

## The Inculturated Theology of Child Adoption among the Dayak Desa of West Kalimantan: An Anthropological Theology Model of Stephen Bevans

Dismas Kwirinus<sup>1\*</sup>, Emanuel Martasudjita<sup>2</sup>, Ignatius Dendi<sup>3</sup>

Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Teologi Widya Sasana, Indonesia<sup>1</sup>

Universitas Sanata Dharma Yogyakarta, Indonesia<sup>2</sup>

University of Santo Tomas Manila, Philippines<sup>3</sup>

Email: [dismaskwirinuspassio@gmail.com](mailto:dismaskwirinuspassio@gmail.com)\*

### Keywords

*Child Adoption, Dayak Desa, Familial Values, Inculturation, Stephen Bevans' Anthropological Model*

### ABSTRACT

This article examines the child-adoption practice within the Dayak Desa community of West Kalimantan through the lens of Inculturation Theology, employing Stephen Bevans' anthropological model. The study is grounded in the recognition that culture is not merely a backdrop for faith but a vital, dynamic partner in theological reflection. Within the Dayak Desa community, the tradition of child adoption is a deeply embedded socio-cultural institution, serving as a primary mechanism for kinship formation, social solidarity, and the transmission of ancestral values. This practice offers a rich symbolic space where local understandings of family—characterized by inclusivity, openness, and communal responsibility—intersect with Christian theological concepts. However, prior research on this tradition has predominantly focused on its anthropological and educational dimensions, leaving a gap in systematic theological analysis, particularly from an inculturation perspective. Addressing this lacuna, the present study explores the symbolic dynamics, relational structures, and customary rituals of child adoption as theological loci that illuminate a creative and critical dialogue between Christian faith and local culture. Using a qualitative, theological-ethnographic approach, it identifies core values of inclusivity, kinship, and identity transformation embedded in the practice. The findings indicate that inculturation, as modeled by Bevans, enables a contextually meaningful reinterpretation of familial theology while affirming and sustaining cultural traditions. This study contributes to the development of culturally sensitive contextual theology and promotes constructive inter-tradition dialogue and more inclusive expressions of Christian faith.

### INTRODUCTION

Culture constitutes a system of human ideas, actions, and creations that are transmitted through learning processes and serve as the foundation for the collective identity of a community (Sudhiarsa, 2021). In the context of the *Dayak Desa* ethnic group in West Kalimantan, the tradition of child adoption occupies a significant socio-cultural position as a mechanism for kinship formation, the maintenance of solidarity, and the transmission of

customary values. This tradition is not merely a social practice but a symbolic space in which familial values and social structures are constructed and reproduced across generations (Fransiska & Suparno, 2019a). The distinctiveness of this tradition demonstrates how *Dayak Desa* culture conceptualizes family as an inclusive, open, and socially responsible community, oriented toward the sustainability of cultural identity.

Scholarly studies on child adoption within *Dayak* communities have been conducted across various disciplines, particularly anthropology and cultural education. Research on the instilling of cultural values in the upbringing of *Dayak Desa* children (Fransiska & Suparno, 2019b), the dynamics of social tolerance within *Dayak Hulu* communities (Rianawati et al., 2024), and changes in child adoption rituals among the *Dayak Pampang'*k indicate that kinship values play a central role in maintaining social cohesion. Furthermore, studies such as those by Viktori et al. (2020) and Kwirinus (2022b) explore the intersection of local rituals with broader socio-religious frameworks. However, these studies have not thoroughly integrated a systematic theological analysis, particularly from an inculturation perspective. This gap presents an opportunity for this research to contribute by offering a culturally grounded theological reading of the family through Stephen Bevans' anthropological model.

The research problem addressed in this study concerns how the *Dayak Desa* child adoption tradition can be understood as a space for the inculturation of familial values within the context of Christian faith. The focal issues include: first, how the symbolic and relational structures within this tradition reflect *Dayak* kinship values; second, how these values interact with theological understandings of the family as a faith community; and third, how social change, modernity, and religious dynamics influence the interpretation of this tradition. Accordingly, this study seeks to elucidate the form of a creative dialogue between local culture and family theology in a contextual and critical manner.

The theoretical approach of this study is grounded in Stephen Bevans' anthropological model, which regards culture as a dialogical partner for theology. This model emphasizes that inculturation is a reciprocal process, whereby culture enriches theological understanding while theology provides new depth to cultural expressions. In the context of the *Dayak Desa* child adoption tradition, this approach is employed to examine how values of love, solidarity, and kinship are manifested within customary frameworks, while simultaneously exploring how Christian faith values find their relevance. Thus, this study aims to develop a contextual, open, and culturally sensitive family theology.

The research employed a qualitative methodology with a field study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with customary leaders, adoptive parents, adopted children, and religious figures familiar with child adoption practices in the *Dayak Desa* community. Participatory observation of customary rites, documentation of local traditions, and a review of anthropological and theological literature were utilized to enrich the analysis. The integration of cultural anthropology theory with inculturation theology served as the primary analytical approach. This method enables a holistic understanding of the interactions between traditional practices, social structures, and theological interpretations, thereby producing a comprehensive and contextually grounded analysis.

This study examines how familial values such as love, responsibility, intergenerational respect, and solidarity are manifested in child adoption practices. The tradition demonstrates that the *Dayak* family is not merely a biological unit but an extended relational network

facilitated through socio-ritual mechanisms. Conversely, dynamics of modernity, religious change, and state regulations have prompted transformations in the rites and meanings of child adoption. Analysis of these changes indicates that the tradition is not static but continually negotiated. Within a theological framework, these dynamics provide a space for reflecting on how faith values can take root within a culture that is constantly evolving.

This study contributes to the development of family theology, inculturation studies, and cultural anthropology by demonstrating that the *Dayak Desa* child adoption tradition constitutes a rich theological locus. Through Bevans' anthropological model, the research illustrates that the interaction between faith and culture can generate new understandings of the family as a cultural-faith community. The findings are expected to inform pastoral development, family education, and local culture-based empowerment programs. Ultimately, this study opens a space for dialogue between customary practices and Christianity, reinforcing the understanding that local culture is a crucial partner in the formation of contextual and relevant theology.

## METHODS

The qualitative research method was conducted using a theological ethnographic approach. The study focused on understanding the symbolic meanings and cultural praxis of child adoption in the Dayak Desa community as a theological locus. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and analysis of customary documents and local liturgies. The analytical process employed techniques of reduction, categorization, and hermeneutical interpretation to connect cultural experiences with Bevans' theological framework regarding the relationship between revelation, culture, and community identity. Validity was strengthened through source triangulation and member checking to ensure coherence of meaning and theological relevance within a contemporary inculturative context.

## RESULTS

The Results and Discussion section presents the main findings regarding the dynamics of the child adoption tradition within the Dayak Desa community in West Kalimantan. The discussion addresses the distribution of the community, the concepts and terminology associated with child adoption, and the meanings of customary objects that accompany the ritual. The analysis also examines the relationship of this tradition with biblical testimony, social structures, and the role of the family as the foundation of kinship values. Furthermore, a theological interpretation is developed to identify the incarnational and redemptive meanings manifested in cultural practice, thereby enabling theological reflection that enriches the dialogue between Christian faith and the Dayak Desa context.

### **The Distribution of the Dayak Desa Community in West Kalimantan**

In West Kalimantan, there are two ethnic groups that identify themselves as the Desa people, both belonging to the broader Dayak ethnic cluster. The primary distinction between the two lies in the pronunciation of the vowel [e] in the word "Desa." In this Dayak Desa subgroup, the vowel [e] is realized as [ə] (schwa), similar to the pronunciation in the word *mengerti*, rather than as [e] as in the word *meja* (Bamba, 2008).

The Dayak Desa are one of the largest Dayak ethnic groups, residing across seven districts: Sintang, Binjai Hulu, Kelam Permai, Sei Tebelian, Dedai, Tempunak, and Sepauk. A sub-group of the Dayak Desa is also found in Sekadau Regency, representing a migration from

Sintang (Kwirinus, 2022a). This migration was motivated by the search for fertile land and the desire to avoid inter-ethnic conflicts, particularly with the Iban community. In Sekadau Regency, the Dayak Desa primarily inhabit Sekadau Hilir District, specifically in the villages of Tapang Sambas, Tapang Kemayau, Tapang Semadak, and Perupuk Mentah (Bamba, 2008).

In addition to Sintang and Sekadau Regencies, the Dayak Desa are also found in Kapuas Hulu Regency. Their presence in Kapuas Hulu is not only due to geographic proximity but also as a result of migration in search of fertile agricultural land. In terms of kinship systems, communication patterns, and concepts of nature and livelihood, the Dayak Desa in Kapuas Hulu share significant similarities with the sub-groups in Sintang and Sekadau (Bamba, 2008).

The reason why they are called Dayak Desa remains unclear. The meaning of the word Desa, which functions both as an identity and a claim, is not explicitly known. Even members of the Desa community themselves are often unable to provide a precise definition. In everyday speech, many words end with the sound “ai.” The frequent use of this sound is considered the reason for their designation as Dayak Desa. Due to the abundance of words ending in “i” or “ai,” the Dayak Desa language is also referred to as benadai-nadai. The term nadai literally means “no” or “none,” and hence, it can be interpreted literally as “not-not” (Nyaming, 2020).

The language spoken by the Desa community shares many similarities with the languages of the Lebang, Mualang, Ketungau, and Bugau peoples. A notable similarity is the frequent use of the sound “ai” in their words. For example, “makan” (to eat) is pronounced makai, “berjalan” (to walk) becomes bejalai, and “pulang” (to return home) is expressed as pulai, among others. Despite these similarities, differences exist in terms of stress and intonation, even when the words carry the same meaning (Bamba, 2008).

### **The Tradition of Child Adoption**

The tradition of child adoption constitutes an integral part of customary law that has long been embedded within Indonesian society. As noted by Soepomo (2000), this practice functions not merely as a social mechanism but also as a cultural institution that regulates relationships, rights, and obligations within customary communities (Soepomo, 2000). Child adoption is understood as an institutionalized process aimed at ensuring family continuity, maintaining social balance, and strengthening kinship networks. Its existence reflects the worldview of customary communities, which positions the family as the center of both social and spiritual life.

Nearly all sub-ethnic groups in Indonesia have some form of child adoption tradition, each with distinct characteristics shaped by their cultural values, social structures, and belief systems. These differences are evident in ritual procedures, social objectives, and the status of the adopted child. Such variation underscores that child adoption is not merely a legal practice, but a manifestation of a community’s understanding of family, lineage, and communal solidarity. Consequently, this tradition cannot be understood uniformly; rather, it must be interpreted within the specific cultural context of each community.

Within an anthropological framework, child adoption functions as an adaptive mechanism that allows families to extend their lineage, preserve the family name, and fulfill specific social needs. In certain customary communities, child adoption is practiced to strengthen inter-family alliances, while in others it forms part of the inheritance structure (Fransiska & Suparno, 2019b). This practice demonstrates the flexibility of customary kinship

systems in responding to social dynamics. Consequently, child adoption represents a form of local wisdom in managing relationships, maintaining social balance, and ensuring cultural continuity.

Beyond its social dimension, the tradition of child adoption also carries strong symbolic and spiritual significance. In many customary communities, child adoption is regarded as a sacred process that affirms a new relationship between the child and the adoptive family through specific rituals (Basas, 2020). These rituals are often accompanied by the presentation of customary symbols that signify the child's integration into the kinship structure. Thus, child adoption is not merely an administrative act, but an event imbued with religious and cosmological meaning, connecting humans with ancestors, nature, and the community's spiritual order.

As a customary legal institution, the tradition of child adoption encompasses binding rules concerning the rights and obligations of both the adoptive family and the adopted child. These rules include social status, inheritance rights, caregiving responsibilities, and the child's role within the family (Widyawati et al., 2025). Although variations exist among sub-ethnic groups, the fundamental principle upheld is the maintenance of balance and justice within the family structure. These customary regulations also ensure that child adoption is not carried out arbitrarily, but in accordance with norms institutionalized and transmitted across generations.

The continuity of the child adoption tradition demonstrates that customary communities possess internal mechanisms to maintain social stability even amid changing times. This tradition contributes to social cohesion by strengthening kinship ties and mutual responsibilities among families (Rianawati et al., 2024). In contemporary society, the practice is preserved because it embodies noble values such as mutual cooperation, solidarity, and respect for life. Thus, the child adoption tradition serves as a concrete example of how local wisdom functions as a pillar of cultural resilience.

The child adoption tradition also reflects customary communities' understanding of human identity and existence. In many communities, a child is not merely a biological individual, but part of a broader network of relationships. Through child adoption, these communities affirm the value of inclusivity within the family structure, wherein a person can be fully accepted regardless of blood relations. This reflects an understanding of humans as relational beings, whose identity is shaped by social engagement rather than solely by biological factors.

Within the context of this study, the tradition of child adoption serves as a crucial object for understanding how family values are articulated both culturally and theologically. This tradition provides rich data regarding symbols, rituals, and social practices that reflect values of love, responsibility, and solidarity. By tracing the structures of meaning embedded in these practices, the research can reveal how customary communities interpret human relationships and how these values contribute to the development of a contextual theology that respects and engages with local culture.

Scholarly study of the child adoption tradition is crucial because this practice serves as a bridge between customary kinship systems and contemporary socio-religious dynamics. A thorough understanding of the tradition enables the identification of values that remain relevant, as well as how the practice transforms amidst modernity. In theological research, this tradition provides a space for dialogue between faith and culture, allowing for a theological reading of

deeply rooted social practices. Thus, this study contributes both to the preservation of culture and to the development of contextual theological reflection.

### **The Term Child Adoption**

Children are typically adopted for several reasons, including the couple's inability to have biological children, compassion toward orphans, the absence of a male child to continue the family lineage, and other circumstances. B. Bastian Tafal defines an adopted child as one who is taken or made a child by someone other than the biological parents (Tafal, 2005). The number of children adopted is not restricted; one may adopt one, two, or even three children.

Meanwhile, Soekanto views child adoption as the act of giving a child to be taken as one's own, referred to in Dutch as *adoptie*. However, Soekanto distinguishes this act from entrusting a child to be raised as a foster child, since in the latter case, the child can be reclaimed by the biological parents upon reimbursing the expenses incurred by the caretaker (Tafal, 2005).

Regardless of the various reasons for child adoption, no distinction is made in treatment between an adopted child and a biological child. All are regarded as equivalent to biological offspring. Consequently, this situation inherently establishes reciprocal rights and obligations between the adopted child and the adoptive parents. The adopted child is entitled to inherit all of the adoptive parents' property, except in cases where the child violates their duties. Conversely, the adopted child is obligated to comply with all the demands of the adoptive family and to uphold the family's good name. Moreover, the adopted child assumes responsibility for continuing family obligations, maintaining, and caring for the adoptive family in the event of the parents' death.

In their tradition, the Dayak Desa community recognizes the terms *Pengangkatan Anak*, *Be'akuk Anak*, and *Ngangkat Anak*. Each of these terms carries its own customary meaning and specific criteria, which are described as follows:

#### **Be'akuk Anak (Mengaku Anak/ Ritual Acknowledgment of a Child)**

Be'akuk Anak is a ritualistic adoption ceremony conducted when a child experiences illness, prompting the child to be adopted by another party. In this practice, one either offers their child to be adopted or seeks an adopted child in order to obtain *rasi* (a blessing or healing grace). The Be'akuk Anak ritual consists of two main components, as follows:

#### **Be'akuk Anak Setengah (Mengaku Anak Setengah/ Incomplete Acknowledgment of a Child)**

A child who falls ill may be adopted by another party, or another party may request to adopt the child. The primary purpose of this practice is to obtain *rasi* (a healing blessing) for the child's illness. The customary procedure not only follows the established regulations governing child adoption but is also supplemented by healing rituals, which are adjusted according to the severity of the child's condition.

#### **Be'akuk Anak Abis/Penuh (Mengaku Anak Habis/Penuh/ Total Acknowledgment of a Child)**

The concept of adoption is similar to what is practiced in the Be'akuk Anak Setengah ritual. Its primary purpose is to seek *rasi* (a healing blessing) for the illness experienced by the

child. However, the Be'akuk Anak Abis (or full adoption) ritual differs in terms of customary regulations, as it follows the comprehensive provisions set by adat law. In addition to the adoption customs, the ritual also incorporates healing practices, which are adjusted according to the severity of the child's illness.

### **Ngangkat Anak (Mengangkat Anak/ Ritual of Child Adoption)**

The practice of ngangkat anak occurs either as a form of introduction or to strengthen familial bonds. The ngangkat anak ritual is divided into three parts as follows:

### **Ngangkat Nama (Mengangkat Nama/ Naming Ceremony)**

The term ngangkat nama refers to a situation in which an individual assumes a child or adopts a parent without following the formal customary procedures established within the traditional legal framework. Typically, this form of ngangkat nama is considerably simpler in practice.

### **Ngangkat Anak Setengah (Mengangkat Anak Setengah/ Incomplete Adoption of a Child)**

The practice of ngangkat anak setengah occurs when an individual assumes a child or adopts a parent due to the absence of a male or female child and with the intention of acquiring an adopted child or parent.

### **Ngangkat Anak Abis/Penuh (Mengangkat Anak Habis/Penuh/ Total Adoption of a Child)**

The practice of ngangkat anak abis/penuh occurs when an individual adopts a child or assumes a parent due to the absence of a male or female child. In this form of adoption, the adopted child is regarded as a biological or legitimate child. Consequently, the child is entitled to the wealth of the adoptive parent, including property and land assets.

### **The Ritual and Process of Adoption**

The adoption process is referred to as the ritual of adoption. In this ritual, the purpose and objectives of the adoption, as well as the associated customary procedures, are typically explained. Prior to the formal establishment of the customary adoption regulations by the Temenggung Adat or the customary leader, both the biological and adoptive parents present the background and reasons for the adoption to the guests invited to the child adoption ceremony.

### **Intentions of Biological Parents (Conditional on Their Continued Existence)**

If the child adoption involves be'akuk anak, the intention of the biological parents in this process is primarily to seek rasi (a healing blessing). Frequently, the hopes of the biological parents are realized, resulting in the recovery of the adopted child. In contrast, if the adoption involves ngangkat anak abis/penuh, the intention of the biological parents is solely to establish a familial relationship with the adoptive parents.

### **Responses of Prospective Adoptive Parents**

Prospective adoptive parents wholeheartedly accept the child as their own after reaching an agreement and ensuring compatibility with the biological parents. Typically, prior to the

adoption ceremony, both the biological parents and the prospective adoptive parents engage in discussions regarding the child to be adopted.

Within the child adoption tradition from the perspective of Dayak Desa society, age and gender criteria are not considered for *ngangkat anak setengah*. However, in the case of *ngangkat anak abis/penuh*, age becomes an important criterion, serving as a reference for determining the applicable customary procedures. Generally, priority is given to children, in accordance with the designation of the practice as child adoption.

### **Customary Objects in Adoption Rituals**

Generally, the determination of procedural matters and customary objects is clearly carried out by the customary leader (Ketua Adat) or the Temenggung Adat. In the context of child adoption among the Dayak Desa, customary matters or objects are divided into two main categories: those for *be'akuk anak* and those for *ngangkat anak*. These distinctions can be outlined as follows:

#### ***Be'akuk Anak (Mengaku Anak/Ritual Acknowledgment of a Child)***

In the Dayak Desa tradition, when *be'akuk anak* is prompted by a child's illness, the adoption customs include not only the standard adoption procedures but also medicinal or healing customs, which are determined according to the severity of the child's condition. The customary objects for the adoption are handed over by the child's biological parents to the adoptive parents through the customary leader (Ketua Adat) during the ceremonial rites. The standard adoption procedures are established as follows:

#### ***Be'akuk Anak Setengah (Mengaku Anak Setengah/Incomplete Acknowledgment of a Child)***

The customary items include a *tempayan sigik* (one jar of rice wine and one chicken). If the adopted child is young, a single piece of *kain bilai* (a cloth similar to a baby sling for carrying the child) is also included. Additionally, a machete or metal blade may be added to strengthen courage. Healing rituals, however, are usually determined independently from the adoption customs. The customary objects used in *be'akuk anak setengah* are generally relatively easy to obtain compared to those required for *be'akuk anak abis/penuh*.

#### ***Be'akuk Anak Abis/Penuh (Mengaku Anak Habis/Penuh/Total Acknowledgment of a Child)***

The adoption is primarily motivated by the illness of a child, with the purpose of seeking *rasi* (a healing blessing). The customary items used in this ritual include: a ceremonial stool; 20 real (currency); a machete or metal blade to strengthen courage; one durian fruit; *kayu sabang merah* or other fruits serving as the *tongkat gayu* (symbolic adoption staff); one jar (*tempayan*) representing the containment of spirit; a set of clothing for the parents. If the adopted child is young, additional items include the customary payment for breast milk in the form of a white plate (*pingan putih*) or a set of twelve white plates (*sesingkap*), a *kain bilai* (child-carrying cloth), *ubung segincil* (thread), *beras sekulak* (rice measured with a milk can), and three bottles of rice wine (*tuak*) or liquor (*arak*). The handover of these customary items is witnessed by two

individuals who are responsible for announcing the formal recognition of the adoption to the members of the village present at the ceremony.

### ***Ngangkat Anak (Mengangkat Anak/Ritual of Child Adoption)***

The underlying motivation for *ngangkat anak* is often social, arising from an acquaintance or the desire to strengthen familial bonds. Children are regarded as the next generation; they will later care for their parents, inherit family assets, and sustain the traditions and culture of the indigenous community in which they live. The *ngangkat anak* process typically begins with *ngangkat nama*, followed by *ngangkat anak setengah*, and finally *ngangkat anak abis/penuh*.

### ***Ngangkat Nama (Mengangkat Nama/Naming Ceremony)***

The *ngangkat nama* custom differs from *ngangkat anak setengah* and *ngangkat anak abis/penuh*. In *ngangkat nama*, the adoption is formalized through symbolic exchanges, such as the swapping of clothing or the presentation of items that serve as proof of adoption, including rings or other tokens, from the biological parents to the adoptive parents.

### ***Ngangkat Anak Setengah (Mengangkat Anak Setengah/Incomplete Adoption of a Child)***

In the *ngangkat anak setengah* custom, whether an individual seeks a child (with the parent initiating the adoption) or a child seeks a parent (with the child initiating the adoption), the customary items are as follows: a *tempayan benaga sigik* (one jar decorated with a dragon motif and one pig weighing 40–60 kg). If the adopted child is young, an additional item includes a single piece of *kain bilai* (a cloth similar to a baby sling) and *ubung segincil* (thread). Furthermore, a machete or metal blade is included as a symbol to strengthen courage.

### ***Ngangkat Anak Abis/Penuh (Mengangkat Anak Habis/Penuh/Total Adoption of a Child)***

In *ngangkat anak abis/penuh*, the adopted child is regarded as a biological or legitimate child, and the adoptive parents are considered the child's lawful parents. The customary items involved include: a ceremonial staff (*batang adat*) worth 40 real; two sets of white plates (*pingan putih*), either two *singkap* or two dozen (24 plates); a machete or metal blade; one durian fruit; *kayu sabang merah* or another fruit-bearing tree serving as the *tongkat gayu* (symbolic adoption staff); one *tempayan benaga* representing the containment of spirit; and a set of clothing for the parents. If the adopted child is young, additional items include the customary payment for breast milk and a single piece of *kain bilai* (child-carrying cloth) along with *ubung segincil* (thread). Other items include three *kulak* of rice (measured with a milk can), one chicken, nine bottles of rice wine (*tuak*) or liquor (*arak*), and two witnesses responsible for announcing the formal recognition of the adoption. The customary items are handed over by the prospective adoptive parents to the biological parents through the customary leader (*Ketua Adat*) during the ceremonial rites.

### **The Significance of Customary Objects in Child Adoption Rituals**

For the Dayak Desa community, customary objects hold profound value and significance. Accordingly, the descriptions and meanings of these objects are presented in the table below:

**Table 1. Significance of Customary Objects in Dayak Desa Child Adoption Rituals**

No	Customary Material	Information	Meaning
1.	Mangkuek/Mangkok (Bowl)	12 buah untuk adat <i>ngangkat anak setengah</i> dan 24 buah <i>ngangkat anak abis/penuh</i> . Mangkok yang dimaksud adalah mangkok kecil dan boleh mangkok yang sedikit besar asal tidak memiliki cacat (retak). Sekarang mangkok ini dianggap sebagai barang pusaka karena sulit didapati. (Twelve bowls are used for <i>ngangkat anak setengah</i> , and twenty-four bowls are used for <i>ngangkat anak abis/penuh</i> . The bowls in question are small, although slightly larger bowls may be used as long as they are free from defects such as cracks. These bowls are now regarded as heirlooms due to their scarcity).	12/24 angka sempurna. Mangkok melambangkan penebusan. Adat dengan mangkok 12/24 buah berarti <i>penebusan</i> yang sempurna. (The numbers 12 and 24 are considered perfect. The bowls ( <i>mangkuek/mangkok</i> ) symbolize redemption. Thus, the use of 12 or 24 bowls in the ritual represents complete or perfect redemption).
2.	Tempayan (jar)	1 buah (1 piece)	Untuk kurung <i>semangat/semangat</i> . Artinya seorang anak yang akan diangkat semangatnya harus dikurung (tetap berada pada anak itu). Kepercayaan orang Dayak Desa semangat itu bisa lari jika ada persoalan dengan anak yang bersangkutan. Akibatnya si anak bisa sakit. (To bracket enthusiasm/enthusiasm. This means that a child whose spirit is to be lifted must be confined (remain with that child). Village Dayak people believe that spirit can run away if there is a problem with the child in question. As a result, the child can get sick).
3.	Beras, babi, dan ayam (Rice, pork, and chicken)	1 <i>kulak</i> (10 kaleng), 3 <i>kulak</i> (30 kaleng), 1 ekor babi dan satu ekor ayam (1 kulak (10 cans), 3 kulaks (30 cans), 1 pig and one chicken)	10/30 angka genap seperti angka 12/24 di atas, berarti angka sempurna. Beras biasanya menggunakan beras yang biasa dimasak untuk konsumsi sehari-hari. Beras itu sendiri melambangkan kehidupan. Babi 40-60 kg (berukuran besar) berarti memberikan sesuatu yang terbaik. Demikian pula ayam berukuran besar juga melambangkan sesuatu yang terbaik. (The numbers 10 and 30, being even numbers like 12 and 24, are also considered perfect. The rice used is typically the variety consumed in daily meals and symbolizes life itself. A pig weighing 40–60 kg (large in size) signifies the offering of the best, as does a large chicken, which similarly represents giving the finest or most valuable contribution).

No	Customary Material	Information	Meaning
4.	Cincin/baju (Ring/clothes)	1 buah/1 lembar (1 piece/1 sheet)	Melambangkan ikatan keluarga antara anak angkat dengan orang tua angkat, khususnya dalam <i>ngangkat nama</i> .
5.	Besi/parang (Iron/machete)	1 buah besi/parang (1 piece of iron/machete)	Parang/besi melambangkan kekuatan. Kuat bukan sekedar fisik melainkan juga semangat yang kuat. (The machete or metal blade ( <i>parang/besi</i> ) symbolizes strength, which encompasses not only physical power but also the fortitude of spirit).
6.	Tuak/arak (Palm wine/arak)	Umumnya 1 tempayan tuak/arak wajib. Tetapi dalam pelaksanaannya selalu disesuaikan dengan keadaan. (Generally, 1 jar of palm wine/wine is mandatory. But the implementation is always adjusted to the circumstances).	Tuak/arak adalah minuman yang menyenangkan seperti anggur bagi orang Eropa. Tuak/arak melambangkan persaudaraan, walaupun kalau dikonsumsi dalam jumlah banyak bisa memabukkan. Tuak adalah minuman khas orang Dayak dalam upacara adat. Tuak berfungsi untuk membuka pembicaraan dalam konteks masyarakat Dayak Desa. ( <i>Tuak/arak</i> is a traditional alcoholic beverage enjoyed similarly to wine in European cultures. It symbolizes fellowship and kinship, although excessive consumption may lead to intoxication. <i>Tuak</i> is a distinctive drink in Dayak ceremonial practices and serves a social function, facilitating dialogue and interaction within the Dayak Desa community).
7.	Kain bilai (Bilai cloth)	1 lembar/helai (1 piece/1 sheet)	Kain bilai melambangkan ikatan yang erat antara anak angkat dengan orang tua angkat. Fungsinya untuk menggendong anak yang diangkat jika anak tersebut masih bayi. (The <i>kain bilai</i> symbolizes the strong bond between the adopted child and the adoptive parents. It is used to carry the adopted child, particularly if the child is still an infant).
8.	Pakaian pesaling (Competitive clothing)	1 stel (1 set)	Melambangkan niat yang sungguh-sungguh dari pihak anak dan mengakui orang tua yang bersangkutan sebagai orang tua angkat. (It symbolizes the sincere intention of the child and the acknowledgment of the relevant individuals as adoptive parents).
9.	Pohon buah/kayu sabang (Sabang fruit tree/wood)	1 pohon sebagai <i>tongkat gayu</i> (tongkat yang terbaik) (1 tree as a <i>gayu</i> stick “the best stick”)	Melambangkan kekokohan ikatan antara anak angkat dengan orang tua. (It symbolizes the solidity of the bond between the adopted child and the adoptive parents).

No	Customary Material	Information	Meaning
10.	<i>Ubung segincil</i> /benang (A single thread)	1 rol benang (1 roll of thread)	Sebagaimana cincin dan kain bilai melambangkan ikatan keluarga, demikian pula <i>ubung segincil</i> juga melambangkan ikatan keluarga yang kuat antara anak angkat dengan orang tua angkat baik dalam <i>be'akuk anak</i> mau pun dalam <i>ngangkat anak</i> ; <i>ubung segincil</i> selalu digunakan. (Just as rings and <i>kain bilai</i> symbolize familial bonds, <i>ubung segincil</i> likewise represents the strong family connection between the adopted child and the adoptive parents, whether in <i>be'akuk anak</i> or <i>ngangkat anak</i> . The <i>ubung segincil</i> is consistently used in these adoption rituals).

Source: Author's analysis of interview data and field observations, corroborated with key informants and relevant literature studies

For the Dayak Desa community, the Tradisi Pengangkatan Anak (Child Adoption Tradition) represents both an effort to safeguard the life of the child and to strengthen familial bonds. Specifically, it serves to protect the child from ongoing illness and prevent potential dangers that threaten their life (*be'akuk anak*), as well as to reinforce kinship ties (*ngangkat anak*). Both *be'akuk anak* and *ngangkat anak* are conducted in accordance with the procedures and customary regulations upheld within Dayak Desa society. As previously discussed, each customary object or material used in these rituals carries significant meaning for the Dayak Desa people.

### Child Adoption Traditions in Relation to Sacred Texts

Every custom practiced within a culture, particularly within Dayak culture, carries meaning and exerts positive effects on the lives of the Dayak people as well as on communal life more broadly. The author summarizes several key aspects that are central to understanding the significance of the child adoption tradition.

### Healing and Health

The Tradisi Pengangkatan Anak, particularly *be'akuk anak*, constitutes a concrete practice aimed at healing. The healing process often involves the adoptive parents taking the initiative to treat the sick child, either through traditional medicine or appropriate pharmaceutical remedies according to the child's illness (Viktori et al., 2020). However, the adoption ritual itself, according to the beliefs of the Dayak Desa community, carries a suggestive or psychosomatic value; thus, when a child is adopted by others with the intention of healing, the child experiences recovery. Consequently, this healing directly contributes to the child's safety and well-being.

In the time of Jesus, it is undeniable that He Himself manifested as a figure endowed with extraordinary healing power. He healed the blind, the mute, the deaf, those afflicted with

leprosy, the paralyzed, and even raised the dead (cf. Matt. 11:5; 12:22; 15:14, 30–31; 20:30; 21:24; Mark 8:22–23; 10:46, 49, 51; 13:35; 14:32; Luke 4:19; 6:39; 7:21–22; 14:13, 21; 18:35; 24:22; John 5:3; 9:1–2, 6, 13, 17–20, 24–25, 32, 39–41; 10:21; 11:37; 12:40; Acts 13:11, et al.,).

There is, indeed, a distinction between the healing performed by Jesus and that associated with the Tradisi Pengangkatan Anak. Jesus healed both physically and spiritually, whereas in the Tradisi Pengangkatan Anak, the healing is primarily physical. Nevertheless, it is not impossible that an individual, after being healed physically, may also pursue spiritual restoration.

### **Love and Brotherhood**

Before the advent of modern medical systems, communities relied exclusively on traditional methods of healing. In the context of the Tradisi Pengangkatan Anak, traditional healing, as far as the author is aware, represents an expression of love. This is because individuals are motivated by affection to undertake a system of care with the hope of preserving the well-being of the affected person, both physiologically and spiritually (Retta et al., 2025).

Moreover, individuals are motivated to express love and fellowship because all humans are created by God with equal essence. As stated in 1 John 4:20: “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar, for whoever does not love the brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” The Apostle Paul also emphasizes that the obligation to demonstrate love toward others has been revealed by God to humanity through His Son, who died on the cross (cf. 1 Tim. 2:16; Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; 5:2; 2 Cor. 14), and is further affirmed throughout the Gospels concerning the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

### **Familial Relations and Fellowship**

H. Khairuddin, in his book *Sosiologi Keluarga*, states that the family constitutes the most important primary group in society (Khairuddin, 2000). This implies that, regardless of its condition, the family represents a distinct and significant organization compared to others because it is characterized by intimate, cooperative, and face-to-face interactions direct, sincere, and profound relationships and by treating members as ends in themselves rather than as means (Khairuddin, 2000).

An ideal family is generally understood as a unit consisting of a father, mother, and child. In reality, however, many married couples are either childless or have only a limited number of children. Such circumstances often create a sense of incompleteness or discomfort, prompting these couples to initiate the adoption of another child to fulfill their familial needs.

The sense of family is profoundly experienced when a married couple is blessed with children, whether biological or adopted children who are formally recognized as their own (i.e., angkat anak abis/penuh). The Church acknowledges that a community of faith begins with the small Church, or “mini-Church,” namely the nuclear family consisting of a father, mother, and child. From this small Church (nuclear family) arises the universal Church, understood as the community of believers in Christ. The marital bond is extended through the presence of children and the wider family. A defining characteristic of this fellowship is living together in accordance with faith and love, accompanied by a willingness to nurture and develop each other’s personal growth.

Another significance of the Child Adoption Tradition among the Dayak Desa community is its function as a means to prevent divorce and adultery for couples who are childless, as customary law permits divorce. In contrast, the teachings of the Church, particularly as expressed in the Holy Scriptures, strictly prohibit divorce and adultery (Peschke, 2003). Jesus' teaching on the prohibition of divorce can be seen in Mark 10:5–9, 1 Corinthians 7:1–16, and Matthew 5:27–28. Mark 10:5–9 states: "Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man separate.'" Similarly, 1 Corinthians 7:11–13 states: "And if she divorces, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. A husband must not divorce his wife. To the rest I say, not the Lord: if a brother has a wife who is not a believer, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer, and he consents to live with her, she must not divorce him."

Meanwhile, the teaching on adultery is explicitly stated in the Old Testament in Exodus 20:14: "You shall not commit adultery." In the New Testament, it is further elaborated in Matthew 5:28–29: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Thus, the Child Adoption Tradition also functions to prevent divorce and adultery among those who are childless. This illustrates a continuity between indigenous traditions and the teachings of the universal Church.

### **Social Structure and Family Roles in the Dayak Desa Traditions**

The social structure of the Dayak Desa community emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals through complex kinship networks. The family is not understood merely as a biological unit but as a moral and spiritual community that upholds social solidarity. Each family member has clearly defined roles in maintaining communal harmony, ensuring the distribution of responsibilities, and preserving traditional values (Kwirinus, 2022b). This system asserts that individual identity is always linked to the broader community, such that social actions including child adoption are guided by principles of inclusivity and by emotional and spiritual bonds among family members.

The role of the family in the Dayak Desa community encompasses economic, social, and religious dimensions. Families serve as sites for value education, resource management, and the preservation of customary rituals that engage multiple generations. Collective activities such as mutual cooperation, deliberation, and traditional celebrations underscore the close interconnection between social functions and the formation of moral identity (Fransiska & Suparno, 2019b). The tradition of child adoption represents a tangible manifestation of how the family operates as an institution that facilitates social cohesion, reinforces solidarity, and channels collective responsibility toward the welfare of younger generations and the sustainability of the community.

In the context of child adoption, the Dayak Desa family demonstrates a unique structural flexibility. Adopted children are treated on equal terms with biological members, acquiring the same rights and responsibilities within the family community (Fransiska & Suparno, 2019a). This practice underscores the principle of inclusivity, expands kinship networks, and

strengthens transgenerational social bonds. Furthermore, child adoption reflects a cosmological perspective in which each individual is considered part of the equilibrium between humans, ancestors, and nature. Consequently, the family functions not only as a social unit but also as a moral and spiritual institution that maintains communal harmony.

The interconnection between social structure and family practices also shapes the cultural dynamics and communal identity of the Dayak Desa. The family, as a social unit, provides a framework for interpreting customary law, making decisions, and preserving holistic familial values. The tradition of child adoption functions as a social instrument that strengthens solidarity, mitigates conflict, and facilitates the social integration of individuals within the community. Thus, the social structure of Dayak Desa families plays a strategic role in maintaining cultural continuity, ensuring balanced social relations, and providing a tangible context for the implementation of incarnational theological values in everyday life.

### **Familial Values as the Foundation for Child Adoption Practices**

Family values in the Dayak Desa community constitute an ethical and social foundation that underpins the practice of child adoption. The family is understood not merely as a biological unit but as a moral institution emphasizing love, responsibility, and solidarity (Retta et al., 2025). Adopted children are fully embraced as members of the family, making the principle of inclusivity a central tenet. This practice demonstrates that familial relationships extend beyond lineage and are grounded in emotional, social, and spiritual bonds, rendering family values a normative basis for community sustainability and the well-being of family members.

Love serves as the principal guiding value in the process of child adoption within the Dayak Desa context. This love is expressed through unconditional acceptance, attention to the child's well-being, and a long-term commitment to their growth and development (Ballano, 2020). By practicing love, families expand their social space and ensure that adopted children feel fully integrated into the community. Love is not solely a personal sentiment but also a collective one, rendering child adoption a tangible manifestation of familial principles that harmoniously connect individuals, families, and the broader community.

In addition to love, the value of responsibility constitutes a practical foundation for child adoption. Families that adopt children assume moral, social, and economic responsibilities for their well-being. These responsibilities encompass education, caregiving, and protection from social or environmental threats. This principle underscores that child adoption is not merely a customary formality but a tangible commitment requiring the active participation of all family members (Ballano, 2020). Consequently, responsibility reinforces social relationships and shapes the child's character in accordance with cultural values and the community's moral norms.

The value of brotherhood also constitutes a crucial foundation in the practice of child adoption. Adopted children are treated on equal terms with biological members, receiving the same rights and obligations within both the family and the broader community. This affirms the principle of inclusivity and expands kinship networks, thereby fostering stronger and more harmonious social relationships. In this context, brotherhood is not only interpersonal but also collective, reinforcing community identity and serving as a medium for transmitting moral, social, and spiritual values across generations.

The value of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) also underpins the practice of child adoption. Adopted children receive support not only from the immediate family but also from the wider community network. Collective participation in caregiving, education, and meeting the child's needs reinforces social bonds and community solidarity. *Gotong royong* demonstrates that family values are holistic, encompassing collective social responsibilities and ensuring that adopted children grow up in a safe, harmonious, and nurturing environment, in alignment with the ethical principles of the Dayak Desa community (Kwirinus, 2022b).

Overall, family values in the Dayak Desa community constitute both a normative and practical framework for child adoption. The values of love, responsibility, brotherhood, and mutual cooperation serve as moral and social foundations guiding the actions of individuals and the community (Loi et al., 2023). The practice of child adoption reflects the internalization of these values in everyday life while simultaneously functioning as a medium for the transmission of cultural and moral norms. Thus, family values are not merely abstract principles but dynamic instruments that reinforce social harmony, community integration, and the manifestation of ethical commitment through concrete acts of care.

### **The Theological Significance of Adoption from the Perspective of Incarnation and Redemption**

The practice of child adoption within the Dayak Desa community constitutes a theological space in which local familial values intersect with the concept of incarnation, understood as God's presence in the human world. Incarnation affirms that God fully enters into human relationships, and in this context, the act of receiving a child from outside the biological lineage serves as a concrete representation of God's universal love. Child adoption demonstrates that familial bonds are not confined to biological ties but are defined by the intention to care for, accept, and love. Thus, this tradition embodies the logic of incarnation, emphasizing God's encounter with humanity through tangible acts of love (Nanthambwe, 2024; Sigurdson, 2016; Wilson, 2021).

The concept of incarnation in Christian theology asserts that God is fully present within human reality, sanctifying every aspect of life, including familial relationships. In the child adoption tradition, the act of embracing a child from outside the nuclear family symbolizes that God's love transcends the boundaries of blood and lineage. Nguyen (2021) emphasizes that the process of cultural inculturation reflects the logic of incarnation, namely the integration of local values with lived faith experiences (Nguyen, 2021). Accordingly, the Dayak Desa child adoption practice becomes an expression that incarnation is not merely a historical event but a reality continually lived out in everyday human relationships.

Theologically, child adoption can be understood as a reflection of adoption theology, in which humans are incorporated into the family of God through the work of Christ. Heim (2020) asserts that incarnation is not only "God becoming human" but also "humans becoming God's family" (Heim, 2024). From this perspective, child adoption is not merely a social act but a cultural sacramental symbol that embodies transcendental acceptance (Nanthambwe, 2024; Wilson, 2021). The familial relationships established through adoption serve as a concrete analogy of God's acceptance of humanity, thereby deepening believers' understanding of their identity as members of the divine family.

The child adoption tradition within the Dayak Desa community is not merely a change in social status but a theological symbolic space that affirms that human relationships need not be determined by biological ties (Daliman, 2024; Endi et al., 2024; Oesterheld, 2016). From the perspective of incarnation, Christ has sanctified the human body along with its social structures, including familial relationships. Accordingly, the practice of child adoption demonstrates how the local community understands love as a reality that transcends bloodlines. This tradition challenges exclusive views of the family and opens new insights, suggesting that every act of acceptance reflects human participation in God's salvific work (Dollahite et al., 2019; Johnson, 2025).

Within Dayak Desa culture, an adopted child is treated as a full member of the family, possessing rights and responsibilities equal to those of biological children. This reflects values of love, responsibility, and solidarity that bind all family members. Theologically, this equality mirrors Christ's action in expanding God's family without distinction of human status. Child adoption thus becomes a profoundly meaningful act, demonstrating that human acceptance within the family is not merely a social function but part of the dynamic of incarnation, in which God encounters humanity through relationships of love cultivated in concrete daily life.

An interpretation employing Stephen Bevans' anthropological model emphasizes that culture serves as a "locus of revelation," a space in which God manifests through human cultural symbols and practices. In this context, the Dayak Desa child adoption tradition can be understood as a manifestation of God's love working through local social structures. Child adoption not only reflects cultural values but also expresses the logic of faith articulated within community life. Bevans' model illuminates how faith and culture do not operate separately but mutually interpret and enrich one another.

Recent literature, such as Ballano (2020), emphasizes that inculturation is an extension of the logic of incarnation, wherein God's presence takes form within concrete culture (Ballano, 2020). Accordingly, child adoption within the Dayak Desa community represents both a cultural expression and an expression of faith. This practice demonstrates that God's love becomes tangible when enacted through the acceptance of a child and the formation of new familial relationships. The process reveals the alignment between cultural action and Gospel teaching, allowing local traditions to be read as a "theological text" that discloses God's identity as love.

Child adoption connects two major dimensions: local familial values and Christian teachings on the divine family. The tradition demonstrates how the Dayak Desa community embodies values of love, acceptance, and responsibility in accordance with the principles of incarnation. This practice is not merely a cultural phenomenon but a theological reflective medium that enriches believers' understanding of the family as a faith community. When culture and faith intersect, child adoption becomes a tangible space in which the dynamics of incarnation are enacted through transformative acts of love.

Child adoption can also be understood within the framework of redemption, namely the work of Christ in restoring and reconciling humanity with God. The process of welcoming a child into a new family reflects the dynamics of relational restoration offered by redemption. When a child is granted space, identity, and dignity within the family, it symbolizes God's action in renewing human conditions. In the Dayak Desa community, this meaning is realized

concretely, making child adoption a symbol of social healing and reconciliation aligned with the redemptive mission.

Redemption in Christian tradition emphasizes the transformation of human status from alienation to acceptance as children of God. The child adoption tradition provides a concrete analogy of this status change. Within Dayak Desa culture, an adopted child is not only socially accepted but also restored in dignity through customary rites and symbols. This change of status reflects God's redemptive action toward humanity. Therefore, child adoption can be understood as a form of cultural participation in the ongoing work of redemption in everyday life.

The dimension of redemption is also evident in the relationship between adoptive parents and the adopted child. This relationship is built upon love, sacrifice, and a commitment to care. In Christian theology, redemption requires an active response in the form of loving action. Accordingly, child adoption becomes a participatory act in the work of redemption, as it restores relational order in a just and loving manner. This tradition demonstrates that redemptive values are not merely understood dogmatically but are lived through social practices that reinforce mutually restorative human relationships (Widyawati et al., 2025).

Through the perspectives of incarnation and redemption, child adoption can be understood as a space of encounter between the divine and the human. In the Dayak Desa community, the relationship between the child and the adoptive family reflects God's action in entering human life and offering renewal. This tradition demonstrates that God's love operates through simple acts, such as welcoming a child into the family (Fransiska & Suparno, 2019a). At the same time, child adoption affirms that redemption is not merely an abstract concept but a reality realized through the restoration of human relationships in everyday life.

Incarnation and redemption possess strong symbolic dimensions within the child adoption tradition. The presentation of customary symbols and the rites of acceptance mark the transformation of the child's identity, analogous to how baptism signifies human identity as a child of God. This relationship illustrates that local culture provides symbols aligned with Christian theology. In the context of the Dayak Desa, customary symbols function as theological signs that convey acceptance, protection, and new status. This enriches the understanding that theological signs can emerge from the living socio-cultural dynamics of a community.

From a pastoral perspective, child adoption reflects a preferential concern for the vulnerable. The act of welcoming a child into a family represents a concrete implementation of incarnational love and redemption, providing space for the continuation of life (Retta et al., 2025). These values are highly relevant to the mission of the Church, which is called to manifest the Kingdom of God through acts of compassion. Through this tradition, the Dayak Desa community demonstrates an intuitive understanding of healing love. Thus, child adoption constitutes an important contribution of local culture to universal theological reflection on responsibility toward others.

The child adoption tradition also embodies a communitarian dimension that reinforces the theological understanding of the Church as the family of God's people. Child adoption demonstrates that the community holds a collective responsibility in shaping relational identities with dignity (Fransiska & Suparno, 2019a). Theologically, the community functions as a space for nurturing faith and relationships of love. The cultural practice of the Dayak Desa concretely affirms this dimension. Thus, the theological significance of child adoption is not

confined to the relationship between the individual child and the family but extends to the entire social network that sustains communal life.

Viewed through Stephen Bevans' anthropological model, incarnation and redemption are concepts that take shape in the rituals, relationships, and concrete actions of the Dayak Desa community. Culture is not merely a context but a structure of meaning that enables the lived experience of revelation. Child adoption becomes a theological locus where faith finds a contextual and relevant expression. Thus, this tradition demonstrates how God works through cultural dynamics and how culture provides a space for believers to experience salvation concretely through relationships of love.

The theological significance of child adoption from the perspectives of incarnation and redemption reveals that this tradition is a concrete expression of God's love that transcends biological boundaries. The act of welcoming a child into the family serves as a sign that incarnation and redemption continue to unfold in human life. Dayak Desa child adoption bears witness to the capacity of local culture to serve as a medium for deepening the understanding of faith. Thus, this tradition enriches family theology and demonstrates that cultural practices can constitute tangible participation in God's salvific work.

### **A Theological Reflection on the Tradition of Adoption**

Theological reflection on the child adoption tradition is necessary to uncover the religious values embedded within this cultural practice. A tradition becomes meaningful when critically reflected upon and placed in dialogue with Church teachings. After examining the anthropological aspects of child adoption and the significance of the sacrament of baptism, theological analysis can be conducted using a parallelistic approach that compares the two. Although theological reflection on culture is challenging due to methodological demands and contextual sensitivities, such efforts open a space for new understanding of how God operates in human history through cultural symbols and rituals (Retta et al., 2025).

This reflective model positions the child adoption tradition as an anthropological locus that can be interpreted theologically. Within the Dayak Desa tradition, child adoption not only addresses social needs but also shapes identity, responsibility, and familial relationships. From the Church's perspective, the sacrament of baptism serves a similar purpose: forming an individual's spiritual identity and incorporating them into the Christian fellowship. When these two realities are placed in dialogue, theological reflection enables the integration of local cultural structures with the theological frameworks taught by the Church, resulting in a more contextual understanding.

The first dimension of the parallelistic reflection is the concept of being "raised as a child." In the Dayak Desa tradition, child adoption involves efforts to meet both the physiological and spiritual needs of the child. Adoptive parents bear full responsibility for the child's sustenance and moral development. The status of an adopted child is also equal to that of biological children, including inheritance rights. This reflects the equal dignity of all human beings as God's creatures. This dimension provides an anthropological foundation for understanding God's action in the sacrament of baptism as a spiritual adoption into the divine family.

In the Church, baptism marks an individual as a son or daughter of God. The relational pattern of Christ with the Father and the Holy Spirit is extended to the baptized, establishing a

new relational identity. Through baptism, one enters into the fellowship of the Trinity and receives a new identity as a child of God (Martasudjita, 2021). The letters to the Romans and Galatians affirm that believers become co-heirs with Christ. This perspective allows for the understanding that the child adoption tradition, while anthropological in nature, possesses a strong theological parallel with baptism, which restores and affirms human identity.

The dimension of healing is also an important aspect of the Dayak Desa child adoption tradition. Practices such as *be'akuk* are performed to obtain *rasi* or physical healing for the child. Adoption acts as a means of restoration encompassing both bodily health and overall well-being. Theologically, this healing dimension parallels the significance of the sacrament of baptism, which grants the forgiveness of sins as a form of spiritual healing. Through baptism, individuals are freed from original sin and personal sins, making restoration in the human person comprehensive, encompassing moral and spiritual dimensions.

The New Testament emphasizes that baptism is closely associated with the forgiveness of sins and the renewal of life. The letters to the Colossians and Romans state that baptism removes the “body of sin” and puts to death the old self. This demonstrates that baptism possesses profound transformative power. Its parallel with *be'akuk* in the Dayak Desa tradition shows that, despite differing contexts and theological intentions, both practices express the dynamics of healing. This reflection indicates that local culture provides symbols that can assist believers in understanding the healing dimension proclaimed by the Church.

The third dimension is being united within a single family. In Dayak Desa culture, child adoption integrates a child into a new family that functions as both a social and spiritual unit. The adopted child acquires roles, responsibilities, and life experiences within the family fellowship. The Church refers to the family as a “miniature Church,” where values of faith, morality, and solidarity are cultivated. Therefore, familial relationships in the child adoption tradition provide a concrete analogy for understanding the Church’s fellowship, which is established through the sacrament of baptism.

The sacrament of baptism involves two interrelated ecclesiological movements. First, an individual is formally accepted as a member of the Church, with rights and responsibilities as part of the faith community. Second, the Church is present and grows within the individual through the internalization of teachings, liturgy, and practices of faithful living. Martasudjita (2003) asserts that these two movements constitute a single, inseparable reality. In cultural reflection, this dynamic parallels the child adoption process, which not only formally welcomes the child but also shapes them within the life of the family (Martasudjita, 2003).

God’s role is central in the theological reflection on baptism. Baptism is an act of grace in which the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon humanity as a divine gift. This grace is freely given through God’s mercy (Darmawijaya, 2010). Pauline letters affirm that God desires the salvation of all people. Accordingly, spiritual adoption through baptism constitutes an act of salvation rooted in divine initiative. This reflection helps interpret the spiritual dimension of the child adoption tradition as humanity’s participation in the broader grace of salvation.

The Holy Spirit, as the distinctive gift of baptism, affirms that humans are not only accepted but also profoundly transformed. Baptism endows individuals with spiritual power to live a new life according to God’s will. In a cultural context, this reflection shows that the process of child adoption does not end with formal acceptance but extends to the moral and

spiritual guidance provided by adoptive parents. Thus, the transformational dimension present in baptism can be analogically read within the relational structure of the Dayak Desa family.

The role of adoptive parents occupies a central position in the child adoption tradition. They are responsible for the physical, moral, and spiritual needs of the adopted child. This responsibility extends beyond mere well-being to the formation of character. Theologically, this role parallels that of godparents in the Church, who accompany the faith development of the baptized child. Both roles demonstrate that personal formation requires strong relational guidance, whether in cultural or religious contexts.

Godparents are required to meet specific criteria as stipulated in the Code of Canon Law (CIC 874). Requirements such as readiness to assume the role, sufficient maturity, living in accordance with the Catholic faith, and being free from canonical penalties underscore the importance of moral and spiritual integrity. Their function as spiritual guides demonstrates that the sacrament of baptism not only unites the individual with the Church but also necessitates community support. This pastoral structure enriches the understanding of the role of adoptive parents as mentoring figures who shape the development of the child.

The role of godparents also encompasses educational and moral functions. They are responsible for assisting the child in developing faith and responding responsibly to God's grace. They represent the believing community that receives and accompanies the child. Theologically, this mentorship structure demonstrates that the Church places personal relationships at the center of faith formation. The parallel with the role of adoptive parents shows that, whether in cultural or ecclesial contexts, a child's development is not shaped individually but through a pedagogical and supportive relational network.

The parallelism between the child adoption tradition and the sacrament of baptism opens new theological insights into how local culture expresses values consistent with Christian faith. Child adoption embodies meanings of acceptance, healing, unity, and accompaniment four dimensions that also lie at the core of baptismal theology. Thus, theological reflection is not intended to equate the two absolutely but to highlight the alignment of values connecting culture and faith. Through this approach, inculturation becomes a dialogical and creative process that enriches the Church.

The theological reflection on the child adoption tradition demonstrates that Dayak Desa culture provides symbols and relational structures that enable a deep understanding of incarnation, redemption, and baptism. This tradition becomes a space in which the values of acceptance, healing, unity, and accompaniment are concretely manifested. When placed in dialogue with Church teachings, the tradition is not merely an anthropological reality but also a theological locus that helps believers understand how God works through culture. Thus, this parallelistic reflection enriches contextual theology and broadens the horizon of faith comprehension.

## CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the *Dayak Desa* Child Adoption Tradition represents a culturally rich phenomenon, ideally analyzed through Stephen Bevans' anthropological model, which positions culture as a dynamic locus of human experience and divine revelation. The tradition's social, symbolic, and spiritual functions—embodying healing, love, fraternity, and family formation—align with cultural anthropology and contextual theology, serving as a concrete

disclosure of God's grace. Theological reflection reveals parallels with the sacrament of baptism, such as elevating individuals from marginality to full familial membership (*Be'akuk* healing mirroring sin forgiveness) and integrating newcomers into community, though distinct in form and matter, thus fostering contextual theological insights without liturgical incorporation. Ultimately, the tradition enriches culture-faith dialogue, converging on healing, acceptance, and fellowship, while emphasizing cautious discernment of historical, biblical, theological, and pastoral dimensions by Church authorities. For future research, scholars could empirically investigate how this tradition evolves amid globalization and interfaith interactions, potentially integrating longitudinal ethnographic data to assess its adaptability in hybrid Christian-Dayak contexts.

## REFERENCES

- Wilson, B. E. (2021). *The Embodied God: Seeing the Divine in Luke-Acts and the Early Church*.
- Ballano, V. (2020). Inculturation, anthropology, and the empirical dimension of evangelization. *Religions*, 11(101), 1–15.
- Basas, A. A. (2020). Inculturation: An ongoing drama of faith–culture dialogue. *Scientia*, 9(1), 92–108.
- Daliman, M. (2024). *Discipling the Dayak people in Kalimantan, Indonesia*. Fortress Press EBooks.
- Dollahite, D., Marks, L., & Wurm, G. (2019). Generative devotion: A theory of sacred relational care in families of faith. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*.
- Endi, Y., Ranubaya, F. A., & Watu, C. (2024). Pesaguan Dayak Kanjan Serayong custom: The relationship between Catholic faith and culture. *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies*.
- Fransiska, & Suparno. (2019a). Metode penanaman nilai budaya dalam pengasuhan anak usia dini pada keluarga Dayak Desa. *Vox Edukasi: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 10(2), 111–119.
- Fransiska, & Suparno. (2019b). Pengasuhan anak usia dini pada keluarga Dayak Desa di Rumah Betang Ensaed Panjang. *Jurnal Golden Age Hamzanwadi University*, 3(2), 95–106.
- Heim, E. M. (2024). Pauline adoption and T. F. Torrance's doctrine of the incarnation. *Biblical Studies*, 8(2), 91–111.
- Johnson, A. J. (2025). Faith alone is essential for salvation. *International Journal of Scientific Research and Management*.
- Kwirinus, D. (2022a). Imanensi dan transendensi Petara Raja Juwata sebagai wujud tertinggi orang Dayak Desa Kalimantan Barat. *Perspektif: Jurnal Agama dan Kebudayaan*, 17(2), 91–113.
- Kwirinus, D. (2022b). Prosesi perkawinan adat pada suku Dayak Desa di Sekadau Kalimantan Barat. *Balale': Jurnal Antropologi*, 3(2), 115–132.
- Loi, A., Kwirinus, D., & Peri, H. (2023). The concept of “Huma Betang” as a model of the values of the philosophy of life of the Dayak community in Central Kalimantan. *Jurnal Pendidikan Sosiologi dan Humaniora*, 14(2), 219. <https://doi.org/10.26418/j-psh.v14i2.64914>
- Martasudjita, E. (2021). *Teologi inkulturasi: Perayaan Injil Yesus Kristus di bumi Indonesia*. Kanisius.
- Nanthambwe, P. (2024). Embodied grace: The implications of the incarnation to public practical theology in Sub-Saharan Africa. *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies*.
- Nguyen, H. T. (2021). A brief theology of inculturation: A pastoral method to understand and ease the generational tension between Vietnamese immigrants and their U.S.-born children. *The Student Journal of Theological Studies*, 4(1).

<https://doi.org/10.15365/sst.2021.5854>

- Nyaming, F. G. (2020). *Tradisi Beduruk suku Dayak Desa: Harmonisasi antara Tuhan, manusia, dan alam*. Penerbit Sekaban.
- Oesterheld, C. (2016). (Un)becoming Dayak: Inter-marriage and the dynamics of identity and belonging in East Kalimantan. *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*.
- Retta, R., Sinaga, T., Saimima, J. R., & Ruhlessin, J. C. (2025). Theology of Badati: A constructive contextual theology in Hutumury society according to Stephen B. Bevans. *Evangelika: Jurnal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat*, 9(1), 120–138.
- Rianawati, Fuadi, A., Dulhadi, Muttaqin, I., Khairawati, & Yapandi. (2024). Preservation of tolerance values of the Dayak tribe Hulu Ketapang District, West Kalimantan. *Arfannur: Journal of Islamic Education*, 5(72), 203–215.
- Sigurdson, O. (2016). *Heavenly bodies: Incarnation, the gaze, and embodiment in Christian theology*.
- Viktori, V., Wokal, B., Rovensius, D., & Kwirinus, D. (2020). Gereja dan ritual tolak bala dalam masyarakat Dayak. *Perspektif: Jurnal Agama dan Kebudayaan*, 15(2), 159–167.
- Widyawati, F., Lon, Y. S., & Midun, H. (2025). Mission and inculturation: Preserving local language and culture in the Indonesian church. *Theological Studies*, 5(2), 1–10.
- Wilson, B. E. (2021). *The embodied God: Seeing the divine in Luke-Acts and the early church*.