

## Mapping the Development of Christology and Contextual Theology in Papua: A Systematic Literature Review (2014–2024)

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**Abstract:** This study examines the development of Christology and contextual theology in Papua over the past decade and its implications for academic discourse, church practice, and the strengthening of inclusive theology. The research employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with the PRISMA protocol, analyzing 33 journal articles published between 2014 and 2024 that explicitly addressed the Papuan context. Data were collected from national and international academic databases and analyzed thematically to map trends, methodological approaches, and research gaps. The findings show that contextual theology in Papua is dominated by qualitative approaches, particularly case studies and literature studies, with a strong focus on integrating Christian faith and local cultural symbols. Four main patterns were identified: symbolic Christology, relational Christology, contextual-liberation Christology, and early signs of ecological Christology. The production of theological knowledge is concentrated in highland communities and institutions such as STFT GKI I.S. Kijne Jayapura, while coastal, southern, and western regions remain underrepresented. Contextual Christology addressing suffering, spirituality, and social identity also remains underexplored. The implications highlight the need for a more inclusive contextual theology that integrates local values, cultural rituals, and interfaith dialogue. Practically, the study recommends reforming theological curricula based on local culture, developing contextual liturgical practices, and strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration to enhance the church's role as an agent of social transformation. The originality of this study lies in its systematic mapping of previously fragmented literature, providing a more structured framework rooted in the lived faith experiences of Papuan communities while enriching global theological discourse.

**Keywords:** Christology; Contextual Theology; Indigenous Theology; Systematic Literature Review.

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji perkembangan *Kristologi* dan teologi kontekstual di Papua selama satu dekade terakhir, serta implikasinya bagi wacana akademik, praksis gereja, dan penguatan teologi yang inklusif. Penelitian ini menggunakan *Systematic Literature Review (SLR)* dengan protokol PRISMA terhadap 33 artikel jurnal terbit 2014–2024 yang relevan dengan konteks Papua. Data diperoleh dari basis data akademik nasional dan internasional, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik untuk memetakan tren, pendekatan metodologis, serta kesenjangan penelitian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa studi teologi kontekstual di Papua didominasi pendekatan kualitatif, terutama studi kasus dan studi literatur, dengan fokus pada integrasi iman Kristen dan simbol-simbol budaya lokal. Empat pola utama teridentifikasi, yakni *symbolic Christology*, *relational Christology*, *contextual-liberation Christology*, dan tanda awal *ecological Christology*. Produksi pengetahuan teologi terkonsentrasi pada komunitas dataran tinggi dan lembaga seperti STFT GKI I. S. Kijne Jayapura, sementara wilayah pesisir, selatan, dan barat masih kurang terwakili. Kajian Kristologi tentang penderitaan, spiritualitas, dan identitas sosial juga belum banyak dieksplorasi. Implikasi penelitian menegaskan perlunya teologi kontekstual yang lebih inklusif dengan mengintegrasikan nilai adat, ritus budaya, dan dialog antaragama. Secara praktis, penelitian merekomendasikan reformasi kurikulum teologi berbasis budaya lokal, pengembangan liturgi kontekstual, dan kolaborasi interdisipliner untuk memperkuat peran gereja sebagai agen transformasi sosial. Keaslian penelitian ini terletak pada pemetaan sistematis atas literatur yang sebelumnya terfragmentasi, sehingga

menghadirkan kerangka teoretis yang lebih terstruktur dan berakar pada pengalaman iman masyarakat Papua, sekaligus memperkaya diskursus teologi global.

**Kata kunci:** Kristologi; Teologi Kontekstual; Teologi Lokal; Ulasan Literatur Sistematis.

## 1. Introduction

Papua is one of the regions in Indonesia with the highest ethnic and cultural diversity. It is estimated that there are more than 250 indigenous tribes in the province, each with distinct languages, although the exact number varies depending on the source of data (Pemerintah Provinsi Papua, 2024). Prominent tribes such as the Asmat, Dani, Amungme, and Korowai are widely recognized, each possessing unique traditions, customs, and spiritual practices. This diversity makes Papua a cultural mosaic, but at the same time presents significant challenges in terms of development, education, and religious ministry due to linguistic and cultural differences.

In addition to ethnic diversity, Papua also exhibits a plural religious composition. According to Darmawan (2024), the majority of Papua's population identifies as Protestant (64.84% or approximately 708,953 people), followed by Islam (29.14% or approximately 318,630 people), and Catholicism (5.75% or approximately 62,869 people). Buddhism and Hinduism were not recorded in significant numbers in the most recent data. Similar trends appeared in 2021, where Christianity (Protestant and Catholic combined) remained the majority while Islam occupied the second largest share. The dominance of Christianity in Papua's social landscape places the church in a central position, not only in religious affairs but also as a key actor in education, social development, and local politics.

On the other hand, Papua continues to face fundamental challenges. The level of structural poverty remains relatively high compared to other provinces in Indonesia. Data from BPS Papua (2024) shows that as of March 2024 there were approximately 152.91 thousand people living in poverty, accompanied by persistent inequality in access to education and healthcare. Cultural marginalization and identity conflicts further complicate the situation, particularly in areas with limited infrastructure (Nawipa, 2024). These conditions make Papuan society vulnerable to social injustice and exclusion from the mainstream of national development. In this context, the church is often viewed as an institution with strong moral legitimacy and social trust to serve as an agent of liberation and reconciliation (Campbell, 2016).

The history of Christian mission in Papua, which began in 1855, records the church's significant contributions to education and healthcare. However, the early dissemination of the Gospel often brought Western values that marginalized local cultures, considering them to be incompatible with Christianity (Mawikere & Hura, 2022). As a result, tensions between faith and tradition continue to persist to this day. Nevertheless, Papuans have consistently sought ways to reconcile the Gospel with local traditions, so that culture is no longer seen as an obstacle but as a spiritual asset that enriches the life of faith.

Against this backdrop, there emerges an urgent need to develop *contextual theology* in Papua. Such theology is not only aimed at interpreting the Gospel within a plural cultural context, but also at responding to pressing realities such as poverty, identity conflict, and social marginalization. The facts of ethnic diversity, religious composition, and Papua's socio-economic dynamics emphasize that rigid theological frameworks derived solely from Western traditions are insufficient. Instead, there is a pressing demand for a *contextual theological* framework that both respects local cultural identities and provides transformative solutions for society.

Research on *contextual theology* has developed along several trajectories. First, studies have highlighted the conceptual foundations of contextual theology as a response to classical theology. These works emphasize that divine revelation must be understood within historical and existential contexts, allowing each culture to discover its own authentic meaning of the Gospel (Bergmann & Vähäkangas, 2020; Ellison & Bevans, 2023). However, such studies remain broad in scope and have not been specifically directed toward Papua.

Second, research has emphasized the relationship between Christian faith and local culture. Several studies point to the importance of integrating customary values such as communal deliberation, cooperation, and respect for ancestors as points of convergence with the Gospel (Keriapy, 2019; Wanane, 2022). Local initiatives such as the *School of Contextual Theology* illustrate growing acceptance of this paradigm. However, most of these studies remain descriptive and fragmented, and thus have not developed into a robust theoretical framework.

Third, historical and practical studies have examined the role of the church in Papua. Various works have analyzed the church's contributions since the early mission era in the fields of education, social services, and reconciliation (Mawikere & Hura, 2022; Ruhulessin, 2020). Yet these studies tend to focus more on the church's social role without providing a systematic analysis of how to build a sustainable framework of *contextual theology*. From these three trajectories, it is evident that there is an academic gap. Research on *contextual theology* in Papua remains fragmented, unsystematic, and has not offered a comprehensive mapping of trends, dominant themes, and contributions of existing literature. This lack of systematic engagement hinders efforts to develop contextual theology that is relevant to Papua's socio-cultural realities.

This study seeks to address that gap by conducting a *Systematic Literature Review (SLR)* on Christology and contextual theology in Papua. Through this method, the research will identify prevailing trends, dominant themes, methodological approaches, and remaining research gaps. The findings are expected to construct a more coherent theoretical framework to support the development of contextual theology relevant to Papua, while simultaneously offering practical contributions for churches and theological education institutions.

This study is grounded in the argument that the cultural richness of Papua is not a threat to Christian faith, but rather a spiritual resource that can enrich theological reflection. By integrating local values into the framework of *contextual theology*, churches in Papua can provide ministry that is more participatory, relevant, and transformative. The working hypothesis is that although the existing literature is scattered and partial, it contains significant potential to be systematically compiled into a stronger foundation for Papuan contextual theology. Thus, this research not only expands the academic discourse but also strengthens ecclesial praxis in addressing the social and cultural challenges faced by Papuan society.

## 2. Method

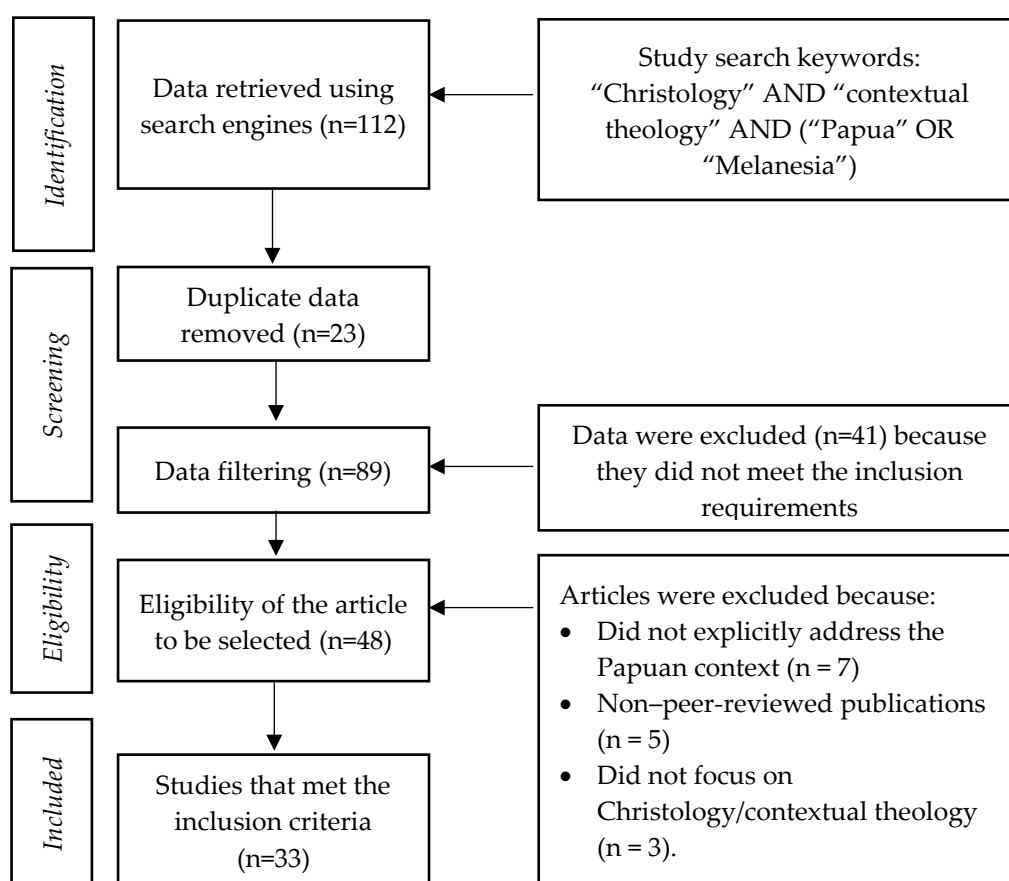
The unit of analysis in this study consists of peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2014–2024 that explicitly discuss Christology and contextual theology in the socio-cultural realities of Papua. These articles were selected because they represent the growing academic construction of contextual theology in Papua and serve as the basis for mapping contributions, themes, and research gaps.

This study employed a *Systematic Literature Review (SLR)* design using the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA)* protocol (Liberati et al., 2009). This design was chosen because it provides a comprehensive, structured, and in-depth overview of the trajectories of previous studies, while also highlighting their relevance to the development of Christology and contextual theology in Papua. The *SLR* approach is appropriate for analyzing diverse literature and synthesizing patterns, trends, and theoretical contributions from earlier works.

The data in this study came from secondary sources, namely peer-reviewed journal articles. The literature search was conducted between December 2024 and April 2025, with the last search conducted on April 15, 2025. The search was conducted through several online academic databases, both international and national, including Google Scholar, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and national academic portals such as Garuda and Sinta. The Boolean search string used was ("Christology" OR "Kristologi") AND ("contextual theology" OR "teologi kontekstual" OR "inculturation" OR "inkulturasi") AND ("Papua" OR "Melanesia"). This string was adjusted to the search format of each platform. For example, on Google Scholar, the query "Christology" "contextual theology" Papua OR Melanesia was used, while on DOAJ and Garuda, the search focused on titles, abstracts, and keywords.

The search is limited to English and Indonesian. Scopus and Web of Science are not included due to institutional access limitations at the time of the search; therefore, the search focuses on open databases relevant to the context of Papua. To ensure the quality of the data, only articles that met the inclusion criteria were analyzed: (1) published between 2014–2024, (2) directly addressing the Papuan context, (3) published in peer-reviewed academic journals, and (4) relevant to the themes of Christology, contextual theology, or inculturation. Non-academic works and articles discussing contextual theology without explicit reference to Papua were excluded.

The process of data collection followed the *PRISMA* stages: (1) identifying the topic and searching for relevant studies using appropriate keywords, (2) screening documents based on titles, abstracts, and keywords, (3) assessing article eligibility using inclusion and exclusion criteria, and (4) selecting the final set of articles for analysis. All stages of the procedure were systematically documented to ensure transparency and replicability (Page, McKenzie, Bossuyt, Boutron, Hoffmann, Mulrow, Shamseer, Tetzlaff, Akl, et al., 2021). The initial search yielded 112 articles (Google Scholar = 68; DOAJ = 24; Garuda = 15; Sinta = 5). After removing 23 duplicates, 89 articles were screened based on their titles and abstracts. A total of 41 articles were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria, and 15 other articles were eliminated after reviewing the full text. Thus, the final number of literature analyzed was 33 articles, as shown in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Study selection flow chart by PRISMA stages**

Two independent reviewers conducted the screening and assessment of articles. Differences in decisions were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. If differences remained, a third reviewer acted as a mediator. The quality of the studies included was assessed using the CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme) checklist to ensure that only articles of moderate to high quality were synthesized further.

The data were analyzed using a *thematic synthesis* approach. The stages of analysis included: (1) organizing the data according to article identity (year, institution, theme), (2) comprehensive reading

of each article, (3) data reduction to extract relevant information, (4) thematic coding based on the focus of the study (Christology, liturgy, cultural symbols, mission), (5) identifying dominant patterns and trends, and (6) drawing conclusions regarding contributions, research gaps, and the future directions of contextual theology in Papua. The validity of the synthesis was maintained through triangulation of literature sources, *peer debriefing*, and systematic documentation following the *PRISMA* reporting standards (Liberati et al., 2009; Page, McKenzie, Bossuyt, Boutron, Hoffmann, Mulrow, Shamseer, Tetzlaff, & Moher, 2021).

Table 1 presents ten representative studies that illustrate the variety of themes and approaches in the literature related to Christology and contextual theology in Papua. A complete list of 33 articles is available in Appendix A. Thematic synthesis was then used to identify recurring theological patterns, key contributions, and knowledge gaps in the literature on Christology and contextual theology in Papua.

**Table 1. Representative Studies on Christology and Contextual Theology in Papua (n = 10)**

No	Author(s), Year, and Affiliation	Context / Setting	Method / Approach	Core Theme	Scholarly Contribution
1	<b>Sondegau (2017)</b> , Parahyangan Catholic University	Migani Tribe, Papua	Qualitative theological study (narrative–cultural analysis)	Inculturation of Christ through the local figure <i>Peagabega</i>	Demonstrates how Christ can be interpreted through Papuan cultural archetypes, enriching local Christian identity.
2	<b>Kayame (2019)</b> , Sanata Dharma University	Cultural and missional context, Papua	Contextual theological reflection	Christ as Elder Brother and Liberator	Develops a Papuan Christological model rooted in social justice and familial values.
3	<b>Elias &amp; Manas (2020)</b> , Christian University of Papua	Maybrat Tribe, West Papua	Contextual-symbolic analysis	The eastern cloth as a symbol of faith	Illustrates how local symbols can function as theological mediations of Christ's presence.
4	<b>Jenbise (2021)</b> , STFT GKI I.S. Kijne Jayapura	Papuan cultural context	Symbolic–theological analysis	Christ as the <i>Bird of Paradise</i>	Presents a contextual Christology rooted in Papuan symbolic imagery, bridging faith and culture.
5	<b>Mawikere (2021)</b> , IAKN Manado	Baliem ethnic group, Papua	Ethnographic–theological study	Eternal life and gospel inculturation	Reveals how the Papuan notion of eternal life strengthens the relevance of the gospel message.
6	<b>Giban &amp; Djoweni (2022)</b> , STAK Diaspora Wamena	Kombai Tribe, Papua	Narrative–oral theology	Oral theology and local narrative tradition	Highlights oral traditions as valid theological sources parallel to Scripture.
7	<b>Rumpaidus (2023)</b> , STFT GKI I.S. Kijne Jayapura	Sentani culture, Papua	Symbolic–pastoral study	<i>Sago</i> as a symbol of reconciliation	Explores reconciliation and peacebuilding through Papuan cultural symbols.
8	<b>Kayame &amp; Rusmadji (2024)</b> , STFT Widya Sasana	Papuan highlands	Theological literature study	“Jesus with Koteka”: symbol of divine solidarity	Articulates an incarnational Christology grounded in Papuan cultural embodiment.
9	<b>Kira &amp; Martasudjita (2023)</b> , STFT Widayasana &	Modio Parish, Papua	Contextual–pastoral analysis	Economic inculturation (coffee & <i>noken</i> )	Shows how local economic activities serve as liberating contexts for theological praxis.

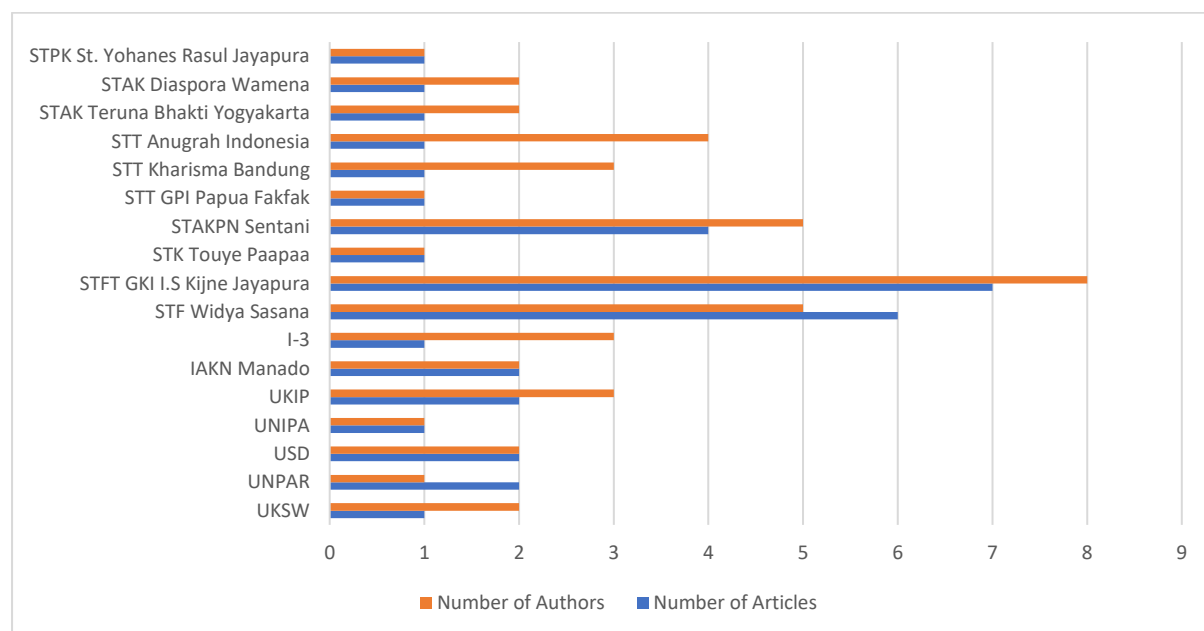
	Sanata Dharma University				
10	<b>Kreuta (2024),</b> STAKPN Sentani	Local church, Papua	Conceptual–contextual study	Understanding Jesus in Papuan cultural framework	Emphasizes inculturation as a hermeneutical key for local Christological understanding.

### 3. Results

#### *Trends, Themes, and Research Methodologies on Christology and Contextual Theology in Papua*

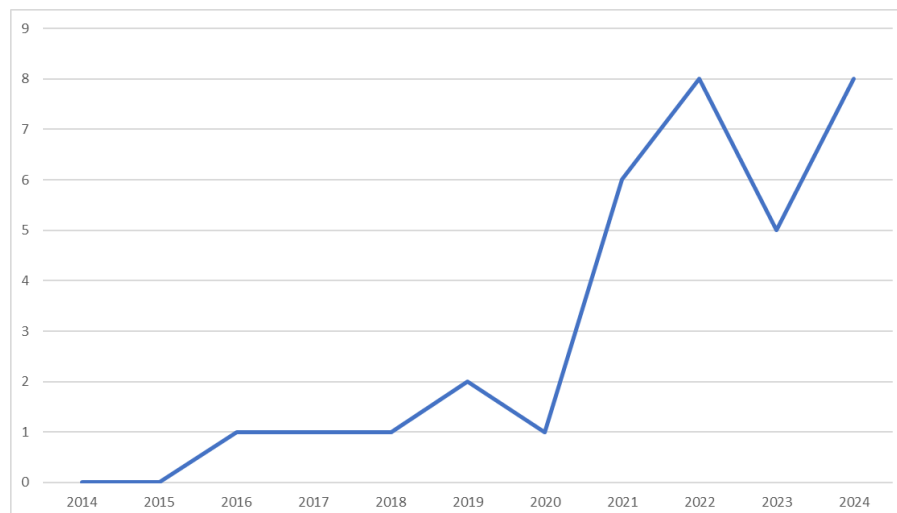
To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the development of contextual theology in Papua, the initial step of this study was to trace and map relevant literature from 2014 to 2024. The identification process was conducted using academic search engines with the keyword “contextual theology in Papua,” followed by a gradual screening based on titles, abstracts, keywords, and full-text content. This screening process resulted in 33 articles deemed eligible, as they directly examined Christology and contextual theology within the socio-cultural realities of Papua and included sufficient references. The full list of articles that met these criteria is presented in the Appendix.

Based on the authors’ affiliations, these 33 articles originated from 17 institutions, consisting of 5 universities, 2 institutes, and 10 theological colleges. Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Teologi Gereja Kristen Injili (STFT GKI) I. S. Kijne Jayapura was the most dominant, contributing 7 articles from 8 authors, followed by Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Teologi (STF) Widya Sasana Malang (6 articles from 5 authors), Sekolah Tinggi Agama Kristen Protestan Negeri (STAKPN) Sentani (4 articles), and Sekolah Tinggi Katolik (STK) Touye Paapaa (4 articles). In addition to local Papuan institutions, several national institutions, such as Universitas Sanata Dharma and Universitas Parahyangan (UNPAR), were also noted as contributors (Figure 2).



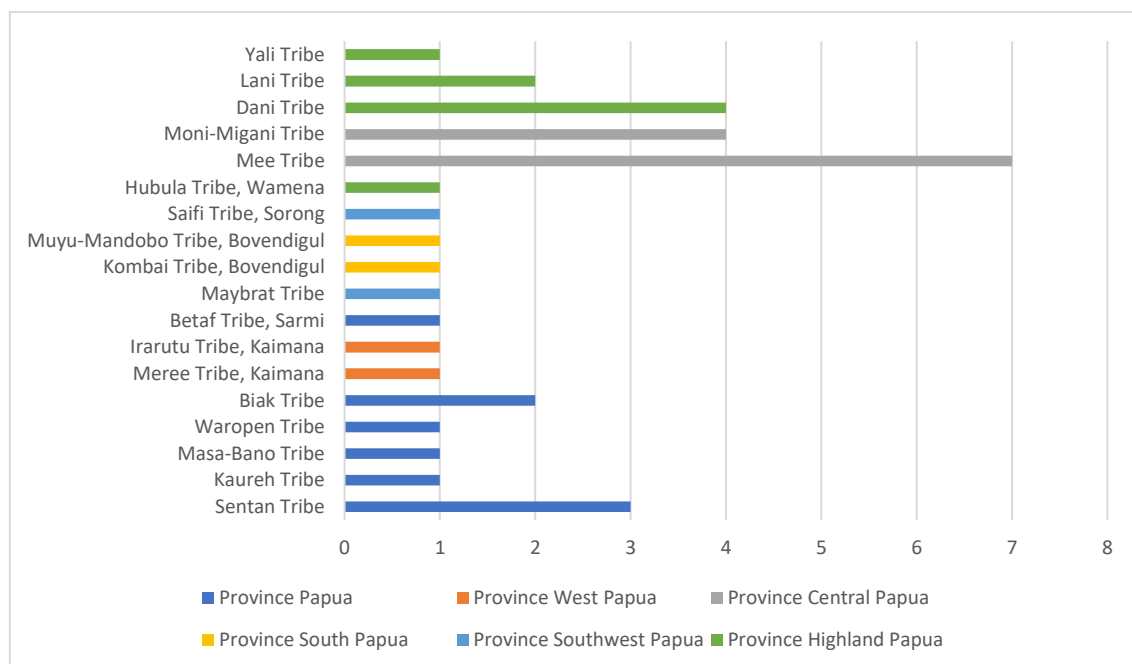
**Figure 2. Distribution of articles based on institutional affiliation**

From a temporal perspective, the distribution of articles shows a significant increasing trend since 2020 (Figure 3). During the 2014–2019 period, the number of publications was very limited, with only about 1–2 articles per year. However, starting in 2020, the trend began to rise, from 1 article in 2020 to 6 articles in 2021, reaching its peak in 2022 with 8 articles. Although there was a slight decline in 2023, publications increased again in 2024, indicating a sustained academic interest in this topic.



**Figure 3. Publication trends of articles per year from 2014–2024**

Ethnographically and geographically (Figure 4), most studies were conducted among the Mee people in Central Papua, with 4 articles, followed by Highland Papuan groups such as the Yali, Lani, and Dani. In the coastal areas, research reached communities in Sentani, Kureh, and Waropen. Meanwhile, several studies have begun to explore Southern Papua, West Papua, and Southwest Papua, focusing on the Muyu, Kombai, and various ethnic groups in Kaimana. These findings confirm that the study of contextual theology in Papua is expanding not only quantitatively but also geographically and ethnographically.



**Figure 4. Distribution of research based on the ethnographic and geographic regions of Papua**

The data show that studies on contextual theology in Papua are increasingly gaining attention within the academic realm, particularly in local theological education institutions that have direct connections to Papuan communities. The dominant involvement of STFT GKI I.S. Kijne Jayapura, STAKPN Sentani, and several other theological colleges indicates a strong commitment by local institutions to develop theological reflection rooted in the faith experiences and cultural realities of the local population. The surge in publications since 2020 marks a growing awareness that theological

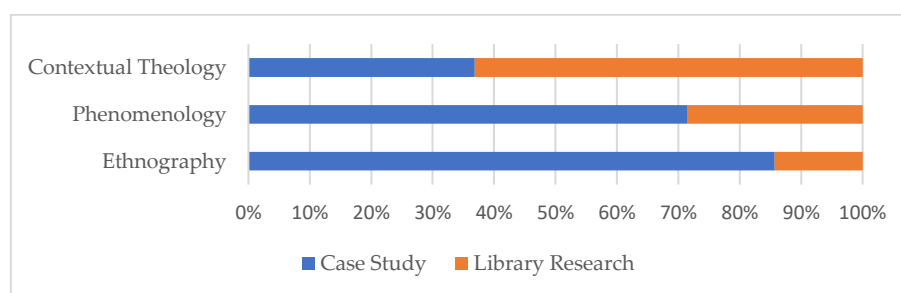
reflection cannot be separated from the increasingly complex social, political, and cultural dynamics of Papua. Nevertheless, research attention still tends to focus primarily on ethnic communities in the highland regions, while representation of groups in the coastal, southern, and western parts of Papua remains relatively limited. This pattern indicates that the discourse on contextual theology is indeed developing but has not yet fully encompassed the ethnographic diversity of Papua. In other words, the achievements so far are significant as an initial foundation, yet there remains substantial room to expand the scope of research in order to present a more comprehensive and inclusive picture of theology in Papua.

The analysis reveals four main trends in the development of research on Christology and contextual theology in Papua. First, the research is dominated by contributions from local institutions, particularly STFT GKI I.S. Kijne Jayapura and STAKPN Sentani, which serve as central hubs for producing literature on contextual theology. Second, there has been a significant surge in publications after 2020, peaking in 2021–2022, indicating growing academic attention to contextual issues in Papua. Third, research focus remains largely concentrated on ethnic communities in the highland regions, especially the Mee, Yali, Lani, and Dani peoples, while coastal and southern communities are relatively underrepresented. Fourth, although still limited in number, there is a trend toward geographic expansion to West Papua, South Papua, and Southwest Papua, marking the beginning of broader cross-regional engagement in reflections on contextual theology in Papua.

Overall, these results provide an important overview of the direction of contextual theology studies in Papua. The findings indicate a growing academic awareness that contextual theology must be rooted in the faith experiences and local cultures of Papua. The surge in publications after 2020 can be linked to the complex socio-political situation in Papua and the increasing awareness within the church of the importance of contextual reflection. However, the dominance of highland regions and the limited exploration of coastal, southern, and western Papuan communities suggest that the construction of contextual theology is still not fully inclusive. Therefore, future research needs to expand ethnographic and geographic representation so that Papuan Christology can develop more comprehensively, be more representative, and possess transformative power for the entire Papuan society.

#### *Theoretical and Practical Contributions of the Literature*

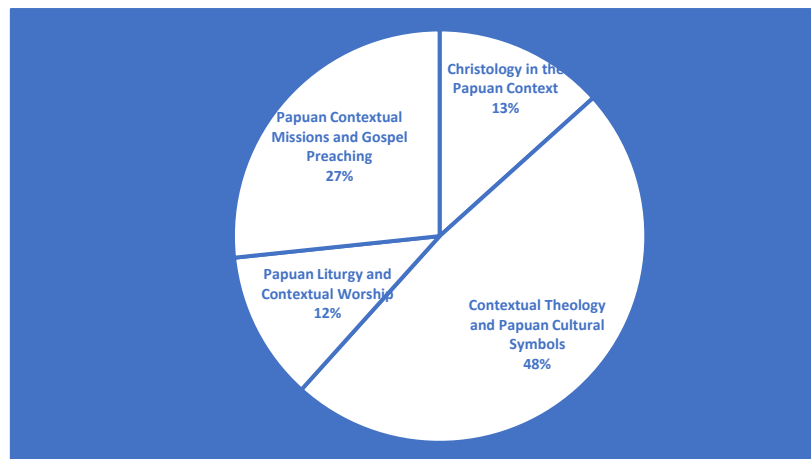
Based on the analysis, all the articles included in the study employed qualitative research. This confirms that theological research in Papua tends to be oriented toward exploring meaning, experience, and cultural context in depth. Methodologically, there are two main categories: case studies and literature studies. Case studies are used to investigate intensively the faith realities and religious practices of specific communities, while literature studies are employed to deepen theological reflection based on classical and contemporary sources. In terms of research approaches, three dominant approaches are identified: ethnography, phenomenology, and contextual theology. The ethnographic approach focuses on local cultural practices, phenomenology on the subjective spiritual experiences of Papuan Christians, and contextual theology on faith reflection integrated with the social, cultural, and historical realities of Papua. In brief, this distribution is illustrated in Figure 5.



**Figure 5. Number of Christology and Contextual Theology Studies in Papua by Research Type, Approach, and Method**



In addition, the research was also mapped based on the thematic focus of the studies. Among the 33 analyzed articles, four major themes were identified: (1) Christology in the Papuan context (13%), (2) Contextual theology and Papuan cultural symbols (48%), (3) Contextual liturgy and worship (12%), and (4) Contextual mission and Gospel proclamation (27%). The percentage distribution of these themes is presented in Figure 6.



**Figure 6. Research Results Based on General Themes in the Study of Christology and Papuan Theology**

The data indicate that the study of contextual theology in Papua emphasizes not only empirical approaches through field research but also conceptual reflection through literature. Case studies are predominantly used in ethnographic and phenomenological approaches, highlighting the role of direct observation and interaction with indigenous communities as primary sources of data. Meanwhile, contextual theology shows a relatively balanced distribution between case studies (40%) and literature studies (60%), suggesting that contextual reflection is constructed integratively from both empirical realities and literary sources. Regarding themes, the majority of research focuses on the relationship between Christian faith and Papuan symbols and culture (48%), whereas Christology (13%) and liturgy (12%) receive relatively less attention.

At least four important patterns can be observed. First, the dominance of qualitative research reflects the epistemological orientation of Papuan theology researchers toward meaning and experience, rather than numerical data or statistical generalization. Second, there is a strong alignment between the ethnographic approach and case study method ( $\pm 90\%$ ), emphasizing that understanding Christian faith in Papua is closely intertwined with the socio-cultural context of local communities. Third, contextual theology demonstrates a balance between case studies and literature studies, indicating an effort to integrate empirical data with literary reflection. Fourth, in terms of thematic focus, most research centers on the integration of theology with local culture, while aspects of Christology and liturgy remain relatively limited, despite their important role in enriching Papuan spirituality.

These findings indicate that the primary theoretical contribution of the literature on Christology and contextual theology in Papua lies in efforts to affirm a faith identity rooted in local culture. The dominance of studies focusing on Papuan symbols and cultural practices reflects an academic awareness that theological construction cannot be separated from the cultural roots of the community. Methodologically, the balance between field-based case studies and conceptual reflection through literature studies demonstrates that theological knowledge is built holistically — anchored in empirical experience while reinforced by a deep conceptual framework. Practically, this literature contributes to the development of more contextualized mission and worship practices, relevant to the diversity of indigenous Papuan communities and capable of strengthening the acceptance of Christian faith in everyday life.

In addition to the dominant focus on cultural symbols and contextual theology, several studies also explore *Christology* and liturgy in Papua and the broader Melanesian context. These works highlight the intricate interplay between traditional cultural practices and Christian worship, pointing to both opportunities and tensions in contextualizing faith. For instance, research on the Auhelawa people in Papua shows how the ideology of “one mind” shapes a distinctive form of collective Christianity that integrates individual belief with communal worship (Schram, 2013). Similarly, the Church in Papua illustrates how liturgical practices coexist with a deep respect for traditional religions, with the celebration of the Eucharist serving as the principal act of worship (Hawkins, 2013). The concept of hybridity has also been employed to explain how Lele Christians incorporate traditional rituals into their theology of healing, thereby creating a unique synthesis between local spirituality and Christian belief (Herrmann, 2019).

From a Christological perspective, liturgy functions not only as a communal practice but also as a theological expression of the mystery of Christ and the ecclesial identity of the church (Quisinsky, 2014). This perspective underscores the dual role of liturgy as both the summit and the source of Christian life. At the same time, contextual theology in the region reveals the persistence of traditional rituals even in Christian communities (Ginting et al., 2025). These dynamics demonstrate that liturgy in Papua and its neighboring contexts cannot be separated from the broader cultural and existential realities in which communities live.

The challenges of balancing cultural traditions with Christian doctrine are further evident in the case of the Torajan *Rambu Solo'* funeral ritual, which, while culturally central, often conflicts with Pentecostal teachings. Nevertheless, aspects of the ritual align with Pentecostal values of spirituality and moral formation, suggesting potential avenues for integration (Pantan, Pakpahan, & Wiryohadi, 2024). In urban areas, the growth of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Indonesia, including Papua, shows how modern liturgical expressions—incorporating multimedia, music, and contemporary preaching—appeal strongly to younger generations (De Jong, 2016). These findings indicate that research on Christology and liturgy in Papua contributes not only to theological reflection but also to practical questions of worship, spirituality, and intergenerational faith transmission in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

Overall, the literature on Christology and contextual theology in Papua demonstrates both methodological richness and thematic diversity, with a clear emphasis on qualitative, experience-oriented research. While most studies prioritize the integration of Christian faith with Papuan cultural symbols, the emerging attention to Christology and liturgy underscores the importance of worship, ecclesial identity, and intergenerational spirituality in shaping theological reflection. Together, these strands of research affirm that Papuan theology is constructed holistically—grounded in empirical observation of local practices, enriched by conceptual and literary reflection, and continually challenged by the task of balancing cultural traditions with Christian doctrines. The theoretical contribution lies in articulating a faith identity rooted in local culture, while the practical impact is seen in the development of contextualized mission, worship, and pastoral practices that resonate with the diversity of Papuan communities.

### *Christology in the Papuan Context*

Out of the 33 articles analyzed, around 6 articles (13%) explicitly address Christology in the Papuan context. Several of these studies provide important contributions by interpreting the figure of Jesus through culturally meaningful symbols. For instance, Sondegau (2017; 2018) interprets Jesus through the Peagabega figure in Migani culture as a representation of solidarity with the marginalized. Kayame (2019) develops a Christology of Jesus as the Elder Brother and liberator from injustice experienced by Papuans, while Jenbise (2021) portrays Jesus as the Bird-of-Paradise, symbolizing beauty, holiness, and the source of life. Furthermore, Kreuta (2024) emphasizes a more systematic contextual analysis of Papuan Christology, and Kayame & Rusmadji (2024) present the Koteka Cross as a theological symbol of God's solidarity with Papuan suffering. These findings demonstrate that

Papuan Christology tends to grow through cultural symbolization while responding to the social realities of the community. Table 2 summarizes several representative articles on Papuan Christology:

**Table 2. summarizes several representative articles on Papuan Christology**

Author (Year)	Christological Concept	Cultural Context	Main Contribution
Sondegau (2017, 2018)	Jesus as Peagabega	Migani culture	Depicts Jesus as siding with the weak and oppressed
Kayame (2019)	Jesus as Elder Brother & Liberator	Papuan kinship structure	Connects Christology with the struggle for social justice
Jenbise (2021)	Jesus as Bird-of-Paradise	Papuan cultural symbol	Emphasizes beauty, holiness, and source of life
Kreuta (2024)	Papuan Christology analysis	Systematic perspective	Encourages academic mapping of Papuan Christology
Kayame & Rusmadji (2024)	Jesus on the Koteka Cross	Papuan highland culture	Expresses God's solidarity with local suffering

The data above illustrates that Papuan Christology is constructed through cultural symbols deeply embedded in local life such as the Peagabega, Bird-of-Paradise, Koteka, and kinship structures. These symbols are used to translate the presence of Jesus into the language of Papuan culture, making the Christian faith more understandable and relevant to local communities. This approach shows that Papuans are not merely adopting Western Christology but are reinterpreting it to align with their historical and spiritual experiences. Hence, Papuan Christology emerges not as a decorative local variant but as a living and contextualized expression of faith. This indicates a conscious theological effort to relate belief in Christ to the cultural, social, and political realities of Papuan society.

Several major patterns can be identified from the literature. First, symbolic Christology, which employs local cultural symbols such as the Bird-of-Paradise and the Koteka to present Jesus as a figure of beauty, holiness, solidarity, and Papuan identity. Second, relational Christology, which interprets Jesus as the Elder Brother, closely linked to Papuan kinship systems and highlighting intimacy between Christ and the community. Third, contextual-liberation Christology, which portrays Jesus as the defender of the oppressed, resonating with Papua's socio-political struggles. Fourth, there are emerging signs of an ecological Christology, which connects Jesus with nature, local food, and the land, although still limited in number. These patterns reveal the dynamic character of local theology, striving to respond to real-life contexts while enriching global theological discourse through a distinctive Papuan perspective.

These findings suggest that Papuan Christology develops through the dynamic interaction between Christian faith and the cultural as well as social realities of the people. Local symbols such as the Bird-of-Paradise, the Koteka, and the Peagabega are not merely cultural ornaments but theological instruments to articulate the presence of Christ in ways that are meaningful to Papuans. This underscores the fundamental principle of contextual theology: the Gospel must be proclaimed and lived in the language of the local culture to be truly relevant. At the same time, it highlights that the faith experience of Papuan communities carries theological weight equal to that of Western traditions and can contribute original insights to global Christological studies.

Moreover, this contextual approach to Christology opens opportunities for dialogue with other contextual theologies worldwide. Papuan symbolic and liberation-oriented Christology resonates with the *Liberation Christology* of Latin America and the *Christology of Suffering* in Africa, though with distinctive emphases on cultural identity and ecological concerns. The presence of Christ is thus understood not only in liturgical realms but also in social struggle, solidarity with suffering, and fidelity to the land as a shared space of life. The implication is the emergence of a Christology that is both deeply rooted in Papuan soil and relevant to global theological conversations about faith, justice, and the integrity of creation. In this way, Papuan Christology can be positioned as an alternative model that enriches contemporary Christological discourse both academically and practically.

#### 4. Discussion

This study shows that research on *Christology* and *contextual theology* in Papua between 2014 and 2024 has experienced significant development, both in terms of the number of publications and thematic diversity. Of the 33 articles analyzed, the majority of studies still employed qualitative approaches using *case study* and *literature study* methods, and focused on integrating Christian faith with Papuan cultural symbols. Four major patterns stand out: *symbolic Christology*, *relational Christology*, *contextual-liberation Christology*, and early signs of *ecological Christology*. Nevertheless, research representation remains dominated by highland communities, while coastal, southern, and western regions of Papua are relatively underrepresented.

These findings indicate that the dominance of qualitative approaches and the focus on cultural symbols occur because Christian faith in Papua develops within communities that are still deeply rooted in local customs and spirituality. The church in Papua plays a crucial role as an agent of social transformation, yet its theological reflection cannot be separated from local cultural practices. Therefore, the use of symbols such as the Bird of Paradise, the Koteka, or the Peagabega figure becomes a means of expressing the presence of Christ in ways that are more relevant and understandable to the people. This also explains why *literature studies* and ethnography were frequently chosen: both methods reveal the profound interaction between faith and culture that cannot easily be reduced to numerical data or statistics.

When compared with previous research, this study shows several important differences. Earlier works emphasized the conceptual foundations of *contextual theology* as a response to classical theology (Bergmann & Vähäkangas, 2020; Ellison & Bevans, 2023), but these studies were broad in scope and had not been specifically directed toward Papua. Other works highlighted the integration of faith and culture through local values such as communal deliberation (*musyawarah*) and respect for ancestors (Keriapy, 2019; Wanane, 2022), but most of them remained descriptive and lacked a coherent theoretical framework. Meanwhile, historical and practical studies on the role of the church (Mawikere & Hura, 2022; Ruhulestin, 2020) tended to focus on social contributions without providing a systematic analysis of sustainable contextual theology. Thus, the findings of this study present novelty by offering a comprehensive mapping of trends, methodologies, and patterns of Papuan *Christology*, while also affirming local academic contributions to enrich global theological discourse.

Historically, the development of Papuan *Christology* reflects the long struggle between the legacy of Western missions and the efforts of local communities to find their own theological voice. The dominance of research employing local symbols such as the Bird of Paradise, the Peagabega, the Noken, and Sago reflects the deep relationship between Papuan spirituality and its environment. Interpreting Jesus through these symbols not only strengthens the faith identity of Papuan Christians but also encourages more meaningful theological reflection (Sarbah, 2022; Timo & Putrawan, 2021). This pattern can be explained as a response to historical marginalization and cultural tensions stemming from early missions that often neglected local traditions (Guirguis, 2019). Thus, contemporary theological efforts represent a corrective response that emphasizes cultural affirmation, liberation, and reconciliation, as highlighted by Knoetze (2022) and Wang et al. (2023), who argue that contextualized theological education and formation contribute to the healing of collective identities and the restoration of spiritual relations within local communities.

Socially, Christology rooted in cultural symbols demonstrates how Christian faith functions as a means of strengthening identity, solidarity, and the struggle of Papuan communities against structural injustice. Previous studies (Mawikere & Hura, 2021; Nawipa, 2024) highlighted the historical tensions between Christianity and Papuan culture, as well as the marginalization of local identities in the preaching process. However, most of these works remain fragmented, descriptive, and fail to provide a coherent theoretical framework. This study offers novelty by presenting a systematic mapping of existing literature, identifying dominant themes, gaps, and methodological trends. In doing so, it provides a comprehensive synthesis that connects previously isolated findings and offers a clearer direction for the development of *contextual theology* that is both academic and rooted in local cultural identity. This aligns with calls in global literature to develop theological education in marginalized

regions through reflective approaches grounded in the context and experiences of local communities (Knoetze, 2022; Schweitzer & Schreiner, 2020).

Ideologically, these findings affirm that theology is never neutral but is always entangled with power relations and socio-political contexts. Through the integration of local symbols, oral traditions, and cultural practices into theological reflection, Papuan Christians are reclaiming control over their faith narratives (Timo & Putrawan, 2021). Theologically, this development challenges the dominance of Western theological paradigms and affirms the legitimacy of indigenous theological expressions (Guirguis, 2019; Sarbah, 2022). Socially, it strengthens cultural identity, promotes inclusivity, and advocates for social justice within Papuan society (Knoetze, 2022). For church ministry, these findings emphasize the urgent need for theological education reform, enhanced research capacity, and the institutionalization of local cultural resources in worship, leadership, and evangelism (Wang et al., 2023). Practically, the study underscores the importance of cross-institutional collaboration, curriculum reform, and dissemination of research results to equip future theologians and church leaders with cultural sensitivity and contextual competence. Thus, this research not only enriches global theological discourse but also contributes to the decolonization of theology and offers a contextual model that enables Papuan churches to develop ministries that are more relevant, participatory, and transformative (Schweitzer & Schreiner, 2020).

The function of this research lies in its contribution to expanding the understanding of *contextual theology* rooted in Papuan realities, thereby enriching both academic discourse and church practice. However, a dysfunction that emerges is the limited geographic representation of research, which prevents Papuan theology from becoming fully inclusive. If this imbalance persists, there is a risk that the voices of coastal, southern, and western Papuan communities will not be accommodated within the broader narrative of *contextual theology*. This situation underscores the urgency of developing *inclusive contextual theology* in Papua, which does not only focus on certain communities but encompasses the full diversity of Papuan ethnicities, cultures, and regions.

An inclusive approach can be realized through the integration of local values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) and *musyawarah* (communal deliberation), which emphasize collaboration and shared decision-making. These values have the potential to enrich church leadership models that are more participatory, responsive, and relevant to Papua's socio-cultural challenges. Furthermore, decolonial theology offers a framework that challenges the dominance of Western traditions and affirms local traditions as integral to faith practice. In the Papuan context, this approach is crucial, as the legacy of colonialism has left deep social wounds and cultural marginalization (Setyawan, 2024).

In addition, the development of contextual Christology in Indonesia highlights both opportunities and limitations in constructing models truly rooted in local realities (Haire, 2015). Several studies confirm that the integration of *contextual theology* into liturgy, leadership, education, and mission practices demonstrates the active transformation of global Christian teachings into forms that resonate with Papuan realities (Sarbah, 2022; Timo & Putrawan, 2021). This indicates that inclusivity is not only about ethnographic representation but also about ensuring that theological practice remains consistently connected to the everyday lives of communities.

Another dimension of inclusive theology in Papua involves religious moderation and interfaith dialogue. In a multicultural society, an emphasis on tolerance allows the church to carry out an inclusive evangelistic mission without compromising its doctrinal identity. Thus, inclusivity applies not only internally within the church but also externally, particularly in interreligious relations. At the same time, developing mission theology in plural societies requires a proportional framework that respects religious diversity while remaining grounded in the Gospel (Ming & Daliman, 2022).

The main challenge of inclusive *contextual theology* is to maintain cultural sensitivity while simultaneously fostering social transformation. Recent studies emphasize that contextual theology in Papua must also address broader social issues such as gender justice, human freedom, and human dignity, ensuring that it does not stop at cultural adaptation but also drives concrete social change (Sipayung & Kaunda, 2022). On the other hand, there is tension between efforts to preserve cultural heritage and the goals of contextualization. Some studies warn that the development of contextual

theology is also a process of heritage formation and identity construction (Lensink, 2021). Therefore, inclusivity in Papuan theology must not only expand geographic representation but also deepen theology's function as a means of identity formation and social reconciliation.

Based on this dysfunction, concrete steps are needed to expand the scope of research so that it becomes more geographically and ethnographically representative. Future researchers need to engage communities in Papua's coastal, southern, and western regions, ensuring that the mapping of *contextual theology* reflects the true diversity of Papuan society. In addition, collaboration between local and national theological institutions must be strengthened to produce a more coherent theoretical framework. Churches are also expected to encourage participatory research that directly involves indigenous communities so that the theology produced genuinely emerges from the faith experiences and struggles of Papuans themselves. Moreover, methodological inclusivity must be considered by integrating interdisciplinary approaches to achieve more holistic analysis. Reforming theological education curricula in Papua is also crucial, incorporating local cultural values to ensure that future church leaders possess contextual sensitivity. Furthermore, existing research findings must be disseminated more widely through church forums, academic publications, and social networks so they can contribute meaningfully to the transformation of ministry, policy, and community life in Papua.

## 5. Conclusion

This study concludes that research on *Christology* and *contextual theology* in Papua during the period 2014–2024 has experienced significant development, both in the number of publications and thematic diversity. Of the 33 articles analyzed, the majority of studies employed qualitative approaches through *case studies* and *literature studies*, focusing on the integration of Christian faith with local cultural symbols. The main findings highlight four dominant patterns in the construction of Papuan Christology: *symbolic Christology*, *relational Christology*, *contextual-liberation Christology*, and early signs of *ecological Christology*. Nevertheless, research representation remains dominated by highland communities, while coastal, southern, and western Papuan regions are relatively underrepresented.

The primary scientific contribution of this study lies in providing a systematic mapping of the trends, themes, and methodologies of research on Christology and contextual theology in Papua. Theoretically, this study reinforces the idea that theology cannot be detached from the cultural roots and faith experiences of local communities, thereby positioning Papuan theology not as a mere local variant but as a living theology with academic weight and global relevance. Practically, the study demonstrates that the integration of cultural symbols, oral traditions, and customary values into Christology enriches church ministry, strengthens faith identity, and fosters social transformation in Papuan society. Thus, this research contributes not only to the development of contextual theology in Papua but also to global theological discourse by offering an alternative model that is participatory, relevant, and transformative.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations. Research representation remains geographically and ethnographically unbalanced, with a strong dominance of highland ethnic groups and limited exploration of coastal, southern, and western communities. Moreover, much of the existing literature remains descriptive and fragmented, which prevents the formation of a robust theoretical framework. Therefore, future research needs to expand geographic representation, strengthen collaboration between local and national theological institutions, and adopt interdisciplinary methodologies to generate more holistic analyses. With these steps, the development of contextual theology in Papua can become more inclusive, comprehensive, and capable of responding more profoundly to the social, cultural, and spiritual challenges faced by Papuan communities.

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