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Indigenous Wisdom and Christian Soteriology: A Contextual Reading of *Poda Na Lima* in Batak Christian Communities

Altin Sihombing
Samuel Elizabeth Theological Seminary, Jakarta, Indonesia
Email: altinsihombing318@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5684-1111

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Abstract

The doctrine of salvation (*soteria*) has historically stood at the center of Christian theology, shaping not only doctrinal identity but also ethical and communal life. Yet in postcolonial and plural contexts, classical Western formulations require contextual rearticulation through dialogue with indigenous wisdom. This study examines *Poda Na Lima*, the Batak Toba moral-ethical system, as a theological resource for reinterpreting Christian soteriology in North Sumatra, Indonesia. *Poda Na Lima* - literally "five instructions" - articulates principles of harmony, wisdom, discipline, respect, and knowledge that have guided Batak communal life across generations. Drawing on a qualitative theological-ethnographic methodology, the research integrates two complementary sources: textual analysis of Batak oral traditions and cultural codifications, and fieldwork among Huria Kristen Batak Protestan congregations, including participant observation and conversations with pastors and elders. Data were analyzed through three stages: hermeneutical reading of *Poda Na Lima* in relation to biblical themes of repentance, reconciliation, and transformation; doctrinal correlation with Christological and soteriological affirmations; and contextual theological synthesis that integrates Batak ethical wisdom with Christian doctrine. Findings demonstrate that Batak Christians reinterpret *Poda Na Lima* not merely as cultural heritage but as a living moral compass aligned with Christological virtues of humility, service, and obedience. When placed in dialogue with soteriology, *Poda Na Lima* enriches the understanding of salvation as both divine redemption and ethical-communal transformation. The study concludes that indigenous wisdom, far from being peripheral, can function as a theological interlocutor, offering a contextual soteriology that affirms the integrity of Batak culture while contributing to global theological discourse on salvation and human flourishing.

Keywords: indigenous wisdom; soteriology; *poda na lima*; Batak

Introduction

Theological discourse on salvation has long been at the center of Christian thought, shaping not only doctrinal identity but also the ethical and social fabric of communities. The Christian tradition affirms that salvation (*soteria*) encompasses both divine reconciliation and human transformation, offering believers not merely deliverance from sin but also a renewed telos of life in communion with God (McGrath, 2020; Hutasoit, 2023). Within global Christianity, however, questions have increasingly been raised about the contextual expressions of soteriology. How do local cultures, indigenous wisdom, and socio-historical realities shape, enrich, or even challenge classical understandings of salvation? This inquiry is particularly urgent in postcolonial settings, where theology is called to emerge from within the lived experiences of local communities rather than be imported wholesale from Western frameworks (Bevans, 2018; Schreiter, 1997; Hale, 2024).

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Indonesia, as the largest Muslim-majority country yet also home to vibrant Christian communities, provides fertile ground for contextual theology. The Batak Toba of North Sumatra, for example, embody a rich cultural heritage that continues to shape Christian life in profound ways. Central to this heritage is *Poda Na Lima*, an indigenous moral-ethical system passed down through generations. Literally meaning "five instructions," *Poda Na Lima* contains five imperatives that guide personal character, family relationships, and communal responsibilities. These are: (1) *marsihutuan* (maintaining harmony), (2) *marhuria* (living with wisdom and prudence), (3) *marsahala* (discipline and self-control), (4) *martungkot* (respect for elders and authority), and (5) *marparbinotoan* (pursuit of knowledge and integrity) (Simanjuntak, 2019). While previous scholarship has highlighted the sociological and anthropological significance of *Poda Na Lima* (Sihombing, 2017), few studies have attempted to place it in direct conversation with Christian theology, particularly soteriology.

This paper seeks to fill that gap by exploring how *Poda Na Lima* can illuminate, enrich, and contextualize theological conceptions of salvation among Batak Christian communities. In so doing, it contributes to global theological discourse by demonstrating that indigenous wisdom not only serves as cultural background but can also act as a theological interlocutor in shaping doctrines of salvation. This study argues that Christian soteriology, when read contextually through *Poda Na Lima*, reveals salvation as a holistic reality encompassing both divine redemption and ethical-communal transformation. Transformation, in this context, involves not only personal moral improvement, as seen in the Batak values of discipline (*marsahala*) and wisdom (*marhuria*), but also the restoration of social harmony (*marsihutuan*) and structural shifts towards communal responsibility. Furthermore, this transformation is deeply tied to an eschatological hope, envisioning ultimate renewal in both individual lives and the broader community. By engaging Christology's emphasis on humility, service, and suffering alongside *Poda Na Lima*'s call for discipline, harmony, and responsibility, we gain a richer account of human flourishing that is simultaneously faithful to Scripture and rooted in local wisdom.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative theological-ethnographic approach, integrating doctrinal analysis with contextual inquiry into Batak indigenous wisdom. The methodological design reflects the dual task of systematic theology—faithful engagement with Christian doctrine—and contextual theology—reading Scripture and tradition in light of local cultural wisdom (Bevans, 2002). The research applies a contextual theological framework where indigenous concepts are critically examined through the lens of Christian soteriology. Rather than treating Poda Na Lima as merely anthropological data, the study positions it as a potential theological resource, engaging with it dialogically alongside biblical and doctrinal sources. Such a design reflects what Schreiter (1985) calls *constructive contextualization*, wherein indigenous traditions are neither uncritically absorbed nor dismissed, but carefully discerned in relation to the gospel. The data for this study were derived from two complementary sources. First, textual sources formed the backbone of the primary data. These included Batak oral traditions and documented interpretations of *Poda Na Lima* preserved in cultural archives and ethnographic accounts (Simanjuntak, 1993; Siahaan, 2017). These indigenous sources were systematically analyzed in dialogue with theological texts on Christology and soteriology, particularly the works of Karl Barth (1956) and Jürgen Moltmann (1993), which provide a doctrinal framework for understanding salvation, reconciliation, and transformation in Christ.

This textual interplay allowed the study to bridge indigenous ethical wisdom with Christian doctrinal reflection. Second, supplementary insights were gathered through fieldwork in Batak Christian contexts, especially within the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) congregations. Participant observations of worship services and communal gatherings illuminated the lived

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expressions of *Poda Na Lima* in contemporary religious practice. Fieldwork was conducted in several HKBP congregations across North Sumatra, with informal conversations held with 15 individuals, including 5 pastors, 3 cultural elders, and 7 active church members, ranging from young adults to senior community leaders. These discussions provided a variety of viewpoints on the ongoing relevance of Poda Na Lima in shaping both ethical and spiritual formation. Many participants shared how the principles of Poda Na Lima continue to guide their lives in both liturgical settings and everyday social interactions. However, there were also critiques within the community, particularly around how younger generations are interpreting the principles of *martungkot* (respect for authority) in ways that seem at odds with Christian values of equality, as well as concerns that contemporary, secular worldviews might overshadow the traditional teachings. These dialogues offered critical insights into the tensions between maintaining cultural heritage and navigating the evolving identity of Batak Christians (Hutasoit, 2023; Solaiman, & Winda, 2023).

Analyzing hermeneutical reading involved interpreting the ethical and cultural meanings of *Poda Na Lima* through the lens of biblical hermeneutics, with particular attention to soteriological themes such as repentance (metanoia), reconciliation, and transformation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). This approach enabled a theological re-reading of indigenous wisdom in light of Scripture. Then, analyzing doctrinal correlation, examined how the core values embedded in *Poda Na Lima* - discipline (*patik dohot uhum*), harmony (*paopat-apaton*), mutual respect (*panghormatan*), solidarity (*marsisarian*), and responsibility (*marsahala*) - resonate with and challenge Christological and soteriological doctrines within Christian theology. This correlation not only highlights continuity but also reveals areas of potential enrichment where Batak wisdom offers a corrective or complementary insight to dominant theological narratives. Last, analyzing contextual theological synthesis, brought these insights into dialogue to construct a contextual theology of salvation that integrates Batak indigenous wisdom with Christian doctrinal understanding. This synthesis seeks to affirm the enduring value of Batak culture, while at the same time contributing to global theological discourse on salvation, ethics, and human flourishing. By framing *Poda Na Lima* as both a cultural-ethical framework and a theological lens, the study offers a model of contextual theology that is locally rooted yet globally relevant.

Results

Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, has been a central locus of theological debate throughout Christian history. Early church fathers such as Athanasius emphasized salvation as participation in the divine life, captured in his famous dictum: *"God became human that humans might become divine"* (Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*). Augustine located salvation primarily in God's grace overcoming human sin (Nicolaides, 2024), while Anselm highlighted satisfaction through Christ's atonement (McGrath, 2020). The Reformation further developed soteriology with Luther's doctrine of justification by faith and Calvin's emphasis on divine sovereignty in predestination (McGrath, 2012). In the modern era, theologians such as Karl Barth underscored the centrality of Christ's atoning work, while Jürgen Moltmann expanded soteriology to include liberation, hope, and eschatological transformation (Moltmann 1993).

Contemporary theologians like N.T. Wright (2006) argue that salvation is not merely about individual souls going to heaven but about God's new creation inaugurated through Christ. This broader understanding of salvation entails both personal renewal and cosmic reconciliation, which involves the restoration of all things—human beings, creation, and the cosmos—as part of God's redemptive plan. Cosmic reconciliation suggests that Christ's death and resurrection have far-reaching implications, extending beyond the salvation of individuals to the healing and restoration of the entire created order. This concept draws from passages like Colossians 1:20, which speaks of Christ reconciling all things to God, whether on earth or in heaven, and Romans 8:19-21, which

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describes creation eagerly awaiting its liberation from decay. Thus, salvation is not just a spiritual or personal matter but a cosmic event that will culminate in the renewal of creation, when God will restore harmony and peace throughout the universe. While these theological developments have significantly enriched global Christianity, they often emerge from European contexts, with limited engagement with non-Western cultures. This has prompted a rise in contextual theologies across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where soteriology is interpreted not only in terms of individual salvation but also in the context of social transformation, liberation from oppression, and communal well-being (Escobar, 2003). These global perspectives highlight the comprehensive scope of salvation, where personal, social, and ecological restoration are all integral to God's mission in the world.

Contextual Theology and Indigenous Wisdom

Contextual theology emphasizes that Christian faith must be expressed in dialogue with local culture, history, and social realities (Bevans, 2018; Hutasoit, 2023). Stephen Bevans identifies models of contextual theology such as the translation model, the anthropological model, and the praxis model, each of which highlights different ways Scripture and tradition interact with culture. Robert Schreiter (1997) similarly argues that theology in the global South must draw from indigenous resources to construct authentic Christian identities. Indigenous wisdom has increasingly been recognized as a significant theological resource. African theologians, for instance, integrate traditional concepts of community and kinship into Christian anthropology and soteriology (Bediako, 1995). In Latin America, liberation theology situates salvation within the struggle for justice and human dignity (Gutiérrez, 1973). In Asia, theologians have drawn on Confucian, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions to articulate contextual understandings of salvation (Phan, 2003). Such approaches affirm that local cultures contain seeds of the Word (*semina verbi*) that resonate with and enrich Christian doctrine.

In the Indonesian context, studies on contextual theology have often engaged with Pancasila (Kurniawan & Putrawan, 2023), interreligious harmony (Sinaga etal., 2025), or adat traditions, but focused studies on Batak wisdom remain scarce (Naipospos, 2015; Hutasoit, 2023). This article seeks to address this gap by foregrounding *Poda Na Lima* as a lens for rethinking soteriology.

Poda Na Lima as Indigenous Ethical Framework

Poda Na Lima is central to Batak identity and has been transmitted orally through generations as a guide for ethical living. Its five imperatives collectively function as a holistic moral compass: first, *marsihutuan* stresses harmony in interpersonal relations, echoing the communal ethos of Batak society second, *marhuria* highlights wisdom and prudence, ensuring decisions are made for the collective good; third, *marsahala* emphasizes discipline and self-control, reflecting the high value placed on moral integrity; fourth, *martungkot* requires respect for elders and social hierarchy, sustaining communal order; fifth, *marparbinotoan* prioritizes the pursuit of knowledge and intellectual development as essential for personal and social advancement (Simanjuntak, 2019). While primarily cultural, *Poda Na Lima* bears striking parallels with biblical virtues such as love, self-control, and wisdom. For instance, Paul’s exhortation to bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) resonates with the ethical vision of *Poda Na Lima*.

This presents potential for theological integration, where indigenous values could not only support but also actively contribute to enriching Christian understandings of salvation. Although scholarship has explored contextual theology in Indonesia broadly (Naipospos, 2015; Sihombing, 2017), few studies directly examine *Poda Na Lima* in conversation with soteriology. Existing works tend to describe it anthropologically rather than theologically, leaving a gap in understanding its potential as a theological interlocutor. Furthermore, while global discourse increasingly values

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indigenous perspectives, the Batak contribution remains under-represented. This article therefore addresses the lacuna by constructing a contextual soteriology that draws upon *Poda Na Lima* as both a moral framework and a theological lens. In so doing, it demonstrates that salvation in Christ, when read through Batak wisdom, is not merely an abstract doctrinal affirmation but a lived reality shaping ethical integrity, communal harmony, and human flourishing.

Discussion

Within Batak communities, the *Poda Na Lima* has long functioned as a foundational ethical framework shaping personal and communal life. Rooted in ancestral wisdom, this indigenous philosophy articulates five core moral instructions—restraint of the eyes (*mata*), ears (*telinga*), mouth (*poda*), hands (*tangan*), and feet (*kaki*). Each element symbolizes both a potential vulnerability to moral failure and a possibility for moral excellence when disciplined correctly. Scholars of indigenous ethics argue that such frameworks function as "cultural compasses," guiding communities through complex social realities without recourse to codified laws alone (Siahaan, 2018). In the Batak context, *Poda Na Lima* is more than a set of prohibitions; it embodies a holistic vision of harmony between individual conduct, family solidarity, and communal wellbeing. From an anthropological perspective, *Poda Na Lima* encapsulates the Batak aspiration to maintain *dalihan na tolu*, the triadic relational system that emphasizes respect toward elders, balance among peers, and care for the younger generation. The fivefold moral guidance works as a safeguard ensuring that relational obligations are neither violated nor neglected.

For instance, the restraint of speech (*poda ni jolo*) is not simply about silence or politeness; it is about cultivating a speech that builds kinship ties rather than destroying them. Similarly, the discipline of the hands is linked to industriousness and honesty, virtues deeply prized in a society where communal labor and mutual assistance remain central (Simanjuntak, 2020). *Poda Na Lima* is not a static tradition. Contemporary Batak Christians reinterpret it within new contexts, especially in diaspora communities and in increasingly pluralistic Indonesian society. Its instructions are read not merely as cultural wisdom but as enduring principles that resonate with biblical calls for moral discernment. The indigenous compass therefore provides fertile ground for theological engagement, particularly in rearticulating Christian soteriology in ways that are both faithful to Scripture and attentive to local culture.

Christological Embodiment of Poda Na Lima

When examined through the lens of Christian theology, particularly Christology, *Poda Na Lima* finds profound resonance in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The restraint of the eyes, for example, corresponds to Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount regarding purity of sight and intention (Matthew 5:28). In Batak Christian interpretation, to control one's eyes is to resist envy, lust, and covetousness, virtues vividly embodied in Christ who, though tempted, did not sin. The indigenous moral instruction thus converges with the Christological call to integrity of vision and heart. The discipline of the ears is equally significant. Batak elders often caution against listening to slander or divisive speech, recognizing the destructive power of rumor in tightly knit communal life. Within Christological reflection, this finds a parallel in Jesus' attentiveness to the voice of the Father over against the noise of public opinion. The Gospels portray Christ as discerning which voices to heed and which to resist (John 10:27), embodying a model of listening that is selective, faithful, and oriented toward obedience. By situating *Poda Na Lima* within this theological horizon, Batak Christians understand the control of the ears not simply as social etiquette but as a participation in Christ's own mode of faithful hearing. The guidance regarding the mouth resonates with biblical imperatives about speech seasoned with grace (Colossians 4:6) and the avoidance of corrupt communication (Ephesians 4:29).

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In Batak cosmology, unguarded speech can fracture kinship ties and dishonor ancestors; in Christological reflection, unguarded speech wounds the body of Christ, the church. Thus, disciplining the mouth is seen as imitating Christ, whose words were life-giving, healing, and reconciling. Batak preachers often emphasize this connection, urging believers to let their speech echo the Logos—Christ as the Word of God—rather than the divisive words of human folly (Hutabarat, 2021; Sitohang etal., 2023; Biwul, 2025). The discipline of the hands, meanwhile, emphasizes ethical labor and nonviolence. Within indigenous practice, hands are meant to cultivate fields, contribute to the household, and extend generosity, not to steal or harm. Christological embodiment radicalizes this instruction: Jesus' hands healed the sick, blessed children, and were ultimately nailed to the cross as the supreme act of sacrificial service. In Batak Christian homiletics, this convergence becomes a call for believers to consecrate their labor as an offering of service, echoing both ancestral wisdom and Christ's example of self-giving. The guidance of the feet underscores discernment in one's path, echoing biblical motifs of walking in righteousness (Psalm 1:1–3). In Batak culture, this means avoiding places of temptation and maintaining one's honor within the community.

In Christological terms, it is linked to Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem—a path of obedience, suffering, and ultimate redemption. Batak theologians have noted that the "feet that walk in obedience" (Isaiah 52:7) embody both the indigenous call for moral direction and the Christological path of redemptive mission (Sibuea, 2019; Sinaga, 2023). Thus, to restrain the feet is not merely to avoid wrongdoing but to intentionally walk in the way of Christ. What emerges from this Christological reading of *Poda Na Lima* is a remarkable convergence between indigenous wisdom and the life of Christ. Each of the fivefold instructions finds both resonance and fulfillment in Christological ethics, suggesting that *Poda Na Lima* can serve as a local hermeneutical lens for articulating what it means to thrive as a Christian within Batak contexts. Rather than being superseded or discarded, indigenous wisdom is elevated and fulfilled in Christ, embodying the Pauline affirmation that "Christ is the yes to all God's promises" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

The analysis of the data proceeded in a systematic manner to ensure that both textual and contextual sources were critically engaged. First, a hermeneutical reading was employed to interpret *Poda Na Lima* through the lens of biblical hermeneutics. The emphasis was on its resonance with key soteriological motifs, particularly repentance (*metanoia*), reconciliation, and transformation in Christ, as articulated in passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:17. By engaging with both scriptural texts and Batak oral traditions, this stage of analysis revealed that *Poda Na Lima* functions not only as a cultural-ethical code but also as a lens through which Christian communities reinterpret salvation in lived practice. Second, a doctrinal correlation was established between the core values embedded in *Poda Na Lima* - discipline (*patik dohot uhum*), harmony (*paopat-apaton*), mutual respect (*panghormatan*), solidarity (*marsisarian*), and responsibility (*marsahala*) - and foundational themes in Christology and soteriology. For example, the Batak emphasis on harmony resonates with Pauline theology of reconciliation, while responsibility and discipline parallel the New Testament's call to discipleship.

This comparative framework demonstrated how indigenous wisdom offers fresh insights into classical doctrinal formulations, without reducing Christian salvation to cultural categories, but rather expanding its contextual expressions. A contextual theological synthesis was constructed, integrating insights from hermeneutical interpretation and doctrinal correlation. This synthesis foregrounds *Poda Na Lima* as a dialogical partner in the articulation of a contextual theology of salvation, one that affirms both the particularity of Batak culture and the universality of Christian doctrine. By situating *Poda Na* Lima within the wider horizon of global theology, the study underscores its potential to enrich ecumenical discourses on human flourishing, moral responsibility, and communal reconciliation. In this sense, the analysis advances beyond

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descriptive ethnography, offering a constructive theological proposal that is both rooted in local wisdom and open to global dialogue. The ethnographic component of this study involved consultations with multiple congregations and a diverse group of 15 individuals, including 5 pastors, 3 cultural elders, and 7 active members from various age groups. These conversations revealed a range of perspectives on *Poda Na Lima*, including voices from Batak Christians who express reservations or alternative interpretations of the framework, particularly regarding its application to contemporary Christian practice. Addressing these diverse viewpoints enriches the qualitative aspect of the study and highlights the ongoing process of negotiation between tradition and Christian faith within the Batak community. The sources for this study were intentionally drawn from both textual traditions and ethnographic engagements to ensure a holistic and comprehensive grasp of *Poda Na Lima* and its theological significance within Batak Christian communities. This dual-method approach reflects the conviction that indigenous wisdom cannot be adequately understood by relying solely on textual archives or solely on lived experience; rather, the integration of both is essential for constructing a theologically grounded interpretation.

The textual corpus included a range of primary materials such as Batak oral traditions, proverbial sayings, ritual instructions, and formal cultural codifications preserved in regional archives. These sources, many of which have been documented by ethnographers and cultural historians (Simanjuntak, 1993; Siahaan, 2017), provide not only descriptive accounts of *Poda Na Lima* but also interpretive insights into how these values have functioned historically within Batak society. In analyzing these texts, attention was paid not merely to their ethical content but also to their theological potential—namely, how they articulate implicit understandings of human flourishing, social harmony, and accountability before a transcendent order.

These indigenous textual sources were systematically brought into dialogue with key theological writings in Christology and soteriology. Classical and modern theologians such as Karl Barth (1956) and Jürgen Moltmann (1993) provided essential conceptual frameworks for evaluating the redemptive and transformative dimensions of indigenous ethics. Barth's emphasis on the Christ-event as the definitive revelation of God and Moltmann's theology of hope and eschatological transformation offered fruitful categories through which *Poda Na Lima* could be read not simply as a cultural artifact but as a potential theological locus. This comparative dialogue allowed the research to probe how indigenous categories of moral wisdom resonate with, challenge, or enrich established Christian theological discourse. Alongside textual analysis, significant attention was given to *fieldwork-based insights* in order to capture how *Poda Na Lima* is embodied in the lived experience of Batak Christians today. Participant observation was conducted in worship services, catechetical sessions, and community gatherings, with particular emphasis on the practices of Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) congregations. These observations revealed that *Poda Na Lima* remains a living tradition, shaping ethical expectations and communal practices even in contexts where Christian doctrine is formally prioritized.

The integration of *Poda Na Lima* into sermons, pastoral counseling, and congregational decision-making demonstrates its continued relevance as a moral compass. Supplementing these observations, informal yet semi-structured conversations were conducted with a total of 15 participants, including 5 pastors, 3 cultural elders, and 7 active members of various age groups from different congregations in North Sumatra. These discussions took place in a variety of settings, including church offices, community centers, and homes, providing a broad perspective on the role of *Poda Na Lima* in Batak Christian life. Ethical considerations for this research included ensuring voluntary participation, with no incentives offered to participants. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without needing to provide an explanation, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the process. The research adhered to standard ethical protocols to ensure the integrity of the participants' voices and the authenticity of the data collected. These interlocutors provided rich, contextualized perspectives on the

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significance of *Poda Na Lima* for ethical formation, spiritual resilience, and community cohesion. Their reflections highlighted the creative ways in which Batak Christians reinterpret ancestral wisdom within a biblical framework. For example, several pastors described using *Poda Na Lima* as a catechetical bridge for teaching concepts such as repentance, reconciliation, and sanctification. Such testimonies underscore the dynamic interplay between indigenous heritage and Christian theology, revealing not a static preservation of tradition but an ongoing process of contextual reinterpretation. Together, the textual and ethnographic sources enabled a multifaceted understanding of *Poda Na Lima* as both an ethical code and a theological resource. The integration of these sources ensured that the research was not confined to abstract theorizing but remained grounded in the lived faith and practices of Batak Christian communities.

The analysis of these materials was conducted in three interconnected stages, each designed to progressively deepen the theological engagement between Batak indigenous wisdom and Christian doctrine. The first stage, hermeneutical reading involved interpreting *Poda Na Lima* through biblical hermeneutics with particular attention to soteriological themes. Rather than treating *Poda Na Lima* as a purely cultural code, it was examined in relation to scriptural motifs of repentance (*metanoia*), reconciliation, and transformation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). For instance, the principle of *pahehehon roha* (purity of heart) was read alongside Jesus' teaching on inner righteousness (Matthew 5:8), while *panghormatan* (mutual respect) was juxtaposed with the New Testament's call to "outdo one another in showing honor" (Romans 12:10). This hermeneutical approach emphasized that indigenous ethics can function as anticipatory echoes of the gospel, opening up fresh avenues for contextual theology. It also allowed for a critical discernment of limitations: while *Poda Na Lima* stresses moral discipline, biblical hermeneutics redirects the focus toward grace and divine empowerment as the foundation of transformation. In the Batak Christian context, transformation refers not only to individual moral and spiritual renewal but also to social and communal aspects, including the restoration of harmony and solidarity within the community. This transformation is both present-time oriented, influencing daily ethical conduct and relationships, and eschatological, anticipating the ultimate renewal of creation in God's kingdom (Tanasyah & Betaubun, 2025; Timo et al., 2025). The second stage, doctrinal correlation sought to establish constructive dialogue between the five principles of *Poda Na Lima* and key doctrines of Christology and soteriology.

Each moral imperative was correlated with theological affirmations of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. *Patik dohot uhum* (discipline) resonates with Christ's obedience unto death (Phil. 2:8), while *paopat-apaton* (harmony) reflects the Pauline vision of the church as one body in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12–27). *Panghormatan* (mutual respect) finds theological grounding in Jesus' command to love one another (John 13:34), *marsisarian* (solidarity) mirrors the communal sharing of the early church (Acts 2:44–47), and *marsahala* (responsibility) aligns with the believer's vocation as co-workers in God's redemptive mission (Ephesians 2:10). This doctrinal correlation revealed not only striking consonances but also productive tensions, which invite further theological reflection on the relationship between cultural ethics and divine grace. The third stage, contextual theological synthesis brought together the insights from the hermeneutical and doctrinal phases into a constructive theological framework.

This synthesis articulated a contextual theology of salvation in which *Poda Na Lima* is not relegated to mere cultural background but is actively integrated into Christian theological reflection. However, it is important to note that contextual theology can develop into syncretism if indigenous elements are uncritically absorbed into Christian doctrine, compromising the purity of the gospel message. To safeguard the truth of the Holy Gospel, this study ensures that Scriptural fidelity remains the central criterion for theological engagement. Doctrinally, it relies on core Christian teachings such as salvation by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) and the authority of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17) to discern and reject any elements that would conflict with

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orthodox Christian faith. Ecclesial safeguards, including the guidance of pastoral leadership and theological oversight, were also integral in maintaining the integrity of Christian doctrine throughout the process. Here, salvation is understood not only as personal reconciliation with God but also as communal flourishing grounded in ethical responsibility and harmony. By weaving Batak wisdom into soteriological discourse, the synthesis underscores that salvation is a lived, embodied reality expressed through moral integrity, communal solidarity, and transformative relationships. This synthesis accomplishes two critical tasks. First, it affirms the theological depth of Batak culture, recognizing indigenous wisdom as a legitimate and fertile locus for theological reflection. Second, it contributes to global theology by offering a model of how local traditions can enrich the universal church's understanding of salvation and human flourishing. Such an approach challenges homogenizing tendencies in theology that often privilege Western categories, demonstrating instead that authentic theological reflection must emerge from within cultural particularities while remaining oriented toward the universal horizon of the gospel.

Conclusion

This study has sought to illuminate the intersections between indigenous Batak wisdom, specifically *Poda Na Lima*, and Christian soteriology as received and lived out within Batak Christian communities. By situating theological reflection within the lived realities of a particular cultural context, the research underscores the importance of contextual theology that does not merely transplant Western theological frameworks but instead engages deeply with local traditions. The findings suggest that *Poda Na Lima*, with its fivefold principles of ethical living, provides a culturally resonant framework for understanding salvation as transformation of life, community, and relationship with God. When read through the lens of Christian soteriology, the wisdom of *Poda Na Lima* enriches the theological discourse on repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and communal flourishing. This integration highlights that salvation is not only an individual matter but also a communal and cultural reality, shaping identity, social responsibility, and ecological stewardship.

The study demonstrates that Christology and soteriology are not diminished but rather deepened when brought into dialogue with indigenous wisdom. The Christ-centered narrative of redemption finds fresh expression in the Batak context, where values of humility, discipline, service, and respect for life are seen as integral to the journey of salvation. This opens up new theological horizons where indigenous philosophy is not marginalized but becomes an indispensable partner in articulating the gospel in culturally faithful ways. This research affirms that contextual theology, such as the synthesis of *Poda Na Lima* and Christian soteriology, offers both local and global contributions to theological scholarship. For Batak communities, it fosters a faith that is simultaneously rooted in the gospel and nourished by ancestral wisdom. For global theology, it provides a model of how indigenous traditions can meaningfully inform Christian doctrines, contributing to a richer, more inclusive understanding of human thriving in God's salvific plan.

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