

# The Naming System of Ngadha Houses and the Mysteries of the Trinity in Flores, Indonesia

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## Abstract

This study focuses on the *sa'o ngaza*, or named houses, within the Ngadha heritage in Flores, Indonesia. These named houses are categorized into three types: the source house (*sa'o pu'u*), derived houses (*sa'o dhoru*) and the tip house (*sa'o lobo*). The central research question explores whether the inherited names of these traditional houses carry religious significance. The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, guiding the methods of data collection, analysis and presentation. Through the lens of cultural studies, underpinned by process philosophy and process theology, a semiotic analysis of the names 'source house' (*sa'o pu'u*), derived houses for the descendants (*sa'o dhoru*) and the tip house (*sa'o lobo*) reveals meanings and values imbued with religious concepts. These concepts, related to the nature of God in local traditions, are manifested as 'The Beginning', 'The End', and 'The Descending to be Involved'. These are referred to as the triadic beautiful names of God, or Dewa Saga Telu. The findings of this research present Dewa Saga Telu as a *semina verbi* of the mysteries of the Triune God (Trinity) in accordance with local traditions. Concurrently, the findings reveal the nature of one God (Dewa Sengata), who eternally exists as three distinct persons: God Beyond (*Dewa Wawo*), God with us (*Dewa Sa'o*), and God within us (*Dewa Ja'o*). These findings can be interpreted as a *praeparatio evangelica* about the mysteries of the Trinity, fostering an intercultural dialogue between Catholic doctrine and the local cultural heritage among the Ngadha people of Flores, Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *named houses, Dewa Saga Telu, the Trinity, intercultural dialogue*

### ***Abstrak***

*Objek dari kajian ini adalah sa'o ngaza' ('rumah bernama') dalam tradisi budaya Ngada, yaitu rumah yang memiliki nama, yang secara kolektif disebut sa'o pu'u, sa'o dhoro, dan sa'o lobo. Pertanyaan penelitiannya adalah apakah warisan nama-nama rumah adat tersebut memiliki makna religius dan dapat menjadi bahan dialog interkultural antara religi lokal dan pandangan Gereja Katolik di Asia? Paradigma penelitiannya adalah penelitian deskriptif kualitatif, baik dalam cara memperoleh data, cara analisis data maupun dalam penyajiannya. Dalam terang kajian budaya berbasis filsafat proses dan teologi proses, secara semiotik, nama 'rumah asal/awal' (sa'o pu'u), 'rumah akhir' (sa'o lobo), dan 'rumah turunan' ('sa'o dhoro') menunjukkan adanya makna dan nilai yang mengandung konsep religius yang terkait dengan hakekat Allah dalam tradisi lokal, sebagai 'Yang Awal', 'Yang Akhir', dan 'Yang Turun Terlibat', sebagai Dewa Saga Telu. Temuan dan kebaruan dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa Dewa Saga Telu merupakan semina verbi tentang misteri Allah Tritunggal (Trinitas) dalam tradisi lokal, yang memperlihatkan kodrat Tuhan Yang Maha Esa (Dewa Sengata) namun memiliki tiga pribadi yaitu Dewa Wawo, Dewa Sa'o, dan Dewa Ja'o yang dapat direproduksi sebagai praeparatio evangelica tentang misteri Trinitas dalam semangat dialog intercultural antara pandangan Gereja Katolik dan warisan budaya lokal di tengah masyarakat Ngadha, Indonesia.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Rumah Bernama, Dewa Saga Telu, Trinitas, Dialog Interkultural.*

### **Introduction**

This study addresses the evolving religious dynamics in Asia, particularly through the lens of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). The FABC emphasizes the importance of engaging in dialogue with local cultures, positioning itself as a facilitator for Catholic Church communities across Asia. This role is crucial in fostering communion among diverse Asian populations, which are often challenged by economic, social, and political disparities, as well as doctrinal disputes, particularly concerning the Trinity (Hardawiryana, 2000, 1995, 1998).

The FABC perceives the local Church as an entity that embodies a specific society, characterized by unique cultural markers that distinguish it from other local churches, all within the broader framework of Catholicity. Given this cultural diversity, local churches inherently exhibit diverse elements, despite sharing a common foundation in Jesus Christ, the cornerstone (Eph 2:20), and uniform practices such as the Gospel, baptism and Eucharist celebration. This diversity necessitates a process of inculturation, fostering cultural dialogue within the dynamics of the Easter and Pentecost mysteries (Hardawiryana, 1995; Tan, 1999). The dynamics of the Easter mystery are manifested in the transformative journey of the Church, which involves the death of the old culture and the continuous emergence of a new one, guided by the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit. The miracle of Pentecost provides a biblical basis for unity in diversity within the Catholic Church, exemplifying the fullness of catholicity in the local Church through intercultural relations. One such local Church is in Ngadha, originating from the Ngadha or Bajawa ethnic group in the Archdiocese of Ende, Flores, Indonesia, where the Ngadha or Bajawa language is spoken (Batarius et al., 2021).

In the face of religious crises and fragmentations in Asia, a spiritual crisis concerning the mysteries of the Trinity emerges. The crux of this crisis (Whitehead, 1984) lies in the misdirection of human spiritual energies, gifted by God, towards destruction and evil, rather than their intended purpose as co-creators and agents of justice, peace, and true happiness. This misdirection results in a conflict between enduring spiritual values and global trends of materialism, secularism, atheism, and indifferentism, leading individuals to worship money or mammon (Mat 6:24, 1 Joh 2:16). In the local

### Heritage of Nusantara:

wisdom of the Ngadha people, the worship of mammon is associated with the satisfaction of base desires, originating from the darkness, wildness, and wickedness of the *wéra* dimension ('negative psyche'). This necessitates a lifelong discipline of purifying the spiritual values of their 'home,' closely tied to the community's sacred and moral dimensions (Vianey, 2008, 2016). The 'home' in this context refers to the traditional Ngadha houses, known as *sa'o ngaza*.

The urgency of this study lies in its demonstration of the rich legacy of local religion and the mysteries of the cultural triadic as a *praeparatio evangelica* for the Divine Trinity and its spirituality. This is particularly relevant for the Asian populace residing in the Ngadha region of Flores, Indonesia, and stems from the naming system of their traditional houses.

## Literature Review

The *sa'o ngaza*, or named houses, are central to this study. These structures, identified by a systematic arrangement of names, represent not only human dwellings—referred to as *kopo molo* ("proper cages"), *lego modhe* ("good cages"), and *rade zi'a* ('fortress of safety')—but also serve as the "House of God" (*Lesa Dewa*). They function as places of worship for the local community, dedicated to their God, explicitly named *Dewa Sa'o* (Vianey, 2008). This perspective aligns with Molnar's concept of traditional houses in the sub-ethnic region of Hoga Sara, located at the border between Ngadha and Nage Keo regencies (Molnar, 2000). Molnar emphasizes that these traditional houses are both "named houses" and "social entities." Smedal, however, posits that *sa'o ngaza* is a ritual entity, serving as a "ritual center" during

its construction and throughout its use in daily life (Smedal, 2000; Tule, 2004).

From a cultural studies perspective, a “name” is a true representation of an entity (Barker, 2006). It is an actual form that represents something, be it a house, God, or a human being. In many ethnic traditions, a “name” reveals the nature, quality, or prominent characteristics of the entity it represents, treating it more as a subject than an object (Noerhadi, 1999). This aligns with the ontological perspective of Whiteheadian process theory, which posits “pan-subjectivity,” stating that all actual entities are living subjects and thus worthy of having a name (Sudarminta, 1991). Therefore, everything in the universe, including *sa’o ngaza*, can be understood and treated as a subject that has a name. The act of naming is not arbitrary but occurs within the context of ritual practices, which carry dynamic and complex meanings that evolve with the spiritual experiences of the participants (Cassirer, 1925; Chang, 2002). This applies to the naming system of traditional houses in Ngadha.

In the Ngadha tradition, as exemplified in Kampung Guru Sina, the entity of *sa’o ngaza* is covertly categorized into two systems: the “collective naming system” (*ngaza mogo*) and the “particular naming system” (*ngaza me’a bhaghi ngia*). This study focuses on the collective naming system, which exhibits a triadic dimension, as the three names form a unified group of traditional houses, collectively referred to as “Woe” (Smedal, 2000). This triadic unity inspires the author to examine it from the perspective of the trinitarian dimension, fostering intercultural dialogue between the Catholic Church and local culture, as emphasized by FABC (Hardawiryana, 1995).

The discourse on the mystery of the unity of the triune God and the oneness of the triadic God (Vianey, 2008) can also be found in the writings of theologian Tuggy, who discusses the history of the formulation of the doctrine of the Triune God in the Greek Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church (Tuggy, 2017). This led to a split between the two Churches that persists to this day. In the Greek Catholic Church's perspective, the one God is present only in the person of the Father, from whom the Son and the Holy Spirit originate, with the Holy Spirit coming solely from the Father. In contrast, the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine posits that the Holy Spirit comes not only from the Father but also from the Son (John 20:18-23). However, this does not imply the existence of three Gods in one group, hence the term "triadic." The Nicene Creed, which forms the basis for the traditional formulation of the Roman Catholic confession of faith, emphasizes that the pre-existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit is God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, leading to the term "Triune God," not "Triadic God." Rationally, the Trinity combines "tri" (triad, meaning three each, triple, or threefold) and "unitas" (meaning unity or oneness). The doctrine of the Trinity posits that God is three divine persons in one substance, essence, or nature. In other words, one God exists in three divine persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There is one God, co-equal, co-eternal, and co-substantial.

## **Method**

This research employs a qualitative and descriptive methodology, as data collection was conducted through interactive and inter-subjective communication (Gill et al., 2008). The focus of the study is the *sa'o ngaza* ('named houses'), specifically examining the

naming system as both a cultural product and a practice within the “little culture” tradition of the small community at Kampung Guru Sina, Ngadha, in the Archdiocese of Ende, Flores, Indonesia (Bagus, 2003; Vianey, 2023)

Field research was conducted from July to October 2023, with a particular emphasis on the inauguration of 27 traditional houses in Guru Sina from 20-23 October 2023. Observations and interviews were carried out with two key informants or ‘great men’ (Mosalaki), namely Godefridus Neno (75) and Yosef One (74). A discussion was also held with Dr. Olaf H. Smedal on 22 October 2023, focusing on the existence of *sa’o ngaza*. The researcher concurs with Smedal’s concept of “woe” as a *sa’o ngaza* coalition (Smedal, 2000) and Cassirer’s interpretation of the value and meaning of the name (Cassirer, 1925).

The meaning and value of the name (*ngaza*) function at the level of articulation between “expression” (Ausdruck) and “(re)presentation” (Darstellung), facilitating the discovery of micro structures and adjustments, referred to as micro-péréquations. The meaning and value of the nomenclature are not completely dependent or predictable unless contextualized within an intercultural dialogue with certain micro adjustments, encompassing both ordinary and extraordinary meanings and values.

This cultural study and interpretation of the texts employed hermeneutic and semiotic interpretation in the following steps: (1) Open coding, which deciphers the code of the naming system of *sa’o ngaza*; (2) Axial coding, which interprets the meanings and values within the code of the naming system of *sa’o ngaza*; (3) Selective coding, which identifies the representative local cultural code that

articulates the mysteries of the trinity within the naming system of *sa'o ngaza* (Baghi, 2023; Vianey, 2023).

As cultural products and practices, this study is situated within the discourse formation of heuristic and “cultural texts” (Sutrisno & Putranto, 2005). It utilizes the perspective of process theory and process theology, developed by Hartshorne based on the Catholic tradition (Kirchberger, 2007) and the semiotic theory (Kleden, 2007). Every cultural product can indeed be treated as a cultural text, which undoubtedly contains meaning and value (Barker, 2006).

## Results

In the Ngadha region, the term *woe* refers to a coalition network of traditional houses, a concept central to their collective naming system. Each *woe* invariably includes a *sa'o ngaza*, a triadic entity comprising three distinct elements: (a) *Sa'o Pu'u*, (b) *Sa'o Lobo* and *Sa'o Dhoru* (Smedal, 2000; Vianey, 2008, 2016).

### a. *Sa'o Pu'u* – ‘The Source House’

*Sa'o Pu'u* translates to ‘The Source House’. This house plays a pivotal role in ritual practices, such as the celebration of Reba, or the New Year ritual (Muda, 1986). The commencement of these rituals must be collectively initiated by all members of the *sa'o ngaza* at this location, prior to individual celebrations at their respective houses. To signify its status as the “Source”, the *Sa'o Pu'u* is architecturally distinct from other traditional houses. A key distinguishing feature is the placement of a small statue, known as “Ana Ye”, on its roof. Interestingly, the form of this small house sculpture (as depicted in Figure 1) bears a resemblance to the ‘Bhaga’, a ‘sacrificial house’ situated in the village center and



associated with a *woe*. Consequently, the local tradition often refers to the source house as “*Sa’o Kopo Bhaga*”, underscoring its responsibility for overseeing the construction process of the *Bhaga*.



*Figur 1.* A small house statue placed on the roof of ‘Source House (*Sa’o Pu’u*), called “*Ana Ye*”. Document: Vianey, 2018.

During the annual *Reba* ritual in *Guru Sina*, the *Bhaga* serves as the second location for the preparation of ritual rice and the offering of sacrificial chickens to God and ancestors (*Riwu Dewa*). This process involves the recitation and interpretation of ancestral wisdom, revealed through the divination of a chicken’s liver. The first location for these activities is *Bo Ma’e*, situated outside the village under the shade of a banyan tree (*ruto, nunu*), while the third location is *Sa’o Pu’u*. These three structures (*Bo Ma’e*, *Bhaga* and *Sa’o Pu’u*) are integral to the initial worship performed during the *Reba Reti Siwa* ritual.

**b. *Sa'o Lobo* - 'The Tip House'**

The second element of the *sa'o ngaza* triad is *Sa'o Lobo*, or 'The Tip House'. The term "lobo" is associated with the concept of the "peak of life", signifying the culmination of the *sa'o ngaza* ritual within the *woe* coalition.



*Figure 2: Sa'o Lobo* ('Tip House'). Above the roof of the 'Tip House' is a wooden statue covered with palm fiber (*ijuk*), with its two hands holding the heirloom weapons or sword (*sau*) and spear (*bhuja*). The statue is called "*Atta Sa'o*". Document: Vianey, 2023.

In the context of the Ngadhu construction celebration, where Ngadhu is a 'sacrificial pole', the customary leader of the 'Tip House' must assume a leading role (Molnar, 2000). This individual is responsible for directing the ritual celebration; hence the 'Tip

House' is also referred to as "Sa'o Kopo Ngadhu". The Ngadhu, a sacrificial pole that accompanies the "Bhaga" sacrificial house, is under the care of the 'Tip House'. The Ngadhu, which also bears a name, symbolizes the male ancestors who established the *woe* and serves as a companion to the *Bhaga* sacrificial house.

### c. Sa'o Dhoro - 'The Derivation House'

In addition to *Sa'o Pu'u* and *Sa'o Lobo*, there is the third collective entity, *Sa'o Dhoro* (Derivation House). The term "dhoro" is associated with the concept of "descent," linking the entities *Sa'o Pu'u* and *Sa'o Lobo*, which are interconnected within the *woe* network. The term "dhoro" is derived from the word "dhadhi," which translates to "giving birth." Thus, *Sa'o Dhoro* is conceptualized as the house born from *Sa'o Pu'u* and *Sa'o Lobo*, akin to a child born from a mother (*Sa'o Pu'u*) and a father (*Sa'o Lobo*).

During the Ngadhu implantation process (*Mula Ngadhu*), *Sa'o Dhoro* assumes three roles: *Sa'o Kaka*, *Sa'o Dai*, and *Sa'o Wua Gha'o*. *Sa'o Kaka* is responsible for carrying and supporting the sacrificial pole to be planted; *Sa'o Dai* serves to hold and support *Sa'o Kaka*; while *Sa'o Wua Gha'o* carries and lifts the two leaders (*Dela*) who ride on the trunk (*saka pu'u*) from the Source House and the tip rider (*saka lobo*) from the Tip House.

This underlines the importance of *Sa'o Dhoro* in terms of *kaka* and *wua gha'o*. *Kaka* signifies 'to shoulder, support with both hands'; *wua* denotes 'to lift something with both hands onto a vehicle such as a horse's back or a boat,' and also means 'fruit'. *Gha'o* implies 'to hug and carry'. These terms are integral to their position, role and

function as a ritual-based social unit in the sacrificial pole establishment ritual. In this context, four men from the “derivation house” of the “supporting house” function to “support” (*kaka*) by carrying the sacrificial pole on their shoulders, while two men from the “derivation house” of the “caretaker house” type (*wua gha'o*) function to “carry” the two leaders of the “Source House” and the “Tip House”, who must be lifted onto the sacrificial pole and lowered again after the procession is over. The leader of the “Source House” occupies a position at the base of the sacrificial pole, and the leader of the “Tip House” occupies a position at the top of the sacrificial pole. This phenomenon has been explored and elucidated by several researchers such as Arndt, Molnar, and Smedal (Arndt, 1958; Molnar, 2000; Smedal, 2000).

In the lense of semiotic theory (Kleden, 2006), the names *Sa'o Pu'u* and *Sa'o Lobo* symbolize the existence of a concept of ‘beginning’ and ‘ending’ in the system of symbols/meaning/values in local wisdom. The name *Sa'o Pu'u*, signifying ‘the source and the beginning,’ and the name *Sa'o Lobo* representing ‘the tip or the end,’ embody the individuals behind these names. In religious code, the individual who is deemed to possess the character of ‘the beginning’ and ‘the end’ is God (Revelation 1:8).

The awareness of the Divine’s presence as the Beginning (*Pu'u*) and the End (*Lobo*) and the One who descends to interact and engage with humans and the universe (*Dhoro*) is also evident in the original religious experience of the Ngadha people, as demonstrated in previous studies on this phenomenon (Arndt, 1929, 1931, 1954, 1958, Muda, 1986). This is at least revealed in the formula of divine ‘names’. In the case of the *Sa'o Ngaza* ritual practice in Sa'o Milo

Loka in Guru Sina (Vianey, 2008), the divine form has names such as *Ine-Ema* and *Dewa Saga Telu*.

The following Pata Dela (Vianey, 2010) in Table 1, corroborated by key informants Godefridus Neno and Yosef One, implicitly expresses the existence of *Dewa Saga Telu*.

Table 1. Pata Dela 1

Ngadha Language	Meaning
• <i>Pu'u bha'i</i>	• Has no Beginning
• <i>Lobo bha'i</i>	• Endless
• <i>Ngaza mona</i>	• Has no name
• <i>Ota mona</i>	• Has no world
• <i>Gazi dhomi Sengata</i>	• He is the Only One
• <i>Da bila dhomi Ngata</i>	• 'The only thing that is beautiful is He
• <i>Da bhu masa nama ngaza</i>	• Who created all thing and all name
• <i>Pege watu boto tana lala</i>	• Since the rocks and the earth are like liquid'

In the first stanza, *Pata Dela* formulates apophatically the attributes of Dewa Saga Telu, namely: first, Without Beginning, Without Ending (*Pu'u Bha'i*, *Lobo Bha'i*). In botanical metaphor, the Divine is analogically formulated as having "no source" (*Pu'u Bha'i*) and being "tipless" (*Lobo Bha'i*). The Divine is purely "*Saga Telu*" (*Three Branches*) like a tree or a road with three branches. This metaphor underscores the enigmatic unity of the 'three in one', which is 'beginning-less' or 'rootless' and 'endless', fundamental to the Divine nature. This aligns with Whitehead's process theory, which posits that God, being eternal, precedes all other actual entities, existing as a pure beginning pole and concurrently as a pure ending pole. God is thus a metaphysical prerequisite for the creative process towards the perfection of all other entities in the process of becoming (Whitehead, 1984).

Second, possesses no name; inhabits no world (*ngaza mona, ota mona*). In a positive and authentic sense, this implies that the Divine is essentially an “impersonal” entity (*ngaza mona*) predating the existence of space-time or the natural world of life (*ota mona*). However, the Divine assumes a ‘personal’ form when it reveals its own “name” through the conduit of human conscience and creative power, which is receptive to the process of revelation. Consequently, throughout the history of religious revelations (encompassing both major traditional religions and minor traditional religions), the Divine is recognized by various names, contingent on the linguistic traditions of each religion.

For instance, the Vedic revelation contains various verses that affirm the existence of 33 gods (Titib, 1996). As the Hindu tradition evolved, as seen in the Puranas, these 33 gods were identified with the Tri Murti gods: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Each of these Tri Murti gods is also venerated through thousands of names (Brahma Sahasranama, Vishnu Sahasranama, and Siva Sahasranama) (Titib, 1996).

In the second stanza of *Pata Dela* above, it affirmatively states that: (3) 'He is the only One' (*Gazi dhomi Sengata*); (4) 'The only thing that is beautiful is He' (*Da bila dhomi Ngata*); (5) 'He is the creator of everything called' (*Bhu masa nama ngaza*). He created (*bhu*) everything as something living, which has value in itself, so that everything must have a name (*ngaza*), and (6) 'Since the rocks and the earth are like liquid' (*Pége watu boto ne'e tana lala*). This implies that in the hierarchy of existence, ‘fluid’ creatures are the initial entities in the cycle of divine creation. These fluid creatures then transform into solid entities, such as soil and stone. Both fluid and

solid entities are considered alive or energetic because they contain an element of breath (*ngai*) or energy (*ngaru*) within their core, which is believed to originate and coexist with the Creator in the mystery of His creative process.

In this second stanza, the nature of God Saga Telu is revealed as being the only one, or one (*Gazi dhomi Sengata*), who is absolutely beautiful (*bila dhomi Ngata*), and who created (*bhu*) all things and all names (*nama ngaza*). According to process theory, the act of bestowing a “name” or personality implies that the creation becomes an entity with inherent creative power, continually self-renewing. Creation is always progressing towards perfection and exists in a network (nexus) of unity and connection with various other entities.

In the context of process theory (theology), the ‘initial nature’ (*pu’u*) and ‘final nature’ (*lobo*) of the Divine, revealed in the first stanza, are balanced by the ‘action nature’ in the second stanza (Kirchberger, 2007). Therefore, at the inception of space and time, God, initially impersonal, is posited to ‘become personal’ through His act of creating the world and everything within it, each with a ‘name’. In ritual practice, He is addressed by numerous names, demonstrating the personal dimension in His relationship with humans, especially with the title Dewa Saga Telu. This title serves as *praeparatio evangelica* of the mysteries of the Trinity, encapsulating the initial and final nature of the Divine, which is most beautiful and impersonal, and transforms into the one beautiful, which is personal, through ‘the nature of His action’ in the creation and administration of the world.

The Ngadha people, as religious beings, recognize the omnipresence of the Divine, a force that is both impersonal and personal,

transcending human understanding (1 John 4:4), accompanying them, and residing deep within human identity (1 Cor. 3:16–17; Eph. 4:6). Arndt has articulated this omnipresence of the Divine, which surpasses human comprehension, into three levels of Divine Presence: *Dewa Zeta Wawo*, *Dewa One Sa'o*, and *Dewa One Ate Ja'o*. This tripartite divine presence is referred to as *Dewa Saga* (Arndt, 1929; Vianey, 2008)

Interviews with Laurensius Liwu, a local Catholic priest from the Ende Diocese (Vianey, 2008), and informants Godefridus Neno (75) and Yosef One (74) have confirmed that *Dewa Saga Telu* represents the *semina verbi* of the Divine Trinity in local tradition. This signifies the nature (widha) of the One God (*Dewa Sengata*) who exists in three persons: *Dewa Wawo*, *Dewa Sa'o*, and *Dewa Ja'o*. The process theory in religious code (Whitehead, 1974) affirms the existence of a non-temporal beginning and ending nature of the Holy One.

Thus, the names *Sa'o Pu'u* and *'Sa'o Lobo* are interpreted as representations of the Divine's Beginning and Ending nature that transcends time. The traditional house naming system in local tradition uniquely balances the 'maternal nature/beginning nature' and 'paternal nature/ending nature' with the 'nature of descending or derivation/or the nature of kinship'. This balance is not mentioned in Whitehead's concept and process theory. This unique aspect can be explained through process theology, developed by Hartshorne based on the Roman Catholic tradition (Kirchberger, 2007). Process theology elucidates the mystery of the divine beginning and ending nature mediated by the Divine's 'natural action'. In this 'natural



action', the Divine, as the 'Beginning' and 'End' (Revelation 1:8), actively participates in the world and life creation.

In Catholic tradition, the nature of God's action is embodied in the person of the risen Lord. He has been eternally present (pre-existence) in the form of the Word of God (John 1:1-3) and revealed in the history of salvation as the unique "Son" of the Father (John 3:16; Matthew 28:19). He is truly human and truly divine, incarnate (John 1:14) in the person of Jesus Christ, who saved humanity and the world, in the name of Immanuel (Mat 1:23). His initial mission involved the liberation of humanity and the world (Luke 4:18-19). He appeared as the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6) like a friend (John 15:15), for every person who strives for perfection, just as the "Father" (who embodies the nature of fatherhood/ultimate nature) is perfect (Mat 5:48).

The collective name of *sa'o ngaza* is interpreted as a representation of the Divine image. *Sa'o Pu'u* represents the divine image as the "Beginning" in the mystery of the "primordial nature/divine motherhood" that is full of love. In this primordial nature, the Divine created humanity with the power of His love (1 John 4:7-8). *Sa'o Dhoru* represents the divine image as the "Descending to be involved" in the mystery of the "natural action/ or natural sonship" of the Divine. The nature of divine action serves to accompany the struggle of human life like a friend (John 15:13-15); and *Sa'o Lobo* represents the divine image as the "End" in the mystery of the "ultimate nature/fatherly nature" of the Divine. The ultimate nature of the Divine becomes the goal for every person in their struggle for life in the world, towards perfection, like the perfect "Father" in heaven (Mat 5:48).

## **Discussion**

### **Indigenization of the Trinitarian Monotheism**

The researcher's reflection suggests that the indigenization of the Sacred's image, as understood in the orthodoxy of the Roman Catholic Church, which adheres to trinitarian monotheism (*Deus Unus et Trinus*) and acknowledges the mystery of the Divine incarnation through His 'nature of action' in the name of Jesus Christ, can be effectively integrated into local religious traditions. This is because all Guru Sina people are formally adherents of the Roman Catholic religion, and their local religious traditions contain seeds of the idea of incarnation and trinitarian monotheism. This is evident at least in the formulation of the ritual utterances of *Dewa Saga Telu* in the names of *Dewa Wawo*, *Dewa Sa'o*, and *Dewa Ja'o*.

The dimension of Divine transcendence, expressed in the Roman Catholic tradition as the "Father" who is in heaven (Matthew 6: 9), can be encapsulated in the name *Dewa Wawo*, signifying God who transcends humans and the world (God Who beyond us). The incarnative dimension of Divine immanence, expressed in the Roman Catholic tradition as the perfect "Son" present in Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2: 4-5), namely the Immanuel (Mt 1: 23), can be intertwined in the name of *Dewa One Sa'o* as God who actively accompanies humans at the community level (God Who with us). Furthermore, the Divine's presence in the depths of the human heart, which in the Roman Catholic tradition is present in the name of the "Holy Spirit" (cf. 1 Cor 3: 16), is also encapsulated in local religious traditions in the name *Dewa Ja'o* as the God who accompanies humans at the individual level, willing to reside in the core of his heart (God Who within me).

It is intriguing in this study, that God, in the name of *Dewa Ja'o*, echoes the voice of God in their heart, who revealed Himself to Moses around 13,000 years ago on the slopes of Mount Sinai (Ex 3: 14), who said: *Ego sum qui sum* (I am Who I am). He is the “I” who exists and is present with me, willing to ‘exist’ with me, willing to stay in the depths of my inner space! He is ‘God Who is within me’.

The reflection of trinitarian monotheism in the Roman Catholic tradition fundamentally emphasizes the mystery of ‘God in relationship’ in related to perichoresis (cf. Mat 28:19-20) and ‘God in communion’ which is based on absolute love (cf. 1 John 4: 7-8). This is highly relevant in the prospects of the struggle for local community life based on the *Sa'o Ngaza* rite. Therefore, in the process of human life’s struggle, both as individuals and as a community, towards a life that is spiritually perfect and socially moral, there must be confidence that the Sacred is truly immanently present in the Spirit and truth of His inclusion (cf. John 4: 23-24). Thus, it is not enough for the representation of the image of the Sacred to simply be expressed in the attributes of ‘The Beginning’ and ‘The End’ as theorized by Whitehead. But it must also be balanced with the image of being “the One Who is descending and Involved”, which is and to come (cf. Rev 1:8). It can be relatively summarized that the image of the Sacred in the *Guru Sina/Ngada* tradition has been inherited in the richness of the triadic symbolic system, in the entity of the *Sa'o Ngaza* ritual and its ritual praxis.

In the local tradition, the perfection of humanity is marked by the consciousness and testimony of life that makes the Sacred One as the *Dewa Ja'o* also known as *Dewa One Ate Ja'o* – ‘God Within My Heart’. In the mystery of this name, the Sacred One becomes the

source, center and pinnacle of personal existence (1 Cor 3:16). In other words, the Divine is truly present within me, but not identical to me, because He simultaneously transcends me in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). He is my God, my “Father-Mother,” my object of worship, and “I” (*Ja’o*) becomes His “child,” His “property.”

Awareness of the presence of *Dewa Ja’o* (‘God Who within me’) as the center of the Trinity cultural spirituality is also revealed in the ritual practice of installing the traditional *sa’o ngaza*, especially at the closing stage; particularly when each person in the *sa’o ngaza* room must gaze at their own reflection in the clarity of the sacred coconut water. Through the ritual of breaking the coconut (*kela nio*), the symbolic action of watching someone’s own face on the surface of coconut water on a traditional plate made of a species of pumpkins (*ngeme*) the Ngadha people can rediscover the mystery of their perfection from their subsidiary consciousness, as a reflection of the Divine image (*nenu ngia Dewa*). The coconut water reflects the personal identity of human beings as *atta* or *kita atta*, which is the *nenu ngia Dewa* (the reflection of God’s image) with its essential nature, namely its spiritual dimension who is ‘good and pure’ (*lina*). The formulation of *Pata Dela* in Table 2 below has been confirmed by both participants Godefridus Neno and Yosef One about the truth of the revelation.

Table 2. Pata Dela 2

Ngadha Language	Meaning
• <i>Wae nio</i>	• Coconut water
• <i>Zale ngéme</i>	• Inside <i>ngéme</i>
• <i>Fiki na’a dhiri</i>	• Hazy on the edges
• <i>Lina pia kisa</i>	• Clear and pure in the middle
• <i>Dewa</i>	• God
• <i>Dhoru nenu ngia</i>	• Looking at our reflection
• <i>Nenu ngia kita</i>	• Reflecting within ourselves

The ritual, in its entirety, serves as a reminder for all participants to genuinely perceive and comprehend their own visages, as well as that of the *Dewa Ja’o*, mirrored in the sanctified lucidity of the coconut water. This is an affirmation of the belief that our faces are indeed a “reflection of God’s image”. Subsequently, the leader of

the ritual, acting in the capacity of the Sacred One, anoints all those who have beheld this “spiritual image” with the same consecrated water. This ritualistic practice has been corroborated by Godefridus Neno and Yosef One, as indicated in Table 3, which details the following pata dela

Table 3. Pata Dela 3

Ngadha Language	Meaning
<p><i>Miu</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>We zio milo rasi siga</i></li> <li>• <i>We dhiji jena sadho gedha</i></li> <li>• <i>Lo molo weki pawe</i></li> <li>• <i>Jaga waka milo mae</i></li> <li>• <i>Posa lema ringu ngaza</i></li> <li>• <i>Tau nenu ngia Dewa</i></li> </ul>	<p>You</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May you be cleansed and purified</li> <li>• May you attain enlightenment to the highest level</li> <li>• May your body stand tall and healthy</li> <li>• May you guard your soul and sanctify your spirit</li> <li>• May you control your tongue and glorify the name</li> <li>• May you become a reflection of God's face."</li> </ul>

Pata Dela above contains 5 (five) purposes and the goals of self-improvement or spiritual development of the Ngadha people based on the divine revelation through *Kela Nio* ritual, namely: (1) human beings must continuously purify their inner selves personally (*zio milo rasi siga*) and through this, they may attain divine enlightenment up to the highest level (*dhiji jena*); (2) the human body must undergo a process of becoming a true body (*lo molo*) and a healthy self (*weki pawe*); (3) humans are invited to continually 'preserve the nobility of the soul' (*jaga waka*) and the holiness of the spirit (*milo mae*); (4) humans are also obliged to control their tongues in communication (*posa lema*) with others and thereby glorify the name (*ringu ngaza*); and (5) humans should purify the mystery of the 'face' of humans as a reflection of the 'face' of God (*nenu ngia Dewa*).

## **Dialogue between local traditions and Roman Catholic Church on the Mysteries of the Trinity**

The dialogue between local traditions and the Roman Catholic Church on the Mysteries of the Trinity is a significant aspect of intercultural discourse. This dialogue, particularly prevalent in Asia, promotes peaceful coexistence and constructive engagement, guided by the principle of *Ecclesia semper reformanda et purificanda* (The Church is always reforming and purifying). It serves not only as a strategy for integrating local values that align with Christian values but also as a means of inculturation, contextualizing the Christian values of the Roman Catholic Church within the spiritual and moral frameworks of Asian societies, particularly Indonesia. This dialogue could potentially evolve into a lifestyle for disciplined and faithful Catholics, encouraging them to grow into ‘new humans’ (Eph 4:13-21) through reflection on the Triune God, who exists in an eternal dialogue of love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:7-8).

It is important to acknowledge that the proclamation of Christian values by the pastoral agents of the Roman Catholic Church in Asia, including the doctrine of the Triune God, has its roots in Jewish, Greek and Roman cultures. This cultural heritage, as documented in the Bible (Matthew 28: 19), has been passed down through Church Tradition since the era of the Church Fathers (1-6 centuries AD) and continues to be updated through the teachings of the Church Magisterium, implemented by Bishops worldwide. Bishops, as the successors of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, have been under the universal leadership of the Apostle Peter since the 1st century (Matthew 16; John 21) and his successors, namely the Pope or

Bishop of Rome. The current leader of the Roman Catholic Church is Pope Francis, the 266<sup>th</sup> pope in the history of the Catholic Church.

The teachings of the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church are disseminated in the form of Documents, such as the Documents of the Second Vatican Council and various Papal Pastoral Letters known as Encyclicals. At the continental level, for instance, in Asia, these documents and pastoral letters are issued by Bishops affiliated with the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). At the regional level, such as in Indonesia, the teachings of the Magisterium are presented in documents and pastoral letters from bishops who are members of the Bishops' Conference of Indonesia or Konferensi Wali Gereja Indonesia (KWI).

The FABC aims to foster intercultural dialogue between local traditions and Catholic Church traditions, sharing a vision of life by identifying similarities and differences within the context of indigenization and inculturation of human, natural, and divine values in Asia. The FABC also strives to contextualize the values of the Gospel, managing cultural diversity to humanize individuals, enhance and preserve the integrity of ecosystems, and glorify the Holy Trinity. Moreover, the FABC seeks to bridge the gap between those who perceive diversity as a threat and those who see it as enrichment, guided by the principle *Ecclesia semper reformanda et purificanda*.

This research, employing analytical tools based on process theory and process theology, reveals parallel concepts that can assist the Ngadha people, who are Catholics living in traditional houses, to deepen their understanding of the mystery of the Triune God. The Ngadha people refer to their traditional home as *sa'o ngaza* or

“named houses.” The names, arranged systematically, reflect the individual identities of the residential buildings and dwelling places. The terms “Source House” (*Sa’o Pu’u*), “Tip House” (*Sa’o Lobo*) and “Derivation House” (*Sa’o Dhoru*) are cultural texts that signify the concepts of “beginning,” “end,” and “Descending to be involved,” as implied in their local wisdom and symbolic system. The ‘descendant nature,’ not stated in Whitehead’s process theory, balances the ‘maternal nature/or beginning nature’ and ‘paternal nature/or end nature,’ rendering the traditional home naming system unique. Process theology, constructed by Hartshorne based on the Roman Catholic tradition, provides the only explanation for this peculiarity. The natural action of the Divine mediates the enigma of the divine beginning and ending nature, addressed by process theology. In this “action nature,” the Divine actively participates in the world and the process of life formation in its capacity as the “Beginning” and “End.”

In the context of process theology and semiotic analysis, the essence of God is perceived as an entity deserving of the roles of “the beginning,” “the end,” and “the engaged descender,” unified in one entity. This perspective validates the belief in the indigenous God, known as Dewa Saga Telu. A *praeparatio evangelica* (‘evangelical preparation’), in the context of indigenization, can reproduce the mystery of the Trinity in the intercultural dialogue between the perspectives of the Catholic Church and local culture in Indonesia, using Dewa Saga Telu. Dewa Saga Telu serves as the *semina verbi* (‘seed of the word’) of the mystery of the Trinity in local tradition.

This dialogue illustrates the nature of the Triune God, *Deus Unus et Trinus*, as Dewa Sengata, but with three distinct persons. There is



one God, co-equal, co-eternal, and co-substantial, namely Dewa Wawo, Dewa Sa'o, and Dewa Ja'o. Dewa Wawo represents God who is beyond us. Dewa Sa'o symbolizes God who is with us. Dewa Ja'o signifies God who is within us. This interpretation provides a unique perspective on the mystery of the Triune God within the context of local Indonesian culture.

According to process theology and semiotic analysis, the essence of God is about someone who is deserving of the roles of "the beginning," "the end," and "the engaged descender" in that one unity. This validates the belief in the native God, known as *Dewa Saga Telu*. A *praeparatio evangelica* ('evangelical preparation) in the light of indigenization about the mystery of the Trinity in intercultural dialogue between the perspectives of the Catholic Church and local culture in Indonesia can be reproduced using *Dewa Saga Telu*, the *semina verbi* ('seed of the word') of the mystery of the Trinity in local tradition. It illustrates the nature of the Triune God/*Deus Unus et Trinus* as *Dewa Sengata* but has three persons; there is one God, co-equal, co-eternal and co-substantial, namely *Dewa Wawo*, *Dewa Sa'o*, and *Dewa Ja'o*. *Dewa Wawo* is God Who beyond us. *Dewa Sa'o* is God Who with us. *Dewa Ja'o* is God Who within me.

## Conclusion

The traditional houses and naming system of the Ngadha community serve not merely as human dwellings, but also as replicas of "God's House" (*Lesa Dewa*). Through the lens of theology and semiotic analysis, the essence of God as 'The Beginning (*Pu'u*),' 'The End (*Lobo*),' and 'The Descending to be Involved' (*Dhoro*) aligns with the triadic nature of God in local religion, known as Dewa Saga

Heritage of Nusantara:

Telu. The names of Dewa Saga Telu are Dewa Wawo, Dewa Sa'o, and Dewa Ja'o. This perspective can be semiotically reinterpreted and contextually reflected upon in both the triadic and trinitarian meanings, as found in local religious traditions and the Catholic Church.

In the context of intercultural dialogue, the mystery of the Trinity combines “tri” (or *Saga Telu* in Ngada language, meaning “three, triple, or threefold”) and “unitas” (or *Sengata* in Ngada language, meaning “unity or oneness”). This concept of Holy Trinity in the Catholic Church parallels the concept of Dewa Sengata and Dewa Saga Telu in local religion. God is understood as three divine persons in one substance, essence, or nature – in other words, one God in three divine persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There is one God, co-equal, co-eternal and co-substantial.

This study affirms the rich legacies of the Ngada local religion and the mysteries of the cultural trinity as *praeparatio evangelica* for the Holy Trinity and its spirituality, among the Asian people living in the Ngadha region of Flores, Indonesia. It also proposes a novelty, which lies in paralleling the concept of God in triadic and triune mysteries. This confirms the view of God in local religion, who is addressed as Dewa Saga Telu. Dewa Saga Telu is the *semina verbi* of the mystery of the Holy Trinity in local tradition, which shows the nature of the One God - Dewa Sengata, but of three persons. There is one God, co-equal, co-eternal, and co-substantial, namely *Dewa Wawo, Dewa Sa'o, and Dewa Ja'o*. This can be formulated as *praeparatio evangelica* about the mysteries of the Trinity in intercultural dialogue between the views of the Catholic Church and local culture in Ngadha, Indonesia.

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