



# Reinterpreting ‘God’s Time’ in Agrarian Conflict: Kairos Theology and Christian Education in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

This study addressed the theological and sociopolitical gap in Indonesia's response to agrarian and ecological crises. It aimed to reinterpret the concept of 'God's time' through a Kairos lens, linking it to Christian educational praxis and eco-theological thought. This study focused on Indonesian regions facing intense land conflict and ecological degradation, particularly those involving indigenous communities. Using a qualitative theological design, this study employed a critical textual analysis of Kairos documents, an ethnographic content analysis of local cultural practices, and a literature review of Christian education and contextual eco-theology. Data triangulation was achieved through document comparison and thematic coding. The results showed that the phrase 'God's time' was often used passively in Christian discourse, frequently serving institutional and political interests instead of inspiring prophetic action. The study concluded that Christian education, when grounded in local wisdom and Kairos theology, has transformative potential to reframe time theologically and promote ecological solidarity. As a practical contribution, this study proposed a contextual framework for prophetic theological education in Indonesia, including a curricular model that integrates environmental justice, indigenous wisdom, and critical solidarity as core components of Christian educational praxis.

Keywords: Agrarian Conflict, Christian Education, God’s Time, Indonesia, Kairos Theology

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's ecological future is deeply intertwined with persistent agrarian struggles. These conflicts, often involving indigenous communities, corporate actors, and state authorities, have led to widespread dispossession, the criminalization of activists, and ecological degradation (Scheidel et al., 2023). Amid this socio-political crisis, Christian communities are often caught between theological ideals and institutional silence. A central expression that emerges in ecclesial and pastoral settings is the invocation of "God's time" (*waktu Tuhan*), a phrase that offers comfort yet can sometimes conceal. Intended to offer hope, this expression can easily become a mechanism for delaying moral responsibility or rationalizing inaction. Rather than embodying divine discernment, it risks becoming theologically sanctioned passivity.

This study proposes that this interpretation of God's time must be challenged both theoretically and pedagogically. Particularly in the context of agrarian injustice and ecological degradation, invoking God's time as an abstract, timeless concept of patience may serve the interests of those in power while leaving vulnerable communities unsupported. In the tradition of liberation theology, waiting can be a strategy of the oppressor cloaked in piety. Thus, the need arises to recover the prophetic and pastoral dimensions of divine temporality, not as a delay but as a decisive call to awareness, action, and solidarity.

While eco-theology and liberation theology have gained traction globally, particularly in Latin America, Africa, and certain Asian contexts, Indonesian theological discourse often lags in critically engaging these movements. According to Conradie (2020), Christian eco-theology includes four critical tasks—interpretation, critique, retrieval, and reconstruction—that are largely absent from Indonesian theological curricula (Hermawan, 2022). Similarly, Ciftci (2015) highlights how eco-theology intersects liberationist concerns in both Islam and Christianity. However, in Indonesia, theological conversations about land, indigeneity, and environmental justice are often overshadowed by spiritualized or moralistic approaches. There is a significant gap in addressing the spiritual and ecological dimensions of land dispossession and cultural erosion in Indonesian theological education. This study seeks to fill this gap by engaging local theological resources and pedagogical models through a Kairos-informed, eco-theological lens.

While global eco-theological discourse provides valuable theoretical grounding, Indonesian scholars have made significant contributions to contextualizing ecological theology within the archipelago's socio-cultural and religious realities. Maggang (2022) emphasizes the integration of maritime ecological concerns into Christian discipleship, arguing that care for the sea must be rooted in both biblical theology and local cultural practices. Expanding this vision, Maggang (2023) develops the concept of "Blue Diakonia," highlighting how Indonesian churches can embody a mission of ecological solidarity with coastal communities through liturgical, pastoral, and advocacy work. Complementing these perspectives, Runtuwene (2025) examines how Protestant congregations in Indonesia integrate creation care into worship, education, and community engagement, showing that a contextualized eco-theology emerges most effectively when grounded in lived ecclesial practices. Incorporating these insights enriches the conceptual

framework of this study, ensuring that the proposed Kairos theology is informed not only by global debates but also by theological reflections deeply rooted in Indonesia's ecological, cultural, and religious landscapes.

Kairos theology—first articulated by South African theologians resisting apartheid and later adapted by Palestinian Christians in their context of occupation—offers a crucial theological and ethical framework for reinterpreting "God's time" as urgent, public, and justice-oriented (Vellem, 2010). Kairos is not merely chronological time (Chronos) but a decisive, opportune moment in which faith demands a response. In this framework, silence is complicity, and neutrality in times of moral crisis is unfaithful. The Kairos Palestine Document speaks of a "moment of truth," in which Christians are called to discern and act in solidarity with the oppressed (Sandmel, 2021). This perspective reframes divine time as a space of crisis and opportunity, not resignation.

In Indonesia, with its complex crises of land grabbing, ecological collapse, and marginalization of indigenous communities, the Kairos vision provides valuable theological traction. Drawing from the prophetic impulse of Kairos theology, this article seeks to reinterpret "God's time" not as deferred hope but as immediate, incarnate commitment. This reinterpretation also demands contextual application through education and formation, particularly within Christian institutions, to shape how future church leaders think theologically about time, justice, and land.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative research design appropriate for exploring theological meaning and human experience within ecological and spiritual contexts (Hammarberg et al., 2016). It draws on insights from contextual Christian education (Leahy, 2023), indigenous eco-theologies (Roberts, 2023; Sihombing, 2023), and political theology to create a conceptual framework that views education as a praxis of resistance and cultural embodiment. The goal is not to discard the spiritual richness of "God's time" but to re-ground it within a theology that is historically conscious, justice-oriented, and culturally situated. Accordingly, the objectives of this study are: (1) to interrogate the theological language of time in the face of ecological and agrarian injustice; (2) to critically retrieve and reframe "God's time" using the Kairos tradition; (3) to integrate this theological reflection with ecological insights from indigenous cultures; and (4) to propose pedagogical implications for Christian education in Indonesia that are both prophetic and locally grounded.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Agrarian Conflict and Ecological Crisis in Indonesia**

Indonesia's ecological trajectory is increasingly shaped by protracted agrarian conflicts, revealing entrenched socio-political and theological fractures. These conflicts are systemic, rooted in colonial land policies, and perpetuated through post-independence legal and economic

regimes. Since the Dutch colonial era, the commodification of land through legal instruments such as *domein-verklaring* (domain declaration or state domain) has displaced indigenous cosmologies that perceive land as a sacred inheritance rather than a commodity. This disjunction persists as state-driven developmentalism—exemplified in mega-infrastructure projects, plantation expansions, and extractive mining—continues to marginalize rural and indigenous communities (Afrizal, 2015; Bettinger, 2015).

To understand the urgency of contextual eco-theology in Indonesia, it is necessary to situate the discussion within the lived realities of agrarian and ecological conflicts. One prominent example is the *Kendeng* farmers' movement in Central Java, where predominantly women farmers have resisted the establishment of a cement factory that threatens their ancestral land (*tanah pusaka*). Their protest—famously encasing their feet in cement while praying—symbolized an unbreakable spiritual and ecological bond with the land and drew national attention to the desecration of their mountainscape. This act, deeply theological in its symbolism, lamented the violation of creation while calling for justice, and has been analyzed as part of a broader struggle for environmental justice involving the *Sedulur Sikep* community (Kunz et al., 2024). Notably, recent accounts and analyses of the *Kendeng* mobilization have focused on community, women, and civil-society leadership, with scant documentation of sustained institutional Christian engagement—an absence that warrants theological reflection (Handayani, 2017).

A similar dynamic emerged in the **#SaveAru** campaign in the Aru Islands of Maluku, where indigenous communities successfully opposed a government-backed corporate plan to convert two-thirds of their forest into a sugarcane plantation (Bräuchler, 2021; Sahrasad et al., 2019). For the Aru people, the forest is not merely a source of livelihood but an integral part of their cosmology, cultural identity, and spiritual heritage, deeply intertwined with their understanding of land as sacred (Kaharudin et al., 2024). While the movement drew national attention and ultimately halted the project, the involvement of the wider Indonesian Church remained limited, and theological discourse on the issue was scarce (Bräuchler, 2021; Sahrasad et al., 2019).

According to the Consortium for Agrarian Reform (Rachman & Setiawan, 2016), more than 1,500 agrarian conflicts have been recorded since 2004, most involving indigenous land claims, resource extraction, and forced eviction. The ecological costs are severe: deforestation, loss of biodiversity, erosion, pollution, and the breakdown of customary environmental stewardship. These conflicts have also led to the detention of 1,395 farmers and agrarian activists, injuries to 633 individuals, the shooting of 110 people by security forces, and the death of 85 people in conflict zones. These are not merely environmental issues; they are deeply theological concerns that raise fundamental questions about land, justice, and the presence of God amid suffering. These realities expose not only environmental and legal crises but also a theological rupture within the life of the Church. Agrarian conflict in Indonesia does not simply reflect socio-economic tension; it lays bare a profound theological crisis, particularly in the response—or lack thereof—of Christian communities.

## **Theological Critique of Passive Time**

Ironically, churches called to be prophetic voices in society often remain silent or retreat into the rhetoric of "God's time" (*waktu Tuhan*), a rhetoric that encourages passive endurance. This tendency has been observed in various studies of Christian responses to structural injustice, where eschatological hope is misused as justification for deferring action (Dávila, 2022; Nilsen & Solevåg, 2016). Instead of functioning as a call to urgent moral engagement, the rhetoric of divine timing can mask complicity and thus reinforce the status quo. Though commonly used to provide comfort, this phrase has in many cases become a theological tool to avoid moral confrontation. Instead of galvanizing communities toward ethical action, it pacifies resistance and delays justice. As Braverman (2018) argues, religious rhetoric that avoids confrontation in the name of patience or divine timing often functions as a tool of pacification, neutralizing prophetic resistance and sustaining systemic injustice.

The concept of "God's time" (*waktu Tuhan*), when reinterpreted through the Kairos lens, moves beyond abstract temporality into a praxis-oriented theological response. In concrete terms, this reinterpretation applies to how Christian communities discern critical moments of injustice and respond with timely, ethical action rather than passive waiting. For example, in regions like Central Kalimantan and Papua, where indigenous communities face dispossession due to extractive industries, invoking "God's time" must not function as a theological excuse for inaction. Instead, it must be reframed as a decisive moment—a divine interruption—that calls the Church to stand in solidarity with the oppressed, engage in advocacy, and promote restorative land practices. Practically, this can be seen when churches organize public prayers combined with environmental campaigns, issue prophetic statements against land grabbing, or create church-based education programs that equip youth with ecological awareness rooted in Scripture and local wisdom. Reinterpreting "God's time" as Kairos thus becomes not merely an academic exercise but a moral and spiritual imperative for Christian praxis in the face of systemic agrarian injustice.

A concrete example comes from an informal discussion held by students from Kalimantan, Papua, Sulawesi, and Java at a small university in Yogyakarta. During this discussion, they agreed that the church's response to environmental issues was slow. They expressed frustration with the church, which often appeared to show little attention to or support for urgent ecological concerns. One student from Kalimantan shared, "We've been hoping for a long time that the church would be more active in supporting environmental causes, but they just stay silent and say that everything is part of God's plan. There's no real action!"

## **Church Complicity and Institutional Interests**

The problem becomes more acute when theological passivity intersects with institutional interests. In various contexts across Indonesia, Christian churches and institutions maintain indirect ties with political elites and corporate actors through financial dependencies, land-use agreements, and participation in development programs. For instance, in North Sulawesi, a

church has been observed to have close affiliations with political parties, with church elites participating in local elections and leveraging church resources for political gain, highlighting the politicization of theology when institutional interests take precedence (Naleng et al., 2023). Additionally, some religious organizations in Indonesia have been involved in development programs that align with government or corporate interests. For instance, a prominent Muslim organization has been reported to have supported the issuance of mining licenses, raising concerns about the potential exploitation of natural resources. This involvement in development programs linked to resource extraction can be viewed as a form of institutional passivity or complicity in ecological exploitation (Halimatusa'diyah & Garadian, 2024). Moreover, the rise of party-based charitable foundations has contributed to new forms of political clientelism, in which welfare initiatives serve as a tool for garnering political support, potentially diverting attention from pressing ecological and agrarian justice concerns. These dynamics demonstrate how theological inaction may be reinforced by institutional entanglements that compromise the Church's prophetic role. These affiliations create a conflicted space in which theological critique is muted by institutional caution. Consequently, the invocation of divine timing serves not only as a spiritual trope but also as an institutional defense mechanism, deflecting the Church's responsibility to speak truth to power.

This theological posture has serious implications, enabling the normalization of injustice under the veil of piety and undermining the Church's credibility as a moral witness. As Dávila (2022) warns, ecclesial silence in the face of structural violence is not neutral; rather, it is complicity. When the Church fails to denounce land grabbing, ecological exploitation, and cultural displacement, especially when these are entangled with state or corporate interests, it ceases to embody the liberating message of the gospel. For example, in Kalimantan, extractive industries have reshaped the ecological landscape into zones of exploitation and waste. Deforestation for palm oil and coal mining has led to soil degradation and heightened disaster risks. In Papua, land seizures under the pretext of national development have not only disrupted ecosystems but also militarized indigenous life and undermined sacred ancestral relations to land (Duile, 2017; Großmann, 2019). Land here is not just territory; it is theology in practice, a spiritual home, communal memory, and a divine covenant.

### **Beyond Anthropocentrism**

Theologically, such violence against land reflects the inadequacy of dominant Christian frameworks, particularly the stewardship model, which often assumes human managerial authority over creation. Although stewardship implies care, it remains deeply anthropocentric, viewing the natural world primarily through a lens of human needs, values, and control. In this model, the Earth is regarded less as a subject in relationship with God and more as a passive object to be managed, used, and conserved for human purposes. Such an orientation marginalizes the intrinsic value of non-human life and ignores the possibility that creation itself has agency, voice, and spiritual significance independent of its utility to humans. This anthropocentric bias hinders a more relational, reciprocal theology that honors creation as a co-

participant in God's covenant. Maulana et al. (2024) argue that this model reinforces a hierarchy of creation that privileges human interests over relational reciprocity with the Earth, reducing land to an object of ethical responsibility rather than a subject of theological encounter.

This anthropocentric bias is further reinforced by the passive invocation of "God's time" (*waktu Tuhan*) in ecclesial discourse. Rather than discerning God's presence in the cries of the earth and the struggles of its people, churches often spiritualize the crisis, calling for patience, endurance, or a focus on future redemption. While pastorally comforting, this theological stance becomes ethically problematic. As Nilsen & Solevåg (2016) argue in their critique of eco-colonialism, religious concepts such as providence and eschatology can unintentionally legitimize ecological oppression when divorced from historical and material realities. Therefore, agrarian conflict in Indonesia demands a theological reconstruction that refuses neutrality, calling the Church to rediscover the prophetic dimension of its mission, to name injustice as sin, and to stand in solidarity with the land and those who suffer upon it. Silence is not benign; it is complicity. The Church must not be an observer but a participant in the struggle for ecological justice.

This study proposes a reinterpretation of "God's time" through a Kairos lens, where time is not a passive unfolding but a decisive interruption, a call to faithful action. In such a reading, theological education becomes a crucial site for nurturing moral imagination, ecological awareness, and resistance to structural sin. Acknowledging the limitations of the church's institutional and theological responses, it is crucial to explore contextualized liturgical practices that embody the public theology of justice and ecological solidarity. One meaningful possibility lies in the theological integration of indigenous rituals, such as *ruwatan* and *sedekah bumi*, into Christian worship. Rooted in local cosmologies, these rituals embody a relational worldview that honors the interconnectedness of humans, land, and the divine. *Ruwatan*, a rite of purification and protection, and *sedekah bumi*, a communal offering of gratitude to the earth, reflect a liturgical ecology that resonates deeply with the biblical vision of creation care and justice. When critically and respectfully integrated into Christian worship through contextual prayers, blessings of land and harvest, or Eucharistic liturgies, these practices can become expressions of lament, repentance, and covenantal commitment to ecological healing.

Far from syncretism, this integration represents a contextual public theology that seriously considers indigenous spiritual wisdom and affirms the sacramentality of creation. It challenges the church to reclaim its worship as a site of resistance against ecological degradation and as a space of solidarity with agrarian communities and the Earth itself (Beck, 2018; Setianto & Mahulette, 2020). In short, agrarian conflict is not only a political or environmental crisis but also a theological emergency, disrupting not only ecosystems but also the sacred grammar of Christian witness. Reinterpreting "God's time" as Kairos thus reclaims the urgency of justice, the spirituality of the land, and the prophetic vocation of Christian communities in Indonesia.

## **Kairos Theology and Prophetic Urgency**

The concept of Kairos, biblically rooted and theologically reimagined, calls the Church to respond decisively to historical moments of moral and spiritual crises. The New Testament uses two Greek terms for time: *Chronos* and *Kairos*. *Chronos* refers to chronological or sequential time—time that can be measured by calendars and clocks. *Kairos*, on the other hand, signifies an opportune or decisive moment, often understood theologically as God’s appointed time for action and transformation (Platovnjak & Svetelj, 2021). In this study, “Kairos” is reinterpreted as a prophetic interruption of ordinary time, where historical crises become opportunities for the Church to embody justice and solidarity.

Kairos theology emerged vividly in the South African Kairos Document (Ramalho, 2020), which declared apartheid to be not only a political evil but also a theological heresy. It redefined God's time as a moment for urgent prophetic action rather than patient endurance. Le Bruyns (2015) further elaborates that Kairos theology insists on public engagement, rejecting neutrality as a betrayal of the Gospel's liberating intent. In a similar spirit, the Kairos Palestine Document (Sandmel, 2021) called for global solidarity in confronting systemic injustice, urging the global Church to discern the "moment of truth."

To develop a robust “Kairos Theology” tailored to Indonesia’s context, it is crucial to engage more deeply with the foundational structure of the South African *Kairos Document* (1985). Specifically, Chapters 2–4—the sections on State Theology, Church Theology, and Prophetic Theology—provide a rigorous framework that can guide theological reflection on agrarian and ecological crises. These chapters offer a methodology that begins with a thorough social analysis of the context, reinterprets scripture and tradition to reveal alternative modes of being, and finally issues a “Challenge to Action” (De Gruchy, 2016). This model resonates powerfully with Indonesia's context, where Christian responses to land and ecological injustice have often been passive or institutionally compromised.

Likewise, more recent theological scholarship affirms the enduring relevance of the Kairos trajectory as a contextual, public theology that addresses crises through a prophetic lens. Le Bruyns (2015), for example, emphasizes contextuality, criticality, and change as core elements of Kairos theology, aligning closely with Indonesian needs for a theology that is socially responsible and transformation-oriented. By drawing on these insights, Indonesian theological institutions can reclaim Kairos not as a mere concept but as praxis: a model that equips pastors, theologians, and communities to discern historical turning points and name structural injustices (e.g., in agrarian conflicts), and initiate embodied theological responses rooted in ecclesial solidarity and prophetic witness.

In the Indonesian context, marked by systemic agrarian dispossession and ecological devastation, the Kairos tradition provides an incisive hermeneutic for reinterpreting “God's time.” Rather than endorsing passive waiting, this theological lens understands time as a moral threshold where history and faith intersect in critical discernment. Le Bruyns (2015) insists that Kairos theology calls the Church to a public, prophetic engagement, exposing the moral bankruptcy of religious neutrality and compels action aligned with the oppressed.

Kairos theology reframes the pastoral invocation of "God's time" not as deferment but as divine disruption—a rupture that invites the Church to embody justice here and now. In situations where churches remain hesitant to critique corporate land grabs or ecological violence, invoking Kairos demands a reorientation of ecclesial identity: from institutional conservatism to prophetic presence, and from spiritualized resignation to incarnate resistance. This ecclesial hesitation is often shaped by a combination of doctrinal limitations and lack of theological awareness. In many Indonesian churches, ecotheology is either absent from formal teaching or reduced to general notions of stewardship without critical engagement with ecological justice or indigenous cosmologies. Doctrinally, the Church may not have developed a clear theological stance on environmental issues, leaving leaders unequipped to respond prophetically. At the same time, practical ignorance—due to limited theological resources, a lack of exposure, or pastoral prioritization of spiritualized concerns—contributes to theological paralysis. As a result, ecological destruction is often seen as a peripheral issue, rather than a core moral and theological crisis. Overcoming this requires both doctrinal development and grassroots theological education that prioritizes creation care as an essential expression of faith. This theological repositioning implies an ethics of radical solidarity.

### **Critical Solidarity and Institutional Challenges**

Critical solidarity, as articulated by Masengwe (2025) and Dávila (2022), extends beyond mere empathy or charity. It entails structural alignment with marginalized communities and confrontational engagement with systems of domination. In the Indonesian context, this means the Church must not only 'stand with' indigenous communities but also risk institutional capital to defend their sacred ties to land, cosmology, and survival. Such theological and institutional commitment can be particularly implemented in regions like North Sulawesi, Papua, and parts of Central Kalimantan, where Christian communities have a significant presence, and indigenous populations continue to resist extractive economic projects. In these areas, the Church has both a spiritual mandate and a social presence that enable it to act prophetically, through advocacy, contextual education, and liturgical expression, in defense of land and local cosmologies. These regions serve as strategic contexts where the Kairos vision can be incarnated in response to concrete ecological injustices.

Braverman (2018) critiques the shallow interfaith discourse that avoids naming political evil, arguing that reconciliation without justice is a tool for pacification. Kairos theology corrects this by framing reconciliation as the fruit of struggle—not a polite ideal, but a painful process rooted in truth-telling resistance and transformation. Similarly, Guzmán (2023) emphasizes that postcolonial eco-theologies must unmask structural sin, especially where global capitalism, ecological destruction, and theological complicity converge. In practice, Kairos Theology demands restructured liturgies, curricula, and ecclesial alliances. Liturgy must express lament, protest, and hope. Theological education must cultivate critical consciousness, ecological discernment, and readiness for public witness. Institutional partnerships must be evaluated not by prestige, but by prophetic faithfulness. Kairos calls for costly discipleship—faithfulness measured

not by church attendance or doctrinal purity but by embodied justice and ecological solidarity. According to Saragih (2025), this vision echoes the concept of “costly grace” as articulated by Bonhoeffer, in which true discipleship involves sacrifice, resistance to injustice, and alignment with the oppressed. In the context of Kairos theology, Le Bruyns (2015) emphasizes that Christian faithfulness must be tested in public life and measured by solidarity with those who suffer under systemic violence and ecological collapse.

Despite the compelling theological vision offered in this study, it is important to acknowledge that institutional adoption of such a radical eco-pedagogical shift may encounter significant barriers. Seminaries and ecclesial bodies may resist due to factors such as entrenched curricular norms, concerns over institutional reputation or political sensitivity, and limited exposure to indigenous ecological theology. For example, educational institutions rooted in tradition may struggle to incorporate concepts like land as sacred or Kairos-centered praxis without risking theological or institutional pushback. Nonetheless, there are promising pathways for adoption. Collaborative networks among seminaries, ecumenical partnerships, and engagement with grassroots communities can serve as catalysts. Notably, recent scholarship on ecological pedagogy—such as Tollison’s proposal for an “ecological pedagogy of embeddedness”—illustrates how place-based and challenge-based learning models can foster community-oriented transformation in theological education (Tollison, 2023). By framing these pedagogical innovations as enhancements to formation rather than threats, the shift becomes more feasible and contextually grounded.

Thus, reclaiming "God's time" in the Kairos tradition is not a rejection of eschatological hope. It affirms that the future will break into the present through human agency empowered by divine urgency. This Kairos moment in Indonesia, defined by ecological collapse and indigenous resistance, requires the Church to act decisively, teach prophetically, and stand unapologetically with those whose cries are also the cries of the land and of God.

### **Cultural Wisdom and Contextual Eco-Theology**

Indonesia's cultural matrix harbors profound ecological wisdom, which has been neglected or dismissed by Western-centric theological paradigms. Indigenous rituals such as *ruwatan*, *sedekah bumi*, *adat tanah*, and *sasi* articulate a sacred cosmology in which land is not a passive resource but a living entity bound by spiritual reciprocity with human and divine realities. These practices enact a theology of place—rooted in memory, myth, and communal covenants—where cosmology is not abstract speculation but daily ethical practice (Beck, 2018; Setianto & Mahulette, 2020). The Batak concept of *tanah pusaka*, as explored by Sihombing (2023), frames land as an inherited responsibility, imbued with ancestral presence and divine purpose. Dayak communities in Kalimantan relate to land as a spiritual partner, resisting commodification through rituals that sanctify boundaries and sustain biodiversity (Großmann, 2019). These cosmologies reflect a theological imagination that resists extractivism, affirming that the earth is not owned but inhabited.

In Indonesia, Christian theology must learn to listen. Veerbeek & Smit (2022) advocate for apophatic eco-theology as a theological posture of humility and openness, where silence becomes reverence and mystery is honored over mastery. Apophasis allows theology to withhold domination and enter into dialogue with indigenous traditions. This is not syncretism but contextual fidelity: affirming that God's Spirit may already be active in local wisdom, inviting mutual recognition rather than hegemonic correction. This dialogical approach aligns with Ackermann's vision of comparative hermeneutics, in which theological borders are porous, and transformation occurs through relational engagement (Ackermann, 2023). Christian theology must shed its triumphalism and embrace the multiplicity of creation's voices. In this framework, indigenous rituals are not pre-Christian but post-colonial witnesses, resilient forms of eco-resistance and theological agency that demand Christian affirmation, not suspicion. However, such affirmation must be accompanied by critical theological discernment. Christian engagement with indigenous rituals must avoid indiscriminate adoption and be guided by biblical principles, particularly regarding the worship of God and respect for the uniqueness of Christ. Practices that affirm the sacredness of creation, communal gratitude, or ethical responsibility can be integrated liturgically when reinterpreted through Christian symbols and theology. This ensures that contextual theology remains faithful to the gospel while genuinely honoring indigenous expressions of ecological spirituality.

Moreover, contextual eco-theology must reckon with intersecting oppression. As Hearn-Ayodele et al. (2025) show, ecological destruction is inseparable from gender-based violence, colonial trauma, and racialized dispossession. Indonesian rituals of lament, purification, and renewal often contain layers of ecological grief and social protest. *Ruwatan*, for instance, may serve not only as a cultural rite but also as a theological strategy of healing, naming communal rupture, and enacting divine reorientation through symbolic ritual. To engage this wisdom theologically, three movements are required: liturgical, epistemological, and pedagogical. Christian worship must be enriched by symbols, gestures, and rhythms that reflect local ecological consciousness. Epistemologically, theological methods must include myths, oral narratives, and ritual actions as legitimate sources of knowledge. However, this inclusion must be approached with critical theological discernment. Not all ritual actions align with biblical principles, and care must be taken to distinguish between cultural expressions that can be theologically reinterpreted and those that contradict core Christian beliefs. The process of integration should be guided by a Christ-centered hermeneutic that discerns the presence of divine truth while rejecting elements incompatible with the gospel message. Pedagogically, the formation of faith must occur in community contexts where farmers, ritual leaders, and environmental activists are theological interlocutors, not subjects of the mission.

This repositioning challenges seminaries and churches to reconsider the very foundation of theological authority, suggesting that the Spirit may speak not only through scripture and tradition, but also through forests, rivers, and ancestral chants. In this light, *tanah* is not merely *bumi* (earth) but *ibu* (mother), a maternal presence that sustains, nourishes, and calls for protection. Such indigenous expressions reveal the depth of local cosmologies, yet their

theological richness is often underdeveloped. To move beyond cursory references, these concepts need to be intentionally woven into a coherent theological framework before being integrated into Christian education and practice. For example, the notion of *pamali* among the *Kampung Dukuh* community reflects a sacred ethic of ecological balance, where prohibitions serve as spiritual safeguards for creation (Ibadulloh & Mutaqin, 2023). Similarly, in Manggarai, *tanah* is revered as the “mother of life,” embodying an eco-theological rediscovery of creation’s sacred agency and ancestral bonds (Sandri et al., 2025). When approached theologically, such wisdom does not rival Christian doctrine but enriches it, guiding local praxis beyond superficial inculturation toward an incarnational theology where land, ritual, and liturgical life are inseparably bound.

To dismiss this as superstition is to sever theology from its ecological and maternal roots. In summary, indigenous ecological wisdom is indispensable to the contextualization of Christian theology in Indonesia. For example, Efendi et al. (2022) demonstrate how spiritual-ecological practices among Tidore communities serve as effective environmental conservation strategies, highlighting the relevance of local cosmologies to sustainable theological praxis. It offers cosmological depth, ritual language, and an ethical vision that can enrich and correct Christian formulations of land, creation, and divine presence. To build a truly incarnational eco-theology, the Church must listen, learn, and cooperate with the spiritual traditions of the land that it inhabits. However, such cooperation must be theologically discerning and bounded by biblical convictions. The Church can affirm aspects of indigenous traditions that reflect divine truth—such as reverence for creation, communal ethics, and sacred memory—while clearly rejecting practices or beliefs that contradict the gospel, such as ancestor worship or animistic deification of nature. The goal is not to syncretize but to contextualize: to allow the gospel to speak meaningfully in a particular culture without compromising its core message. Christian cooperation must therefore be dialogical yet confessional, affirming God's presence beyond the Church while remaining rooted in Christ-centered theology. In doing so, it moves from being a colonizer of culture to a guest, a partner, and a witness of God who speaks also through the soil.

### **Christian Education as Transformative Praxis**

Christian education in Indonesia cannot be confined to doctrinal instruction or abstract theological discourse. In a context marked by an ecological crisis and agrarian injustice, theological formation must become a transformative praxis, where faith is cultivated through ethical discernment, cultural rootedness, and ecological engagement. The classroom must become a site of liberation, rather than reproduction, and a space where theology is interrogated, embodied, and enacted for the healing of land and community.

Leahy (2023) argues that theological education must engage in global challenges while remaining locally grounded. This tension demands pedagogical innovations that are both prophetic and participatory. Birkler (2023) underscores that eco-theological pedagogy must move beyond cognitive learning to the formation of ecological virtues—patience, reverence,

humility, and resilience. These virtues are not peripheral but essential to the cultivation of Christian identity in a wounded world.

Transformative praxis requires curricular reform in theological education, particularly through the integration of ecological justice, indigenous knowledge, and post-colonial critique into core courses. One essential course is Eco-Theology and Customary Land Rights, which explores biblical texts such as Deuteronomy 19:14 in conversation with *adat* law and present-day agrarian conflicts in Indonesia (cf. Maulana et al., 2024). Grounding theological theory in case studies from Papua, Kalimantan, and North Sumatra allows students to deeply engage with lived realities. Another necessary course, Ecological Liturgy, centers on designing worship practices that integrate ecological lament and creation-centered rituals. For instance, incorporating water from a polluted river into lament liturgy has become a powerful sacramental act of grief and protest (cf. Setianto & Mahulette, 2020). Such courses aim not only to inform but also spiritually form students to become responsive and contextually aware ministers.

Pedagogically, this reform must embody dialogue and communal values rooted in Indonesian cultural wisdom. Christian education in Indonesia can be drawn from practices such as *musyawarah*, *gotong royong*, and *nguri-uri budaya*, which foster collective discernment, mutual respect, and honoring of ancestral wisdom. Suri & Chandra (2021) showed that early education grounded in cultural values cultivates empathetic and inclusive learners—principles that resonate with incarnational pedagogy and relational discipline in Christian formation. To operationalize these values, theological institutions can adopt innovative learning models such as field practicums and conflict simulations. In field practicums, students immerse themselves for two weeks in indigenous communities affected by extractive industries, learning theology from below through daily engagement, ritual encounters, and ecological suffering (cf. Großmann, 2019; Roberts, 2023). Meanwhile, conflict simulations train students to inhabit the perspectives of multiple stakeholders—mining corporations, churches, and indigenous groups—thus nurturing analytical empathy and critical ethical reflections.

Strategic partnerships must be fostered to enrich theological formation and ensure its rootedness in the realities of ecological and social struggles. Collaborations with NGOs, such as *Jaringan Advokasi Tambang* (JATAM), can be instrumental in co-developing teaching modules that integrate up-to-date data, case studies, and advocacy frameworks. These organizations provide grounded, justice-oriented perspectives on the extractive economy and its complex social-ecological consequences, offering students tools to analyze and engage in real-world conflict. In parallel, theological institutions must actively open their classrooms to indigenous wisdom by inviting *tetua adat* and ritual practitioners to serve as guest faculty. Their narratives and cosmological frameworks serve as counter-epistemologies that challenge dominant theological assumptions, cultivating a theology that is both contextual and decolonial (Ackermann, 2023; Sihombing, 2023). Through such partnerships, theological education can be transformed into a site of solidarity, intercultural dialogue, and prophetic imagination. Spiritual formation must also be reimaged. McAllister (2020) called for spiritual disciplines rooted in

land-based ethics: practices of attentive walking, meditative planting, ecological lament, and communal fasting. These disciplines cultivate a theology of place and body, grounding students not only in ideas but also in solidarity with the Earth’s fragility and beauty.

Ultimately, Christian education must be measured not by institutional expansion or academic output alone but by the kind of disciples it forms. Dávila (2022) reminds us that orthopraxis, the embodiment of theological conviction in public ethics, is the mark of a liberating church. Education that fails to equip students to hear the cries of the land and respond with wisdom, courage, and community is a betrayal of its calling. Currently, theological education in Indonesia holds radical potential. When it centers on ecological justice, indigenous knowledge, and a prophetic witness, it becomes not just a transmission of content, but a vocation of hope. Christian educators are thus summoned as cultivators of conscience, curators of culture, and catalysts of change.

### Proposed Kairos Pedagogical Model for Ecological Justice in Indonesia

As a practical contribution, this study proposes a contextual pedagogical framework that reinterprets “God’s time” (Kairos) for ecological justice in Indonesia. The framework integrates four interrelated components—environmental justice, indigenous wisdom, critical solidarity, and prophetic praxis—into Christian educational praxis. Each of these components responds directly to the intersection of agrarian conflict, ecological theology, and local cosmologies, thereby moving beyond abstract theorizing toward curricular innovation. The proposed framework is outlined in the table 1.

Core Component	Description	Pedagogical Implication
<b>Environmental Justice</b>	Reinterpreting "God’s time" (Kairos) as a decisive moment to resist ecological and agrarian injustice.	Integrate case studies (#SaveAru, Kendeng movement) into theology curriculum; encourage students to critically analyze ecological conflicts.
<b>Indigenous Wisdom</b>	Affirming local cosmologies such as <i>tanah sebagai ibu</i> and concepts like <i>pamali</i> as theological resources.	Use local rituals, oral traditions, and indigenous ecological ethics as teaching material for contextual theology.
<b>Critical Solidarity</b>	Moving beyond charity toward structural alignment with marginalized communities.	Experiential learning: immersion programs with indigenous and agrarian communities; student participation in advocacy or eco-liturgical practices.
<b>Prophetic Praxis</b>	Framing theology not as theory but as public witness and transformative action.	Develop liturgies of lament and hope; require theological projects that address real ecological issues in local contexts.

Table 1. A Contextual Pedagogical Framework

This framework illustrates how theological education in Indonesia can move from passive conceptualization to active formation. By embedding ecological conflicts, indigenous cosmologies, and prophetic solidarity within the curriculum, seminaries and churches are invited to nurture leaders who are not only theologically competent but also contextually responsive. The model thereby fulfills the promise of the abstract by offering a concrete pedagogical pathway for prophetic and ecological transformation.

## CONCLUSION

Reinterpreting the concept of 'God's time' is essential for addressing the theological paralysis that often hampers Christian responses to Indonesia's agrarian and ecological crises. Rather than serving as a justification for inaction or delay, 'God's time' must be reclaimed as a theological imperative for timely and just engagement. This study demonstrates that the dominant passive framing of divine timing fails to account for the ethical urgency demanded by contemporary ecological and land injustices. This failure is evident in multiple real-world consequences: churches often remain silent in the face of deforestation, land grabbing, and the displacement of indigenous communities. Instead of mobilizing congregations for advocacy or ecological stewardship, theological institutions frequently offer spiritual consolation that disengages congregants from public responsibility. In some cases, church leaders have even used the phrase "God's time" to justify postponing public statements or actions, fearing institutional backlash or political entanglements, with the result that prophetic witness is replaced by moral neutrality, allowing ecological degradation and structural violence to continue unchallenged. Such patterns reveal a serious shortcoming in both theological vision and pastoral leadership.

By engaging Kairos theology alongside indigenous cosmologies, theological education in Indonesia has the potential to become a site of resistance and renewal. As Le Bruyns (2015) argues, contextual theologies that integrate prophetic time (Kairos) and indigenous worldviews can disrupt colonial theological paradigms and generate transformative pedagogies rooted in justice and ecological solidarity. Such integration enables theological institutions to become spaces not only of academic inquiry but also of moral formation and social resistance. Theological institutions must not only revisit their curricula but also reconfigure their pedagogical approaches and partnerships to foreground justice-oriented, contextually grounded formation. Such reform requires sustained dialogue with indigenous wisdom, practical exposure to affected communities, and the integration of liturgical and ethical responses rooted in local cosmologies. Moving forward, further research should explore how interfaith and interethnic collaborations can deepen the impact of these reforms and foster broader solidarity networks for ecological justice. Through these efforts, theology can offer not only critical reflection but also prophetic action in the face of ongoing systemic injustice.

### Competing interests

The author declares that there are no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

### **Author contributions**

R.B.A. is the sole author of this research article. He conceptualised and designed the study, conducted the research, performed the analysis, and wrote the manuscript.

### **Ethical considerations**

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects. The study is based on textual analysis, literature review, and publicly available documents. No human participants, animals, or confidential data were involved.

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### **Data availability**

The data that support the findings of this study are derived from publicly available academic publications, policy documents, and documented case studies. No primary empirical dataset was generated. All sources are fully cited in the reference list.

### **Disclaimer**

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the result of independent academic research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Faculty of Education and Humanities, Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, Yogyakarta, or that of the publisher.

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