

## ***Katoba* Tradition as a Cultural Pedagogy of Repentance in Muna: A Catholic Theological Reading toward the Sacrament of Penance**

**Samuel Pella**

Universitas Sanata Dharma Yogyakarta

Email : samuelpella19@gmail.com

**Xalastinus Jasper Hanta**

Universitas Sanata Dharma Yogyakarta

**Geoffrey Roderic Evan Kaba**

Pontifical and Royal University of Saint Tomas, Manila

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### **Abstract**

This article interprets the *Katoba* Tradition in Muna culture as a cultural pedagogy of repentance and examines it from the perspective of Catholic theology, particularly in relation to the Sacrament of Penance. Rather than equating *Katoba* with the sacrament, this study argues that *Katoba* functions as a preparatory horizon that forms moral, awareness, responsibility, and openness to conversion. Using a qualitative literature-based approach supported by contextual insights, the article analyses the symbolic and ethical dimensions of *Katoba* in dialogue with Catholic understanding of repentance, reconciliation, and sacramental grace. Grounded in biblical theology and Church teaching, the study identifies both convergences and limits between *Katoba* and the Sacrament of Penance. While *Katoba* emphasizes moral purification and social harmony, the sacrament offers holistic reconciliation with God and the Church through Christ's salvific grace. Employing Bevans' synthesis and countercultural models, this article proposes an inculturative approach that respects Muna culture while safeguarding the theological uniqueness of the Sacrament of Penance.

**Keywords:** *Katoba tradition; repentance; Catholic theology, Sacrament of Penance; inculturation.*

### **Abstrak**

Artikel ini menafsirkan tradisi *Katoba* dalam budaya Muna sebagai suatu pedagogi kultural pertobatan dan membacanya dalam terang teologi Katolik, khususnya dalam relasinya dengan Sakramen Tobat. Kajian ini bukan pertama-tama menyamakan *Katoba* dengan Sakramen Tobat tetapi menegaskan bahwa *Katoba* berfungsi sebagai horizon persiapan yang membentuk kesadaran moral, tanggung jawab etis, dan keterbukaan terhadap pertobatan. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui studi pustaka yang diperkaya oleh wawasan

kontekstual, artikel ini menganalisis dimensi simbolik dan etis *Katoba* dalam dialog dengan pemahaman Katolik tentang pertobatan, rekonsiliasi, dan rahmat sakramental. Berdasarkan teologi Kitab Suci dan ajaran Gereja, artikel ini menunjukkan titik temu sekaligus batas antara *Katoba* dan Sakramen Tobat. Jika *Katoba* menekankan pemurnian moral dan keharmonisan sosial, Sakramen Tobat menghadirkan rekonsiliasi dengan Allah dan Gereja melalui rahmat keselamatan Kristus. Dengan memakai model sintesis dan tanding-budaya Stephen B. Bevans, artikel ini mengusulkan pendekatan inkulturatif yang menghargai budaya Muna tanpa mengaburkan kekhasan teologis Sakramen Tobat.

**Kata kunci:** Tradisi *Katoba*; pertobatan; Teologi Katolik; Sakramen Tobat; inkulturasi.

## 1. Introduction

Every human being cannot be separated from the bonds of tradition and culture. Tradition and culture influence and become the basis of human self-development. Human identity is shaped within certain cultural and social contexts that integrated with ethnic, religious, and moral dimensions. Human identity develops by containing social, ethnic, and religious aspects. Each aspect is interrelated and develops with certain characteristics. These aspects are interconnected and gradually shape patterns of meaning, values, and behavior. Traditions are transmitted from one generation to another through customs, practices, and beliefs that help individuals interpret life and responsibility within their communities. Traditions exist and develop within a particular culture.<sup>1</sup> Within religious traditions, such cultural practices often function as formative spaces where moral awareness and responsibility before the Divine are cultivated.

The rapid development of modern society has significantly affected the continuity of traditions and culture. In many contexts, local traditions are increasingly marginalized by modern lifestyles that emphasize technology, efficiency, and individual expression. Younger generations often encounter global popular culture more intensively than their own cultural heritage, resulting in a diminishing familiarity with traditional values. One reason for this is the insufficient transmission of traditional and cultural values from an early age or childhood.<sup>2</sup> As a result, children's knowledge and understanding of tradition and culture is less in-depth.

As the successors of society, younger generations need to be equipped with an adequate understanding of their cultural traditions. Culture constitutes an invaluable heritage that reflects the collective wisdom of a community. In a pluralistic society such as Indonesia, local traditions serve as resources for character formation and social cohesion. The preservation and transmission of culture, therefore, require creative engagement with modern contexts without losing the depth of values embedded within tradition. In religiously rooted traditions, this process also opens space for reflection on moral responsibility and spiritual formation. One such tradition is *Katoba*. *Katoba* developed within the culture of Muna people in Southeast Sulawesi.

Some people, especially Muna community who were born in the millennial era, do not recognize the *Katoba* tradition. In fact, whereas the *Katoba* tradition is frequently treated as peripheral, historical examination reveals it as a foundational element of life in Muna

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<sup>1</sup> Sumarto, "Budaya, Pemahaman Dan Penerapannya : Aspek Sistem Religi, Bahasa, Pengetahuan, Sosial, Kesenian, Dan Teknologi," *Literasiologi* 1, no. 2 (2019): 151–52, <https://doi.org/10.47783/literasiologi.v1i2.49>.

<sup>2</sup> Amelia dan Sri Sumarni, "Peran Orang Tua Dalam Mengoptimalkan Perkembangan Sosial Anak Usia 5-6 Tahun," *Jurnal Pendidikan Anak* 11, no. 2 (2022): 173, <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpa.v11i2.55121>.

culture.<sup>3</sup> Beyond its sociocultural function, *Katoba* embodies a moral and religious pedagogy centered on initiation, repentance, purification, and the restoration of right relationships in society. The term initiation and repentance are relevant in Catholicism. In Catholicism, initiation (sacraments) consists of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation. Baptism is the entrance to the sacraments, as a sign of one's acceptance into union with Christ and the Church. Those who have been initiated into the Church are continually called to conversion, particularly through the Sacrament of Penance.<sup>4</sup> In this article, the discussion will focus more on the aspect of repentance in its relationship to Muna culture and Church teachings.

The sacrament of penance or reconciliation cannot be separated from Jewish tradition and culture. Church documents, especially Sacrosanctum Concilium article 72 use the term sacrament of penance instead of reconciliation. If we look at the root of the word reconciliation, it means God's initiative to offer reconciliation to His people (with God, others, and all of creation).<sup>5</sup> The sacrament of reconciliation reminds us of the vulnerability of humans to fall into sin and mistakes. Humans always want to live a good life but still fall into sin. Sin damages human relationships with God, others, and the environment. The reception of the sacrament of reconciliation contains an element of togetherness with God. Humans always have the desire to live together with God.

The study of the *Katoba* tradition in relation to the sacrament of penance uses models of inculturation popularized by Stephen Bevans. The author chose to apply the synthesis and counterculture models. The synthesis model emphasizes the importance of proclamation of the gospel (good news), gives place to context, and points to the importance of praxis. The countercultural model leads to an encounter between culture and the gospel. Culture is never perfect, so it must be converted by the gospel. The gospel brings about a change in perspective towards culture and leads to a new understanding.<sup>6</sup> These models allow for a dialogical encounter between culture and the Gospel while maintaining a critical stance toward cultural elements considering Christian revelation. This article does not seek to equate *Katoba* with the Sacrament of Penance, nor to place them on the same sacramental level. Rather, *Katoba* is interpreted as a cultural horizon that prepares moral consciousness and disposes individuals toward a deeper experience of conversion.

Many people have discussed the *Katoba* tradition in Muna culture in books and journals. Most of them only focus on the process, meaning, and lessons that can be drawn in the *Katoba* tradition which is associated with Islamic values (identity).<sup>7</sup> The *Katoba* tradition is often perceived as reinforcing Muslim identity in Muna society. However, its core meaning, derived from *toba* or *tobat* (repentance), expresses a positive moral orientation that allows *Katoba*, as an initiation ritual in Muna culture, to be meaningfully engaged within Catholicism.<sup>8</sup> While previous studies on *Katoba* have largely emphasized its role in reinforcing Islamic identity and cultural continuity, this article offers a theological

<sup>3</sup> Asliah Zainal, *Menjaga Adat, Memperkuat Agama : Katoba Dan Identitas Muslim Muna* (Deepublish, 2017), 1–6.

<sup>4</sup> Adrianus Sunarko, "Rahmat Dan Sakramen: Teologi Dengan Paradigma Kebebasan," *Melintas* 33 (Januari 2017): 17, <https://doi.org/10.26593/mel.v33i1.2952.14-33>.

<sup>5</sup> Emanuel Martasudjita, *Sakramen-Sakramen Gereja Tinjauan Teologis, Liturgis, Dan Pastoral* (Kanisius, 2003), 312.

<sup>6</sup> Emanuel Martasudjita, *Teologi Inkulturasi Perayaan Injil Yesus Kristus Di Bumi Indonesia* (Kanisius, 2021), 211–25.

<sup>7</sup> Rukmina Gonibala dkk., "Strategi Pelestarian Tradisi *Katoba* Sebagai Media Pendidikan Islam Pada Masyarakat Etnis Muna Di Sulawesi Tenggara," *Journal of Islamic Education Policy* 3 (Juni 2018): 7, <https://doi.org/10.30984/j.v3i1.849>.

<sup>8</sup> Andreas Melki, "Upacara *Katoba* Dalam Budaya Muna Lolibu Sebagai Sarana Evangelisasi Iman Katolik Dalam Terang Anjuran Apostolik Evangelii Gaudium" (Skripsi, Universitas Sanata Dharma, 2022), 36.

contribution by interpreting *Katoba* within the framework of Catholic theology of repentance. The novelty of this study lies in reading *Katoba* as a cultural pedagogy that finds its fulfillment in the Sacrament of Penance. Through this perspective, the article seeks to contribute to the discourse on inculturation by demonstrating how local traditions can serve as meaningful entry points for catechesis and evangelization without compromising the theological integrity of the Church's sacramental life.

## 2. Research Method

This research uses a qualitative method with a literature study approach. The qualitative method consists of primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources come from literature books that discuss *Katoba*. Meanwhile, secondary sources are taken from writings related to the tradition of *Katoba* and the sacrament of penance. Several written sources in books and journals about *Katoba* were used by the author to support this research. The author also uses the direct interview method to several people who know and have seen the practice of *Katoba* tradition in Muna society. With the available sources, the author tries to interpret *Katoba* in relation to the sacrament of penance in the Catholic Church.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

### 3.1 *Katoba* and its Practice

Muna people recognize three rituals that accompany human life: life cycle rituals, nature processing rituals, and incidental rituals.<sup>9</sup> The word repentance is interpreted as an act of regretting all bad deeds and promising not to do the same thing in the future.<sup>10</sup> When viewed from the root of the word (*tobat*), almost every religion understands the concept of repentance.

The meaning of the word *toba* is usually associated with the acceptance of a child in society by instilling religious values. *Katoba* means repentance taken from the word *toba*.<sup>11</sup> The word “*tobat*” is interpreted as an act of regretting all bad deeds and promising not to do the same thing in the future. *Katoba* is performed by children (female or male) who are 7-12 years old. The purpose of it is to make children have good morals by instilling traditional, cultural and religious values. *Katoba* becomes the foundation of a child's behavior in daily life in the community.<sup>12</sup> The *Katoba* tradition is an obligation for children because it can be interpreted as a process of accepting a person in culture and society. The child is obliged to say the creed as a sign that he has been accepted as a member of the culture.<sup>13</sup> The obligation contains elements of freedom and without coercion from others.

#### 3.1.1 Implementation of *Katoba* in Muna

According to Dhavamony, rituals are performed to reaffirm things that are considered important in society and strengthen morality. Some rituals are based on belief systems and myths. The basis of the implementation of *Katoba* is the awareness of the importance of the

<sup>9</sup> Zainal, *Menjaga Adat, Menguatkan Agama : Katoba Dan Identitas Muslim Muna*, 50.

<sup>10</sup> La Taena dkk., “*Katoba*: A Rite of Passage in Muna Society, Indonesia,” *The Eastern Anthropologist*, 2018, 72.

<sup>11</sup> Zainal, *Menjaga Adat, Menguatkan Agama : Katoba Dan Identitas Muslim Muna*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Hadirman, “Tradisi *Katoba* sebagai Media Komunikasi Tradisional dalam Masyarakat Muna *Katoba*,” *Jurnal Penelitian Komunikasi Dan Opini Publik*, 2016, 21.

<sup>13</sup> Hadirman, “Dinamika Bahasa dan Budaya Yang Tercermin Tradisi Lisan *Katoba* Pada Masyarakat Muna,” *Jurnal Al Qalam* 16, no. 3 (2022): 881, <https://doi.org/10.35931/aq.v16i3.963>.

concept of cleaning *daki* (our *ali*) and cleansing or purification. Here are some of the processes of the *Katoba* ritual in Muna society:<sup>14</sup>

1) Ritual preparation *Gholeono Metaa* (determining a good day), the determination of a good day in the implementation of the *Katoba* ritual is related to the concept of sacred and profane. Not all days can be used as the right time to perform *Katoba*. A good day to perform *Katoba* is usually in the early months of *Shawwal* after *Eid al mubarak*. The *Katoba* ritual runs smoothly when the time and day are right. Usually, *Katoba* is performed in the morning before the sun is above the crown of the head.

2) The conditions of *Katoba*, the manner of repentance (relating to people and God). Human-related matters include regretting one's sins, avoiding anything that could lead to sin, and eliminating the tendency to do wrong. It is God's right to decide to forgive people's mistakes.<sup>15</sup> Humans should regret, avoid, and eliminate wrongdoing in order to be forgiven by God. In *Katoba* there is monologue communication (giving advice) and dialog (between the imam and the child). In this section the child recites the confession.

3) The *Katoba* advice, includes being kind to family members (*lansaringino*), how to worship (*ka'alao oe*), and maintaining a balanced relationship with fellow humans and the universe (*hakkunaasi*). All advice is delivered by the *Katoba* leader (imam).

4) The closing, prayer or recitation ends with the word *amen*, after which everyone claps. The whole ritual closes with a meal and dancing together (*lulo*).

### 3.1.2 The Meaning of *Katoba*

*Katoba* is a traditional way of instilling and passing on moral values. Interestingly, the inculcation and inheritance of moral values emphasize the three-subject relationship between the divine, human, and nature.<sup>16</sup> Such a relational framework reflects a moral worldview in which human life is understood as accountable not only to social norms but also to a transcendent source. With *ditoba* people are invited to realize their dignity as human beings who are weak and vulnerable to sin. The practice of *Katoba* also contains three elements: repentance, a pledge of repentance and testimony of faith, and *Katoba* advice.<sup>17</sup> These elements can be understood as expressions of a cultural pedagogy that shapes conscience and responsibility. In this sense, *Katoba* may be understood as a preparatory horizon for deeper theological reflection on repentance, which finds its sacramental fulfilment in the Sacrament of Penance, as discussed in the following section. In this section, two meanings of *Katoba* in Muna culture will be shown, namely cleaning the dirt and purifying oneself.

#### Cleansing away Dirt (*ali kita*)

In Muna understanding, parents bear responsibility for their children from early childhood until before marriage. This responsibility is conceived as a form of debt that must be fulfilled; when it remains unpaid, the burden persists and clings to the person. This condition is symbolized by *daki*, a substance that adheres to the human body and represents moral and spiritual pollution.<sup>18</sup> Cleansing *daki* requires both physical washing with water and the fulfilment of parental responsibilities.

<sup>14</sup> Zainal, *Menjaga Adat, Menguatkan Agama : Katoba Dan Identitas Muslim Muna*, 124.

<sup>15</sup> Jumarddin La Fua, "Etnopedagogi *Katoba* Sebagai Bentuk Pendidikan Karakter Dan Pendidikan Lingkungan Hidup Pada Etnis Muna," *Jurnal Zaawiyah* 1 (Desember 2015): 103.

<sup>16</sup> Hadirman, "Sejarah dan Bahasa Figuratif Dalam Tradisi *Katoba* pada Masyarakat Muna," *Jurnal Aqlam* 2, no. 1 (2017): 49, <https://doi.org/10.30984/ajip.v2i1.510>.

<sup>17</sup> Taena dkk., "*Katoba*: A Rite of Passage in Muna Society, Indonesia," 75.

<sup>18</sup> Musafar Musafar dkk., "Strategi Pelestarian Ritual *Katoba* pada Komunitas Muna Perantauan di Kota Kendari," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Konseling (JPDK)* 4, no. 5 (2022): 5871.

Within the *Katoba* ritual, parents play a central role by presenting their children for initiation. Parents pay off the debt (*daki*) by saying that “my obligations as a parent have been paid”.<sup>19</sup> Through this act, parents symbolically discharge their *daki* by declaring that their parental obligations have been fulfilled. These responsibilities are embedded within social and cultural expectations, and failure to nurture a child’s development exposes parents to communal scrutiny and moral accountability.

### Cleansing and Purification

The concept of cleanliness or purity in the *Katoba* ritual lies in the symbols used. The symbols consist of verbal symbols (words) and non-verbal symbols (tools). Non-verbal symbols are seen in the actions of the ritual leader who puts the children being tried into the room and pours water over the child’s head.<sup>20</sup> The symbols used in the *Katoba* ritual are *pitara* (containing rice and eggs) which symbolizes one’s purity, white cloth which symbolizes purity, and water (cleansing). *Katoba* shows that humans have a noble dignity, different from animals. Humans have intellect (distinguishing between good and bad).

The meaning of cleansing and purification refers to none other than the word repentance. Repentance means returning to the state of *fitrah* (reversing direction from evil deeds to good deeds based on awareness and regret). The purpose of human repentance is cleansing from sins to the state of being born into the world. People who repent will experience peace because they are not overshadowed by guilt over the sins or mistakes, they have made. There are three sources of mistakes that need to be regretted, namely mistakes of the heart (*kahalano dukuno lalo*), words (*kahalano dukuno pogau*), and actions (*kahalano podiu*). The *Katoba* ritual reminds us that humans are prone to falling into sin and error. From a young age, awareness of this vulnerability must be instilled and advice given on good moral conduct.

Sometimes the rituals performed by a culture include the relationship between humans and God. God (as the culture calls him) is supreme and beyond humans. The Muna people call *Ompu* (a title for the Divine) as the one who has greatness, glory, and omnipotence. It is no wonder that the atmosphere, movements, and everything that happens in the ritual has meaning.<sup>21</sup> In the *Katoba* ritual, the relationship between the priest and the child symbolizes the closeness of the supreme being to humans. The *Katoba* ritual contains a deep theological element, namely the relationship between humans (sinners) and God. God is the one who has the right to forgive the sins committed by humans. *Katoba* is also related to sociology, education and economics. Sociological science in *Katoba* is revealed through the determination of good days to perform the ritual. In addition, there is an element of education in the *Katoba* tradition, namely the cultivation of values.<sup>22</sup> The values taught are a form of morality in daily life. Thus, the *Katoba* tradition contains all aspects and dynamics of human life, namely social, economic, educational and cultural.

<sup>19</sup> Rukmina Gonibala Ardianto dan Hadirman, *Tradisi Katoba Pada Masyarakat Etnis Muna : Makna, Nilai, Dan Strategi Pelestariannya* (Deepublish, 2020), 50.

<sup>20</sup> Melki, “Upacara *Katoba* Dalam Budaya Muna Lolibu Sebagai Sarana Evangelisasi Iman Katolik Dalam Terang Anjuran Apostolik Evangelii Gaudium,” 50.

<sup>21</sup> Laode Monto Bauto, “Socio-cultural values as community local wisdom *Katoba* muna in the development of learning materials social studies and history,” *Historia: Jurnal Pendidik Dan Peneliti Sejarah* 14, no. 2 (2016): 199–200.

<sup>22</sup> Bauto, “Socio-cultural values as community local wisdom *Katoba* muna in the development of learning materials social studies and history,” 207–12.

### 3.2 The Sacrament of Penance in the Tradition of The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church recognizes the term initiation which simply refers to the act of receiving someone into the communion of God's people. Looking at the root of the word, initiation comes from the Latin *inire* which means to enter, enter, or join a group.<sup>23</sup> People are accepted and recognized as members. Initiation in the Catholic Church consists of baptism, eucharist, and confirmation. People who are already recognized as members of the Church can receive other Sacraments such as the sacrament of penance.

The practice of reconciliation or the sacrament of penance is found in scripture, especially the Old Testament. The Old Testament mentions that repentance touches the inner aspect caused by deeds. The Old Testament connects suffering with sin. People who suffer and are sick are considered to have many sins. If they want peace, they must repent by offering burnt offerings (Lev 16:1-19). Whereas in the New Testament, Jesus emphasized the importance of repentance for people to achieve salvation.<sup>24</sup>

The Old Testaments and New Testaments discuss the term repentance. The meaning of repentance in the Old Testament is the gift of God that bestows a pure and new heart to people who want to repent (Jer 31:33). The meaning of repentance in the new covenant (the words of Jesus) is readiness and purity to welcome the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:4). The New Testament connects repentance with healing.<sup>25</sup> Repentant people are those who are healed of their burdens and turn away from their evil deeds. The practice of repentance of the early believers reveals that it is God Himself in Jesus Christ who forgives sins.

The history of receiving the sacrament of penance has changed. In the beginning, the reception of the sacrament of penance (confession) was done publicly or together. Repentance became a condition for people to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist. Personal reception of the sacrament of penance began in the sixth century.<sup>26</sup> Of course, there are differences in emphasis in the two practices of penance. The elements of repentance and the actions of the people are important in the practice of public penance. Whereas in the practice of private confession, the element of awareness of sin is an important and profound element.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially *Lumen Gentium* 11, affirm that "Those who receive the sacrament of Penance obtain forgiveness from the mercy of God for their contempt of Him, and at the same time they are reconciled to the Church, whom they have sinfully offended, and who assists their conversion by her love, example and prayers".<sup>27</sup> The spirit of the Second Vatican Council was continued by Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia* 11 "The principal task of the Church is the ministry of the sacrament of reconciliation as reconciliation". The ecclesiological dimension of the sacrament of penance is at the center of issues discussed in several letters of recommendation, sermons, and ecclesial documents. Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* states that in our times, awareness of the meaning of sin is weak (EG 64). Awareness of responsibility and the wrongs committed is no longer a fear or a burden that must be repaid.

<sup>23</sup> Martasudjita, *Sakramen-Sakramen Gereja Tinjauan Teologis, Liturgis, Dan Pastoral*, 207.

<sup>24</sup> S. Laurensius Dihe, *Sakramen Tobat di Tengah Globalisasi* (PT Kanisius, 2013), 26.

<sup>25</sup> Martasudjita, *Sakramen-Sakramen Gereja Tinjauan Teologis, Liturgis, Dan Pastoral*, 215.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Ortega Galed, "Sigillum Sacramentale: Rahasia Sakramental Pengakuan Dosa, Studi Kanonik," *Studia Philosophica et Theologica* 23, no. 1 (2023): 83, <https://doi.org/10.35312/spet.v23i1.492>.

<sup>27</sup> I. E. Putranto, "Kesadaran Dan Pertobatan Misioner," *Sawi*, no. 22 (2018): 15–16.

### 3.3 Theological Synthesis of the *Katoba* Tradition with The Sacrament of Penance

The church cannot escape from a particular culture.<sup>28</sup> The church participates in the dynamics in the midst of culture and all forms of traditions that develop. Cultural traditions and beliefs become an entry point for the Church to proclaim Christ and God's work of salvation. The church must dare to have an encounter with culture so that the gospel can be grounded and understood by God's people. Inculturation is the Church's way of evangelizing or proclaiming good news to all people.<sup>29</sup> Inculturation is a transformative process in which cultural values are affirmed, purified, and brought to their fulfillment in Christ.

Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* discusses cultural evangelization (inculturation). The Pope explained that the spirit of evangelization must be carried out with joy and recognize the rich treasures (culture) that the Holy Spirit has poured out on the Church (EG 117). *Evangelii Gaudium* provides an understanding of the importance of proclaiming the Gospel according to the cultural context.<sup>30</sup> What needs to be considered is the tendency to blur the meaning of the Gospel and syncretism. The proclamation of the Gospel can be done through inculturation by appreciating the culture and concrete situation of the community because the process of inculturation is a form of evangelization.<sup>31</sup>

The church should adapt its proclamation to the contextual theology model. The models of contextual theology presented by Bevens consist of translation, anthropological, praxis, synthesis, transcendental, and countercultural models.<sup>32</sup> Drawing on the contextual theology models proposed by Stephen B. Bevens, this study employs the synthesis and countercultural models to interpret the *Katoba* tradition. The synthesis model allows for dialogue between cultural values and Christian faith, recognizing analogies that can foster understanding and practice. At the same time, the countercultural model insists that culture, which is always limited and imperfect, must be critically evaluated and transformed by the Gospel. Applied to *Katoba*, these models prevent the tradition from being treated as a parallel sacramental practice and instead situate it as a cultural framework that prepares moral awareness and responsibility. It is interesting that the understanding of culture, which is never perfect, must be perfected by the gospel as part of the countercultural model.<sup>33</sup>

The *Katoba* tradition and Christian teachings, especially the sacrament of penance, have some similar understandings. From theological standpoint, *Katoba* cannot be synthesized with the sacrament of penance at the level of ritual or sacramental efficacy. But *Katoba* can be understood as a cultural pedagogy that disposes individuals toward a deeper appreciation of conversion and reconciliation. In *Katoba*, there are meanings that can be used to the direction of repentance namely the understanding of God, the understanding of man, and salvation. These dimensions do not constitute a sacramental structure, but they reflect anthropological and moral insights that can enter into dialogue with Christian theology.

<sup>28</sup> Martasudjita, *Teologi Inkulturasi Perayaan Injil Yesus Kristus Di Bumi Indonesia*, 54.

<sup>29</sup> Emanuel Pranawa Dhatu Martasudjita, "Inkulturasi Dan Tata Perayaan Ekaristi 2020 Gambaran Berinkulturasi dalam Konteks Indonesia," *Studia Philosophica et Theologica* 22, no. 2 (2022): 162–63, <https://doi.org/10.35312/spet.v22i2.441>.

<sup>30</sup> Georg Ludwig Kirchberger, "Teologi Inkulturasi dalam Sejarah Gereja dan Dewasa Ini di Flores, Indonesia," *Jurnal Ledalero* 22, no. 1 (June 22): 94–95, <https://doi.org/10.31385/jl.v22i1.342.88-101>.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Bevens, "Pope Francis and Inculturation," *Jurnal Ledalero* 18, no. 2 (2019): 207, <https://doi.org/10.31385/jl.v18i2.186.203-222>.

<sup>32</sup> Martasudjita, *Teologi Inkulturasi Perayaan Injil Yesus Kristus Di Bumi Indonesia*, 200–225.

<sup>33</sup> David Eko Setiawan, "Resensi Buku: Model-Model Teologi Kontekstual," *Fidei: Jurnal Teologi Sistematika Dan Praktika* 7, no. 2 (2024): 436–39, <https://doi.org/10.34081/fidei.v7i2.580>.

The sacraments of initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist – form and inseparable unity within the life of the Church. Their meaning and efficacy are grounded in sacramental grace rather than cultural acceptance. In other side, *Katoba* has a fundamental role in marking social maturity and communal belonging within Muna community. From the perspective of Catholic theology, baptism is valid when the *forma* and *materia* are administered in accordance with the norms established by Church law.<sup>34</sup> *Katoba* and can be done by anyone because the most important thing is acceptance (a sign of maturity) and instilling good values as a part of society. *Katoba* can be the cultural and spiritual pedagogy to sacramental life. The church can proclaim the Gospel by purifying the view of *Katoba* that has something in common with the Christian context. The theological convergences between *Katoba* and the sacrament of penance can be identified in their respective understandings of God, the human person, and salvation.

### 3.3.1 Understanding of God

In the *Katoba* tradition, the One God is supreme and all-knowing. God has the right to forgive people who sin and make mistakes. God is the center to which people turn when they want to confess their sins. God is merciful and is the first to offer mercy to man.<sup>35</sup> While man with *toba* reflects an anthropological awareness of human fragility and vulnerability. This understanding corresponds with the biblical portrayal of God as merciful and compassionate, “slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Exod. 34:6; Ps. 103:8–12). In Scripture, forgiveness is consistently presented as God’s initiative, rooted in divine mercy rather than human merit. Man, that has vulnerability is called to remain in need of conversion (cf. Rom 3:23). Repentance is no single moment but an ongoing toward God.<sup>36</sup> In Gospel, as expressed in Jesus’ call: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matt. 4:17). Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* reiterates this biblical vision by affirming that God’s mercy is inexhaustible and continuously offered, while human beings often hesitate to seek it (cf. EG 3).

From a theological perspective, the *Katoba* tradition and the sacrament of penance display convergent understanding of repentance and the sources of human sin. In *Katoba* the *ompu* (the priest who leads *Katoba*) has the power and authority to forgive people’s sins. The *ompu* functions as a cultural and moral authority who guides the ritual process and symbolizes divine presence within the Muna community.<sup>37</sup> God is the One who is omnipotent and beyond human beings. By contrast in sacrament of penance, Jesus Christ, Himself, has the power to erase or forgive sins. Jesus is described as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). Jesus also tells the paralytic: “Child, your sins are forgiven” (Mk 2:5).<sup>38</sup> With His authority, Jesus entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to the apostles: “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them” (Jn 20:22-23). This authority then is exercised within the Church through apostolic succession (Bishops, priests) with ordained ministers acting *in persona Christi* (cf. 2 Cor:5-18-20).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> C. Groenen, *Teologi Sakramen Inisiasi: Baptisan-Krisma Sejarah Dan Sistemik* (Kanisius, 1992), 240–41.

<sup>35</sup> Melki, “Upacara *Katoba* Dalam Budaya Muna Lolibu Sebagai Sarana Evangelisasi Iman Katolik Dalam Terang Anjuran Apostolik *Evangelii Gaudium*,” 158.

<sup>36</sup> Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, “Recalling the Sacraments: The Case of Penance,” *J. Christian Legal Thought* 12 (2022): 28.

<sup>37</sup> Jules Couvreur dan Rene Van Den Berg, *Sejarah dan kebudayaan kerajaan Muna* (Artha Wacana Press, 2001), 186.

<sup>38</sup> Robert L. Fastiggi, *The Sacrament of Reconciliation: An Anthropological and Scriptural Understanding* (Hillenbrand Books, 2017), 3.

<sup>39</sup> Ladislav Orsy, *The Sacrament Of Penance: Problem Areas And Disputed Questions*, t.t., 29–30.

### 3.3.2 Understanding of Humans

Both the *Katoba* tradition and Christian teaching understand human beings as fragile and prone to sin. Human vulnerability is expressed in the tendency to deviate from moral norms and to disregard divine commandments. This shared anthropological insight is articulated through the concept of sin, which functions as a key interpretive framework for understanding human weakness and the need for repentance.

In the *Katoba* tradition, sin is understood primarily as moral impurity arising from human actions that deviate from goodness and divine order. Humans are believed to be born in a state of *fitrah*, that is, fundamentally pure and clean, yet capable of moral failure through thoughts, words, and deeds that contradict God's will. Repentance in *Katoba* therefore requires personal awareness and acknowledgment of all wrongdoing, both conscious and unconscious. This understanding resonates with the biblical affirmation that human beings are created good yet remain vulnerable to sin (Gen. 1:31; Rom. 7:19).

In Catholic theology, sin is defined more relationally, namely as a rupture in the relationship between human beings and God, with others, and with creation itself. Sin signifies a separation from God's love caused by human selfishness and disordered freedom<sup>40</sup> (cf. Isa. 59:2; Rom. 3:23). Consequently, repentance is understood not merely as moral regret but as a restorative movement aimed at reestablishing communion with God. This relational understanding undergirds the Church's sacramental theology, particularly the sacrament of penance, which serves as a means of reconciliation and healing within the ecclesial community.

The practice of *Katoba* further reflects the conviction that human beings fundamentally need divine guidance in order to live rightly. Within Muna culture, *Katoba* is administered to children who are considered capable of distinguishing between good and evil, thus marking an early awareness of moral responsibility. Those who undergo *toba* are expected to express sincere remorse for their faults and to commit themselves to a morally upright life.<sup>41</sup> In a parallel manner, the Catholic Church teaches that baptized children, having reached the age of reason, may receive the sacrament of penance as an expression of their growing moral awareness and accountability<sup>42</sup> (cf. CIC, can. 989).

Despite these similarities, an important theological divergence must be emphasized. *Katoba* generally understands repentance as a singular, definitive act marking moral maturity, whereas Catholic theology understands repentance as a continual and lifelong process. Because human beings remain prone to sin, the sacrament of penance is not performed once but repeatedly, whenever individuals recognize their sinfulness, experience contrition, and seek reconciliation (cf. Luke 15:7; 1 John 1:8–9). The exhortation parts of *Katoba* are equivalent to penitence in the sacrament of penance.<sup>43</sup> This ongoing dynamic reflects a more realistic anthropological assessment of human fragility within Christian theology.

### 3.3.3 Understanding of Salvation

The concept of salvation within the *Katoba* tradition is not formulated explicitly in theological or eschatological terms. Instead, salvation is understood in a holistic and practical

<sup>40</sup> Laurentius Dihe, *Sakramen Tobat di Tengah Globalisasi*, 16.

<sup>41</sup> Fua, "Etnopedagogi *Katoba* Sebagai Bentuk Pendidikan Karakter Dan Pendidikan Lingkungan Hidup Pada Etnis Muna," 103.

<sup>42</sup> Gregorius Tinenti dan Hemma, "Sakramen Tobat Antara Formalitas Dan Urgensitas," *Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia* 7, no. 8 (2022): 12376, <https://doi.org/10.36418/syntax-literature.v7i8.8715>.

<sup>43</sup> Melki, "Upacara *Katoba* Dalam Budaya Muna Lolibu Sebagai Sarana Evangelisasi Iman Katolik Dalam Terang Anjuran Apostolik Evangelii Gaudium," 161.

manner, encompassing spiritual, physical, social, psychological, and ecological well-being. Spiritual salvation is expressed through ritual prayers led by the *ompu*, which seek divine protection from evil influences and aim to draw individuals closer to the omnipotent God. Physical and social salvation are related to communal harmony and resilience, achieved through adherence to established moral norms and cultural values. Ecological salvation is articulated through exhortations to maintain balance with nature, which is regarded as an integral part of human life.<sup>44</sup>

In contrast, Catholic theology understands salvation as both divine and relational, rooted in God's initiative of grace and realized through reconciliation with God. Within the sacrament of penance, salvation is experienced when individuals recognize their sinfulness, express contrition, and turn back to God. This process restores the broken relationship between God and humanity and brings about inner peace through the forgiveness of sins (cf. Ps. 32:1–5; Rom. 5:1).<sup>45</sup> The sacrament thus mediates not merely moral improvement, but a salvific encounter grounded in Christ's redemptive work.

A fundamental distinction between *Katoba* and the sacrament of penance lies in their respective horizons of salvation. *Katoba* remains largely oriented toward this-worldly harmony, right relationships with God, others, and nature in the present life.<sup>46</sup> While this perspective is valuable, it does not explicitly articulate salvation as participation in the divine life beyond history. Catholic theology, by contrast, situates salvation within an eschatological framework, understanding it as participation in God's life that begins in the present and reaches its fulfilment in eternal communion with God in the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Rev. 21:1–4).

Nevertheless, *Katoba* contains an implicit soteriological insight: salvation begins when human beings acknowledge their fragility and choose to return to the path of goodness. This insight resonates with the biblical understanding of conversion as a turning back to God (Ezek. 18:1–32).<sup>47</sup> Yet, within *Katoba*, sin is often perceived primarily as a violation of customary norms rather than as a rupture in the relationship with God. Consequently, suffering and misfortune are frequently interpreted as the result of moral or ritual failure within the community.

The public performance of *Katoba* further emphasizes its communal orientation. The concluding festive meal highlights restoration and celebration rather than prolonged penitential discipline. From a theological synthesis, *Katoba* may thus be understood as a cultural disposition toward salvation, fostering awareness of human fragility and the need for moral restoration. The sacrament of penance, however, deepens and fulfills this orientation by situating salvation within the economy of grace and directing it toward its ultimate eschatological fulfillment in God.<sup>48</sup>

### 3.4 Pastoral Response to the *Katoba* Tradition

The *Katoba* tradition carries positive pastoral value insofar as it functions as a means of social acceptance and the transmission of moral values to children within the Muna community. As a cultural practice, *Katoba* aims to shape character, responsibility, and

<sup>44</sup> Hadirman, "Sejarah dan Bahasa Figuratif Dalam Tradisi *Katoba* pada Masyarakat Muna," 54.

<sup>45</sup> James B. Prothro, *The Bible and Reconciliation: Confession, Repentance, and Restoration*, 1st ed, with Timothy C. Gray dan John Sehorn, A Catholic Biblical Theology of the Sacraments Series (Baker Academic, 2023), 128.

<sup>46</sup> Hesti dan Ahmad, "Tradisi *Katoba* Pembentuk Karakter Anak Di Muna," *Jurnal Buah Hati* 8, no. 2 (2021): 7, <https://doi.org/10.46244/buahhati.v8i1.1249>.

<sup>47</sup> Prothro, *The Bible and Reconciliation*, 79.

<sup>48</sup> Prothro, *The Bible and Reconciliation*, 7.

communal belonging. When understood primarily at the cultural and ethical level, *Katoba* does not inherently contradict religious life. However, tensions may arise when *Katoba* is interpreted as a religious rite, particularly when it is claimed as an instrument of Islamization. Such claims can create difficulties if *Katoba* is practiced by members of other religious traditions.

A pastoral response to this challenge requires dialogue and discernment. One constructive approach is to facilitate encounters between Church representatives and traditional elders to clarify the meaning, purpose, and limits of *Katoba*. Through dialogue, points of convergence between *Katoba* and Christian values, such as moral formation, responsibility, and communal harmony, can be identified, while theological differences are respected. The Church's pastoral sensitivity in engaging culture plays a decisive role in the success or failure of evangelization.

The Church carries out its mission in the midst of culture through encounter and inculturation. This demands that the Church move beyond a position of distance or suspicion toward local traditions and instead engage them critically and creatively as Bevens said as dialogical model or conversation model to practice synthesis in inculturation.<sup>49</sup> Pastoral inculturation involves recognizing and exploring cultural texts, entering into dialogue with cultural actors, and discerning how Gospel values may be expressed meaningfully within a given cultural context. Traditional leaders and cultural experts should be involved in this process so that an authentic synthesis between the Gospel and local culture may emerge. It must be emphasized that inculturation is not a one-time project but an ongoing process that requires patience, discernment, and continual evaluation.

One pastoral challenge in inculturating the *Katoba* tradition is the diminishing number of elders who possess deep knowledge of the ritual, as well as the declining interest of younger generations. In response, the Church is called to contribute to cultural preservation by introducing local traditions to young people in ways that are meaningful and educational. Evangelization through inculturation becomes effective when all elements of society such as cultural, religious, and generational, work together.

At the same time, the Church must guard against a different danger: the blurring of the meaning of the sacrament of penance. Inculturation must never relativize or obscure the centrality of Jesus Christ or the sacramental life of the Church.<sup>50</sup> This risk can be addressed through ongoing catechesis that clearly presents Christ as the center of evangelization and the sacraments as privileged means of grace.

A further pastoral issue concerns the liturgical placement of *Katoba*. Because the sacrament of penance has a fixed and normative liturgical structure, *Katoba* cannot replace or modify it. *Katoba* may be practiced as a cultural rite of moral formation, particularly for children after baptism, but it does not confer absolution. Christian values may be communicated through *Katoba*, yet Catholics must still receive the sacrament of penance. In this way, *Katoba* is respected as a cultural tradition, while the sacrament of penance remains the higher and normative expression of reconciliation within the Church.

#### 4. Conclusion

The *Katoba* tradition and the sacrament of penance share meaningful convergences in their emphasis on repentance, moral formation, and the restoration of relationships. In Muna

<sup>49</sup> Stephen B. Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, Inc., 2013), 145.

<sup>50</sup> Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 174.

culture, *Katoba* functions as a rite of passage that leads individuals toward maturity through repentance and the internalization of ethical values. Similarly, the sacrament of penance begins with an awareness of sin and the intention to repent, through which God grants the grace of true repentance and restores broken relationships with God, others, and creation.

Despite these convergences, *Katoba* remains a cultural practice of moral and social restoration, whereas the sacrament of penance is a sacramental act rooted in Christ's salvific authority and the economy of grace. *Katoba* does not confer sacramental absolution but may be understood as a cultural pedagogy that disposes individuals toward repentance and reconciliation. The Catholic Church in Muna has not yet sufficiently engaged this tradition pastorally. This study offers an initial theological framework for interpreting *Katoba* as part of an ongoing process of inculturation that safeguards the primacy of the sacrament of penance while valuing local culture.

Future research may further explore empirical pastoral practices, comparative studies with other local penitential traditions, and the concrete implications of inculturation for catechesis and sacramental formation within culturally diverse Catholic communities. The study of this research is expected to be a starting point or foothold to interpret the *Katoba* tradition in Muna culture as an ongoing practice of inculturation.

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