo tambisa en atëta ro'na male'nas wo tambisa kita en do'na pakamangen. Awoja waja së itoe kailekanta an Elkitaab. (Adriani-Gunning 1907)*

(Translation: Because of His great love for humanity, He gave us His Son, Lord Jesus Christ, who came into the world to free His followers from guilt and make their hearts pure to be blessed. All these can be found in the Bible).

The word '*Apo*' in this expression refers to the 'Divine One' (God), and it is related to the choice of words that have a meaning equivalent to the understanding in Christian

teachings about God or Allah. However, when the translation process is part of contextualisation, the phrase '*Apo Isa Elmesëh*' becomes theology about Christ from a dialogue between two religious systems. Therefore, based on this explanation, in the Minahasa religious system, this word does not only refer to ancestors but also to 'the Divine being'.

In the New Testament books in the Tontemboan Bible, the phrase '*Apo Isa*' appeared 28 times, which translates to 'Lord Jesus'. Meanwhile, for the word 'God', 'Allah' or 'Lord Allah', the word 'Tjaseroean' was used (Kasuruan or Casuruan).

The translated book of Matthew Gospel into Tombulu entitled '*Toetoeroe' Lenas Ni Isa Linomei Meikiit Oem Pinantik Ni Matioes*' published in 1933, does not use the phrase '*Opo Isa*' to refer to 'Lord Jesus.' However, the word '*Opo*', which means 'Lord' or 'God', is consistently used in dialogues to greet Jesus. The word '*Opo*' is also used to refer to 'Lord Allah' with the phrase '*Opo Wangko Empoeng*' (Tulaar 1933).

The description of the word '*Apo*' (Tontemboan) or '*Opo*' (Tombulu) in teaching and Bible books indirectly reveals Minahasa culture-based Christology. Therefore, those interested in the translation process need to be able to convey their religious messages because it does not occur in space, monolithic and or static manner but dialogical and continuous.

This is shown by the involvement of Minahasa teachers who, even though they are Christians, still inherit the values and culture of the region. Hence, in accordance with Bevans' opinion, contextualisation occurs meaningfully during the translation process. Since the beginning of NZG's zendeling mission presence in Minahasa, local teachers have been recruited through the 'custodial' system of education. According to the Tontemboan translation, J. Regar, a Bible teacher in Sonder, worked with M. Adriani-Gunning. The translated book of Matthew Gospel into Tombulu is written by B. Tular, a Minahasa teacher.

Since the translation of religious teaching books by Hermann in 1848, these activities have been supported and intended to achieve the vision and mission of the NBG. *Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap's* knowledge and skills in translating have continued to grow, which explains why the use of '*Apo*' or '*Opo*' in the translation of catechism books or Bibles in both languages from 1848 to 1933 also developed.

An important figure in the NBG, Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp 1819, explained the purpose of translation and distribution of the Bible during a board meeting. Gijsbert stated that Java should be the centre of NBG activities, from where it is spread throughout the Dutch East Indies. Van Hogendorp further stated the following:

We just want everyone who longs to use the Bible to be able to do that easily... Let Christians, Jews, Muslims, pagans, scholars, philosophers, and everyone utilize the Bible effortlessly... In the

world, the trick that hinders the spread of the Goodnews is an overt effort to convert people to Christianity... Therefore, it is important to pass on the Bible to all nations in all languages, regardless of whether it will be used to preach the word or to disprove faith, ... with the belief that the use of the Bible to disprove the Christian faith can ultimately be a tool for instilling our teachings. (Swellengrebel 2006)

Based on Van Hogendorp's understanding, it is known that for NBG, Bible translation is primarily for the agenda of developing civilisation. This is because it carries messages and values for the renewal of civilisation. In other words, Bible translation is primarily a scientific activity used by religious institutions to carry out evangelism. Therefore, its translation benefits religion, society and civilisation (Swellengrebel 2006).

Van Hogendorp's understanding clearly shows a European perspective in analysing cultures. In 1819, Gerrit Jan Hellendoorn as pastor or preacher was the only Christian living in Manado and only occasionally visited the Minahasa people in the mountains. At that time, the NBG, which was only established for five years, had yet made contact with people in the Dutch East Indies, let alone Minahasa, hence the perspectives of the institution leaders were very monolithic.

In 1914, N. Adriani<sup>4</sup> an NBG employee stated that Bible translation was first conducted by a linguist 'associated' with the missionaries (Swellengrebel 2006). Adriani, who had been in contact with people from Poso and Minahasa, realised from field experience that in practice, a translator for the NBG delegation cannot work without the help of the zendeling missionary and vice versa. This is because the zendeling missionary possess extensive knowledge of the local community's culture and have recruited young people in the area to become teachers. The opinion that continues to be held institutionally by the NBG, which considers that Bible translations should be carried out by missionaries equipped with linguistics, is different from The British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) (Swellengrebel 2006).

*Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap* always strives to be scientific, especially regarding linguistics and national science or ethnology, even though the activities of evangelism and Bible translation are interrelated in practice. Furthermore, when searching for translated books, especially in Minahasa, the teachers' names are listed as part of the compilers of the translation. Therefore, NBG practically uses scientific means and works with missionaries and local people during translation.

Based on the perspective of NBG, this translation project is part of evangelism and the history of Minahasa teachers' involvement. According to the local culture, the text produced from this process, which contains words, phrases, expressions and language logic, is also a theological process. Lourens de Vries of the United Bible Societies, Amsterdam, explained

4. Dr. N. Adriani is the husband of M. Adriani-Gunning who, together with J. Regar, a Minahasa Bible teacher who translated the Bible into Tontemboan, published in 1907.

the relationship between the purpose of translation and culture as follows:

The issue of translation always includes making various decisions to solve the problems of selectivity and 'uncertainty' inherent in the process and skopos. The intended or expected social and cultural functions of a text in the target congregation play a decisive role in the patterns of choice made by translators. (Vries 2009)

The translation is the encounter of two cultures through language. Therefore, this process is not only associated with determining the 'substitutes' for words or phrases but also with finding out how a message can be constructed together with readers of different languages. The original text is usually created from a cultural context, including language. This relates to historicity, which is closely related to the message meaning of the text. For example, Andrew Brake (2019) used the word 'no' to find the right words that could replace 'lamb' in the phrase 'Lamb of God' from the Papuan language. However, not all words or phrases in the original language of the Bible can be translated because 'lamb' is not only a figure of speech but textually already contains meanings understandable from the cultural context of the text's writing. Therefore, replacing it with the word 'pig' will lead to confusion between one party and another and a shift in theological meaning. The word 'mount Sinai' needs to be replaced with 'mount Lokon', the name of a volcano in Tomohon – North Sulawesi, to bring the Bible closer to readers in Minahasa.

Therefore, translation is not a simple process because a word selection process does not only consider the literal 'fitness' but the substantial meaning of suitability. It is understandable why the phrase '*Apo Isa Elmesëh*' in Tontemboan refers to 'Lord Jesus Christ' or '*Opo*' in Tombulu as a title or greeting, which means 'Lord' or 'God'. Although this was not directly used in the first translations, it later appeared in books published in 1907 and 1933. This is in line with the NBB principle regarding the translation process carried out scientifically from 1848 to 1907 with a lot of input from Minahasa teachers.

The teachers conclude that the word 'God' refers to Jesus and can be translated as '*Apo*' or '*Opo*'. There is strong evidence that the determination is based on a mature theological study carried out in a three-phase process as stated by Singgih. This is a theological dialogue process between zendeling-translators and Minahasa teachers who conducted the translation process, especially in the old religious system. Therefore, it can be concluded that the phrase '*Apo Isa Elmesëh*' refers to 'Lord Jesus Christ', and the word '*Opo*' is a title or greeting to Jesus as 'Lord' in the Tontemboan and Tombulu.

### **'Apo Isa Elmaseh' and 'Opo' (Jesus) as Minahasa Christology**

Mkole asserted that historically, Christianity owes its debt to translation, which ceaselessly mediates the salvation of Jesus Christ from one culture to another, expanding the open

meaning of the incarnation and resurrection (Loba-Mkole 2008). Singgih stated that contextualisation is not just applying one pattern to the local situation but is primarily concerned with having '... a point of contact (*Anknupfungspunkt*) with a life perspective' (Singgih 2012).

With emphasis on different points, these two opinions agree that culture is important for constructive theology. It is a continuous process that never stops because of its complex and dynamic context. According to Anthony P. Cohen, as quoted by Stanley Grenz, culture is something that gathers people and processes (Grenz 2000).

The above opinions help provide an adequate understanding of the history between Christianity from the West and Minahasa culture, especially regarding Bible translation. Minahasa encountered by translators and zendeling missionary consists of cultural and theological space. Therefore, the 'encounter' is a dialogue and a joint process in constructing meaning. Based on this perspective, it can be stated that the phrase '*Apo Isa Elmesëh*' refers to 'Lord Jesus Christ' while the word '*Opo*' refers to a title or greeting to Jesus as 'God' in the Tontemboan and Tombulu translations.

In the Minahasa religious system, the idea of the Divine is related to the belief in the existence of a Power as the Originator of everything called *Apo Kasuruan Wangko*. As the one who transcends, the Divine is known as *Opo Wanananatas*. Meanwhile, as someone who is worshipped and respected, it is called *Opo Empung*, and as the richest and most powerful person, it is called *Empung Wailan* or *Opo Wailan*. Furthermore, the Divine life is directed to obtain blessings, protection, care and longevity (Renwarin 2012).

There is also the idea of a supernatural human (*tou*), namely '*apo*' or '*opo*' in the sense of an ancestor who is respected and has a religious, spiritual relationship with the generation. This relationship is mainly revealed in implementing rituals through trance communication between leaders known as *walian* or *tonaas* with ancestors who spiritually have important positions in religious systems and practices (Renwarin 2012).

These ideas later met with Christianity introduced by Westerners, such as zendeling missionary and translators. However, it was associated with the occurrence of a dialogue, which is not just a conversation of two ideas but a difficult discourse. When these Western Christians came to Minahasa, they did not bring the original Bible text but also the theology from their locality. The text used as a reference for translating the Bible is Hebrew, Greek or Latin. This implies that the writers of books who have received inspiration from God have tried to 'translate' the divine messages into written form to be conveyed to the people. Therefore, in the end, it can be stated that what happened in the process of translating the Bible into Tontemboan and Tombulu in the 19th century was a theological dialogue.

The encounter between Christianity and the local culture is called an uncomplicated dialogue because it contains a multi-layered context. There are different time and space contexts for the Bible texts, with varying writing, collections and editions by early Christian readers in European contexts. Therefore, the text about 'Jesus' has also been multi-layered until it crystallised in the formulation of the Trinity, which later became the 'official' belief of the European Catholic and Protestant Churches. This was then constructed as European Protestant Christian Christology to become a belief in evangelism. It also becomes the Christology of the zendeling missionary and translators in encounters with people of different traditions and cultures.

The first four gospels of the New Testament, consisting of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, tell about the historical Jesus. These include his birth, ministry, inspiring people about the Kingdom of God and miracles, before he was judged, punished, tortured, crucified, died and rose again.

John's theology of Jesus is the God who created life. 'In the beginning was the Word with God. All things came into existence through him, and without him was nothing'. (Jn 1:1, 2). The word became flesh in Jesus Christ. This statement also confirms the cosmic significance of Jesus in all divine purposes (Hurtado 2003). The Jesus whom John believed in is God and has existed even before the world was created. Jesus, in such a formulation, is very close to the Minahasa religious conception of the Divine as the Originator of everything known as *Apo Kasuruan Wangko*.

In the New Testament, such as Mark 6:4, Luke 4:24 and John 4:44, he is called a prophet (Eckardt 2006). Prophets in the Jewish tradition are not God or Angels but humans who accept God's call to deliver messages. Furthermore, other titles, such as Jesus is Lord, the Messiah and Son of God, reveal Christians' beliefs or responses of faith. In this case, it can be stated as a Christology according to the Bible or testimony of faith about Jesus Christ.

Minahasa Christians in the 19th and 20th centuries received the gospel of Jesus from joint evangelism work between zendeling missionary and Bible translators with local teachers. They accepted Jesus Christ as God who became man, as in the conception of '*Apo Isa Elmesëh*' and '*Opo*'. These locals entered into a process of religious transformation and Western Christianity by proceeding into a dialogue by all parties to a joint process of seeking and finding Jesus in the true nature. This is in accordance with the Bible, which has been read and studied dialogically through the process of contextualisation with the translation of words and meanings.

From the concepts of '*Apo Isa Elmesëh*' and '*Opo*' as a result of this interpretation, several contextual Christological meanings were distinguished, which can be named:

1. *Holistic Christology*: Jesus is the Originator of life, and in Minahasa culture, he is regarded as *Apo Kasuruan Wangko*,

meaning the 'ancestor of life'. He is the *Empung renga-rengan*, referring to God who always accompanies humans while living with the universe. He is *Opo Empung*, the Almighty God on whom all movements of life are based to achieve the vision of living together, namely *pakatuan who pakalewiren* comprising strength, health and long life. The same idea can be found in the conception of shalom as a vision of the Kingdom of God. Salvation occurs holistically and applies to humans and all creation based on this meaning.

2. *Christology for Liberation*: Jesus is God who became man, and in his humanity, he was tormented, crucified, died and rose from the dead. In Minahasa culture, the concept of '*opo*' or venerated ancestors is not the Divine but is believed to be a wise human being who has started community life. *Tonaas* is the quality of human life that has wisdom, fully committed to life and faithful to the truth that manifests in liberation praxis.
3. *Christology in the Spirit of Life*: The Trinity, consisting of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, indicates that Jesus is spiritually lived in oneness. The conception of '*apo*' or '*opo*' contains the idea of the spiritual presence of the Transcendent. This implies that Jesus is not an ancestral soul but with the conception of '*opo*' or '*apo*' as an 'ancestral soul' in the Minahasa religion. This allows Christians in this region to appreciate the existence and presence of the Holy Spirit for a sustainable joint life.

The formulations of Christological reconstruction enable the church to understand its presence in a complex context with dynamic problems and changes. They proclaimed Jesus or Christology does not need to be a conquering ideological power, but an *Apo/Opo* who liberates and calls everyone to enter into a mutually reinforcing fellowship while conducting *mapalus messianik* (Roeroe 1990),<sup>5</sup> a life of sharing and mutual solidarity for peace among all creation. The proclaimed Christology is a reflection, an action, theology and praxis-oriented towards the integrity of human life with nature and all that supports life to achieve God's vision among the Minahasa people in the vision of *Pakatuan wo pakalewiren*.

This historical fact refutes opinions regarding modern Christological reconstruction (theology about Christ), which understands the process as if it only happened in one direction. If dialogue occurs, it is understood to only occur in academic spaces conducted by theologians. The narrative regarding translating the Bible and teaching books in Minahasa in the 19th century shows that the process of theological dialogue has occurred in the unique Minahasa cultural space, resulting in a contextual-constructive model of Christology as the theology of indigenous Christians.

<sup>5</sup> 'Mapalus' from the Minahasa language, 'ma' meaning 'mutually' and 'palus' meaning 'to share', is a practice of working together with the Minahasa people.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the encounter between Minahasa culture with European Christianity, through the translation of catechism books and the Bible into the Tontemboan language, is known as contextualisation. This study discussed the selection and determination of the phrase 'Apo' or 'Opo' in the translated texts. Therefore, based on the process that has taken place in a dialogical manner, the phrase 'Apo Isa Elmesëh' and the word 'Opo' refer to 'Lord Jesus Christ', thereby forming a typical Minahasa Christology.

This formulation is an appreciation of Jesus in the Minahasa context, as a religious-cultural understanding preached by the European zendeling missionary. 'apo' or 'opo' and 'Apo' or 'Opo' mean ancestors and the Divine and are very important in expressing the spiritual appreciation of human existence in the continuity of history and community life in this region. Furthermore, there is a religious and spiritual appreciation for the existence of the Divine in the cosmic life.

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## Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

## Authors' contributions

J.B. engaged with the original draft, methodology and conceptualisation, while D.P. worked with the conceptualisation, formal analysis, supervision and validation and C.R. helped with the software, validation, editing and reviewing, including funding acquisition.

## Ethical considerations

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

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## Data availability

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