



THEOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES: THE FINAL DESTINATION OF DEAD BABIES AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NIAS ISLANDS LUTHERAN CONGREGATION

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Abstract: *The death of babies on the Nias Islands, where most of the population adheres to Lutheran Christian beliefs, has become a serious problem from a theological and psychological perspective. Theologically, congregations are confused about the certainty of their baby's destination or safety when they die. The state of grief and confusing doctrines about soteriology related to dead babies have intimidated the psychology of parents whose children died as babies. To overcome this problem, researchers conducted a study using qualitative research methods. Based on theological investigation, the destination of a baby's death depends on the will of God, who is abundant in grace. He was able to choose someone to save from the womb. Meanwhile, from a psychological perspective, it is denied that parents whose babies die experience psychological disorders. Theological and psychological studies regarding the final destination of dead babies for the Nias Islands Lutheran congregation are the novelty of this research..*

Keywords: *Theology, Psychology, Soteriology, Dead Babies, Nias Lutheran Congregation*

INTRODUCTION

Even though the event of physical death cannot be controlled by humans, believers hope that everyone who believes in their heart and confesses Jesus with their mouth that He is Lord and Savior, will receive an eternal life (Rom.

10:9-10). This hope is built upon Jesus' claim while on earth, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (Joh. 14:6, KJV).*" Salvation in Christ has been designed by God Himself from eternity and can only be received by humans through faith in Jesus (Eph. 2:8-9). This was also confirmed by Eninta Ginting and Pardomuan Munthe in their research, human salvation is God's effort to return humans to His original design.¹ Gulo even explained that if Christ does not redeem a sinner, that person is not truly free.² Likewise, Federans Randa claims, salvation can only be obtained through belief in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior.³ The conclusion that can be drawn from the existing premises is that a person is saved by faith and confession in Jesus.

The problems that arise because of the premises above are; If faith and confession in Jesus are a condition for being saved and gaining eternal life, then what about little babies who are not able to confess with their mouths and believe in their hearts that Jesus is Lord and

Savior? There are various perspectives regarding the fate of dead babies, some think they are angels because they don't know anything, including about sin.⁴ There are also those who think that babies who die go to heaven because they have not sinned.⁵ Eninta Ginting and Pardomuan Munthe explained that a baby who has been baptized when he dies, obtains salvation through the mother's faith where the baby is contained in the womb. For Ginting and Munthe, the safety of a baby is achieved by the faith of the mother who conceived and gave birth to him.⁶ Even some people in the universalism group, such as Hans Kung, Karl Rahner, Raimundo Panikkar, Victor I. Tanja, admit that it is impossible for there to be hell or a place of eternal punishment because Christ loves children.⁷ From this group's understanding, there is no heaven or hell for dead babies because everyone survives. Meanwhile, conservative charismatics believe that babies who die go to hell because of their inherent sinful nature. Observing the premise of Nainggolan and Paradesha which states that there is no salvation for people who do not believe in Jesus,⁸ and thus it can

¹ Enita Ginting and Pardomuan Munthe, "Tinjauan Dogmatis Mengenai Keselamatan Bayi Yang Sudah Dibaptis Meninggal Diperhadapkan Dengan Pandangan Yohanes Calvin Dan Implikasinya Bagi Anggota Jemaat GBKP Runggun Lau Gunung," *JURNAL SABDA AKADEMIKA* 2, no. 1 (2022): 178.

² Fenius Gulo, "Yesus Satu-Satunya Pemberi Kemerdekaan Bagi Orang Berdoa Ditinjau Dari Esai Yohanes 8:36," *KERUSO: Jurnal Teologi & Pelayanan* Vol. 6, no. 2 (2021): 20, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33856/kerusso.v6i2.198>.

³ Federans Randa, "Karya Keselamatan Allah Dalam Yesus Kristus Sebagai Jaminan Manusia Bebas Dari Human Kekal Allah," *LOGON ZOES: Jurnal Teologi, Sosial Dan Budaya* 3, no. 1 (2020): 61.

⁴ Lolan Lewi Pongdatu, Alfri Tandi, and Lisa Lewi Pongdatu, "Kajian Teologis Keselamatan Bayi Dalam Perspektif Jhon Calvin Dan Implikasinya Bagi Warga Gereja Toraja," *WIDYA Karya: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Dan Teologi* 1, no. 3 (2023): 41.

⁵ Pongdatu, Alfri Tandi, and Lisa Lewi Pongdatu, "Kajian Teologis Keselamatan Bayi Dalam Perspektif Jhon Calvin Dan Implikasinya Bagi Warga Gereja Toraja."

⁶ Ginting and Pardomuan Munthe, "Tinjauan Dogmatis Mengenai Keselamatan Bayi Yang Sudah Dibaptis Meninggal Diperhadapkan Dengan Pandangan Yohanes Calvin Dan Implikasinya Bagi Anggota Jemaat GBKP Runggun Lau Gunung."

⁷ Demy Jura, "Kajian Soteriologi Dalam Teologi Universalisme, Calvinisme, Dan Arminianisme Serta Kaitannya Dengan Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Kristen." Vol. 1, No.2 (Oktober 2017): 22-24., *UKI: Jurnal Teologi Educatio Christi* 1, no. 2 (2017): 22-24.

⁸ Marnaek Nainggolan and Happy Fasigita Paradesha, "Teladan Spiritualitas Figur Nuh: Standar Kehidupan Rohani Bagi Pemimpin Kristen Masa Kini," *EDULEAD: Journal of Christian Education and Leadership* 3, no. 2 (2022): 191-204, <https://doi.org/10.47530/edulead.v3i2.107>.

be concluded that the children who died did not receive salvation because they could not believe in Christ. As a result of the existing problem, it has created new problems, namely psychological problems for parents whose babies died when they were still small. Apart from the death of her beloved child, on the other hand, soteriology's hopes for her baby were dashed due to the doctrines of some of today's Christian scholars. The premises above imply discrimination against babies who die when they are young and also affect the psychological state of their parents.

This research is really needed because in recent years, cases of infant mortality, especially in the Nias Islands, where the majority of people believe in Lutheranism, have increased.⁹ In fact, from data created by TvOne.Com, the highest cases of infant mortality in North Sumatra in 2023 will be in the Nias Islands.¹⁰ Regarding the infant mortality rate in Nias, Prof. Yasona Hamolangan Laoly paid attention when conveying his aspirations.¹¹ Likewise, dr. Lie Agustinus Dharmawan, founder of doctorSHARE, also contributed to overcoming this serious problem. How could this not happen, in the Nias Islands themselves there is a lack of attention from the central government regarding adequate health facilities, including infant nutrition, resulting in very high stunting.¹²

This has become a serious problem for the health of babies in Nias and even the baby's parents. The fact that many babies died in Nias also effected parents whose children die, experiencing poor psychological conditions and even

physical or health conditions when facing misfortune. (Kansil and Meily Meiny Wagiu 2021, 51) People who experience misfortune tend to experience sad emotions as a response to loss of a loved one. (Yosep et al. 2023, 2) Aritonang explained that parents' grief when their child dies can cause emotional reactions such as guilt, regret, fear and discomfort.¹³

On the other hand, the majority of the people of the Nias Islands themselves, more than 95% of whom believe in Christianity, are dominated by the Lutheran Protestant denomination.¹⁴

There are even many cases of miscarriage while pregnant.¹⁵ It is certain that these dead babies have not had the opportunity to acknowledge and believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Thus, the question in this research is "What could be the theological explanation on the soteriological status of the children?" The results of this research serve as psychological strengthening for the Nias Islands Lutheran Congregation whose baby died.

RESEARCH METHODS

To solve the existing problems, this research requires qualitative methods. Researchers use the Bible as the main source for finding out the destination of babies who die. In this case, the researcher carries out critical theological discussions by upholding the values of hermeneutic interpretation. Books and journals were used to build a theoretical basis and interviews were

⁹ Elida Sihotang, "Rapat Pengkajian Kasus Kematian Ibu Dan Anak Triwulanan Tahun 2023," DKP2KB KABUPATEN NIAS, 2023.

¹⁰ Linova Rifianty, "Tahun 2022 Angka Kematian Ibu Dan Bayi Di Sumut Menurun," TVOneNews.Com, 2023.

¹¹ Novrizaldi, "Kunjungi Nias, Menko PMK Soroti Sangat Tingginya Angka Stunting," Website KEMENKO PMK, 2021.

¹² Novrizaldi.

¹³ Donna Aritonang, "Solidaritas Allah Dalam Penderitaan Seorang Ibu Karena Kematian Anaknya: Sebuah Tawaran Pendampingan Pastoral," *DANUM PAMBELUM: Jurnal Teologi Dan Musik Gereja* 3, no. 1 (2023): 89–90.

¹⁴ Fenius Gulo, "Strategi Misi Kristus Dan Perkembangannya Di Masa Jemaat Mula-Mula Serta Implikasinya Untuk Gereja Lutheran Indonesia," *SANCTUM DOMINE: Jurnal Teologi* 12, no. 2 (2023): 99.

¹⁵ Crack Fiona, "Menjadi Ibu Tanpa Anak: Kisah Pulu Perempuan Dengan Bayi Yang Dilahirkan Mati," BBC News Indonesia, 2018.

needed to show the fact of the existence of psychological disorders for parents whose children died in the Nias Islands Lutheran Congregation. Then, news media really needs to know about the fact that babies have died on the Nias Islands in recent years. Meanwhile, the results from the analysis of the Bible regarding the safety of the dead babies relate to some psychological methods as a tool to strengthen the parents whose babies die.

RESULTS

Death Is a Result of Human Sin

Shortly after humans were created, God asked Adam to obey Him by not eating the fruit of the tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden. In fact, God firmly tells us that transgression results in death (Gen. 2:17). Apparently, Adam could not stand the sweet advances from his wife, who had already been tempted by the devil to eat the forbidden fruit. God did not change, shortly after man fell into sin, confirming the punishment for Adam's transgression, "for dust you are and to dust you will return (Gen. 3:19)." It can be understood that this text is an emphasis on Adam that physical death is an event that cannot be avoided due to his fall into sin. Regarding Genesis 3:19, Mathias Jebaru Adon interprets that sin makes humans lose eternity and experience death so that human life becomes limited (band. Palms. 90:9-10).¹⁶ Human sinfulness is a serious problem for God because it is considered an insult to the Lawgiver himself.

The harmonious relationship between God and Adam before the fall (Gen. 3:8) has disappeared and he has become an enemy of God due to human violations. It must be understood that it was not God who changed but rather that Adam and Eve rebelled against their

creator. Adam's sin made humans separated from God, far from living in fellowship with God and dead in spirit (Eph.4:18).¹⁷ This has made humans ignorant of Divine things (1 Cor.2:14) and must be born again to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). The human soul has been defiled and evil because of sin against God. This makes the human spirit separated from God, his mind becomes dirty and stupid so that he cannot help himself. Human separation from God is spiritual death which is also related to but different from physical death. Spiritual death can be interpreted as the separation of all aspects of a person's life from God. The essence of spiritual death can be seen from God's warning to Adam that after eating the fruit of the tree he would die (Gen. 2:17). Note that after Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, this does not mean they immediately died physically. When humans disobey God's commands (Genesis 3:6-7), humans do not immediately die physically, but since then death has begun to flow in human life so that humans experience death. The separation of body and soul is also part of the consequences or punishment for sin. This threat of punishment is clearly seen in the statement: "For you are dust and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:19). This understanding also appears in Paul's argumentation in Romans. 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:12-23. The Church has always seen death in its fullest sense, including physical death and not as a consequence of negligence for not taking medicine when sick and so on, but as a punishment for sin. This death includes physical death, namely the divorce between spirit and body, which causes damage to the body.

The peak of human death is eschatological. Glory is a reward that

¹⁶ Mathias Jebaru Adon, "Asal-Usul Kejahatan Dan Penderitaan Menurut Kitab Kejadian 3:1-24 Dan Usaha Manusia Melawan Dosa," *DANUM PAMBELUM: Jurnal Teologi Dan Musik Gereja* 2, no. 2 (2022): 118.

¹⁷ Riwan and Fasmani Ndruru, "Argumentasi Teologis Tentang Dampak Dosa Terhadap Pikiran," *PHRONESIS: Jurnal Teologi Dan Misi* 5, no. 2 (2022): 160.

God gives to to sinners, if they believe in Jesus (Matt. 10:28; 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 14:11). If a person experiences physical death while still being spiritually dead, he is eternally separated from God. After physical death, unrepentant people experience eternal death and are cast into hell as a place of misery.¹⁸ Whatever circumstances they receive, what is clear is that this punishment is an eternal punishment for sinners. Meanwhile, God's grace eliminates spiritual death and eternal death through Jesus Christ for those who believe (Gen. 3:21; 4:4; Heb. 9:22; John 5:24; 8:51). Faot, Octavianus, and Juanda said that for people who died in Jesus, their spirits went to heaven (1 Cor. 5:5) where the heaven referred to was Paradise. Meanwhile, the souls who reject Jesus will enter the torment of hellfire (1 Pet. 3:20) and be punished forever in the lake of eternal fire (revelation 20:15)."¹⁹

Various Soteriological Views Regarding Dead Babies

Before looking further into the Bible's statements about dead babies, it is better to look at some views. First, Universalist Soteriology. Universalism is developing in several countries, including Indonesia.²⁰ The aim of this theology is basically good, namely, to build relationships between people, but its doctrine is not in accordance with the Bible.²¹ This ideology believes that all humans are saved by God regardless of their beliefs or religion. In a simpler sense, all religions are the same, all are true and save because of God's grace on

all mankind.²² Considering the premises produced by this ideology, it is believed that dead babies will go to heaven. Second, Soteriology of Armenianism. The Armenianism group was the result of the pioneering work of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609); a Dutch theologian. At that time, Arminius was a professor of theology at Leiden University and pastor of the Dutch Reformed church. Ariminius' thoughts were continued and developed by his followers who were also called Arminians. For this group, salvation from God depends on human response. Sinners have the power to choose to cooperate with the Holy Spirit or reject God's grace.²³ For this group, a person's salvation does not depend on God's sovereignty but on human ability. From the existing conclusions, babies who die for this group are not saved because a baby does not yet could cooperate with God in obtaining salvation. Third, *Calvinist soteriology*. This group was born from the thoughts of John Calvin who was devoted to studying the Bible. While its followers are called Calvinism.²⁴ The five basic teachings of Calvinism are formulated in the form of an acronym, namely TULIP. As for the explanations, "Total depravity - total destruction," "Unconditional election - unconditional election," "Limitid atonement - limited redemption," "Irresistible grace - a gift that cannot be rejected," "Perseverance of the saints - the perseverance of the saints."²⁵ For

¹⁸ Elisabeth Sitepu, *Memahami Doktrin Dosa* (Bengkalis: DOTPLUS Publisher, 2023), 19–20.

¹⁹ Agustinus Faot, Jonathan Octavianus, and Juanda, "Kematian Bukan Akhir Dari Segalanya KERUSSO: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pelayanan," *KERUSSO: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pelayanan* 2, no. 2 (2017): 15–18.

²⁰ Jabes Pasaribu et al., "Respon Gereja Terhadap Pluralisme Dalam Aktivitas Misiologi Kristen," *EKKLESIA: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 1, no. 1 (2022): 1–10.

²¹ Pasaribu et al., "Respon Gereja Terhadap Pluralisme Dalam Aktivitas Misiologi Kristen."

²² Demy Jura, *Soteriologi; Eksistensi Doktrin Soteriologi Kristen Pada Pluralitas Teologi Antar Agama* (Jakarta: UKI Press, 2023), 19.

²³ Hendra Suherman, "Teologi Calminian: Sebuah Tawaran Diskursif-Dialektis Perjumpaan Soteriologi Calvin Dan Arminian," *JURNAL TERUNA BHAKTI* 5, no. 1 (2022): 158.

²⁴ Suherman, "Teologi Calminian: Sebuah Tawaran Diskursif-Dialektis Perjumpaan Soteriologi Calvin Dan Arminian."

²⁵ Frangky Franclien Lumowa, "Kerusakan Total Menurut Calvinisme Dan Implikasinya Bagi Jemaat GMIM Bukit Moria Tondei Satu Wilayah Motoling Lolombulan," *EDUCATIO CHRISTI* 3, no. 2 (2022): 66.

Calvinism, every baby in the womb is contaminated by sin and there is no human being who is not conceived in sin.²⁶ However, Calvinism believes that salvation is a gift from God and is given to humans even before they were created in their mother's womb. According to John Calvin as noted by Lolan Lewi Pongdatu, et al., salvation is God's will so that all babies who die have the right to obtain salvation from God. For Calvinism, a baby has the right to be saved, but God determines in His wisdom whether they are chosen to save or not. Babies do have sins from the time they are in the womb, but the babies have not committed any sins.²⁷

God's Grace Behind Child Baptism from a Lutheran Perspective

For the Lutheran Church, every child of a believer in Jesus must be baptized because they are also counted as people who receive God's promises. God said, *"And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you (Gen. 9:9, KJV)."* This agreement applies to Noah as a righteous man and his descendants including the babies who were counted in his family. Furthermore, God said, *"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. Thi is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised (Gen. 17:7, 10)."* God's behavior in making Israel his chosen people had a major impact on the Christian faith because it resulted in salvation for the entire human race.²⁸

Circumcision is a sign of the eternal covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants. In this case, both adults and even Abraham's children. The inclusion of children in the promise of salvation is emphasized in Acts 2:39, *"For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."* As all of Abraham's children, namely Israel, are included in the eternal covenant, so too are the children of believers included in God's people. Circumcision was understood as a sign of the Israelites' entry into the community of God's people. For Lutherans, the sign of a Christian's entry into an eternal covenant is baptism.²⁹ The eternal covenant is seen in the promise of forgiveness of sins and salvation through holy baptism.

Even though circumcision is a sign of the covenant as God's people, it does not mean that everyone who has been circumcised is saved. External circumcision cannot save man. Likewise, baptism does not save if it is not accompanied by faith (1 Cor. 10:1-6). If the baptism of a baby or child is not answered by the faith of the parents or the child's faith in the future, then the baptism received has no meaning in his life. Baptism at infancy is only for children of parents who believe in the Lord Jesus. That is why at a child's baptism, the parents on behalf of the child promise to educate the child to believe in the Lord Jesus and raise the child according to the word of God. Parents have a big responsibility to teach and guide their children to arrive at a confession of faith which is carried out at confirmation of sidi. So for the Lutheran Church, baptism as a baby with confirmation of sidi is an inseparable

²⁶ Lumowa, "Kerusakan Total Menurut Calvinisme Dan Implikasinya Bagi Jemaat GMIM Bukit Moria Tondei Satu Wilayah Motoling Lolombulan."

²⁷ Pongdatu, Alfri Tandil, and Lisa Lewi Pongdatu, "Kajian Teologis Keselamatan Bayi Dalam Perspektif Jhon Calvin Dan Implikasinya Bagi Warga Gereja Toraja."

²⁸ Christopher Alexander, Duma F. Pakpahan, and Yohanes R. Suprandon, "Panggilan Allah Kepada

Abraham: Konsep Anugerah Dan Implikasinya Dalam Kehidupan Orang Percaya," *PENGARAH: Jurnal Teologi Kristen* 4, no. 2 (2022): 12.

²⁹ Dominggus E. Naat Naat, "Teologis-Dogmatis Tentang Sakramen Dalam Pelayanan Gerejawi," *PENGARAH: Jurnal Teologi Kristen* 2, no. 1 (2020): 1-14.

series.

Just as circumcision is a sign of a covenant that is done once in a lifetime, so too is baptism only done once in a lifetime. The church baptizes children not because of their faith, but because God commanded them to be baptized. Berkhof even claims that the sacrament of baptism is a holy rule made by Christ himself as a sign of God's grace which in turn a person expresses faith. Jesus Christ commanded to baptize all nations to become His disciples (Matt. 28:19). The premise of this verse led to the wise decision that young children born into Christian families should be baptized because they belonged to "all nations." This is even more clear in Jesus' actions in treating small children, He promised the Kingdom of God (Luke 18:15-17). Everyone who enters the Kingdom of God must be born again with water and the Spirit (cf. Mark 1:8), likewise baptized children receive rebirth through baptism. In the Old Testament, young children entered into the covenant through circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14), while in the New Testament circumcision is equated with baptism (Col. 2:11-13). Just as young children in the Old Testament were circumcised to receive God's grace, so Christian children receive the gift of being children of the promise through baptism.

The baptism of children was commonly practiced by Jews when there were other nations who adhered to the Jewish religion. This baptism is called proselyte baptism.³⁰ Proselyte baptism is administered to adults and children to enter into the covenant with the requirements of being circumcised, baptized, and making offerings. Jewish priests usually baptized the children of proselytes based on the court's confession. Even looking at the early Christian community, there are indications that infant baptism was

carried out in the family of Cornelius as jailer in Philippi (Acts 10:47-48; 16:33). Comprehensively, there is not a single verse that prohibits baptizing children and this shows that children are recipients of God's grace and deserve to be baptized.

DISCUSSION

Theological Study: Where is the Final Destination of Dead Babies?

Death means biological death, the permanent disappearance of life functions or the separation of the body from the soul. Physical death is one of the consequences of human sin. Even though believers experience physical death, they gain eternal life together with Christ. Meanwhile, for people who do not believe, when they experience physical death they also experience eternal death because their spirit has died due to sin. However, it must be understood that this premise has become a problem for philosophers when talking about dead babies. The problem is, where is the destination of the dead baby? Is it in hell or in heaven? It must be admitted that this issue is hotly discussed and has not provided a complete answer until now. Moreover, for some mothers who have experienced miscarriages or parents who have lost babies, this issue is very sensitive. At first glance, perhaps some people believe that dead babies will suffer eternal punishment. This statement is supported by texts in the Bible which say that human nature is sin (Psalm 51:7). Because all humans have a sinful nature, they need a new birth and are renewed by Christ (John 3:3-5). Through Bible texts like this, people tend to think that if all humans have a sinful nature, experiencing eternal punishment if they are not born again, then this also applies to babies who die. Even though there are several Bible texts that say that the wage of sin is death, we must be more careful and wiser in drawing the conclusion that babies receive eternal punishment from God. Some of the things below are worth

³⁰ Sariyanto and Adi Chandra, "Proselit Pada Masa Perjanjian Lama Sampai Perjanjian Baru," *SIAP: Jurnal Teologi* 10, no. 1 (2021).

considering.

God's grace

Salvation is a gift from God to humans. If salvation is seen as still requiring conditions, it really does not deserve to be called a gift. Barus' thinking is very correct when quoting Paul Enns and R.C. Sproul conveys Luther's statement that good deeds do not play a role in salvation but only because of God's grace.³¹ The Bible emphatically says: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; it is not the result of yourselves, but it is the gift of God, it is not the result of your works: let no one boast (Eph. 2:8-9)." Regarding Ephesians 2:8-9, Samarena interprets that justification is not related to behavior and salvation is not obtained based on the merits of good deeds or piety but rather God's grace.³² Regarding saving faith, Gulo emphasized that saving faith is a gift or gift from God.³³ Salvation can never be achieved in every sinful human effort, only God is able to provide salvation based on His grace (Eph. 2:8; KPR. 15:11; Rom. 3:24; 4:16; 11:5-6; 16:20; Col. 1:14; Tit. 2:11; Rev. 22:21). Grace means that the giver has no obligations while the recipient has no rights. This gift is only based on love and not reciprocity.

The reason why some people maintain the argument that salvation still requires human contribution is to maintain the view of free will. For this group, they believe that humans can still choose to believe in Jesus or not, be saved or not saved. However, this view

was responded to by Yosapat Bangun when confirming Martin Luther's claim "man's free will is enslaved by sin."³⁴ In other words, when humans fell into sin, they did not have the ability to choose to approach a holy God. As explained by Gulo, a person is called and saved only because of God's grace.³⁵ Thus, sin does not prevent babies from receiving God's grace.

The Sovereignty and Allegiance of God

God is sovereign to choose the lives of babies from the time they are in the womb. In the Bible, you can see how God chose Jeremiah and Paul since they were in the womb (Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15). Several verses in the Bible show that God sovereignly chooses a person to be saved while in the womb. Even Josapat Bangun recorded the conclusions of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Zwingli, that salvation in Christ is completely God's gift and cannot be rejected by humans.³⁶ Apart from that, David said "to You I was handed over from the moment I was born, from my mother's womb You are my God (Psalm 22:11." In other words, David emphasized that since the womb, God has introduced Himself and acknowledged him as God. Lord sovereign to call someone to believe and be saved.³⁷ It is true that all humans sin, but sinfulness does not prevent these babies from being saved by God's grace. God, in His wisdom and omniscience,

³¹ Rodenita Br. Barus and Lukas Bali Ate, "Analisa Teks 'Tetaplah Kerjakan Keselamatanmu' Menurut Filipi 2:12-13 Dalam Isu Soteriologi," *SHEMA: Jurnal Teologi & Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 2, no. 1 (2022): 7.

³² Desti Samarena, "Konsep Soteriologi Menurut Efesus 2:1-10," *FIDEI: Jurnal Teologi Sistematis Dan Pratiika* 2, no. 2 (2019): 260.

³³ Fenius Gulo and Pangeran Manurung, *Kontribusi Iman Dalam Keselamatan; Jawaban Atas Isu-Isu Soteriologi-Hamartologi Kontemporer*, 1st ed. (Sidoarjo: Bible Culture Study, 2020), 146.

³⁴ Josapat Bangun and Juliman Harefa, "Sola Gratia Melihat Dari Status Manusia Di Hadapan Allah, Karya Penebusan Kristus, Dan Anugerah Yang Mendahului Keselamatan," *SUNDERMAN: Jurnal Ilmiah Teologi, Pendidikan, Sains, Humaniora Dan Kebudayaan* 13, no. 2 (2020): 116.

³⁵ Fenius Gulo, "Memahami Teologi Paulus Tentang Kedaulatan Dan Pilihan Allah Dalam Kitab Kisah Para Rasul," *SHEMA: Jurnal Teologi & Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 1, no. 2 (2021): 58.

³⁶ Bangun and Juliman Harefa, "Sola Gratia Melihat Dari Status Manusia Di Hadapan Allah, Karya Penebusan Kristus, Dan Anugerah Yang Mendahului Keselamatan."

³⁷ Gulo, "Memahami Teologi Paulus Tentang Kedaulatan Dan Pilihan Allah Dalam Kitab Kisah Para Rasul."

cannot intervene when choosing someone to be saved since pre-existence. Agreeing with the views of Lolan Lewi Pongdatu, et al., the safety of babies is determined by God's will.³⁸ Thus, humans should not intervene with God regarding His sovereignty in choosing dead babies to be saved and should not be judges for babies who die.

Psychological Studies: Strengthening the Nias Islands Lutheran Congregation

Physical death is an unexpected event even though humans experience physical death when it is time. In general, when a family member dies, feelings of sadness and other emotional reactions occur naturally. Like the problem in this research, the fact that babies die on the Nias Islands has become a serious problem in relation to the psychology of the parents. What's more, the soteriological doctrine regarding the goal of a baby's death has increased the psychological burden on parents. For this ethnic group, whose majority believe in Lutheran Christianity, family has become a palpable priority scale in their customs. Considering the culture of this society in relation to family relationships, it at least helps readers to imagine how parents feel when a family member, namely their baby, dies. As explained by Kansil and Wagiu, unfortunate situations such as losing a baby, can cause someone to experience physical and emotional suffering.³⁹ Aritonang even explained that the grief of a parent, especially a mother when her child dies, gives rise to many emotional reactions such as guilt,

regret, fear, and discomfort.⁴⁰

To prove the above, researchers interviewed 15 Nias Lutheran congregations.⁴¹ whose baby died in the last 4 years. Researchers conducted interviews with parents after their baby died for four days. In Nias tradition, if someone has died, on the fourth night "*fame'e gö afuriata ba zino mate ba fananö bung aba Lewatö* (giving the last meal to the deceased and planting flowers on the grave) is carried out." However, in its development, through the church, this tradition shifted to a consolation service. Researchers used this moment as the right time to conduct interviews. When researchers asked respondents an open question, "How did you feel when your baby died?" A total of 13 people gave answers while crying "this world has no meaning anymore," while 2 other people said, "learn to comfort yourself because there is God to help." Then when researchers asked, do you believe that your beloved baby went to heaven? A total of 5 people answered, "don't know," 3 people answered "it depends on God," 1 person answered, "become an angel," 2 people answered "maybe going to hell because they don't believe in Jesus," 1 person answered "going to heaven because their parents are Christians" and The other 3 people did not give any response apart from remaining silent while crying. For parents who believe that their baby goes to heaven, the researchers again asked the question, "what influences your theology to believe that your baby goes to heaven? Most believe that because the Lord Jesus loves children as taught by God's servants from the Lutheran Church. Next, the researcher asked, "how do you deal with your sadness?" Most of them answered, of course, by

³⁸ Pongdatu, Alfri Tandil, and Lisa Lewi Pongdatu, "Kajian Teologis Keselamatan Bayi Dalam Perspektif Jhon Calvin Dan Implikasinya Bagi Warga Gereja Toraja."

³⁹ Yuansari Octaviana Kansil and Meily Meiny Wagiu, "Pendampingan Pastoral Kristiani Bagi Keluarga Yang Berduka Akibat Kematian Karena Covid-19," *POIMEN: Jurnal Pastoral Konseling* 2, no. 1 (2021): 51.

⁴⁰ Aritonang, "Solidaritas Allah Dalam Penderitaan Seorang Ibu Karena Kematian Anaknya: Sebuah Tawaran Pendampingan Pastoral."

⁴¹ Fenius Gulo and Raisa Fransika Maria, "Hasil Wawancara Para Peneliti Terhadap Jemaat 15 Jemaat Lutheran Kepulauan Nias Yang Bayinya Meninggal Dunia" (Gunungsitoli, 2023).

praying, reading God's Word and coming to God's servants for counseling. Meanwhile, parents who are still unsure about the final destination of their dead baby have influenced their fear process. This can be seen from respondents' answers when researchers asked, "Is your sadness influenced by your understanding of the final destination of your dead baby?" Some answered that they were very affected. It must be realized that the reaction of parents whose babies die proves their psychological state due to grief. If these kinds of emotions are not controlled, they can cause dangerous mental and psychological disorders.

Grief or what is known as grief is a reaction that occurs when someone experiences a loss so deeply that it affects the person emotionally. When someone grieves or grieves, that person must experience a process called the grieving process. Kubler-Ross in 1969 researched the grieving process. In research conducted by Kubler-Ross, there are five stages in the grieving process, namely denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In the interview process, researchers believe that most respondents went through the stages as described by Kubler-Ross. The first stage is the rejection stage. In the denial stage, people experiencing grief will feel that the world has become meaningless, and life has no meaning. The person is in a state of shock and denial. In the second stage, namely anger, the individual will feel angry about the situation and may ask questions such as "where is God?" Or "why is God evil?" After passing the anger stage, the grieving person will experience a bargaining process. In this process, people tend to wonder, thinking in the past, trying to negotiate the situation and the pain of the loss. The fourth stage is depression. After going through the bargaining process, the grieving person will enter a stage of depression, where the feeling of emptiness within will become even more

intense and as if there is no end, so that the person feels there is no hope. If the grieving person can get through periods of depression, then that person will enter the acceptance stage. The acceptance stage does not mean that the person feels fine, but this stage means that the person is able to accept the reality that the person they love is no longer there and realizes that this is a permanent reality that must be accepted.⁴²

Parents whose children die, of course go through a grieving process. In difficult situations like this, mothers whose babies die are already experiencing enough emotional stress, especially if the environment behaves in a judgmental manner regarding the safety of these babies. The emotional pressure experienced can influence the severity of the depression experienced. Based on a more thorough investigation, when someone is grieving, they are very vulnerable to physical and psychological disorders. Even more so if the behavior of the people around you do not provide comfort. Thus, as Christians, we should be able to act wisely and not be intimidated by various teachings.

CONCLUSION

Biological death is one of the consequences of humanity's fall into sin and cannot be avoided. Regarding when and when, it has become a Divine mystery that could happen to anyone without compromise on age, old, adult, young or baby. Regarding the uncertainty of the destination of deceased babies, this has been the focus of this research. Based on the observations as presented in this study, it is concluded: First, although there are several verses in the Bible that emphasize that the wages of sin is death

⁴² S. Pratama, W. N.; Silvia, Y.; Riyeni, "Kajian Teologis Kitab Ayub 1-2 Dan Implikasi Psikologis Terhadap Keluarga Kristen Yang Mengalami Kematian Anak Di Gereja Toraja Klasis Makale Tengah Jemaat Imanuel Tampo," *KAMASEAN: Jurnal Teologi Kristen* 1, no. 2 (2020): 107–26, <https://doi.org/10.34307/kamasean.v1i2.32>.

and that faith in Jesus is the way to obtain salvation, it is not good to quickly conclude that babies who die will receive eternal punishment from God because of his inherent sinful nature. Second, being a judge for a dead child is a wrong action. The wisest step is to pray for the parents of the dead baby. Third, it must be understood that salvation from God is a gift given to humans according to His will and omniscience. Even before the foundation of the world, someone was chosen to be saved by God (Eph. 1:4). Therefore, do not become God's advisor and accuse Him of being unfair. Fourth, the sinful nature that is attached to babies from the womb of their parents cannot hinder God's grace towards them. Fifth, it is hoped that the study in this research will strengthen parents whose babies have died, as was the case in the Lutheran Congregation on the Nias Islands. Sixth, as a believer, you must strengthen and pray for parents whose babies have died as a solution in dealing with someone's psychology when they are grieving.

Thus, if readers carry out further research, it is recommended that other variables be found, such as looking for the causes of the number of babies dying on the Nias Islands, strategies for preventing babies dying on the Nias Islands and ways of counseling support for bereaved families.

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