

***Marapu* as Christophany for Orang Sumba:
An Experiment in Christological Inculturation**
Miguel Gaspe, CSsR

Abstract

In a place like Sumba, Indonesia where the indigenous ancestral belief (*Marapu*) is pulsating deeply into the life and culture of its people, inculturating a foreign belief such as Christianity can pose a great challenge. This paper proposes that a Christophany – a deeper kind of doing Christology that embraces and dialogues with the local religio-cultural context – must take place if one is to do effective and relevant mission work in Sumba. Drawing from his personal immersion experience and employing theological pedagogies inspired from the theologies of Edward Schillebeeckx, Jose de Mesa and Raimon Pannikar, the author attempts to articulate an inculturated Christology that speaks to the local people and reimagines ways of doing mission in a deeply religious and culturally rich Sumba.

Narratives of a Journey

In searching for the meaning of my encounter with the *Marapu*, I realize that presenting a narrative would enrich the continuous dialogue of our Christian faith with other religions. The belief in the *Marapu* holds a significant facet into the Sumba people's sense of "salvation." As I have observed during my stay in Sumba, the local's experiences of "salvation" in their belief of the *Marapu* can be a potential seedbed to present a "Christology" narrated through their rich narratives and contexts. The fruit of this exchange can both enrich our understanding of the *Marapu* belief in the life of the Sumbanese. At the same time, we as Christians could exercise the dialogue of cultural exchange in a manner that fully recognizes the narratives of other people.

To put into practice our theological training, the recommendations presented in this paper are an attempt to contribute to the works of literature and methodologies concerning inculturation. This realization comes from my conviction of God in Jesus who is present in every reality of human activity. It is in understanding Christ and His role in God's grand narrative of salvation where we, the agents of evangelization, can gauge our direction. The God revealed in Jesus Whom in our belief is conceived not only in the doctrines defined by Western thought, but also manifests in the rich experiences of Asian narratives. Elements within the *Marapu* belief are yet to contribute to the continuous enrichment of the Jesus-story for the people of Sumba.