

Research Article

# From the Altar (Dor) to the Church Pulpit: Transforming the Worship Values of the Klon Tribe in Christian Religious Education

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**Abstract:** This study explores the transformation of traditional worship values within the Klon tribe community in Alor, East Nusa Tenggara. Prior to their conversion to Christianity, the community practiced a religious system centered on *mesbah* (stone altars) where they worshiped ancestral spirits and local deities. The introduction of Christianity through inculturation led to a significant shift in worship practices, transitioning from rituals at the *mesbah* to those at the church pulpit. However, rather than losing their spiritual and communal values, these traditions adapted and were integrated into Christian practices. The study highlights how elements of local wisdom were preserved and transformed, creating a bridge between indigenous beliefs and Christian teachings. This transformation demonstrates that the core values of worship such as reverence for ancestors and community solidarity continued to play a role in the newly adopted Christian practices. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of understanding such cultural transformations, especially in the context of Christian Religious Education. It suggests that contextualizing religious teachings within local traditions and wisdom can foster a deeper, more meaningful connection to faith for communities undergoing cultural change. By valuing these local traditions, Christian Religious Education can become more relevant and impactful, encouraging a harmonious blending of old and new beliefs.

**Keywords:** Altar Stone; Christian Religious Education; Inculturation; Klon Tribe; Local Wisdom

## 1. Introduction

In Indonesia's rich and colorful ethnic diversity, each ethnic group has a unique identity that is reflected in their belief systems, social structures, and cultural practices. One of the most interesting tribes to study is the Klon tribe, a community that lives with strong local wisdom and ancestral traditions. The religious life of the Klon tribe is inseparable from their interaction with nature and their recognition of a higher power, namely the Ruler of the Universe.

The Klon tribe, located in the province of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), specifically in Alor Regency, Southwest Alor District, has a distinctive tradition of worship that is integrated into their social structure and local wisdom. On Alor Island, one of the traditional customs that is still preserved is that of the Klon tribe, who speak the Klon language and have a prominent cultural element, namely the *mesbah* (called dor). The *mesbah* is a ritual place used by the indigenous Klon tribe to perform worship activities, pay respect to their ancestors, and maintain a balance between humans, nature, and the spirit world.

Before accepting the gospel, the Klon tribe had a strong traditional belief system. The center of all religious rites was the mezbah, a place of sacrifice made of stone and located in the middle of a settlement or a specific location in the open air. The mezbah served as a place for the community to offer sacrifices to the spirits of their ancestors and local gods, who were believed to be protectors and sources of blessings.

The introduction of Christianity into tribal communities such as the Klon tribe involved a process of inculturation, in which local cultural values interacted with Christian teachings. This article analyzes the transformation of the Klon tribe's traditional worship values from

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the altar to the church pulpit, as well as its implications for the development of contextual and meaningful Christian religious education.

## 2. Research Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with ethnographic methods to gain a deeper understanding of the transformation of the traditional worship values of the Klon tribe, specifically the shift from the altar (dor) to the church pulpit, and its implications for the development of contextual Christian Religious Education. The research was conducted in the Alor Barat Daya District, Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province, where the Klon tribe resides. The subjects of the study included traditional leaders, religious leaders (elders), community leaders, and members of the Klon tribe who were involved in both traditional and Christian religious practices.

Data collection was carried out using two main techniques: in-depth interviews with traditional leaders and church leaders to explore their understanding of the changes in worship values, and participatory observation of the implementation of both traditional rituals and Christian worship activities in churches. These methods allowed for a comprehensive examination of the cultural transformation and the integration of traditional beliefs into Christian practices, providing valuable insights into the development of Christian Religious Education that respects local wisdom.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### The Concept of Worship and Altar in a Theological Perspective

The most common word for worship in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word *hawah*. Its original form is *hishtahawah*, which means to bow down, to do obeisance, to pay homage, to worship. The word *hawah* appears 170 times in the Old Testament, but less than half (approximately 75 times) is translated as worship in the NIV version. In approximately the same number of instances, the word bow down is used. Bowing down means to humble oneself, especially when done in the presence of an authority figure. But what is important is the purpose behind the physical posture. This action can be performed as a mere physical gesture, and thus manipulated. However, the action and the attitude of the heart must go hand in hand. So, as a term, worship conveys the idea of honoring God and expressing submission to Him (Wijaya, 2015).

The Greek word *proskuneo* is summarized by H. Schonweiss and C. Brown in the New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology 2: For the Greeks, this verb was a technical term for worship of a god, meaning to fall down, to submit oneself in worship. *Proskuneo* can indicate an inner attitude of respect and humility. Worship is at the heart of man's relationship with God. In the Bible, *proskuneo* is the word most commonly used for worship in the New Testament (John 4:20-24; Revelation 15:4), just as *hawah* is in the Old Testament. The original idea behind the word is to give honor, to respect with enthusiasm, to submit oneself. Like *hawah*, at its core is an attitude of the heart that can be reflected through body language (Wijaya, 2015).

Worship is not merely a ritual act, but an expression of faith and complete surrender to God. (Romans 12:1) states that worship encompasses liturgical, ethical, and spiritual aspects, emphasizing that every form of worship must be centered on God and done in spirit and truth. For mainstream and evangelical Christians, worship is not just church liturgy, but encompasses all aspects of life. True worship is living righteously according to God's Word. Worship is not a practice among pietists. John MacArthur conveys this meaning: Worship is not a matter of being in the right place at the right time. Worship is not an outward activity that requires a certain atmosphere. Worship takes place in the heart, in the spirit. The basic nature of worship is to give worship to God from the deepest part of ourselves, in praise, prayer, song, giving, and living, always based on His revealed truth (Wijaya, 2015).

The word "mezbah" (מִזְבֵּחַ) (in Hebrew literally means "altar". The root of this word comes from the word "zavak" (זָבַח), which means "to slaughter" or "sacrifice." In a religious context, an altar is a place where offerings or sacrifices are presented to God. In Jewish tradition, altars play a very important role in religious rituals, especially in the context of worship in the Temple. In Jewish tradition, there are two main types of altars: the altar in the Temple (burnt offering) Lev 6:8-13: God gave Moses instructions regarding the rules for burnt offerings (Paterson, 2003); and the altar used in a domestic context Numbers 28-29 (Paterson, 2003). The altar in the Temple, located in the outer courtyard, served as a place where large sacrifices were offered, reflecting a more formal and centralized worship practice. On the

other hand, the small altars found in households were often used for daily rituals and celebrations, allowing people to worship in a more personal and intimate context. Altars served as a meeting point between humans and God (Méndez, 2020). In many sacred texts, altars are considered sacred places where people can draw closer to God through sacrifice. The sacrifices offered on the altar could be animals, grains, or other materials, depending on the type of worship performed. The process of slaughtering and offering was considered an act of devotion and surrender to God. In the journey of faith, the altar is not merely a physical structure, but a symbol of sacrifice and deep spiritual commitment. As recorded in (Genesis 12:7), Abram built an altar to the LORD as a form of acknowledgment of His promises and His presence in his life. This action reflects the close relationship between humans and God, where the altar becomes a place of meaningful spiritual encounter. Moreover, in Leviticus 1:9, the altar serves as a place of prayer and hope, becoming a point of communication between the people and the Creator. The altar is a sacred space where gratitude and supplication are offered with a sincere heart (Saerejen & Bambang, 2025).

Theologically, the altar symbolizes the place where humans meet God, where sacrifices are offered as a symbol of redemption and purification. In the context of Christianity today, the altar can be interpreted as a symbol of inner transformation, where the people offer themselves as living sacrifices.

### **Traditional Belief System of the Klon Tribe**

Animism is a belief in ancestral spirits and spiritual forces that are believed to inhabit nature and surrounding objects. This belief is reflected in various traditional ceremonies aimed at seeking blessings or protection from ancestral spirits (Meizandi, 2025). Animism and dynamism are forms of local beliefs that have been rooted in Indonesian society since prehistoric times. Animism is generally understood as a belief in spirits or super-natural beings, especially ancestral spirits, which are considered to have a major influence on human life. Adherents of this belief believe that these spirits can provide protection or bring disaster, depending on how humans treat them. Ritual ceremonies such as offering sacrifices and summoning spirits are often performed for specific purposes, such as healing from illness, successful harvests, safety during travel, and even good luck in battle (Arni, 2018).

The Klon tribe adheres to and practices animism, which is manifested through a ritual called KDIR GEH in the Klon language. This ritual, which can be translated as “feeding KDIR” or “feeding idols,” is one of the most prominent manifestations of animism in Klon culture. In the Klon tribe's belief system, the universe is seen as an entity inhabited by spiritual forces capable of bestowing prosperity, especially in the agricultural sector. This cosmological concept gave rise to the ritual tradition of Blorkde or “new eating.” In the cosmological view of the Klon tribe, crops such as rice, corn, and tubers are not merely considered the result of human hard work, but as a gift from the guardian spirits of nature and ancestors who are believed to be the first entities to bring life to earth. Therefore, before the first harvest is consumed, the Klon people are required to perform a traditional ritual called blorkde or New Food. This ceremony serves as a form of respect and gratitude to the ancestors and rulers of nature for the abundance of the harvest. This ritual is a form of offering the first fruits in the form of agricultural products, game, and livestock which are offered to the rulers of the universe as a form of gratitude and recognition of the source of all abundance.

The Makan Baru tradition has a deep symbolic meaning, reflecting the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. This ritual is not only a communal meal, but also a spiritual agreement between the community and the forces of nature, with the hope that nature will continue to provide abundant life and protect the community from disasters and disease.

The Blorkde or New Food Ceremony is held periodically, once a year, right after the first harvest is completed. The ritual takes place in the months after the end of the rainy season, which marks the main harvest period. The ceremony is centered at the Klon tribe's altar or house, which serves as a symbol of unity and collective identity for the community. In the context of traditional Klon society, the tribal house not only serves as a place for deliberation and decision-making, but also as a center for traditional religious rituals. It is here that the community calls upon the spirits of their ancestors and expresses their gratitude for the fruits of the earth, making the tribal house a sacred space in the social and spiritual life of the Klon community (Koilhar, 2025).

### Social and Cultural Functions of Altars

William G. Dever (2001), an archaeologist, in his work *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* explains that altars are one of the artifacts often found in ancient archaeological sites, especially in the Middle East. This finding is clear evidence of religious practices in the past. Altars are usually in the form of piles of stones or simple altars used as a place to offer sacrifices or other offerings to gods or God (Maniata et al., 2025).

Altars or *dor* in the Klon tribe tradition are not just stone structures for offerings, but are spiritual and social centers that represent the relationship between humans, ancestors, and the Ruler of the Universe. Its functions include rituals, traditional leadership, and the preservation of communal values. The altar serves as a spiritual public space that brings all members of the community together in a ritual unity. In the ceremony of offering the first fruits of the annual harvest, all the crops are gathered and placed on the burning altar. This ritual is led by Eben Ler (the village king), who climbs onto a special altar to offer prayers and offerings to the Lord of the Universe. This action demonstrates the role of the altar as a symbol of authority and social unity. In addition, the traditional social structure is also reflected in the appointment of the ritual commander, who comes from the eldest son in the Klon tribe's genealogy. He serves as the keeper of the burning fire and the slaughter spear, signifying that the altar is also a place for the inheritance of values and responsibilities between generations. The altar is a sacred place that serves as a medium of communication between humans and divine powers. In traditional rituals, Eben Ler utters a spiritual invocation:

*“Woooo..Ur, Mdi All..lang.. Labtal anongmi, abang tang. na ambang oborgwar, ewer bilin namang uu.. wrep”* (O Ruler of the Universe, Your fame and power are like the shining sun and moon. It is because of Your greatness and glory that I come to worship You and bring offerings. Incline Your ear and hear my call.) (Hingkoil, 2025).

This expression shows that the *mesbah* is a place of recognition of transcendent power, as well as an expression of faith and respect for nature and ancestors. The ritual also strengthens the cultural and spiritual identity of the Klon community.

### The Process of Inculturation, Acceptance of the Gospel, and Transformation

Culture can be understood as the result of human creativity, taste, and will in living life. Culture is not limited to abstract ideas or values, but also manifests itself in tangible forms known as cultural expressions. These manifestations cover various aspects of human life, such as behavior patterns, language, tools, social organization, religious systems, art, and various other forms of expression. All of these elements serve as tools to help humans adapt and maintain their existence in society. Thus, culture is the result of complex interactions between humans and their environment, which continues to evolve over time and becomes the collective identity of a community.

Etymologically, inculturation comes from Latin, namely the word in which means “inside” and *cultura* which means “culture.” So, inculturation is the process of incorporating something into culture. In the context of Christian theology and mission, inculturation refers to the process of integrating the message of the Gospel and Christian faith into local culture. The goal is for believers to fully experience their faith within the context of their own culture. Inculturation is not just a matter of outward adaptation, but a deep dialogue between the gospel and culture. In this process, the two actively interact with each other. The hope is that the gospel can truly become “flesh” or incarnational in the lives of believers, without losing the purity and essence of its teachings (Eunike Agoestina, 2020).

The ancestors of the Klon tribe lived in a system of animism and dynamism, where the universe, including large trees, rocks, caves, mountains, and sacred places, was seen as a source of supernatural power and prosperity. They believed in the existence of a supernatural power greater than humans, which ruled and controlled the universe. This belief is reflected in their respect for natural elements such as the sun, moon, and stars, which are considered manifestations of the greatness and power of the Ruler of the Universe. Although they do not have a personal concept of God as in the Abrahamic religions, the Klon people recognize the existence of a divine entity that is the source of life, blessings, and prosperity. As a form of respect and gratitude, the Klon people offer the fruits of the earth, especially the first fruits of the annual harvest, which are placed on an altar (called *dor*). This offering is made in a traditional ceremony led by Eben Ler (the village king), who climbs onto a special altar to convey prayers and requests to the Ruler of the Universe. During the ritual, sacred chants are recited that express recognition of the almighty power and glory of the Lord, as well as requests for the offerings to be accepted and blessings to be bestowed upon the community (Hingkoil, 2025).

The term Gospel comes from the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*), which literally means “good news” or “joyful news.” In the context of Christianity, this term refers to the first four books of the New Testament, namely the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These four books convey the good news about the coming of Jesus Christ as the Savior of mankind. Etymologically, the word “Gospel” also has roots in Arabic, which shows the cross-cultural influence in the spread of Christian teachings. Theologically, the Gospel is understood as the message of salvation that brings hope and liberation to everyone who believes in Him (Agoestina, 2020).

The inculturation of Christian values in the Klon tribe society took place gradually. The Gospel entered the Klon tribe through evangelists but was not immediately accepted by the Klon tribe society. Along the way, the Klon people began to realize the similarities between their traditional worship practices and Christian worship practices. One of the most striking similarities is between the *mesbah* (dor) as a place of offering in local tradition and the church pulpit as the center for delivering the word in Christian worship. This symbolic similarity became a cultural bridge that facilitated the process of accepting the teachings of the Gospel. Over time, the Klon community began to accept the Gospel as a truth that was in line with the spiritual values they had embraced. They identified that the Ruler of the Universe, whom they had worshipped without a name, was actually God as introduced in Christian teachings. This process not only changed their religious orientation but also enriched their spiritual understanding through the integration of local values into their new life of faith.

One of the important figures in this transformation process was Isak Karmalai, a member of the Klon community who accepted the gospel and experienced conversion. He later became a central figure in the development of the church in his community and played an active role in introducing and developing church life among the Klon people. His role reflects how local figures can be agents of change in the process of religious inculturation and cultural transformation.

The ancestors of the Klon tribe lived in a system of animism and dynamism, where the universe, including large trees, rocks, caves, mountains, and sacred places, was seen as a source of supernatural power and prosperity. When evangelists came bringing the news of the Gospel, the Klon community saw it as exciting news, even though at first they continued to maintain their practice of worshipping nature. Over time, the intensity of the ongoing preaching of the gospel fostered a deep interest in the hearts of the people. They began to understand that the objects of nature that they had previously used as means of worship were the creations of Almighty God. In their traditional rituals, God is referred to by names such as Ur, Mdi, Al, Lang Lahtal, which are interpreted as the Creator, with symbols of glory manifested through the light of the moon and sun.

The acceptance of the gospel by the Klon tribe was marked by mass baptisms held at two strategic locations, namely Lola Beach in the Probur Utara village area and Srani Beach in the Halerman village area. The choice of these locations was based on several considerations. Lola Beach is an open area that is easily accessible to the general public, inhabited by the Klon tribe and other tribes living together, and has a spring that can be used for baptismal water. The process of inculturation of the Gospel into the culture of the Klon tribe shows a meeting point between Christian values and local traditions. Several similarities that accelerated the process of accepting the Gospel include: 1). The figure of the evangelist was seen as equivalent to the village king and tribal chief who previously had authority in idol worship rituals on the altar. 2). The spear, which was a sacred weapon in traditional rituals, was reinterpreted as a symbol of the Word of God and the Bible, a spiritual weapon in the Christian faith. 3). The altar, where traditional leaders recited mantras and ritual language, was interpreted as a pulpit, a place for proclaiming the Word of God. 4). The first fruits of the earth, livestock, and poultry, which were once offered in traditional rituals, are now understood as tithes, vows, and collections in Christian worship. 5). Traditional leadership structures such as village kings, tribal chiefs, and their assistants underwent a transformation of roles to become pastors, elders, and deacons in the church structure.

This spiritual transformation reflects a harmonious process of inculturation between the Gospel and local culture, in which Christian values do not erase cultural identity, but rather enrich and transform it towards a deeper understanding of God as the Creator of the universe.

### **Implications for Christian Education**

Christian education is a Christ-centered process based on the truth of God's word as written in the Bible. In Norman De Jong's view, as quoted by Pazmiño, Christian education is a process that aims to bring a person to the knowledge of Christ and build their life in

Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. This understanding is in line with the Apostle Paul's statement in Ephesians 4:13, which emphasizes the importance of growth in faith toward spiritual maturity and unity in the knowledge of the Son of God. Thus, Christian education does not only focus on the transfer of theological knowledge, but also on the formation of character and holistic spirituality in the light of Christ. Christian education must be rooted in biblical principles, where the word of God is the main foundation in every learning process. Through teaching that is sourced from the Bible, a person can know God personally and understand His plan for human life. As God's creation, humans have a purpose and hope that has been determined by the Creator. To understand and live out these hopes, a deep learning process is needed regarding God's will and plan as revealed in His word (Rivan).

The Klon tribe's culture, rich in spiritual values, respect for nature, and a strong social structure, makes an important contribution to the development of contextual Christian Religious Education (CRE). The tradition of worship through the altar (dor), which is the center of the Klon people's religious life, reflects a deep spiritual awareness of the existence of divine power, even though it is not yet personally known as God in the Christian sense. The introduction of the Gospel into the Klon community did not erase these cultural values, but rather created a space for dialogue between the Christian faith and local wisdom. The symbolic similarity between the altar and the church pulpit became a meeting point that accelerated the process of inculturation. This shows that CAR cannot be separated from the cultural context in which faith is lived. Christian Religious Education in communities like the Klon tribe involves several key elements. First, it emphasizes the importance of appreciating and integrating local values as part of the faith learning process. This approach ensures that cultural aspects are respected and incorporated into religious teachings. Second, it uses a contextual approach, where cultural symbols, such as the altar, can serve as a bridge to help the community understand Christian theological concepts in a meaningful way. Third, it encourages the active participation of traditional leaders and the local community in the faith education process, exemplified by figures such as Isak Karmalai, who played a significant role in this integration. Lastly, it focuses on developing a relevant Christian Religious Education (PAK) curriculum that not only teaches doctrinal beliefs but also fosters character development and spirituality, grounded in the local cultural reality. This approach ensures that the curriculum remains both spiritually enriching and culturally relevant for the community. Thus, the culture of the Klon tribe does not become an obstacle to the growth of the Christian faith but rather becomes fertile ground for the development of a Christian Religious Education that is vibrant, meaningful, and grounded in reality.

#### 4. Conclusions

The transformation of the traditional worship values of the Klon tribe from the altar (dor) to the church pulpit was a long process that reflected the dynamics of inculturation between local culture and Christian teachings. Before learning about the gospel, the Klon people had a strong belief system rooted in animism and dynamism, with the altar as the spiritual and social center. Through the altar, they expressed their gratitude and respect to the Ruler of the Universe, whom they believed to be the source of life and blessings.

The introduction of the gospel into the Klon community did not immediately replace their old beliefs, but rather took place through a process of adaptation and reinterpretation of existing cultural symbols. The similarity between the functions of the altar and the church pulpit became an important bridge in the process of accepting Christian teachings. The Klon community finally realized that the spiritual values they embraced were in line with Christian teachings, so they accepted the Gospel and acknowledged God as the true Lord of the Universe.

This transformation has important implications for the development of contextual Christian Religious Education (CRE). CAR not only serves as a means of teaching doctrine, but also as a medium for integrating Christian values into the local culture. By respecting local wisdom and cultural symbols such as the altar, Christian religious education can become more meaningful, relevant, and capable of forming a contextual faith that is deeply rooted in the life of the community.

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