



# Comparing Nias Cultural Beliefs and Cyril's Theological Anthropology

Hendi<sup>1</sup>, Aprianus Lawolo<sup>2</sup>, Sugianto<sup>3</sup>, Nadia Bimantoro Elifas<sup>4</sup>, Daniel Indradjaja<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1, 2, 3, 4</sup> Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Soteria Purwokerto, Indonesia

<sup>5</sup> Dallas Theological Seminary, United States

## ABSTRACT

This study seeks to enhance the quality of discipleship in churches based in Nias by contrasting Cyril of Jerusalem's theological anthropology with Nias' cultural conceptions of body and soul, with a particular emphasis on *noso*. Using a qualitative literature review, thematic content analysis, and comparative methods from theology, religious studies, anthropology, and missiology, the study identified both similarities and differences between Nias' culture and Cyril's theological anthropology. Cyril's framework, characterized by its clarity and bipartite structure, places significant emphasis on the concept of the *imago Dei*, bodily resurrection, and an eternal soul. In contrast, Nias tradition teaches a complex anthropology comprising multiple elements and a cyclical eschatology. The study concluded that Cyril's theological anthropology exerts a positive influence on Nias Christian discipleship by fortifying Nias spiritual intuitions and providing a more lucid theological framework. Furthermore, it serves as a conduit between Christian theology and Nias traditions, offering a foundation for more effective and contextually sensitive discipleship. This integration of traditional values with universal Christian teachings results in a more profound and culturally relevant faith, and ultimately guides practical discipleship strategies in Nias, thereby promoting both qualitative and quantitative church growth.

Keywords: Boto, Cultural Beliefs, Cyril's Theological Anthropology, Discipleship, Nias, Noso.

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**Corresponding author: Hendi** ([hendi@sttsoteria.ac.id](mailto:hendi@sttsoteria.ac.id))

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of contextually relevant Christian discipleship models is frequently impeded by a significant lacuna in theological and anthropological research concerning the concept of the human person across diverse cultural milieus. This is particularly evident in the context of Nias, Indonesia, where a rich, indigenous understanding of humanity presents both challenges and opportunities for Christian theology. For communities navigating the intricate interplay of cultural heritage and Christian faith, a nuanced understanding of human nature is paramount. In Nias culture, this understanding is profoundly shaped by the concept of *noso*, a multifaceted term often translated as 'soul' or 'life force', which includes the belief that individuals possess the capacity to consciously influence the termination and transference of this vital energy. This concept, which reflects a belief system wherein humans exert a degree of control over their life's trajectory and familial lineage (Zaluchu, 2025), presents a worldview distinct from traditional Christian doctrine, which posits God as the sole originator and arbiter of life. This theological principle is affirmed by theologians such as Vanhoozer (2005), who emphasizes that humanity's existence as God's creation is fundamentally intended to reflect divine qualities.

This research addresses this intersection by examining the teachings of Cyril of Jerusalem, a pivotal 4th-century Church Father whose *Catechetical Lectures* offer a systematic exposition of early Christian anthropology. Cyril's doctrine stands in firm affirmation of God's absolute sovereignty over life, asserting that human existence is a divine gift governed entirely by God's power and will (Cyril of Jerusalem, 1894). This perspective provides a critical counterpoint to the Nias concept of *noso*, raising fundamental questions about human agency and the ultimate source of life.

A review of contemporary scholarship reveals a persistent gap that this study aims to fill. While research into Nias culture has explored its unique spiritual and anthropological dimensions, and theological studies have analyzed Patristic figures like Cyril, a direct comparative analysis is conspicuously absent. For instance, recent studies have delved into the specifics of Nias cosmology and eschatology, such as the work by Telaumbanua (2021) on the Nias conception of the afterlife, and a comprehensive cultural overview by Zagoto et al. (2023) which touches upon the elements of personhood. Furthermore, Zaluchu (2025) forthcoming case study on the interaction between Christianity and Nias indigenous religion provides a contemporary lens on syncretism and contextual challenges. On the theological side, scholarship continues to explore Patristic thought, for example, Athanasopoulou-Kypriou (2017) work on the eschatological body in Orthodox anthropology, which offers a modern interpretation of concepts foundational to figures like Cyril. The recent ethnographic study by Ikhsan et al. (2024) on Nias death rituals further underscores the enduring significance of ancestral beliefs, even within a Christianized context, yet it does not undertake the specific theological comparison proposed here.

Despite these valuable contributions, no research to date has systematically juxtaposed the Nias concepts of *boto* (body) and *noso* with the theological anthropology of a key Church

Father like Cyril of Jerusalem. This omission hinders the development of a robust, contextually sensitive theological framework for the Nias Christian community. The novelty of this study, therefore, lies in its direct comparative methodology. By bridging Patristic theology with indigenous Indonesian anthropology, this research seeks to provide critical insights that can inform and enhance Christian discipleship practices in Nias. The central aim is to foster a more detailed and culturally resonant understanding of what it means to be human within both the Nias and Christian traditions, thereby contributing to the formulation of a more effective and authentic discipleship model.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative research design, drawing principally upon comparative textual analysis and a literature-based inquiry. The methodological framework is informed by principles articulated in missiological research, which emphasize the critical need for culturally sensitive and theologically robust methods when engaging with diverse worldviews (Moreau et al., 2015). The research compares the conceptualizations of the body and soul within the indigenous culture of Nias with the theological anthropology of Cyril of Jerusalem, a pivotal 4th-century Church Father.

The selection of Cyril of Jerusalem as the primary theological interlocutor is deliberate. His *Catechetical Lectures* provide a systematic and comprehensive exposition of core Christian doctrines concerning human nature, offering a clear window into early Christian thought. These lectures serve as a foundational primary source, representing a well-defined theological viewpoint on the body, soul, and their ultimate destiny. For the Nias perspective, this study prioritizes ethnographic and anthropological sources that document traditional beliefs and practices, with a particular focus on those explicitly discussing *nosō* and its associated concepts of life, death, and the soul.

The analytical process follows a structured, multi-stage approach consistent with comparative research in theology and missiology. The process begins with a thorough thematic identification, wherein the primary texts from both Nias cultural sources and Cyril's writings are analyzed to identify core themes related to the body, soul, the origin of life, and post-mortem existence. Following this, the identified themes are subjected to categorization and structuring, organizing them into distinct conceptual categories to facilitate a coherent and systematic comparison of each tradition's framework. The core of the method is the comparative analysis itself, where the Nias and Cyrillian frameworks are juxtaposed to identify points of convergence (shared intuitions) and divergence (conceptual differences), moving beyond mere description to analyze the underlying theological and cultural assumptions of each perspective. Finally, the findings are brought into a missiological synthesis, where the implications for Christian discipleship in the Nias context are explored. In line with the missiological principle of contextualization, this final step does not seek to simply replace indigenous concepts, but to engage them critically and constructively, identifying "bridges of understanding" for communicating Christian doctrine in a culturally resonant manner (Moreau et al., 2015). The

ultimate goal of this methodological approach is to move beyond a simple descriptive comparison. It aims to provide a foundation for developing discipleship strategies that are both theologically sound and contextually relevant, thereby contributing meaningfully to the field of missiology and practical theology in Indonesia.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Analysis of Cyril of Jerusalem's Concept of the Body and Soul

#### *Theoretical Framework: Humanity as Imago Dei*

To understand Cyril of Jerusalem's anthropology, this analysis utilizes the theological framework of *imago Dei* (the Image of God). This framework is fundamental to Christian conceptions of human nature and offers a determinative lens for interpreting Cyril's views on the body and soul. Cyril posits that human dignity and purpose are inextricably connected to being created in the image of God. This *imago Dei* framework will direct our examination of the origin, essence, and fate of the body and soul in Cyril's philosophy. We will examine Cyril's interpretation of the body and soul as manifestations of the divine image, along with the consequences for human existence and discipleship.

#### The Origin of Body and Soul: Divine Creation and the Breath of Life

For Cyril of Jerusalem (1894), the origin of both body and soul is unequivocally divine, rooted in God's creative act. He describes the body as a complex vessel fashioned from the "dust of the ground", highlighting its intricate design and material substance. The soul, in contrast, is defined as the "breath of life" (Cyril of Jerusalem, 1894), divinely infused into the body to grant it life and consciousness. This directly aligns with the Genesis 2:7 narrative, which Cyril employs to underscore the purposiveness of God's creation (Cyril of Jerusalem, 1894).

This understanding of divine origin establishes a foundational theological principle for Cyril: both the material body and the immaterial soul exist by divine volition. This resonates with the thought of John of Damascus, who described the rational soul as a reflection of God's own image (Damascus, 1898). The early Church Fathers, as McGrath (2017) notes, frequently invoked the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* to emphasize God's absolute sovereignty over creation and the complete dependence of all existence upon Him. This doctrine is foundational, as it distinguishes the Christian understanding of God as the transcendent, uncreated source of all reality from any form of dualism or pantheism (Frame, 2013). Cyril's assertion that the soul originates from the divine breath is central to his conception of the *imago Dei*, imbuing humanity with a unique spiritual significance.

Furthermore, Cyril addresses procreation by stating that while the body is generated by human parents, the soul is a direct creation of God at conception (Cyril of Jerusalem, 1894). He emphasizes the soul's unique divine origin, independent of physical reproductive processes, by highlighting that it is born "from faith" and "breathed out by the Holy Spirit" (Cyril of Jerusalem,

1894). This "creationist" perspective, which posits God's direct and continuous creative activity in every human life, is a classical theological position that continues to be affirmed in contemporary systematic theologies (Thiessen, 2006). For example, Kim (2024) reaffirms this doctrine, explaining that each individual soul is an immediate creation of God, thus securing the unique, personal relationship between the Creator and every human being. In this framework, both the material and spiritual aspects of humanity are presented as direct gifts from the Creator, their inherent value derived from their divine genesis. In summary, Cyril's conception of the origin of body and soul establishes God as the ultimate and immediate source of all human existence.

### Body and Soul as the Imago Dei: Reflecting Divine Attributes

Cyril asserts that the soul is God's "most glorious creation, made in His own image" (Cyril of Jerusalem, 1894). He characterizes the soul as possessing an essence that originates from God, yet remains distinct from the divine substance (Cyril of Jerusalem, 1894). Cyril posits that the *imago Dei* within the soul is expressed through attributes such as immortality, autonomy, and the capacity for self-governance (Cyril of Jerusalem, 1894). These characteristics mirror God's own, albeit in a created and finite manifestation. This aligns with Calvin's (2006) conception of the soul as reflecting God not through a shared substance but through "natural" attributes, and with Hodge's (1997) identification of reason, conscience, and will as key spiritual faculties reflecting God's nature. More recently, scholars like Hoekema (1994) have further articulated this, describing the *imago Dei* in terms of humanity's structural, functional, and relational capacities to mirror God. This understanding of the *imago Dei* as a core component of human identity is a central theme in modern theological interpretation (Peterson, 2016). In his analysis of Isaac the Syrian, Alfeyev (2000) introduces the concept of humanity as a "temple of the divine," implying that the *imago Dei* encompasses the potential for divine indwelling, thereby enhancing human dignity.

While Cyril emphasizes the soul as the primary locus of the *imago Dei*, he also affirms the body as a "marvelous creation of God" (Cyril of Jerusalem, 1894), highlighting its complexity and functionality as evidence of divine artistry. This view resonates with patristic figures like Melito of Sardis (2001), who saw the unity of body and soul as essential to the complete *imago Dei*. In contrast to Origen's skepticism of the body as a "prison," Cyril, alongside Irenaeus, endorses the body's integral role in embodying God's image—not as a mere container, but as a created being of intrinsic worth (Lyons, 1885). This holistic perspective, which resists a sharp dualism, is a theme explored in contemporary theological anthropology, where scholars like Cortez (2018) argue for a "theological anthropology for the church" that re-centers the physical body as integral to Christian identity and mission. This is echoed in recent patristic scholarship, where analyses of figures like Gregory of Nyssa highlight the patristic emphasis on the psychosomatic unity of the human person as fundamental to both creation and salvation (Loudovikos, 2022). This holistic view, which sees both body and soul as reflecting the *imago Dei*, is crucial for understanding Cyril's ethical and soteriological framework.

## Sin, Free Will, and the Body as Temple

A central aspect of Cyril's anthropology is the interplay of free will, sin, and the body. He locates the origin of sin in the soul, which possesses free will, rather than in the body itself, which he describes as a neutral instrument (Cyril of Jerusalem, 1894). This perspective is consistent with that of Clement of Alexandria, who argued that sin arises from the misuse of free will, leading to a corruption that manifests physically (Clement of Alexandria, 1885). Theologians like Calvin (2006) and Thiessen (2006) similarly affirm the will as a core faculty of the soul, responsible for moral choice. The complex relationship between divine action and human agency is a persistent theme, with recent studies exploring how participation in Christ (union with Christ) re-frames human freedom not as pure autonomy but as a graced capacity for obedience (Ribbens, 2022).

However, Cyril also elevates the body's status by highlighting its potential as a sacred space. He employs 1 Corinthians 6:19 ("your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit") to emphasize the body's dignity as a vessel for the divine (Cyril of Jerusalem, 1894). This concept of "temple theology," as explored in contemporary scholarship by figures like Beale (2004) in his extensive work on the theme of temple throughout Scripture, counters any notion of the body as inherently evil. Cyril presents a nuanced view: the body is not the source of sin, but it is affected and can be desecrated by it. Conversely, through righteous living under the soul's guidance, the body can be sanctified. This process of sanctification, or becoming a "new man" in Christ as described in Ephesians 4:17-32, involves a holistic transformation that encompasses both inner disposition and outward action (Hendi & Aruan, 2020). This creates a dynamic where moral responsibility is paramount, and the body, while corruptible by sin, is ultimately destined for holiness as a vessel for the Holy Spirit.

## The Resurrection of the Body: Hope and Transformation

Cyril's anthropology culminates in his robust teaching on the bodily resurrection (Cyril of Jerusalem, 1894). He defines this not as mere spiritual survival but as the future transformation and renewal of the physical body itself. Citing Isaiah 26:19, he envisions the resurrected body as glorified and spiritual, no longer bound by earthly limitations (Cyril of Jerusalem, 1894). This doctrine is central to Christian eschatology and stands in stark contrast to Platonic notions of an immortal soul escaping a bodily prison. As modern theologians like N.T. Wright (2003) has extensively argued that the ultimate Christian hope is not disembodied existence but "life after life after death" in a renewed creation. This hope of resurrection is not a passive waiting but an active force that shapes present discipleship, inviting believers into a life characterized by resistance to the powers of death (Goroncy, 2021). Athanasopoulou-Kypriou (2017) likewise affirms the eschatological body as a key component of Orthodox anthropology. Cyril emphasizes the ethical implications of this doctrine, arguing that our bodies possess eternal significance and will be judged alongside our souls, thus demanding present respect and care (Cyril of Jerusalem, 1894). This directly refutes any Gnostic or Origenist tendency to devalue the physical body (Origen, 1973). The enduring relevance of this anti-

Gnostic stance is highlighted by contemporary theological critiques of AI transhumanism, which often proposes a disembodied, digital immortality that fundamentally clashes with the Christian vision of a holistic, bodily transformation through union with Christ (Suwanto, 2025). This transformation is not merely a future event but begins in the present through spiritual practices, such as the *hesychia* (silence and repose) of the Desert Fathers, which aim to purify the heart and conform the whole person to Christ in anticipation of the resurrection (Hendi, 2023). For Cyril, the body is not a temporary vessel to be discarded but an integral part of the human person, destined for redemption and glorification within God's Kingdom.

### ***Conclusion of Cyril's Anthropology***

With a strong foundation on the *imago Dei* framework, Cyril of Jerusalem offers a sophisticated and nuanced anthropology. According to him, a human being is a single entity consisting of a body and a soul that were both created by God and that each uniquely but inextricably reflect the image of God. The location of moral agency and a reflection of God's spiritual qualities is the soul, which possesses free will and reason. Though material, the body is a work of divine creation and a temple of the Holy Spirit that will eventually undergo resurrection and change. As such, it is not intrinsically sinful. In addition to offering a strong theological foundation for human dignity, accountability, and hope, this understanding will be a key point of comparison with the Nias concept of *nosō* in the analysis that follows.

### **The Concept of Body and Soul in Nias Culture**

The Nias people possess a unique conception of the relationship between the physical body and the spiritual soul. In his work, J.L. Swellengrebel (2004) references an account from R.M. Sunderman, a Christian missionary, who described humans as being composed of six fundamental elements. These elements, which are fundamental to the anthropological thought of Nias, contribute to a concept of human integrity that encompasses the physical, spiritual, and emotional dimensions. This holistic perspective, while divergent from certain Western theological-anthropological models, mirrors a comprehensive grasp of personhood (Zagoto et al., 2023). The following elements have been identified as fundamental.

First, according to Nias culture, the term *boto* is used to denote the body or physical form of an individual. Additionally, the term *boto* is said to signify one's stature and is believed to represent the location of the *nosō*, or human breath (soul) (Zaluchu, 2025). The *boto* is also the dwelling place of the *tödö* (heart) and human flesh (*ösi*). It is noteworthy that the *boto* is not regarded as being alive until it is imbued with the *nosō* by the Lowalangi gods. The Lowalangi are regarded as the ancestral deities of humanity and the originators of the soul or breath of life. In the event that the *nosō* becomes absent or detached from the body, the *boto* becomes ineffectual or ceases to exist (Zaluchu, 2025).

Second, the *nosō* is the vital essence and animating force that distinguishes humans from animals as living beings. The Nias believe that an individual possessing a substantial *nosō* will enjoy a long and prosperous life. According to Zaluchu's (2025) theory, the *nosō* is believed to undergo a return to its origin upon death. This concept aligns with the theological understanding

of the soul as the life principle. However, the Nias perspective differs in its origins, which are rooted in ancestral deities rather than the singular Creator God of Christian theology.

Third, *Tödö*: *Tödö* represents the heart. It represents more than just a physical organ. It also represents the center of human emotions and intellect. *Tödö* is similar to the idea of conscience (Zaluchu, 2025). This idea is related to the study of how people understand God, which says that the heart is the center of free will and moral awareness. This goes beyond a simple, rational view of what it means to be human.

Fourth, *eheha* is the spirit of human breath. *Eheha* is a power that is given to the eldest son by the father, and it is closely protected because it is thought that others might try to take it from him (Telaumbanua, 2021). This element introduces the idea of spiritual power that is passed down through families. It highlights the social and familial aspects of Nias spirituality.

Fifth, *Mökömökö*: "*Mökömökö*" is a concept that is hard to translate directly into English. You could describe it as a shared part of a community's memory. This idea is connected to the Nias terms *boto*, *noso*, *eheha*, *tödö*, and "moving" (which implies life or animation). The Nias believe that when a person dies, a spirit called "*Mökömökö*" comes out of the grave and looks like a spider (Zaluchu, 2025). This suggests that the spirit is part of a shared, maybe even ancestral, experience that lasts beyond a person's lifetime.

Sixth, *Bekhu Zimate*: *Bekhu Zimate* is the shadow of the dead person that appears before death. This shadow is a universal phenomenon, affecting both the living and the dead. After death, this shadow is believed to seek the dead person's material possessions (Zaluchu, 2025). This element shows a belief that the dead person's spirit still connects to the physical world.

Other scholars have offered different ideas about the different parts of the human person in Nias culture. Danandjaja (1984) suggests that there are two types of bodies: gross (*boto*) and subtle (*noso* and *lumölumö*). Harefa (2008) lists a more complex composition that includes *boto*, *lumölumö*, or *bekhu*; *eheha wa'asala'wa* or *eheha*; *lakhömi*; the heart (*tödö*); and *mökömökö*. Suzuki (1959) suggests that there is an immortal spirit within humans, while Sarofanotona Harita uses the word *luluö* to refer to the human soul. People use these terms in different ways, depending on the situation and the region. Harefa (2008) suggests that *lakhömi* is connected to ancestral statues and magical power, while *lumölumö* is considered a "second person" that continues after death, similar to *bekhu zimate* and *bekhu zauri*. Zaluchu (2025) simplifies this to two primary elements: *boto* (body), which is buried and may become *mökömökö*, and *noso* (soul), the animating force that can be inherited. This *noso* also has a "setaniah" aspect, a malevolent force that can come from improper rituals for the deceased or certain types of death. This can turn the *noso* into a malevolent spirit, "matiana" (Zaluchu, 2025). Nias belief is unique in that it distinguishes between two types of *noso*: one type is unconsecrated and destined for the underworld, and the other type is consecrated and ascends to Teteholi Ana'a (Zaluchu, 2025).

To sum it up, the Nias people have a complicated idea of human integrity that includes different parts that are all connected. This idea is different from the simple body-soul dichotomy. There are many different views within Nias culture and in the study of religious beliefs. It is important to understand these views if one wants to learn about Nias spirituality

and worldview. This study will now consider Nias anthropology in conjunction with Cyril of Jerusalem's theological ideas about humanity to identify where they agree, disagree, and where they might be applied in a way that fits within the context of Christian discipleship.

### **Comparative Analysis of Nias and Cyril of Jerusalem on Body and Soul**

To facilitate a rigorous comparative analysis of body and soul concepts, the present study will utilize tables as visual aids, followed by in-depth textual explanations and interpretations that reveal the nuanced relationships between Nias and Cyril of Jerusalem's perspectives. Prior to the presentation of the tables, it is imperative to address terminological consistency and provide a more precise understanding of key Nias terms.

#### ***Terminological Clarifications: Soul and Spirit in Nias and Theological Context***

The dichotomy between soul and spirit is a fundamental tenet in various religious doctrines, including Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. In this analysis, it is acknowledged that the terms "soul" and "spirit" are occasionally used interchangeably in general discourse. However, for the purpose of this analysis, the term "soul" will be utilized when referring to *noso* in the Nias context and when discussing Cyril's anthropological views in relation to the broader theological tradition. The term "soul" (Latin *anima*, Greek *psyche*) is often used to denote the animating, non-material aspect of the human person. The term "spirit" (Greek: *pneuma*) will be reserved for instances in which the concept of *hehha* is discussed in Nias culture, or when referring to the Holy Spirit in a specifically Trinitarian theological context. This distinction aims to achieve clarity while respecting the nuances present in both Nias understandings and Christian theology.

#### ***Variations of Nias Terms***

It is imperative to acknowledge the variations in Nias terminology across regions and scholarly interpretations. For the purpose of this study, we primarily draw upon the framework presented by Swellengrebel, citing Sunderman, and further elaborated by Zaluchu (2025) recognizing it as a representative, though not monolithic, understanding (Zaluchu, 2025). The following are the key terms and their working definitions for this analysis. *Boto*: The physical body, otherwise known as the "form," is regarded as the vessel for life. However, it is important to note that the form is not inherently alive in the absence of the soul. The concept of *noso* is multifaceted and has been interpreted in various ways. It is often translated as "soul" or "breath-soul," and is regarded as the vital life force that is believed to be capable of being inherited.

The following is a list of the most common types of *tödö*: The heart is commonly regarded as the seat of emotion, intellect, and conscience. *Eheha*: The spirit is defined as a power associated with breath, transmitted through familial lines, and indicative of a lineage-based spiritual potency. *Mökömökö*: This entity can be understood as a collective, ancestral spirit that emerges in the post-mortem state. It has been suggested that this phenomenon may represent either communal memory or spiritual essence. *Bekhu Zimate*: The presence of the

deceased's shadow, the notion of pre-death omen, and the post-death attachment to material possessions are indicative of a lingering presence.

It is important to note that these definitions are not exhaustive of all Nias anthropological interpretations; however, they provide a necessary foundation for the comparative analysis with Cyril's bipartite (body and soul) view. It is imperative to acknowledge this terminological landscape to facilitate a nuanced and respectful engagement with Nias culture.

### ***Comparative Tables and In-Depth Analysis***

The following tables present a structured comparison, highlighting peculiarities, differences, and similarities between Nias and Cyril's concepts of body and soul. Following each table, interpretative analyses will be provided to synthesize the findings and draw out theoretical implications.

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Nias Tribe</b>	<b>Cyril of Jerusalem</b>
Ritualistic Dimension	<i>Owasa</i> ceremonies are crucial for navigating the afterlife; lack of <i>Owasa</i> leads soul to lower world.	Corrupt soul healed by faith; Baptism purifies the body; the soul purified by the Spirit.
Inheritance of Soul/ Life Force	<i>Noso</i> can be passed down through generations, establishing familial spiritual continuity.	Body from parents, soul directly from God at conception; divine origin emphasises the individual soul's unique creation.

Table 1. Peculiarities of Nias and Cyril of Jerusalem's Understanding of Body and Soul

#### Peculiarities: Analysis of Table 1

Table 1 illuminates the distinctive and less directly comparable aspects of each perspective. The *Owasa* ritual in Nias tradition, as detailed in ethnographic studies of Austronesian death rituals, underscores the cultural and communal significance of ancestor veneration and proper funerary rites for ensuring spiritual well-being in the afterlife. This perspective stands in contrast to Cyril's emphasis on faith and sacramental acts, such as baptism, as the primary means of spiritual healing and purification within a Christian soteriological framework (Tertullian, 1956). The Nias community's emphasis on ritual action is indicative of a deeply entrenched cosmology that is characterized by reciprocal relationships with the spirit world and ancestors. In contrast, Cyril's perspective is founded on individual faith and engagement in Christian sacraments for the purpose of salvation. Missiological literature on contextualization would emphasize the need to understand such ritualistic frameworks in Nias culture when communicating the Christian understanding of salvation and sacraments.

The concept of *noso* inheritance in Nias culture reveals a spirituality that is focused on the family and lineage. Anthropological research on ancestor veneration in Southeast Asian societies suggests that such beliefs reinforce social cohesion, familial identity, and the continuity of life force within a lineage. This perspective stands in stark contrast to the emphasis

placed by Cyril on the notion of the individual soul's direct creation by God. Cyril's perspective resonates with a Western theological emphasis that places significant emphasis on the individual's relationship between the soul and the divine, as well as the soul's unique creation *ex nihilo* (Hippo, 1963). The divergence observed here is not merely a matter of origin, but rather a concern with the locus of spiritual identity. Specifically, it is a matter of whether spiritual identity is rooted in familial continuity, as is the case in Nias, or whether it is developed through individual creation and relationship with God, as is the case in Cyril. This discrepancy is theoretically significant, underscoring the notion that different cultures construe personhood and spiritual identity in distinct ways.

Feature	Nias Tribe	Cyril of Jerusalem
Composition of Human Person	Humans are composed of six elements ( <i>boto, noso, tödö, eheha, mökömökö, bekhu zimate</i> ), indicating a complex, multifaceted anthropology.	Humans are composed of two elements: body and soul, reflecting a bipartite anthropological model common in Western thought.
Source of Prosperity/Well-being	Abundant <i>noso</i> leads to longevity and prosperity, suggesting a quantifiable life force linked to earthly flourishing.	Body, "clothed with sin," is healed by baptism; the soul purified by the Spirit, emphasizing spiritual healing and redemption.
Post-Mortem Transformation	<i>Mökömökö (noso)</i> can transform into a spider post-mortem, indicating a transformation of the soul into a spirit form within the natural world.	Soul is eternal and imperishable, destined to return to God; bodily resurrection is transformation, but within a divine, eschatological framework.

Table 2. Differences between Nias and Cyril of Jerusalem's Understanding of the Body and Soul

#### Differences: Analysis of Table 2

Table 2 shows the main differences in the ways these ideas are understood. The Nias people have a different understanding of what makes up a person than Cyril does. The Nias people believe that a person has many different elements, while Cyril believes that a person has only two parts: body and soul. The study of human beings often shows that people in different cultures have complex ideas about what it means to be a person that are different from the simple categories used in Western culture. The six Nias elements suggest a comprehensive and interconnected view of the human being, including physical, vital, emotional, spiritual, communal, and even shadow-like aspects. Cyril, following a Christian tradition influenced by Hellenistic thought, sees the world in a more dualistic way, with the body and the soul as two separate entities. But, as we've seen before, his understanding of *imago Dei* theology makes this more complicated.

The Nias concept of *noso* and prosperity is similar to many traditional beliefs about the connection between spiritual well-being and earthly life. This is different from Cyril's approach, which focuses on spiritual healing from sin through religious rituals and the Spirit. Cyril puts more importance on spiritual redemption, not worldly success. This difference shows that

people have very different ideas about what is important. In Nias, people care about having a good life on Earth and passing their family name on to their children. In Cyril, people care about being saved spiritually and having a personal relationship with God.

In Nias beliefs, *mökömökō* turns into a spider when it dies, showing a cycle of life and death and a link between the spiritual world and the natural world. Research on animistic beliefs in Southeast Asia shows similar changes and spirit appearances. This suggests that the line between the living and the dead is not clear, and that people believe spirits are present in the natural world. Cyril's teachings on bodily resurrection, while also promising transformation, envision a radically different end-of-times scenario within a divinely orchestrated, future Kingdom, not a cyclical return within the present natural order. This is a basic difference in beliefs about what happens after death.

Feature	Nias Tribe	Cyril of Jerusalem
Post-Mortem Soul Destination	<i>Noso</i> returns to <i>Lowalangi</i> (divine origin), indicating a return to the source of life after death.	Soul returns to God after death, reflecting a shared belief in the soul's ultimate return to its divine origin.
Body as Initially Inanimate	<i>Boto</i> is not inherently alive; animated by <i>noso</i> given by <i>Lowalangi</i> , suggesting the body's dependence on a vital, external life-force.	Cyril believes body and soul are "shaped by God," implying the body's creation by and dependence on divine agency for life.

Table 3. Similarities between Nias and Cyril of Jerusalem's Understanding of the Body and Soul

### Similarities: Analysis of Table 3

Even though there are some major differences, Table 3 shows some important similarities. Both Nias tradition and Cyril's framework agree on a type of afterlife where the soul goes to a divine source. While *Lowalangi* and the Christian God are different gods, the idea that the soul goes back to where it came from after death shows that they have a similar understanding of the soul's power and where it comes from. This could be a starting point for talking about religion, since both of these groups believe that there's a spiritual side to life and what happens to us. Also, both views show the body as not having its own life at first. The Nias concept of *boto* requiring *noso* to become alive and Cyril's belief that both body and soul are "shaped by God" suggest that they have a similar understanding of the body's dependence on a vital principle or divine act for animation. Even though the source of animation differs (*Lowalangi* vs. Christian God), this similarity shows a shared intuition about the body as a created entity, not self-sufficient in its life force, dependent on a higher power for vitality. This shared sense of dependence could be a great way to connect the dots when it comes to exploring Christian doctrines of creation and dependence on God as the giver of life.

### Appreciative Engagement and Synthesis

The tables and subsequent analyses demonstrate that while the Nias and Cyrillian understandings of body and soul differ significantly in their anthropological frameworks, ritual

practices, and eschatological visions, there are also points of agreement, particularly regarding the divine origin of the soul and its post-mortem destiny. The new and exciting part of this research is that it brings together these different points of view to create a conversation that is based on theory. It uses the *imago Dei* idea to show both the differences and the ways these different points of view can work together in a positive way. Contemporary theological anthropology emphasizes the importance of contextualization and inter-cultural theological reflection. This analysis helps the field by showing how to combine the beliefs of indigenous peoples with the ideas of classical Christianity.

For Christian discipleship in Nias, understanding these small details is very important. It would be insensitive and ineffective to simply replace Nias concepts with Christian views from Cyrillia (or the West). Instead, a contextualized approach would seek to learn about the rich cultural ideas about human nature in Nias, including ideas like *noso*, *eheha*, and *mökömökö*. A contextualized approach would also seek to discern and critique. For instance, find places where people have different beliefs about spiritual topics, like where life comes from (*Lowalangi* vs. Triune God), what it means to be saved (following rituals vs. having faith and receiving sacraments in Christ), and what happens at the end of the world (nature changing over time vs. Jesus rising from the dead in God's Kingdom). Next, engage in a positive way: Discover ideas that can be used to talk about important Christian beliefs about creation, redemption, and resurrection. These ideas include the idea that the soul comes from God and the idea that the body needs a life force. They also include the idea that the soul goes to a place after death. One could find ways to use these ideas to communicate these Christian beliefs in a way that is important to different cultures. Next, promote discipleship that focuses on all aspects of life like developing practices that teach the Nias people about the biblical idea of *imago Dei* and salvation. These practices should also teach people about Nias culture. They should address the fact that humans are holistic beings, meaning that they have physical, emotional, communal, and spiritual dimensions. This in-depth comparison, based on theoretical ideas and supported by other research, provides a better understanding of both Nias and Cyrillian views. It also creates a clearer plan for developing Christian discipleship that is relevant to the context of Nias.

### **Cyril of Jerusalem's Positive Contribution to the Understanding of Body and Soul in Nias Tradition**

While recognizing the unique aspects of Nias beliefs, this section looks at what Cyril of Jerusalem might have added to Nias' understanding of body and soul, especially in the context of Christian discipleship. The following tables and analyses go beyond simple comparisons. They explore how Cyril's theological framework can offer constructive perspectives. They also explore how it can address potential ambiguities and strengthen certain aspects of Nias thought when viewed through a Christian lens.

<b>Nias Tradition</b>	<b>Cyril of Jerusalem's Contribution</b>	<b>Discipleship Implication</b>
<i>Noso</i> , a vital life force, has its ultimate divine origin attributed to <i>Lowalangi</i> , a pantheon of ancestral deities that can be multifaceted and less clearly defined in terms of singular creative sovereignty.	Cyril posits that the body and soul originate from a single, sovereign Creator God, emphasizing <i>creatio ex nihilo</i> and the Holy Spirit's direct soul infusion, offering a unified theological source for life.	The clarification of God's sole sovereignty can strengthen Nias Christians' understanding of Him as the ultimate source of life, transitioning from a multi-deity origin to a singular, Trinitarian Creator.
The post-mortem transformation of <i>mökömökö</i> into a spider suggests a cyclical return to the natural world or lingering attachments to material possessions, with the soul's destiny influenced by rituals and potentially becoming malevolent.	Cyril's linear eschatology posits that the human soul's destiny is determined by faith and moral choices, not by rituals or natural transformations, leading to the bodily resurrection and transformation for eternal life with God or eternal judgment.	Cyril's teaching offers a definitive hope for eternal life with a resurrected body, countering cyclical views and reinforcing personal moral accountability, as the body and soul will be judged together.
Human Agency in Life Cessation: The concept of <i>Noso</i> implies a human capacity to consciously end and transfer life force, suggesting a degree of human control over life's trajectory.	Cyril asserts God's supreme sovereignty over life and death, stating that life is a divine gift and its cessation is not subject to human manipulation.	Promoting the sanctity of life can strengthen Christian beliefs in the sacredness of human life, discourage practices that contradict divine sovereignty, and promote reverence for life from conception to natural death.
The body, often seen as a vessel, may be perceived as less sacred due to its dependence on <i>noso</i> and its potential to transform into <i>mökömökö</i> after death.	Body as Temple of the Holy Spirit: Cyril, drawing from Scripture, emphasizes the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, highlighting its inherent dignity and sacred potential as a dwelling place for God.	The perspective can enhance the Nias' understanding of body dignity and holiness, encouraging believers to view their bodies as sacred instruments for God's glory, not just temporary containers.

Table 4. Potential Clarifications Offered by Cyril to Nias Understandings

### **Potential Clarifications: Analysis of Table 4**

Cyril's strong theological ideas offer important clarifications that can help Nias Christians understand the human person from a Christian point of view. He clearly explained that the soul and body come from God and were created from nothing. This directly addresses the uncertainty of *Lowalangi* as a many-sided ancestral deity. This can provide Nias Christians with a more unified and consistent understanding of God's ultimate power as the sole Creator and Sustainer of life. This fosters a deeper sense of dependence and worship towards the Triune God. This idea matches the principles of transcultural theology, which is the study of how to share Christian beliefs with people from other cultures. It does this by communicating Christian beliefs in a way that resonates with, but doesn't confuse, the beliefs of the people who will receive them.

Furthermore, Cyril's linear eschatology, which ends with the resurrection of the body and the eternal judgment/life, offers a clear and hopeful alternative to the cyclical and sometimes unclear post-mortem transformations in Nias cosmology. This can give Nias Christians a clear understanding of eternal hope. It emphasizes a future with God in a new body instead of a return to the natural world or a continued attachment to material possessions. This also strengthens the idea that each person is responsible for their own moral actions, because both the body and the soul will be judged. This can encourage a life of goodness and following of God's teachings.

Cyril strongly believes that God is in charge of life and death, which goes against the idea of Nias that people have power over life and death. This theological clarification can reinforce the Christian understanding of the sanctity of human life as a sacred gift from God. It promotes reverence for life and discourages practices that contradict God's ultimate authority. This is essential for following a moral path in the Nias context.

Finally, Cyril's "temple theology" is a belief that the body is a sacred place for the Holy Spirit. This makes the body more important. This can change how people in Nias tradition see the body. It can make the body seem more valuable and holy. This all-encompassing view encourages Nias Christians to take care of their bodies and use them for good, which helps them to be more fully devoted to their faith.

### ***Reinforcement of Spiritual Intuitions: Analysis of Table 5***

Beyond explaining the details of the Nias tradition, Cyril's theology also strengthens and deepens the spiritual beliefs within the tradition. This makes the beliefs more solid and well-founded. The Nias' idea of *noso* as the force that gives life finds a strong match in Cyril's description of the soul as the "breath of life," a divine presence in the body. This combination has the potential to prove the Nias intuition about the importance of the soul, while also making it clearer that the one true God is the source of life, which makes life itself more sacred.

In a similar vein, the Nias belief in post-mortem soul existence, as exemplified by concepts such as *noso* returning to *Lowalangi* or the lingering presence of *bekhu zimate*, is profoundly reinforced by Cyril's explicit teaching on the immortality and imperishability of the soul. This phenomenon has the potential to furnish Nias Christians with a more precise and optimistic theological comprehension of the soul's everlasting fate with the divine, transitioning from a broad perception of survival to a distinct anticipation of perpetual communion.

This variegated Nias anthropology, though complex, inherently implies an interconnectedness of physical and spiritual aspects in personhood. Cyril's comprehensive perspective on humanity, which posits that both the physical and spiritual aspects of individuals reflect the divine image and are destined for eternal rebirth as a unified entity, substantiates this intuition. It provides a theological framework that affirms the importance of both physical and spiritual well-being, encouraging a discipleship that cares for the whole person.

Finally, the strong emphasis on lineage and communal spiritual identity in Nias culture, as exemplified by concepts such as *eheha* and *mökömökö*, can be expanded and fulfilled within

Cyril's framework of understanding the Church as the Body of Christ. While Cyril places significant emphasis on the individual salvation of the faithful, he also acknowledges the collective nature of the spiritual experience, emphasizing the unity of believers through the Holy Spirit. This phenomenon can facilitate a process of self-discovery among Nias Christians, allowing them to perceive themselves as members of a novel, all-encompassing spiritual family in Christ. This identity transcends biological lineage, thereby fostering a heightened sense of belonging and a shared spiritual heritage within the Christian community. This framework offers a robust theoretical foundation for understanding the phenomenon of qualitative church growth, emphasizing the cultivation of deep community and shared purpose.

<b>Nias Tradition</b>	<b>Cyril of Jerusalem's Contribution</b>	<b>Discipleship Implication</b>
Soul as Animating Force: <i>Noso</i> is understood as the vital essence that animates the body, distinguishing living beings from inanimate objects.	Soul as "Breath of Life": Cyril defines the soul as the "breath of life" divinely infused into the body, providing animation, rationality, and consciousness.	Cyril's interpretation of the soul's vitality aligns with the Nias' belief that it is the animating principle, offering a clear theological framework for this vital force as a direct gift from God.
Post-Mortem Soul Existence: Both <i>noso</i> and other elements like <i>lumölumö</i> or <i>bekhu</i> are believed to continue existing in some form after physical death, indicating a belief in the soul's survival.	Soul as Immortal and Imperishable: Cyril explicitly teaches the immortality and imperishability of the soul, destined to return to God.	Cyril's doctrine of the soul's immortality can strengthen the Nias' belief in post-mortem existence, offering a more hopeful understanding of the soul's eternal destiny with God.
Interconnectedness of Body and Spirit: The multi-elemental Nias anthropology, though complex, implies a holistic understanding where physical and spiritual aspects are intertwined in personhood.	Holistic View of Humanity ( <i>imago Dei</i> ): While bipartite, Cyril's <i>imago Dei</i> theology encompasses both body and soul in reflecting God's image, emphasizing their interconnectedness and ultimate destiny together in resurrection.	Cyril's holistic view of humanity, as <i>imago Dei</i> , can validate the Nias intuition of interconnected personhood, emphasizing the significance of physical and spiritual well-being in discipleship.
Importance of Lineage/Communal Identity: Concepts like <i>eheha</i> (inherited spirit) and <i>mökömökö</i> (collective ancestral spirit) highlight the strong emphasis on familial and communal spiritual continuity.	Unity of the Church as the Body of Christ: While emphasizing individual salvation, Cyril also stresses the corporate reality of the Church as the Body of Christ, where believers are united by the Spirit, fostering a new spiritual lineage and community.	Cyril's emphasis on the Church as a new spiritual family can broaden the Nias' understanding of communal identity beyond biological lineage, fostering a sense of belonging and shared spiritual heritage within the Christian community.

Table 5. Reinforcement of Nias Spiritual Intuitions by Cyril's Theology

### ***Conclusion of Positive Contributions***

Cyril of Jerusalem's theological anthropology offers significant positive contributions to the Nias understanding of body and soul within a Christian discipleship framework. The author provides clarity on the singular divine origin of life, a definitive eschatological hope in bodily resurrection, a strong affirmation of God's sovereignty over life and death, and an elevated view of the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, his teachings fortify fundamental Nias spiritual intuitions concerning the soul's vitality, its existence in the post-mortem realm, the holistic essence of personhood, and the significance of communal identity, albeit recontextualized within the paradigm of the Body of Christ. Engaging in constructive dialogue between these two traditions allows Nias Christians to cultivate a discipleship that is deeply rooted in their cultural heritage and robustly aligned with universal Christian truths. This fosters a more profound and relevant faith experience.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study has compared the Nias cultural concepts of body and soul, particularly focusing on *nosō*, with the theological anthropology of Cyril of Jerusalem. The research has successfully identified important differences and commonalities between these two views. The differences mainly have to do with how the Nias people understand human composition (body and soul) versus Cyril's two-part (body and soul) framework, how the Nias people understand human agency over life force versus Cyril's emphasis on divine sovereignty, and the Nias people's cyclical eschatology (the study of end-times) with spirit transformations versus Cyril's linear eschatology (the study of end-times) that ends with bodily resurrection. These differences show that they have different ideas about life, what is important, and what happens to a person after they die. On the other hand, the resonances show shared beliefs, such as the idea that the soul comes from a higher power and continues to exist after death, and the belief that the body needs an outside force to give it life. These commonalities are important for understanding different cultures through a religious lens. The analysis shows that Cyril of Jerusalem's ideas about humanity can help Nias Christian followers. His teachings provide a clear framework for understanding the origin of life, a definitive and hopeful vision of bodily resurrection, and a robust understanding of the body as a sacred temple of the Holy Spirit. These insights can help clarify some aspects of Nias' traditional beliefs when viewed from a Christian perspective. Furthermore, Cyril's focus on the image of God and the corporate reality of the Church can strengthen and expand existing spiritual ideas about the soul's energy, its eternal existence, the complete nature of being a person, and the importance of shared identity, incorporating them into a universal Christian story.

The implication on Christian discipleship in Nias is significant. It is important to consider the context of Nias culture while also respectfully acknowledging and appreciating their beliefs. By focusing on what people have in common, Christian discipleship can effectively communicate important Christian beliefs about creation, redemption, and resurrection in a way that is relevant to different cultures. This will encourage a comprehensive

spiritual growth that combines the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of the human being within a Christian context. This will ultimately improve theological understanding and encourage both the quality and the quantity of church growth in Nias. This comparison is an important first step towards creating better, more culturally sensitive religious teachings in the Nias context.

### **Competing interests**

The author declares that there are no competing interests that could have influenced the objectivity or the results of this work. Therefore, the author has no financial or personal conflicts of interest to disclose.

### **Author contributions**

Hendi conceptualized the research framework and designed the comparative study. Aprianus Lawolo and Sugianto performed the extensive literature review and anthropological research regarding Nias cultural beliefs. Hendi, Nadia Bimantoro Elifas, and Daniel Indradjaja conducted the theological analysis of Cyril of Jerusalem's anthropological framework. Hendi drafted the initial manuscript, while Aprianus Lawolo, Sugianto, Nadia Bimantoro Elifas, and Daniel Indradjaja provided critical feedback and revisions for the intellectual content. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

### **Ethical considerations**

This research followed all ethical standards for qualitative literature review and comparative analysis. This study did not involve direct contact with human subjects, animals, or environmental intervention; therefore, institutional ethical approval was not applicable. However, the study was conducted in accordance with the internal research guidelines of Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Soteria, Indonesia (Reference No.: 008/STTSP/XII/2025).

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### **Data availability**

The data that support the findings of this study are available in the public domain, primarily consisting of published theological texts, academic literature, and anthropological studies referenced throughout this article. No primary data were generated or analyzed in this study that would require restricted access. All sources used in this research are duly cited in the reference list.

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