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Christian Morals in the *Bura Su'a* Ritual of Ngada, Flores, Indonesia

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Article History	Abstract
Received January 25, 2025	<i>Bura su'a is a special ritual performed by the Ngada people in Eastern Indonesia in their main traditional house (Sa'o Ngaza) on the eve of their traditional New Year celebration called Reba. This ritual aims not only to pass on the heritage of their ancestors and important traditional moral values, but also to affirm the existence and identity of the clan. This article aims to examine the moral messages conveyed in the Bura su'a ritual from a Christian moral perspective. Using a descriptive, qualitative, interactive analysis approach and contextual theology methods, the authors will examine this theme in three parts. First, they will discuss research studies of the su'a and the Bura su'a ritual, as well as the symbols and expressions used in it. Second, the authors will examine the Bura su'a ritual from a Christian moral perspective. Here, the authors will compare the messages in the Bura su'a ritual with certain concepts in Christian moral theology. Third, the authors will recommend efforts to ensure the preservation of this ritual in Ngada culture and to concretize the moral message of living together in the digital age. The authors found that the Bura su'a ritual contains Christian moral values, namely, first, respect for God, ancestors, fellow human beings, and nature; second, parental responsibility in educating children and concern for the weakest and poorest in the community; and third, the formation of a morally integrated personality based on biblical and theological virtues of courage, honesty, perseverance, and justice.</i>
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INTRODUCTION

Every society and culture has several special rituals to pass down and to instill

moral values that are essential for the lives of its members, both as individuals and as a

collective (Kardana et al. 2022). Moral values are handed down not only for personal moral growth but also for the sake of harmonious living together to maintain and sustain the community and its culture (Tang and Rahim 2019). In most traditional societies, the task of transmitting moral values to their members is the responsibility of community leaders. In the context of Indonesian people's lives in the modern era, however, this task is often placed more heavily on educational institutions (Magezi and Madimutsa 2023). Whereas, the responsibility for transmitting moral values has involved various parties (Rinenggo and Kusdarini 2021). However, Atasoge and Sihombing (2022) explained that long before the arrival of Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, Indonesians had possessed local values that were useful for upholding their community life.

Like most Indonesian tribal societies, the Ngadanese in East Nusa Tenggara have many ancestral rituals to instill moral values into their members. Among these rituals is *bura su'a* (*bura*= spitting with saliva mixed with betelnut; *su'a*= sacred digging stick), which affirms the inseparable bond between the Ngadanese and their ancestors (Madu et al. 2024). This ritual is carried out in each traditional house (*sa'o ngaza*), as one part of the overall ritual of *su'i uwi* (*su'i* = cutting; *uwi*= a kind of tuber) during the traditional New Year celebration of the *reba* feast (Setyawan and Dopo 2020). At this feast, the Ngadanese celebrate and express gratitude for their lives of togetherness (Nae Soi et al. 2024).

With *su'a* as its central focus, the ritual of *bura su'a* must be performed in the traditional house (*sa'o ngaza*) and in the presence of tribal members or residents of the traditional house who have gathered for the *reba* celebration. Together, they re-commit to accepting ancestral moral teaching and inheritance as mandated in the *bura su'a* ritual. According to the Ngada

philosophy, this kind of togetherness is what makes it possible to live and to work together in a community (Pollock 2021). Indeed, one of the most significant elements found in the ritual of *bura su'a* is that the statement of willingness to accept the inheritance and teachings of the ancestors is not only stated communally but also stated personally and explicitly. Each participant who takes part in the ritual will receive the *su'a*, which is circulated, and will express in a clear and loud voice: '*subu su'a*'. This exclamation is associated with openness, as seen in the expression '*moe aze da peti subu*' (like a rope woven into a knot that is easy to open). It is a solemn and sacred promise to be open to receiving advice, input, criticism, or change. Thus, the ritual of *bura su'a* for the Ngada people can be categorized as a sacred and solemn moment.

This article seeks to examine specifically the moral messages of ancestral heritage, which are re-enacted by the ritual leader of the *bura su'a*. Before the *su'a* is circulated to all members of the tribe or the inhabitants of the traditional house (*sa'o ngaza*) present, the leader will invoke the 'memory' of the origin and owner of their *su'a*, which is none other than the ancestors of the inhabitants of the traditional house (*sa'o ngaza*). Following that, the leader explains the meaning of *su'a* and what must be derived from the ancestors for future generations to live in the traditional house (*sa'o ngaza*). There are two main points. Firstly, all tribal members and residents of traditional houses (*sa'o ngaza*) must be enlightened and encouraged to always understand and implement ancestral moral messages in their daily lives. Secondly, a request is made to the ancestors to support and to accompany every member of the tribe in his or her future journey.

At the same time, many Ngadanese are also Roman Catholic Christians. These two facets of Ngadanese identity, ancestral and Christian, have coexisted alongside of

one another for over a century, providing a remarkably stable religious, cultural, and moral framework for Ngada society, but with little popular reflection on how they may or may not be compatible. Therefore, the main question of this research is how to bring into dialogue the moral messages in the *bura su'a* ritual and Christian moral teachings. Today, however, rapid economic, technological, and educational changes threaten to erode both the ancestral and the Christian facets of Ngadanese identity, and while these changes bring some material benefits, they also have harmful effects on persons and communities. The authors believe that a more explicit and intentional effort to relate the ancestral traditions with Christian beliefs and morals will help enrich and strengthen both aspects of Ngadanese identity, and ultimately to support the continued flourishing of Ngada society in the midst of rapid change.

The authors have chosen to undertake such a dialogue by examining one important ancestral ritual, the *bura su'a*. After describing the ritual, the authors will examine closely the moral messages which the ritual conveys. Then the authors will compare these moral messages with concepts from Christian moral tradition. This comparison has two purposes: it aims to affirm the values of local wisdom already embodied in the ritual of *bura su'a*; conversely, it also aims to affirm and to contextualize Christian moral values within the Ngada community, forming a contribution to the ongoing development of Christian moral theology as the faith that the Ngada people have embraced (Lina et al. 2023). Thus, the rite of *bura su'a* can be appreciated and supported by Christian believers, and the practice of culture and faith or religion can be equally understood and practically lived, not to be seen as two contradictory things (Delehanty 2020).

Literature Review

Studies on the local wisdom of the Ngada people from a Christian perspective have been carried out by some researchers. For instance, Yohanes Vianey Watu conducted research into the contribution of the Ngada people's 'counting game' in strengthening of character formation. By utilizing the theory of oral tradition and neodiffusionism, Watu attempted to examine the oral tradition as social memory and the spread of values of this oral tradition in a wider context through interactions with new values from outside. Watu concluded that 'counting games' in the Ngada community also contributed to the development of Christian spirituality and the development of one's personality (Watu 2020).

In addition, Paskalis Lina and Raymundus I Made Sudhiarsa researched the Christian moral values behind the figurative carvings of the Ngada people's traditional house (*sa'o ngaza*). Using a contextual theological approach and qualitative research they found that the figurative carvings on the *sa'o ngaza* also carry Christian moral messages that can be lived in life, such as wisdom, protective leadership, diligent work, and discipline (Lina and Sudhiarsa 2022b).

Lina and Sudhiarsa also researched the ritual of tragic death of the Ngada people called *mata golo* and the importance of the rite of *ke'o rado* (rite of reconciliation) and linked it to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. By using a semiotic approach, they found common ground and points of difference that can be a guide for the Ngada people in responding to the experience of the tragic deaths of their family members (Lina and Sudhiarsa 2022a).

Margareta Dhiu conducted research on the role of *pata dela* (ancestral sayings) in developing and shaping the character of the Ngada people. Using purposive sampling techniques and in-depth

interviews with informants, the researcher found that *pata dela's* speech contains values that specify obligations and prohibitions that intend to educate individuals to behave well (*modhe*), right (*molo*), beautiful-clean (*bila*), and holy (*milo*), which presents the character education values of discipline, tolerance, hard work, creativity, independence, unity, cooperation, humility, respect for the rights of others, responsibility, frugality, care for others, and care for the environment (Dhiu 2022).

The latest research on the interaction of the Ngada culture and Christian faith was conducted by Yohanes Vianey Watu. In his research, Vianey Watu delves into the intricate cultural and theological dimensions of the Ngadha people, highlighting their unique naming conventions as reflections of their beliefs and social structures. Vianey Watu explores the interplay between culture and religion within the framework of the local church, asserting the importance of inculturation and cultural dialogue in religious practices (Watu 2024).

Based on the literature above, the authors explore the values of local wisdom of the Ngada people - in East Nusa Tenggara, Eastern Indonesia, specifically in the ritual of *bura su'a*. To the authors' knowledge, the novel values in this *bura su'a* ritual have never been explored or studied, especially in their correlation with Christian moral values. The authors believe that the Ngada people, who are mostly Catholic, on the one hand, need to investigate their values and cultural repertoire and engage in dialogue with Christian moral teachings. On the other hand, this effort can be understood as a contextualization of Christian moral values in the Ngada culture so that they are stronger, actual, and have an impact on communal life or become a kind of civic skill for the Ngada people (Ariani et al. 2022).

The authors note that the *bura su'a* ritual is also a method of contextualizing Christian moral values for the Ngada people.

This paper will focus on two main parts. Firstly, the authors will focus on *su'a* and the ritual of *bura su'a*. Here the authors describe the meaning of *su'a* and the ritual of *bura su'a* along with the moral values contained in it. Secondly, the authors examine the moral values contained in this *bura su'a* ritual from the perspective of Christian moral teachings as a method of contextualizing Christian moral values with recommendations for concretization in real life.

Conceptual Framework

The framework used in this paper is that of contextual theology as articulated by Stephen Bevans, that is, the effort to understand the local culture and context as a means of proclaiming the Christian faith.

Bevans as quoted by Situmorang argues that there is no such thing as theology in a vacuum; there are only contextual theologies, such as feminist theology, black theology, and liberation theology. Contextual theology, therefore, is not an option (Simatupang 2023). Thus, the attempt to read and to interpret the ritual of *bura su'a*, its symbols, and its language is a theological imperative. Moreover, points of correlation among *bura su'a* and the Christian moral tradition can be identified. Such correlations can enable the Christian moral tradition to be brought into dialogue with the context of local cultural beliefs. This is because, long before the arrival of the Catholic Church, Ngada people had already possessed moral values that were useful for their community life.

From the perspective of contextual theology, every experience has a very deep meaning. Contextual theology seeks to interpret every life experience as a reference for constructing Christian faith and morals. Of course, this kind of effort is imperative,

so that faith and moral action as a Christian are not taken for granted as something that is indoctrinated from the outside – from the perspective of western theology – but instead are built from the local context, from the experience of everyday life. One of the relevant contextual theological models in building local theology related to the objectives of this research and writing is the synthesis model. According to Bevans, this model is a middle ground that combines three models, namely, the translation model, the anthropological model, and the praxis model.

As further explained by Martasudjita, the translation model seeks to maintain the importance of evangelization and the inherited Christian doctrine and faith while still creating space for reflection on the local socio-cultural context (anthropological model), as well as the need for real action in building a social, cultural and community revolution based on internalized values (praxis model) (Martasudjita 2021). This theory inspired the authors to build a Christian moral study in the context of the *bura su'a* ritual. This study will be used as a model for translating Christian moral values. This notion is in line with Noorbani et al. (2022) that religion and local wisdom that co-evolve in the community can become social capital for community development.

The above description further confirms that the synthesis model used in this research is a dialectical method or dialogical model, and a bilingual model. Christian moral values are brought into dialogue with local cultural values to seek the development of views that can be accommodated and welcomed by both parties. Christian faith no longer stands in a superior or higher position, but instead collaborates with cultural treasures and is increasingly rooted in the context of the lives of believers. As cited by Bevans described such an approach as "a continuous dialogue between faith and

culture or cultures, a creative and dynamic relationship between Christian proclamation and culture or cultures" (Bevans 1985).

To achieve the above objectives, the ritual of the *bura su'a* which is full of symbols must be read and re-analyzed, giving contextual meaning to the life of the Ngada people today. The first symbol, according to Bruce-Mitford et al. (2008) is something that reminds humans of their connection with the created world (cosmos). But symbols must be distinguished from signs. For example, a sign can be a visible message that reminds someone of something. Signs convey a simple message that is immediately relevant to the current situation, while the symbol is more of an image or visual sign that represents a particular idea and points to a more universal truth. Fire or the sun, for example, refers to the masculine power that surrounds humans, while the earth is a feminine symbol, a symbol of motherhood, the source of life. When viewed in the light of symbols, human life becomes more enriched and meaningful (Bruce-Mitford et al. 2008).

RESEARCH METHOD

The present research into the *bura su'a* ritual of the Ngada people, Flores, used descriptive qualitative research methods (Fadli 2021). The application of descriptive qualitative research methods aims to explore the meaning contained in the practices and objects of research. The author utilizes a descriptive analysis model in this research, so that the moral meaning contained in the *bura su'a* ritual can be examined essentially and brought into dialogue with Christian moral teachings. For this purpose, the author uses the contextual theology approach (Bevans 1985), in which theology does not stand as a ready-made theory, but rather as a result of the construction of values and facts that

have been lived by the people of Ngada, Flores. Contextual theology in the Christian moral perspective means observing and listening to the context of people's real lives and struggles, so as to provide moral guidance that is relevant and effective for the growth of faith. The contextual theology approach explores moral values in cultural practices that are believed to be signs of God's presence (Whyte 2023).

Data were collected through direct observation and documentation of the *bura su'a* ritual and in-depth interviews with informants. The location of this research is Dadawea Village, Golewa Sub-district, Ngada Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. The author utilized a snowball sampling strategy with the intention of keeping the informants focused on the research question, namely what are the Christian moral values behind the *bura su'a* ritual? For this purpose, the author conducted in-depth interviews with six key informants, namely the traditional leader (*mosalaki*) of the Tiko and Dumi clan (Mr. T and Mr. M), members of the Dumi clan involved in the *bura su'a* ritual (Mr. S and Mrs. G), members representing the younger generation and male groups (Mr. A), and members from the children/young people and female groups (Mrs. Y).

The authors began by conducting interviews with the tribal leaders (*mosalaki*), Mr. T and Mr. M, who are responsible for leading the *bura su'a* ritual in January 2024. Furthermore, in January 2024 the author interviewed Mr. S (65 years old) and Mrs. G (59 years old) who came from the Dumi clan and participated in the *bura su'a* ritual. In January 2024 the author interviewed representatives of the younger generation and teenager to confirm the understanding of moral values in the *bura su'a* ritual as found in the previous interviews with their life experiences. Finally, the author conducted another in-depth interview with all interviewees while participating for the second time in the *bura*

su'a ritual on January 02, 2025. The second research process ended with a focused group discussion (FGD) on the meaning of the *bura su'a* ritual and the Christian moral values contained in it. As a result, several important themes were found, namely, the meaning and role of *su'a* in Ngada culture, the process of implementing the *bura su'a* ritual, the symbols contained in it, and its meaning from a Christian moral perspective.

To support the accuracy of the research data, the author made written documentation and video recordings. The documentation was done after obtaining verbal consent from the informants. The data obtained were then analyzed using the interactive analysis method with a measurable process, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Guetterman and James 2023). In accordance with the research questions, the data were structured while being brought into dialogue with a Christian moral perspective. These efforts were made to achieve the purpose of this research, which is to find Christian moral values in the *bura su'a* ritual of the Ngada people, Flores. Valid and accurate data strengthen the author's conclusion that the Ngada people of Flores have lived the Christian moral values in the *bura su'a* ritual. Therefore, the *bura su'a* ritual needs to be preserved for future generations as a process of strengthening Christian character and faith. The findings outlined in this paper have been tested for validity through data triangulation and informant reviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

***Su'a*: Its Function and Meaning for the Existence of Ngada People**

In Ngada culture, the *su'a* is a sacred digging stick made from a special stiff reed, which in the local language is called '*guru*.' This stiff reed will be sharpened at the top

and then placed transversely on the *mataraga* of a traditional house (*sa'o ngaza*). *Mataraga* is the central part of the traditional house (*sa'o ngaza*) and the place where a leader in the clan or traditional house sits and presides over the ritual ceremony. According to the informants, in ancient times, the ancestors used this *su'a* as a staff when working in the fields, and as a key for the entrance to traditional houses (*sa'o ngaza*). Dhogo (2009) said that *su'a* also has several special meanings for the Ngada people.

Firstly, the *su'a* affirms the existence of a traditional house as the main house (*sa'o pu'u*). In Ngada culture, the *sa'o pu'u* or main house is the initial house that is the origin of the clan of each *sa'o*. The *su'a* given is a symbol of power or authority or the right to a certain inheritance. With *su'a* each member of the traditional house has broad authority to regulate customary affairs in the *sa'o* concerned.

Secondly, the *su'a* is a symbol of fellowship or unity. The *su'a* is made from a type of reed, similar to the Spanish reed, which is called *guru*. In addition to being used for *su'a*, *guru* is used as a pillar for the growth of *uwi*. This *uwi* is dug up and used in the *Reba* celebration, which is held every year. *Uwi* must grow and propagate through the *guru* (reeds) that has been planted, to produce abundant yields. If *uwi* does not follow the pillar that serves as its guide, it will cease to develop. Thus, the Ngada draw a lesson from this to name people who are stubborn and do not obey the laws and norms that apply in the community with the phrase '*moe uwi bau ladu*' (like *uwi* that does not follow the pillars). From this, it is clear that the *su'a* made by the *guru* is a symbol of unity. *Uwi* grows in harmony with the pillars. *Su'a* reminds all members of the clan and traditional houses always to uphold unity and integrity.

Third, *su'a* refers to the solidity of the teachings of the ancestors. In the *bura su'a*

ritual, the teachings will be repeated so that all members of the clan and traditional houses can understand and live them in everyday life. Noble teachings should not be wasted by members of a clan and traditional houses. The firmness and coherence of the teachings of the ancestors are symbolized in a dense and solid *su'a* (made of *guru*). Just as the *guru* continues to grow and to survive throughout the year and throughout the seasons, so the teachings of the ancestors must be preserved by their descendants throughout the ages. Times may change, but the teachings of the ancestors must remain solid, and firmly held to be the rule of life for their future generations (Dhogo 2009).

***Bura Su'a* Ritual: Materials, Place - Time of Implementation, Taboos, and Ritual Procedures**

Materials that need to be prepared

Several main tools are required for the performance of *bura su'a*. Firstly, the *su'a*. The ritual of *bura su'a* requires the leader to hold the *su'a* in his hand. Since this ritual cannot be performed without a *su'a*, the leader must ensure that the *su'a* used is appropriately placed in the *mataraga* of the traditional house. Secondly, betel (*nata*), areca nuts (*heu*), and lime (*oka*) are placed in the *beka*. All these materials must be prepared before the ritual of *bura su'a* begins. The ritual leader then eats the betel nuts, areca nuts, and lime until they are liquid red. This color will be sprayed three times on the *su'a* to mark the start of the ritual of *bura su'a*, which means *bura* (spitting) *su'a*. The red *su'a* that has been sprayed is then circulated to every member of the clan and traditional house who are present.

Figure 1. Materials used for *bura su'a* rituals (*su'a*, betel, areca nuts and lime in the *beka*)



Sources: Personal Documentation

Place, Time of Implementation, and Taboo

As explained earlier, the ritual of *bura su'a* is part of the Ngada people's *reba* (new year) celebration which usually lasts for three days. The *bura su'a* ritual itself is carried out on the second night in a traditional house (*sa'o ngaza*). According to informants, the ceremony is conducted at night. This is because at that time it is hoped that all other activities have been completed. This is so that every member of the family or clan can gather together without being disturbed by anything. They are expected to focus their full attention on the messages from the ancestors that will be conveyed in this *bura su'a* ritual. For this reason, all members present must sit around in the traditional house inner room (*one sa'o*), directing attention to the *mataraga* or the ritual leader. The ritual

leader usually wears a head covering (*boku*) and a traditional sarong for men (*sapu*). Then the neck, shoulders, and chest are covered with another cloth called a *lu'e*.

During the *bura su'a* ritual process, several taboos need to be strictly observed by all participants present. According to the informants, some of the main taboos are as follows: firstly, during the time when the ritual leader says a prayer, everyone present is prohibited from sneezing and salivating. At first glance, this taboo can be considered unreasonable. However, the interviewees argued that in the local wisdom of the Ngada people, sneezing and salivating denote disrespect or disregard for what other people say. Because the words spoken in this *bura su'a* are the advice of the ancestors, whose names are mentioned at the beginning of the ritual, then sneezing and salivating are seen as unethical behaviors.

The second taboo that is strictly forbidden during the ritual process of *bura su'a* according to the informants is farting and entering and exiting the traditional house. Clearly, such acts exhibit disrespect and demonstrate an unwillingness to listen to the advice received. Each member present will be reminded of the taboos before the ritual is performed, in order to ensure they take them seriously. If those things occur, the ritual will automatically be canceled and must be repeated. When researchers interviewed youths and children present, they also knew about the taboos and prohibitions in this *bura su'a* ritual. With the explanation that has been given, they can understand it. In essence, it entails that all members of the clan and traditional houses respect their ancestors who have left them an inheritance and moral values that they can use in their everyday lives.

The Order of *Bura Su'a* Ritual

Introduction

The ritual of *bura su'a* usually begins after the leader takes his place under the *mataraga* (the center point of the traditional house). As an introduction, while waiting for all the members of the clan and the traditional house to gather and to take their place in the traditional house, the leader will take the betel, areca nut, and betel lime (*oka*) that has been provided, eat it and start chewing it. After all the members have gathered, the ritual leader will convey things that need to be considered during the ritual, especially the taboos that must be considered seriously. If a member is ill, he/she is allowed to leave the traditional house before the ritual begins. After that, everyone is asked to stay calm, focus their attention to the ritual leader and listen to what he has to say.

Taking *Su'a* and Prayers

After everything is prepared, the ritual leader will take the *su'a* from its place. *Su'a* is then grasped tightly with both hands with the sharp side facing the chest. This act symbolizes holding firmly and keeping in the heart the sharp and firm words of the ancestors. Before invoking the name of the ancestor and saying a prayer, the ritual leader will spray the *su'a* with saliva (mixed with chewed betel nuts) three times until the *su'a* is red. After that the leader takes a moment in silence, then calls the name of the ancestor from the traditional house or clan accompanied by the following advice:

Table 1. Ancestral Teachings

Ngada Language	English
<i>Dia su'a go Jua ne'e Luni</i>	This is Jua and Luni's <i>su'a</i> .
<i>Su'a sa wunga wi gose tuza</i>	One <i>su'a</i> is for planting crops.

<i>Su'a se dhako wi usu sa'o</i>	<i>Su'a</i> means to lock the door of the house with one tie.
<i>Su'a da dhanga pado wi ma'e ri'o ra'o</i>	This is <i>su'a</i> which is always used to regulate so that there is always peace and harmony
<i>Su'a da dhanga pedu wi ma'e eu</i>	This is <i>su'a</i> that is usually used to regulate so that it doesn't get too uncomfortable
<i>Su'a da dhanga gaka, wi ma'e kadhi laga</i>	<i>Su'a</i> used to reprimand so as not to violate.
<i>Su'a da dhanga po, wi ma'e kadhi kodho</i>	<i>Su'a</i> is to be used to advise, to assist one another.
<i>Su'a da dhanga gege, bela ma'e deke mote ma'e ngadho</i>	This is <i>su'a</i> , that always advises not to talk badly about each other's names
<i>Fego wi ma'e papa tengo, gajo wi ma'e papa bha'o.</i>	So that you don't hit each other and fight each other.
<i>Su'a da dhanga pedu pado da fay walu ne'e ana halo</i>	The <i>su'a</i> is used to protect widows and orphans
<i>Su'a da dhanga soro mazi bodha jere moe watu tai, bodha tedha moe he'a wea</i>	This is <i>su'a</i> that leads to speaking and being fair and equitable
<i>Su'a da dhanga gose tuza, tebu ledhe da wunu nguza</i>	This is <i>su'a</i> that is usually used for planting so that plants can thrive
<i>Gote tuza, tebu setoko woso bodha benu bo</i>	Despite planting, it must grow a stem until it fills the barn.
<i>Gote tuza seki'u, bodha woso benu iru, go tenga wi mara deghe, go ledha wi mara bepa.</i>	Even if only a piece is planted, there must be a lot to fill the para-para, to fill the shelter
<i>Go su'a di ti'i magha, wi wesi ngana wi le kana kese, wi peni manu wile roka dhaga</i>	This is <i>su'a</i> that enlightens the mind, so that in raising livestock and poultry they can continue to breed abundantly
<i>Raba go ga'a wi ma'e pe'i, ko kodo</i>	So that the feeder for livestock and the egg-

<i>wi ma'e teo. Go wesi wi dhesi, go loka wi lowa</i>	laying cage are always filled and used so that everything continues to breed
<i>Go su'a dhanga nidi lagha da kedhi banga, raba ulu wi ma'e mu kasa wi ma'e bana</i>	This is a <i>su'a</i> that is used to protect children so that they are always healthy.
<i>Wi mesa kapa we'e moe moro dala, wi dhadhi woso we'e moe siu so, wi bo we'e moe tewu taba, wi bhuka we'e moe muku wae.</i>	To always breed, become many, and continue to have children and grandchildren
<i>Su'a da dhanga kebi da kedhi, wi ma'e gedhi, wi sama tede da joge lizu</i>	A <i>su'a</i> that always protects the little ones so they don't get left behind, like a tall protective fence
<i>Su'a da dhanga bhapa da banga wi ma'e gadha, wi sama go hala da gawu awu</i>	This is the <i>su'a</i> that guides the little ones so they don't get forgotten. It is like a strong protective fence.
<i>Su'a da dhanga usu du ne'e pegha gheka. Da usu wi go su'a sina, da pegha wi go watu mite</i>	It is a <i>su'a</i> that is used to close firmly.
SUBU SU'A!	TAKE SU'A!

Source: Personal field observations

After the ritual leader says the prayer, he will put the sharp tip of the *su'a* on his chest while shouting: *subu su'a*. This exclamation can be interpreted as taking or accepting this *su'a*. That means all the statements or prayers that have been mentioned may be kept in mind and accepted.

Figure 2. Tribal chief leading the *bura su'a* ritual



Sources: Personal Documentation

Circulation of su'a as the closing ritual

The ritual leader will then pass the *su'a* to all those present starting with the member sitting on his right (*kago wana*). Each member who attends this ritual is obliged to accept the *su'a* that has been prayed for, directing the sharp tip of the *su'a* carefully at his chest while exclaiming: *subu su'a*. According to sources, the placement of the sharp part of the *su'a* towards the chest has a symbolic meaning. This is because the words or discourses of the ancestors were sharp and strong. It is imperative to embed these words of wisdom into the heart and to live them in real life so that one can grow into a strong and honest person. That is why the *su'a* has a sharp edge at the top (*lobo*). After arriving at the last member, the *su'a* is returned to the ritual leader and then placed on the *mataraga*. Thus, the ritual of *bura su'a* ends and then continues with dinner together in a large family as an expression of gratitude.

Figure 3. *Su'a* is circulated to all participants



Sources: Personal Documentation

For the Ngadanese, the traditional values of the *bura su'a* ritual are undeniably rich. But for the purpose of this writing, the authors will focus on three main values: first, respect for God, ancestors, fellow human beings, and nature; second, parental responsibility in educating children and concern for the weakest and poorest in the community; and third, the formation of a morally integrated personality based on biblical and theological virtues of courage, honesty, perseverance, and justice. With these in mind, the following discussion will engage in a constructive dialogue between Christian moral values and the values conveyed in the the *bura su'a* ritual.

Christian Moral Values in the *Bura Su'a* Ritual

Before exploring further, the moral values in the ritual of *bura su'a*, two fundamental questions need to be asked, namely: what is morality and why is it necessary to be moral? Those questions and the answer given, according to Bert Messchenga, lead to the most basic discussion of morality. In certain contexts,

morality must be related to the behavior of a person who does not focus their attention only on themselves, but also on others. This is to seek the common good from time to time. However, Musschenga said that this kind of thing presupposes certain characteristics in a person, namely, capacity and competence. If capacity is accompanied by competence, then the final goal to be achieved will be fulfilled (Musschenga and van Harskamp 2013).

The study of the *bura su'a* ritual in the Ngada community is an effort to identify moral competence. It helps to find the underlying capacity, and then find out what steps must be taken to develop this capacity into competence. That is why the moral values contained in the *bura su'a* ritual are brought together with the teachings of the Catholic faith so that they can be lived competently and integrally. Therefore, beliefs about what is acceptable and not acceptable in the ritual of *bura su'a* must be met with a Christian perspective on morality. This perspective refers to ethical and unethical approaches to an ultimate goal, namely personal and communal happiness. Essentially, happiness is in acts of love for God and fellow humans (Sutton W. and Schmidly 2016). The principle of judging right and wrong behavior is based on the Word of God (the Holy Scriptures), Tradition, and the Church magisterium. However, the Word of God in the Holy Scriptures still occupies the first position, namely as the main guide, because of the belief that God is the only source of goodness that does not depend on anything (Lina and Wijanarko 2022). It is He who gives the principle of goodness to humans so that they can behave and act rightly until they reach salvation in Him. The Word of God underlies every believer's behavior (Sutton W. and Schmidly 2016).

If the Word of God is the basis for moral action, then Christian ethics can be understood as a methodological reflection

on the values, norms, virtues, and goals of Christian life in the context of one's contemporary life, referring to the Scriptures and faith traditions (Nullens and Michener 2010). Likewise, methodological reflections on wise words that direct human actions to goodness as found in the ritual of *bura su'a* can also be believed to be wisdom that comes from God. These moral values are taken from the context of the life of the Ngada people, who are generally farmers and ranchers. Therefore, in the context of contextual theology, the authors examine the *bura su'a* ritual within the framework of Christian moral teachings. Of course, first of all, a semiotic analysis should be carried out (Martasudjita 2021), as described at the beginning of this paper, to find the exact context expressed in the ritual of *bura su'a*.

***Bura su'a* Ritual as a Method of Contextualizing Christian Moral Values**

Firstly, respect your ancestors, parents and nature

The Ngada people believe that the moral values that are necessary for their communal life come from their ancestors. The existence of ancestors gives special authority and power to moral values and these values must be passed on, taught, learned, and repeated until they are implemented in life. Moreover, ancestors are always seen as 'intermediaries' between members of the clan/traditional house and the *Dewa* (God) they believe in (Nai 2020). The opening lines of the *bura su'a* ritual speech above emphasize that the *su'a* comes from the ancestors, and that it is to be used for three basic categories of action: "*Dia su'a go Jua ne'e Luni. Su'a sa wunga wi gose tuza. Su'a se dhako wi usu sa'o. Su'a da dhanga pado wi ma'e ri'o ra'o.*" (This is the *su'a* of Jua and Luni. This one is for planting plants. For locking the door of the house, use this one. One is usually used to ensure harmony and order). If *su'a* for the

Ngada people is understood as the symbolic presence of the ancestors, then it is closely related to the legacy they left for their descendants. Thus, every member of the clan and traditional house must make effective use of the inheritance they have been granted. They cultivate the land, maintain traditional houses carefully, and strive to bring harmony to the community.

The first idea in the ritual of *bura su'a* is in line with the understanding of the inheritance of moral values in the teachings of the Christian faith. Moral values are first believed to come from God himself, as found in the Holy Scriptures and also from the examples of those who faithfully follow God's commands. That is why Christian moral values are always fixed and continue to apply throughout the ages without being affected by socio-political conditions (Bobbert 2017). God Himself has determined right and wrong actions that are useful for human life. For example, the ten commandments (Decalogue) that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai clearly show that God established His laws and gave them to His people in a covenant context. If His people are obedient in doing so in private and communal life, then they will enjoy harmony and salvation (Graham Ryken 2003). The covenant will continue to be repeated in life with the Israelites on their journey to the promised land and also when they have lived and settled there. The Israelites suffered and were far from salvation due to their disobedience and violation of laws and covenant.

In addition, the commandment of God given to Moses and the people of Israel in the Decalogue is the commandment to honor parents (father and mother). God said 'Honor your father and mother' (Exodus 20:12). This command shows how critical the existence of a family is for a human being. When God gave Moses the two tablets of stone on Mount Sinai, He made it clear about love for God and fellow

human beings and love for fellow human beings must start within the family. Respect for parents is not to idolize them but to give them proper love. The attitude that opposes them is to disregard them, to reject them, or not even to acknowledge their authority (Ryken 2003). Of course, in real life, there are often fractures in the relationship between children and their parents. The child is not recognized by their parents and this act causes deep wounds in their hearts. As a result, even parents are not respected by their children. In the study of Yohanes V. Watu, the phenomenon of massive use of social media and the influence of global culture disrupts the understanding and even disrespect of children or the younger generation towards their parents and local culture (Watu 2020). Such a reality in Christian theology, however, is rooted in sin against God's will. In the context of the Decalogue (God's commandments), every parent is obliged to take care of their children, and children are obliged to respect the authority of their parents. When the Ngada people consistently carry out the teachings handed down by their ancestors, they are also simultaneously living their Christian faith (Betu 2023).

One thing that is no less important is the advice to cultivate the land (*goze tuza*) responsibly. The ancestors perceive the land as an important part of the life of their family and their generations. This advice is in line with the actual message from Pope Francis in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* No. 2, to care for creation. The earth which is our common home is screaming and suffering because of various irresponsible behaviors. We can see the damage in the soil, water and air and all forms of life (Francis 2015). Christians believe that the natural world is a truly good gift from God (Genesis 1) and therefore needs to be protected and preserved. Thus, every act that destroys nature not only disrupts the harmony of life and violates the inheritance

of the ancestors, but especially is against God himself who is the creator.

Secondly, the duties and responsibilities of parents to their children and concern for those who suffer in the community

The ritual of *bura su'a* begins also with advice that must come from parents, namely the ancestors. They are the owners of the *su'a*, the inheritance which is now entrusted to their descendants. The words spoken at the ritual of *bura su'a* confirm this. "*Su'a da dhang'a pedu wi ma'e eu. Su'a da dhang'a gaka, wi ma'e kadhi laga. Su'a da dhang'a po, wi ma'e kadhi kodho. Su'a da dhang'a gege, bela ma'e deke mote ma'e ngadho. Fego wi ma'e papa tengo, gajo wi ma'e papa bha'o. Su'a da dhang'a pedu pado da fay walu ne'e ana halo. "Su'a da dhang'a soro mazi bodha jere moe watu tai, bodha tedha moe he'a wea."* (*Su'a* is usually used to prohibit stubborn behavior. *Su'a* is meant to reprimand, rather than to ignore and to violate. *Su'a* is reserved for advice, so that no one ignores it. The *su'a* is intended to advise, so as not to speak badly of others. So that they do not fight each other. The *su'a* is usually invoked to protect widows and orphans. The *su'a* that guides us to speak and act fairly and equitably.

The principles in Ngada's local wisdom above also affirm the basic elements of Christian morals. Every parent not only brings children into this world but is also responsible for educating them with love so that they grow into complete human beings. By providing education that is useful for children's lives, parents become partners of God in bringing down a newborn life and especially advancing the quality of a human's life. In essence, a family is the first place for nurturing and protecting human life (Lon 2019). The spirit of kinship in the *bura su'a* ritual can be used as a method of moral formation and implementation of Christian moral values, especially for children and the younger generation so that

they truly uphold the values of life, humanity, brotherhood, justice, truth, honesty and diligent work, in addition to intellectual-academic achievements measured by diplomas and grades (Lon 2019).

The Christian moral message which is also contained in the *bura su'a* ritual is the advice to care for those who are weakest and suffering in the community, who are referred to as widows and orphans (*fay walu ne'e ana halo*). God Himself in several places commands His people to pay attention to this in their lives. For example, in Isaiah 1:17 God says: "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow." Meanwhile in the New Testament, Jesus is also very concerned about people who suffer, including widows. He raised up a young man in Nain, the son of a widow (Luke 7:11-17). He also praised a poor widow who gave more than all the people who put money into the temple treasury (Mark 12:41-44). All of these actions are in line with the advice of the ancestors in the *bura su'a* ritual to care for and to be in solidarity with the weakest in the community, especially widows and orphans. In this context, Pope Francis in his Encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* no.8 even invites all the faithful to build a universal brotherhood especially with the weak and the outcast in society and respect their dignity as fellow human beings (Francis 2020).

Thirdly, a well-integrated personality and commitment to life values

The ritual of *bura su'a* is not restricted to the context of life in the nuclear family or extended family. From the expression stated in the ritual of *bura su'a*, it is clear that the formation of character and the cultivation of moral values in the family will also affect the life of a child in the wider community. Society can be called a

character education laboratory because that is where moral values are habituated and visualized consistently (Hidayat et al. 2022).

Another moral value in the ritual of *bura su'a* is that in addition to one having to work hard to improve the economic life of his family, one must also adhere to the moral principles that have been accepted in encounters with other people. A strong commitment to this moral principle must be maintained in recognition of the deeply integrated legacy of parents. The Ngada call it by the expression '*Su'a da dhanga kebi da kedhi, wi ma'e gedhi, wi sama tede da joge lizu. Su'a da dhanga bhapa da banga wi ma'e gadha, wi sama go hala da gawu awu. Su'a da dhanga usu du ne'e pegha gheka. Da usu wi go su'a sina, da pegha wi go watu mite*' (The *su'a* that always protects the little ones from being left behind, is like a tall protective fence. This *su'a*, which guides young ones not to get lost, is like a strong protective fence around them. *Su'a* used to be tightly closed).

The moral message of the *bura su'a* ritual is further confirmation of an established rule, which is that every positive act has constructive results in communal life. Min Ju Kanga and Michael Glassman define a force in social life as action taken by a community for the improvement of the present and the future (Kang and Glassman 2010). Morality contributes to the personal development of the moral agent, the community, and other people around them. Moreover, ethical actions must be positively correlated with one's deep respect for his/her parents and ancestors. A virtuous and civilized person is always familiar, rooted, and committed to the moral messages conveyed by his/her parents and ancestors. This moral heritage becomes like a protective fence (*hala* or *tede*) or a locked door (*usu du, pegha gheka*), so it cannot be easily broken by other values that destroy the harmony of the community and

personal integrity. This kind of commitment is not something that is automatically given but must become a habit that is lived consistently at all times.

From the perspective of Christian moral theology, virtues are dispositions that are firmly integrated into a person's self, into their conscience, and then firmly lived in real life. According to Thomas Aquinas, a person of high morals does not just restrain their evil desires, but most importantly, they enjoy the benefits of acting rightly (Oesterle 1984). Sonya Charles explains that building a strong moral character is habituation with three key aspects according to Aristotle. First, the child should practice doing virtuous deeds. The second is for children to enjoy the good and right things they do, and the third is for parents to compliment children with appreciation and good and right life examples (Charles 2019). Christian moral values contained in the ritual of *bura su'a* must also be habituated into the real life of the Ngada people.

CONCLUSION

Su'a and the *bura su'a* ritual in Ngada culture, Flores contain noble values that must be preserved and passed down from generation to generation. This research has discovered the moral values contained in the *bura su'a* ritual and brought them into dialogue with the Christian moral perspective. The purpose of these findings is for Ngada people to better understand their identity holistically, namely as Christian people in the context of their cultural and traditional heritage. Furthermore, the Ngada people involved in the *bura su'a* ritual need to realize and build a harmonious relationship with God, ancestors, others and nature. This is the true moral responsibility of performing the *bura su'a* ritual in the context of Christian faith. Similarly, parents must take responsibility for the education of their

children, and all members of the tribe must develop genuine concern for the weak and poor among them. In this way, all members of the tribe can form their personalities and virtues based on the Word of God, such as justice, honesty, truth, and peace. Finally, this research contributes to the strengthening of Ngada local traditions, especially the *bura su'a* ritual and the continuous inculturation between Christian faith and Ngada culture in order to have an impact on the personal and communal lives of the Ngada people, Flores.

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