

EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF *TO PEMBUNI* BELIEF AMONG THE NOSU'S PEOPLE FROM WILLIAM JOHNSTON'S MYSTICAL THEOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study investigates the enigmatic figure To Pembuni who is highly venerated by the Nosu community. The researchers seek to comprehend the beliefs and experiences of the Nosu community regarding To Pembuni through phenomenological research. The findings indicate that To Pembuni exists in the tangible world of the Nosu and a spiritual dimension. This mysterious entity is sometimes thought to assume a human appearance or reside in homes, stemming from community members seeking comfort from excessive taxation by seeking refuge in the forest. The Nosu people possess a profound appreciation and intimate bond with To Pembuni underscoring their profound rapport. The theme of the intricate relationship between environmental preservation and the mystical bond with To Pembuni highlights the interconnectedness of all life. In addition, the researchers present mystical theology from the viewpoint of William Johnston, a knowledgeable Irish Jesuit scholar, who regards it as a field that uncovers hidden knowledge acquired through divine communion, guided by love. Ultimately, this study illuminates the phenomenon of mystical encounters, underscoring the significance of safeguarding the environment and fostering a harmonious relationship with the divine. These findings resonate with William Johnston's mystical theology.

Keywords: *mystical experiences, mystical theology, nosu community, To Pembuni, william johnston*

INTRODUCTION

To Pembuni is a revered figure in the complex belief system of the Nosu people. This mysterious entity, wrapped in invisibility and the allure of secrecy, gets its name from the Nosu language—a blend of "To," meaning 'person,' and "Pembuni," suggesting 'hidden or invisible.' To Pembuni's mystique is full of intriguing aspects, depicting it as once an ordinary community member, just like the rest of the Nosu folks. It sought refuge in the forest to escape heavy taxation imposed by local authorities, adding to the mystery.

To Pembuni's presence is quite flexible, sometimes appearing as a human or dwelling in settlements. One curious trait is its preference for specific individuals or newcomers to the Nosu domain. The term *To Pembuni* gained popularity in the 1970s, but its existence dates back much further. The essence of *To Pembuni* revolves around the idea of a concealed human essence with an enigmatic origin.

In the Ratte Bo'te forest, many recount intriguing experiences tied to the aura of *To Pembuni*. These include echoes of worship, the sound of bells, the rhythmic pounding of rice, glimpses of villages, encounters with intriguing strangers, unusual conversations,

and even the occasional disappearing act by Nosu individuals. To some, *To Pembuni* remains a mythical mystery, an abstract idea without concrete proof. However, for others, encounters with *To Pembuni* are profoundly personal and etched in their own experiences.

For some people, *To Pembuni* is a puzzle or mythical mystery, an abstract idea without physical evidence as myth is understood as a variety of traditional stories about supernatural events. However, for Mircea in Margaretha, one of the important functions of myth is to build models of behavior. Through myths, people will also gain religious experiences (Margaretha, 2017). Thus, it can be understood that although *To Pembuni* is interpreted as a mythical mystery, for some individuals who have experienced it, *To Pembuni* is engraved in their experience.

Intriguingly, despite its ethereal essence, *To Pembuni* is understood to encompass quintessential human traits. The singular divergence lies in its abode—a realm where it dwells harmoniously. This belief paints *To Pembuni*'s existence across two domains: the distinct realm of *To Pembuni* and the earthly world shared with the Nosu people. Vivid depictions carve a human-like silhouette, living a life mirroring that of their counterparts within regular society.

In addition to the Nosu community, several regions in Indonesia also believe in the existence of mystical beings (Buijs, 2009). For example, in Toraja, Ampupadang is regarded as the spirit of a ruler in a particular region, often appearing within its territory, resembling a human. However, with a more diminutive stature, yellow hair, and sharp, needle-like teeth. Meanwhile, in the Minangkabau regions of Sumatra and Malay, the Bunian Man is a human-like spirit with a captivating appearance, residing in a different dimension and occasionally revealing itself to chosen individuals (Yulianto, 2019). In North Halmahera, the Moro community is perceived as figures with human characteristics, ascribed with cultural, religious, and social values. The Moro people are believed to manifest themselves to specific individuals. They are thought to aid in activities like gardening, tree-cutting, rice harvesting, and construction, with their work surpassing that of an average person. These diverse beliefs add to the

captivating tapestry of mythical and supernatural entities that hold significance and influence across various Indonesian societies (Papua, 2019).

While Protestant Christianity holds sway in Nosu society, it is intriguing that the presence of Christianity has not erased the enduring belief in *To Pembuni*; instead, it stands, upheld, and unswayed. This connection to *To Pembuni* holds a distinct place, cherished as "solata"—a term entwined with the meaning of invisible yet palpable companions, fellow humans, and friends. Hence, the Nosu community enacts deliberate customs to nurture their bond with *To Pembuni*. A prime instance is the forest sojourn, approached with conscious care to avoid idle chatter and thoughtless acts like haphazard trees or plant felling. Such deeds, it is believed, carry the potential for misfortune—a dangerous outcome of being adrift in the woods only to reappear after some time. Furthermore, traversing the wilderness, especially along the axis road in Ratte Bo'te, involves a customary practice. A respectful honk of the vehicle's horn at specific junctures becomes a ritual, steering clear of sudden halts and steering away from jarring, resounding impacts—a belief rooted in the narratives of seasoned drivers and frequented travelers along this road.

Literature Review

Christianity, in its essence, holds a dynamic and profoundly spiritual energy, culminating in the notion of Mystical Theology. This profound concept revolves around the unity binding the human soul and the divine presence of God. This theological sphere encapsulates veiled wisdom garnered through the guiding light of love—a force that not only imparts mystical knowledge but also stands as its illuminating tutor. Experience forms the foundation of this theology, rendering the knowledge genuinely fulfilling. Christian mysticism serves as a form of faith, reflecting on God's genuine love and arising from an individual's life experiences encountered through the love of God, the True Love (Papua, 2019). It is worth highlighting the significant contributions of William Johnston, an Irish Jesuit, in delving into the depths of Mystical Theology. His insights

draw from an intricate grasp of the Bible, an adept understanding of para mystics, and a keen perception of the ongoing shifts within the Church. At its core, Mystical Theology stands out for its unique grasp of the love epitomized by the Crucified—a love that serves as the gateway to a realm steeped in profound enigma.

The investigation into these unique experiences bears significant scholarly importance. Delving into the Nosu people's perspectives on *To Pembuni*, particularly when intertwined with theological facets, emerges as a captivating avenue for researchers to explore. This has ignited scholarly curiosity, igniting a pursuit to unravel these phenomena and their interconnected nuances. The envisioned outcome of this scholarly endeavor involves unearthing and meticulously recording the indigenous wisdom embedded within these narratives. This, in turn, could lay the essential groundwork for comprehending the deep-rooted reliance of the Nosu community on *To Pembuni*.

The phenomenon of belief in mystical beings coexisting with human life extends beyond the Nosu community. It is observed in other regions as well, such as the Moro community in North Halmahera, as highlighted by Eka Krisdayanti in her thesis titled "Tobelo People's Perception of Moro Society Theological Studies of Creation." This research employs qualitative methods, specifically data collection through interviews with individuals affiliating with the Moro society. The study's primary focus lies in examining the perceptions of the Tobelo people, from both Islamic and Christian perspectives, concerning the Moro community and its relationship to the Creation Theology of these two major religions. This approach distinguishes the current research from previous investigations centered on *To Pembuni*, which were primarily approached from the standpoint of Mystical Theology.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research centers on the belief in the mystical figure of *To Pembuni* within the Nosu community. Our main theoretical tool for this journey is phenomenology, a qualitative research method that lets us step into the shoes

of individuals and understand their experiences on their own terms.

Through in-depth interviews and interpretative techniques, we're aiming to unveil the attitudes, beliefs, and encounters that informants have had with *To Pembuni*. This will give us a treasure trove of insights – recurring themes, patterns, and the mystical aura tied to this revered figure in the Nosu belief system. But that's not all. We're also tapping into the wisdom of William Johnston's Mystical Theology, a significant theory in the realm of Christian mysticism. Johnston, an Irish Jesuit, guides us into the deep union between the human soul and God, exploring the profound love that's at the heart of Mystical Theology.

By blending these two approaches, we're aiming for a holistic understanding of the *To Pembuni* belief. We're keen to explore how it shapes the Nosu community, how it resonates with mystical experiences, and how it aligns with the lens of Christian theology – all through the prism of William Johnston's insights.

This journey isn't just about academic exploration; it's about understanding the roots of mystical beliefs among the Nosu people. It's a unique chance to glimpse how traditional beliefs intertwine with the prevailing religious currents in their society, giving us a deeper insight into their cultural landscape.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative research approach, specifically phenomenological methods, to explore the attitudes and experiences of individuals about the phenomenon of belief in *To Pembuni* by the Nosu community. Phenomenological methods are ideally suited to investigate the nature and essence of the experiences as perceived by the individuals themselves. As posited by Armada Riyanto, the outcomes of phenomenological research yield descriptive frameworks that encompass the genuine qualities of society, encompassing the perspectives on life (Riyanto, 2018).

The core objective of this study revolves around delving into the firsthand experiences of our informants. The researchers aim to explore their encounters and deeply rooted beliefs concerning *To Pembuni*. Our research

occurs in Nosu, a picturesque sub-district in the heart of West Sulawesi, Indonesia. Its breathtaking landscape, enveloped by lush hills and dense forests, gives the area a refreshing and pleasant climate.

To embark on this phenomenological journey, the researchers have charted out a clear path. First off, we engaged in one-on-one interviews with our informants. This allowed them to lay bare their thoughts, emotions, and reflections about their interactions with *To Pembuni*. We created an open and non-judgmental space where their narratives could flow freely and candidly. From our pool of informants, the researchers pinpointed two key figures – Pole and Maraya, both armed with rich experiences.

Once we had these narratives, we took them through an intensive analysis. Using interpretative techniques, we dove deep into the data to uncover recurring themes, patterns, and insights. This process was all about peeling back the layers to grasp the core meanings behind our informants' encounters with *To Pembuni*. Through this, we aimed to capture the essence of their beliefs and perceptions, allowing us to tap into the very soul of their experiences.

With the phenomenological approach as our guiding light, our mission is to paint a vivid portrait of the diverse experiences and viewpoints that surround *To Pembuni's* belief. By doing so, the researchers are not just unraveling the mystical allure of this figure; they are also shedding light on its cultural and spiritual significance within the vibrant tapestry of the Nosu community.

DISCUSSION

The Definition of Mystical Theology

Etymologically, mysticism derived from the Greek "mystikos," mysticism embodies the essence of secrecy, being all-encompassing, hidden, and veiled in darkness (Rusdiana, 2018). mysticism holds within its grasp teachings that resonate like closely guarded secrets. These teachings are whispered only to a select few, those who walk the path of devoted followers. Wrapped in an air of enigma, they offer profound insights and wisdom to those who possess a profound spiritual connection and seek enlightenment. Thus, mysticism stands as a beacon, capable of

unveiling truths concealed from plain sight, guiding individuals on a profound journey toward heightened consciousness and realizing their spiritual essence (Rusdiana, 2018).

In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, mysticism is described as a multifaceted concept that encompasses both spiritual experiences and philosophical beliefs regarding the nature of reality and human connection with the divine or higher realms. It has been a subject of fascination and inquiry in various religious, philosophical, and spiritual traditions throughout history (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

According to the Indonesian Dictionary, mysticism is described in two primary senses (Anon n.d.-a). Primarily, it embodies a spiritual essence and framework intertwined with religion, answering the innate human desire to forge a deep connection with the divine. Secondly, it ventures into the realm of supernatural occurrences that lie beyond the grasp of conventional human reasoning. The first dimension paints mysticism as a subsystem or even an entire religious system, acknowledging its potential for rational and irrational attainment. Here, mysticism shines as the conduit bridging individuals to the divine, fostering profound connections. On the flip side, the second facet zooms in on the supernatural and irrational aspects inherent in human existence. However, this intricate definition presents its challenges within the realm of religion. Often, mysticism is perceived by the general public as an enigmatic, gripping, and eerie realm, a dwelling place for the inexplicable phenomena that stretch the boundaries of the ordinary.

Mysticism is commonly interpreted as personal and profound religious or spiritual encounters. During such enigmatic experiences, individuals feel an unexpected and unintentional connection with knowledge of God or the divine realm. According to some views, the term "mystic" refers to an immediate process of self-connection between one's soul and God through contemplation fueled by feelings of love (Rolt, 2000). In this transformative event, there occurs a genuine "fusion" between the human soul and the divine, manifesting as an authentic "spiritual experience" rather than mere imagination (Jones, 1999). Consequently, the essence and

significance of the word "mystic" can be understood as a spiritual, non-discursive approach to the soul's communion with the transcendent God or the fundamental reality of the universe. Within this framework, it becomes evident that all forms of "mystical" practices inherently embody a devotional approach to worshipping the one true God (Bagus 1996; Panjaitan, 2013).

Mystical practice entails the disposition of the human mind and soul, consistently seeking and endeavoring to attain direct experiences in connection with God (McIntosh, 1998). In this pursuit, God transcends being an object and becomes an experiential reality. Mystical or metaphysical knowledge, which delves into the underlying essence beyond observable phenomena, is acquired through emotional and intuitive channels. The objects of mystical knowledge are abstract and supra-rational, such as the occult (Smith, 1977).

Theologically, mysticism is defined as an absolute love that instantaneously transports the mystic's heart into the presence of God, dissociating it from the confines of temporal and sequential creation (Louth, 2018). As a concept, mysticism believes that truths that cannot be reached by reason can be discovered through deep reflection and self-presentation, which believes in the possibility of spiritual unity between humans and God (Napel, 2009). In the realm of profound understanding, mysticism puts forth a fascinating notion: that there exist truths lying beyond the confines of reason. However, they are accessible through deep contemplation and devoted practice. This stance affirms the incredible potential for human beings to forge a connection, even a union, with the divine through spiritual ties. Now, if we gaze toward "mystical theology," this concept takes on a distinct hue. It encapsulates the following: it is a discipline that unveils and imparts a unique kind of knowledge, something hidden and esoteric, achieved by forging a complete unity and communion between us, human beings, and the divine realm of God.

Mystical Theology has a distinctive experiential nature and follows a certain pattern that not only involves processing inner experiences but also provides guidance and direction for those who experience these

mystical moments. This pattern is based on the authority of the Holy Scriptures, the teachings of the Church Fathers, the explanations of theologians, and traditional practices tested in mystical life (Silva, 2020). Moreover, here is the kicker: this does not mean losing our individuality. Instead, mystical theology acts as a compass, directing us to navigate the exploration and actualization of this concealed wisdom. All this occurs through a profound connection with God – the wellspring of all existence – while still honoring our distinct sense of self (Panjaitan, 2013).

The concept of mystical theology emerged within Christianity with the introduction of the term by a monk named Dionysius Areopagite in his dissertation titled "Mystical Theology," dated back to the 4th or early 5th century. The core aim of mystical theology is to be a guiding light for prayer, ushering individuals on a transformative voyage akin to ascending a mountain under the cloak of night. This mystical odyssey strives to transcend the confines of mere assumptions, rationalizations, and traditional thought patterns. It beckons the seeker into a realm of un-knowledge – a domain reminiscent of Moses encountering the divine amidst the enigmatic cover of darkness. Dionysius adds his hues to the canvas. He weaves the term "theology" with the threads of supreme wisdom. And then, he douses "mystic" with the essence of mystery, portraying it as an adjective that veils rather than reveals. Within this frame, he invites us to step onto a path shrouded in secrecy, an expedition that holds the allure of the elusive, the intangible, and the shadowed. It is like a call to embark on an enigmatic and concealed journey, delving deep into the terrain of spiritual exploration (Johnston, 1996).

The roots of "mystery" lead us back to the Greek word "μυστήριον," which carries the meaning of 'shut up.' Initially, it was woven into secretive religious rituals, a code of silence that held these ceremonies close to the heart (Johnston, 1996). With time, this term found a new dwelling place for the Bible. In its essence, the Bible is a vessel of mystique, holding the enigma of Christ within its pages. Mystical interpretations of the Bible go beyond the surface, peeling back layers to unveil the profound mysteries that lie beneath. Now, let

us pivot to "mystic." This term has its origins anchored in the works of Dionysius, gaining prominence during the late Middle Ages in the Western world. It is like a torchbearer, illuminating the path toward more profound understanding. And then there is "mysticism," a term that emerged more recently, casting its gaze on the terrain of modern times, carrying echoes of ancient wisdom in its wake.

In the New Testament, the word mystery, based on its origin in the Greek *musth  rion*, from the word *mustes*, is interpreted as secret, with an allegorical meaning (Susanto, 2007). The term *musth  rion* refers to the Divine secret that is currently being revealed or has even been revealed by God to humans through His actions inspired by the Holy Spirit (Douglass, 2008). Within the Gospels, "mystery" stands alongside parables, creating a tapestry of understanding. Take Mark 4:11, for instance. It whispers that the mysteries of the kingdom of God are gifts to those who delve more profoundly, while for those at a distance, the teachings unfold through parables. This tells us that these mysteries, woven into the Gospels, house spiritual truths that unveil themselves to those attuned to profound insights. Meanwhile, parables don the attire of veiled tales, kindling contemplation and understanding into a broader audience.

The mystery in the New Testament is synonymous with the kingdom of God. This mystery, unfurled through the teachings of the New Testament and grasped by the Church Fathers, holds the essence of Christ's profound truth. It is about His sacrifice, resurrection, and the promise of His return. This tapestry paints the portrait of Christ as a window into the Father's divine nature, marking the epicenter where the world's redemption unfolds. There is an intertwining of threads – the theology of love and mystery. This tapestry appreciates the ineffable aspects of the divine that cloak themselves in an enigma. It nods to the understanding that certain truths evade human grasp, yet they are within reach through a deep spiritual connection with God (Johnston, 1996).

At the heart of Christian mysticism lies its primary wellspring – the Bible. The link of Church Fathers' writings depicts their deep immersion in the Scriptures. They maintained

a perpetual relationship with these revered texts, devoting themselves to the study, contemplation, and embodiment of the teachings. Their literary creations often bore the mantle of biblical exegesis or contextual interpretations. This was no accident; their works resonated closely with the essence of the biblical verses. The Church Fathers' bond with the Bible was not just a footnote; it formed the bedrock of Christian mysticism. This connection charted the course for their contemplative pursuits and spiritual journeys, painting a vivid picture of their intimate relationship with divine wisdom (Johnston, 1996).

Specific passages within the Bible hold the keys to understanding mystical experiences. Take, for instance, the simple yet profound prayer "Our Father." Mystics often embrace it like a mantra, echoing its words in a rhythmic chorus of devotion. Within these unassuming words lies the essence of mystical theology – an ocean of boundless divine love and the soul's yearning to transcend earthly bounds, language constraints, and the confines of human thought. It is an invitation to dive into the profound mysteries that underpin existence. However, there is more. At the zenith of the Christian spiritual voyage – the anchor point for all mystical theology – lies the encounter with death and resurrection, entwined with the crucified and risen Christ. This transformative dance with the death and rebirth of Jesus takes center stage in Christian mystical contemplation. It is a beacon guiding believers toward a deeper communion with the divine, a journey that resonates within the core of their being (Johnston, 1996).

Another treasure trove of mystical insight lies within the significant Epistles of the Apostle Paul. Galatians 2:20 offers a powerful glimpse into Paul's transformative journey, where he surrenders himself to Christ's embrace, proclaiming, "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me." This passage becomes a canvas for the art of ego transcendence, an embodiment of complete devotion to the Divine, echoed in the heartfelt utterance, "Abba, Father!" In 1 Corinthians 6:17, Paul weaves a tapestry of mystical union. Here, believers merge their essence with the Lord, becoming one spirit with Him. As time unfurled the chapters of Protestantism, certain

theologians took up the mantle to deepen this mystical theology. A remarkable figure in this journey is Jacob Boehme, a German mystic who wove threads of influence into the German Pietist and Quaker movements of the 17th century. Both movements, while unique in their expressions, upheld the significance of spirituality and mysticism within Protestantism's embrace. Boehme's teachings became a ripple in the pond, touching figures like William Law, an English mystic, and even John Wesley, the trailblazer of Methodism. Through their encounters with Boehme's ideas, these luminaries played a part in shaping the mystical currents within the tapestry of Protestant traditions.

Mystical Theology in William Johnston's Perspective

According to William Johnston, the development of mystical theology took place gradually over the initial five centuries of Christian history. During this period, different theologians held distinct perspectives on theology. Origen viewed theology as the theology of love, while for Cappadocia and Dionysius, it represented the theology of mystery. Johnston perceives mystical theology as a discipline that reflects and imparts hidden wisdom attainable through love, encompassing both natural and supernatural dimensions (Johnston, 1996). The theology of the Cappadocian Fathers is known as apophatic theology, or "theology of negation," signifying the 'way without light.' In this context, God is considered ineffable and beyond human comprehension, only felt through His Presence, as He cannot be directly seen. The Cappadocian figures and mystical traditions in the region blended apophatic theology with paradoxical content and a cataphatic approach, resulting in a unique theological synthesis. One striking paradox in all theology, particularly mystical theology, is that while God can be known, this knowledge cannot be simultaneous (Johnston, 1996). Nevertheless, mystics often described God as an intimate friend they knew deeply. Amidst the theme of darkness prevalent in mystical theologies, figures such as Gregory Nissa and John of the Cross realized that darkness contains illumination (Johnston, 1996).

In the realm of theological exploration, mystical theology delves into the profound nature of direct encounters with the divine. According to Johnston, these mystical experiences involve a deep and intimate engagement with the very essence of the divine itself. As we trace the developmental trajectory of mystical theology, Johnston identifies three crucial stages that shape its understanding. The first stage, known as the apophatic phase, emphasizes the ineffability of God. During this phase, language takes on a negative connotation, using terms like "nothingness" and "unknowable" to convey the attributes of the divine. Rather than defining God in concrete terms, apophatic language aims to capture the transcendence of God's nature beyond human comprehension.

In the subsequent kataphatic stage, the focus shifts to accentuating the positive aspects of God. Positive language such as "love" and "wisdom" describes the divine qualities. However, despite these efforts to articulate divine attributes, kataphatic terms inevitably need to encapsulate the multifaceted nature of the divine essence fully. For instance, "love" is employed as a symbol of God's character, drawing upon its association with the highest form of human virtue and as a reflection of divine attributes.

Lastly, the unitive stage brings into focus the experience of a profound union with God. In this stage, individuals encounter the divine directly and immediately, fostering a profound sense of interconnectedness. By grasping the significance of these distinct stages, mystical theology seeks to illuminate the intricate nuances of divine encounters and their potential for transformative impact on human spirituality.

Johnston argues that these three stages of mystical theology are not mutually exclusive; instead, they represent different facets of the human experience of the divine. Moreover, he suggests that various factors, including the emergence of Christianity, the progress of Western philosophy, and interactions with Eastern religions, have significantly influenced the evolution of mystical theology.

In contemporary times, there has been a renewed interest in mystical theology, partly due to scholars like Johnston, who have played

a pivotal role in making this field more accessible to a broader audience. Additionally, the growing fascination with spirituality and the quest for life's deeper meaning has contributed to the increased attention given to this study area.

Johnston's profound insights have had a substantial impact on the evolution of mystical theology across the 20th and 21st centuries. Through his literary works, he has successfully introduced mystical theology to a broader spectrum of individuals. Furthermore, his scholarship is a valuable resource for theologians and scholars, advancing the exploration and comprehension of this essential domain.

One central concept in Johnston's exploration is his belief that mystical experiences are universal and transcend specific religious boundaries. He views these encounters as potentially transformative moments that provide profound spiritual insight. Interestingly, Johnston parallels mystical theology and modern scientific discoveries, particularly in physics. Both realms suggest a unified universe, with mystical experiences hinting at a profound sense of oneness with the divine, while modern physics uncovers the fundamental interconnectedness of the cosmos. Additionally, Johnston delves into the connections between Christian mysticism and the mystical traditions of Eastern religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism. He highlights the shared emphasis on inner transformation and the pursuit of unity with the divine.

In summary, "Mystical Theology" by Johnston offers a thought-provoking and captivating exploration. It is an invaluable resource for those intrigued by Christian mysticism, modern science, and Eastern spiritual traditions. William Johnston's perspective on the evolution of mystical theology spans over five centuries, evolving through different lenses: love, mystery, and negation. These mystical encounters hold universal relevance beyond religious confines. Johnston's work sparks contemporary interest, bridging scientific insights and Eastern traditions. His three distinctive stages illuminate divine encounters, encompassing ineffability, positive attributes, and unity.

***To Pembuni*: A Nosu People's Perspective**

To the Nosu people, *To Pembuni* is regarded as a human being (known as "tau" in Toraja) just like any other, but with a distinct characteristic of being intricately connected to nature. This connection allows *To Pembuni* to exist in two realms—the unique realm of *To Pembuni* and the familiar natural world of the Nosu people. The term *To Pembuni* is assigned based on the understanding that these individuals possess the remarkable ability to conceal themselves or remain unseen, as perceived by the Nosu community (Pole & Maraya, *To Pembuni in the Perspective of the Nosu Society*, 2023). *To Pembuni* bears the same physical characteristics as ordinary human beings. Therefore, when individuals have direct encounters with *To Pembuni*, they do not feel fear or unease.

To Pembuni is said to have the ability to appear to specific individuals whenever they choose, despite their hidden existence. It is believed that they lead lives much like regular humans, engaging in everyday activities such as starting families, shopping at the market, tending to gardens, and participating in worship. The transformation into *To Pembuni* is thought to have been prompted by historical circumstances, particularly the oppressive weight of taxes (Toraja: *sima*) in the past, which drove them to seek refuge in the forest. Over time, this association led to the emergence of the figure known as *To Pembuni* (Maraya, 2023).

The term *To Pembuni* was coined in the 1970s, even though the belief in such beings had existed for many years prior, albeit without the specific label of "*To Pembuni*." The adoption of this term was a reflection of their elusive and hidden nature. The exact origins of this belief remain uncertain. Nevertheless, it persists among the Nosu people, who consistently encounter and have experiences with the presence of *To Pembuni* (Pole & Maraya, *To Pembuni in the Perspective of the Nosu Society*, 2023). As an example, within the Ratte Bo'te forest, those who traverse the area often share captivating and remarkable accounts. They describe hearing sounds of worship, the ringing of bells, the rhythmic noise of rice being pounded, catching fleeting glimpses of villages, encountering unfamiliar individuals exhibiting unusual behavior, and

engaging in peculiar conversations. Additionally, occasional incidents arise where Nosu individuals become lost or mysteriously vanish, only to reappear later, seemingly through a magical and inexplicable process (Pole, *To Pembuni in the Perspective of the Nosu Society*, 2023). *To Pembuni* primarily inhabit the wilderness within the Nosu region, particularly in places like the Ratte Bo'te forest, while some also dwell in villages, living near the community (Maraya, 2023).

From a different angle, *To Pembuni* is embraced as a compassionate *solata*, signifying a friend or companion, poised to extend aid to humans and fulfill their entreaties. This might involve bestowing knowledge for self-preservation or imparting remedies for healing ailments (Maraya, 2023). Thus, recognizing and showing gratitude for *To Pembuni's* existence is paramount. In fostering a harmonious rapport with *To Pembuni*, the community observes specific customs. For instance, when embarking on journeys into the forest, the community refrains from indulging in frivolous dialogues and exercises caution when dealing with trees and plants. Of particular significance are the sacred Taro plants, referred to as nests, which hold a revered status as pig feed. Disregarding these practices could lead to unfavorable outcomes, such as disorienting oneself within the forest and returning after days have elapsed. These practices underscore the Nosu people's commitment to maintaining a respectful and balanced relationship with *To Pembuni*, acknowledging their significance in the intricate tapestry of their beliefs and experiences (Maraya, 2023).

Individuals who have shared their encounters with *To Pembuni* describe unsettling occurrences when they find themselves disoriented and lost. During such episodes, their surroundings become obscured by a dense mist, complicating their attempts to find their way home. Strangely, they often find themselves trapped in a perplexing cycle, wandering in circles without progressing toward their intended destination. What stands out is that those who have come into contact with *To Pembuni* and have experienced these disorienting moments eventually return home unharmed and in good health. Intriguingly, there have been no documented instances of

individuals losing their lives after such encounters. *To Pembuni*, an enigmatic figure with human-like attributes remains veiled or concealed in another realm. It is widely held that *To Pembuni* assumes the role of a guardian and custodian for the Nosu region. Their presence serves as a barrier against ill intentions from outsiders, safeguarding the region's serenity and security. This conviction reinforces the belief that external influences hold no power to disrupt the peace or disturb the equilibrium within the Nosu area. In this sense, *To Pembuni* symbolizes a mysterious and watchful sentinel, ensuring the harmony and well-being of the Nosu community and their surroundings (Pole & Maraya, *To Pembuni in the Perspective of the Nosu Society*, 2023).

United by their Protestant Christian beliefs, the Nosu community approaches *To Pembuni* with a demeanor characterized by reverence and regard. *To Pembuni*, rather than being subjects of worship, they are viewed as fellow members of the grand tapestry of creation. The prevailing sentiment centers on fostering harmony with these enigmatic entities—a harmonious coexistence encompassing their existence and place within the larger natural order. This perspective avoids the temptation to elevate *To Pembuni* to a divine pedestal, acknowledging their significance while respecting the boundaries of their being. Within this framework, *To Pembuni* are held in high regard, not as deities to be worshipped but as integral threads woven into the intricate fabric of existence. Their unseen presence is valued and esteemed, evoking admiration akin to that reserved for any cherished creation. However, this sense of admiration is tempered by an understanding that such esteem does not transcend the bounds of what is considered divine. *To Pembuni* are appreciated for their unique role within the Nosu people's lives, their mysterious presence eliciting a mutual sense of respect and admiration, devoid of the trappings of worship. This perspective is a product of the belief that *To Pembuni* occupies a profound space in the Nosu community's collective consciousness. Their elusive nature, rather than inducing fear or unwarranted reverence, nurtures a sentiment of companionship and mutual recognition. The Nosu people, guided by their Christian

convictions, embrace this relationship grounded in respect and appreciation, bridging the gap between the seen and the unseen, the known and the mysterious. In this manner, the Nosu people mirror their commitment to their Protestant Christian beliefs, advocating a bond that is founded on love, reverence, and the shared reverence for all that is divine (Pole & Maraya, *To Pembuni* in the Perspective of the Nosu Society, 2023).

***To Pembuni* in the Perspective of Mystical Theology**

In the realm of mystical theology, as it intertwines with the enigmatic presence of *To Pembuni*, an intricate belief unfolds—a belief that these divine manifestations are not mere happenstance but purposeful aids in humanity's journey. The encounter with *To Pembuni* serves as a conduit to a shared connection with the divine, where the Nosu people and those touched by their presence gain a profound insight into the expansive tapestry of God's creation that transcends human borders. This mystic connection, in turn, nurtures inner serenity and a heightened state of enlightenment.

The mystique surrounding *To Pembuni* rests in their enigmatic ability to traverse the boundary between visibility and invisibility, revealing themselves with a deliberate intention. This mysticism, although deeply felt, resists easy articulation—a notion that aligns seamlessly with apophatic theology. This sacred understanding recognizes that certain truths evade the grasp of rational discourse, finding their abode only through intimate unity and communion.

Within the mystical realm, one may choose either the path of apophatic or cataphatic theology. The former navigates the ethereal corridors of the ineffable divine, while the latter endeavors to capture divinity within the confines of human language. In the context of *To Pembuni*, the fabric of their existence may seem unfathomable, even perplexing, converging with the realm of ineffable experiences. The mystical rendezvous with *To Pembuni* is an intimately personal affair, where individual connections with the divine assume monumental significance. To the Nosu people, *To Pembuni* is not a deity to be revered or a presence to be feared. Instead, they are

perceived as fellow companions, etched into existence by the same divine hand, sharing this life journey.

This understanding extends the contours of their comprehension, acknowledging that in the vast expanse of creation, a symphony of mystical life forms dances veiled in obscurity. This communion with *To Pembuni* takes form through meetings, exchanges, and the oral tradition of storytelling, crystallizing when *To Pembuni*'s presence is felt amidst the turmoil of forest destruction. This manifestation mirrors a mystical kinship with nature, echoing the tenets of pantheistic thought that perceive divinity coursing through every facet of creation. Thus, any harm inflicted upon the natural world is not just an environmental concern; it is a ripple that touches the heart of the divine.

Within the tapestry of Christianity, fellowship finds its roots in the triune nature of God, uniting all of creation within a celestial embrace. This mystical covenant extends its tendrils to the command in Mark 16:15, wherein the call to preach the gospel to all creatures reverberates. It is a clarion call to herald the reach of Christ's redemption, spanning beyond the confines of humanity and spanning the horizon of a new heaven and earth. As this mystical communion with *To Pembuni* transpires, the gospel's proclamation extends its arms to encompass the sacredness and interconnectedness that enshrouds all creatures within God's infinite creation.

The Ruler of the Earth in the Old Testament Perspective

As expressed by the psalmist, the vast expanse of the universe and every facet it holds is unequivocally claimed by the Lord—an affirmation deeply woven into the fabric of Christianity. It resonates with acknowledging a supernatural force and the cosmic conductor, God Himself, who stands as the master architect behind the cosmos and every element it houses. This divine figurehead is the esteemed creator of the universe, its constellations, and all its intricate contents. In theological contemplation, perspectives revolving around the spiritual dimensions unveil a riveting narrative: originally, humanity was designated as the earth's

custodian. However, in the aftermath of a transgression within Eden's sanctuary, this mantle was momentarily wrested by Satan. Notwithstanding these assertions, the Bible sets forth an unwavering declaration: humanity, not Satan, remains the faithful steward of the earth.

God's hand in creation unfolds as an act driven by an innate yearning to lavish boundless goodness upon the universe. In its wake, the universe stands as a reflection of God's intrinsic essence. This cosmic benevolence extends its arms, touching every created entity with a touch of divine goodness. Consequently, a profound kinship links the Creator and His creations. Across the diverse spectrum of life forms, the path of knowing, loving, glorifying, and serving God unfurls, culminating in acquiring eternal glory. As the cosmic genesis takes shape, God assumes the role of caretaker and guide, shepherding the universe toward its ultimate destination. This narrative weaves a tapestry where all entities, seen and unseen, find themselves under God's watchful gaze and benevolent jurisdiction (Atabik 2015). In this capacity, He stands as the benevolent sovereign, nurturing the earth and its inhabitants alike. In sum, the New Testament's clarion is called reverb.

In sum, the New Testament's clarion call reverberates: the universe finds its anchor in the ownership of the Lord. Echoing through theological reflections, the notion of God's benevolent creative force and his abiding providence over the creation resound. With the mantle of sovereignty resting upon His shoulders, God's constant care and guiding hand forge a symbiotic bond between creator and creation. Within this cosmic dance, the universe finds its true purpose and ultimate fulfillment.

The Ruler of the Earth in the New Testament Perspective

In the New Testament, the term "cosmos," often translated as "world" or "earth," can carry diverse meanings. It can refer to the entirety of God's creation, as exemplified in the passage "God who made the earth (empty) and all that is in it" (Acts 17:24). Likewise, the New Testament writers believed wholeheartedly that God was the Creator and the cosmos was His creation (Donald, 1995).

However, another aspect of "cosmos" pertains to the world of man, encompassing not only the physical environment where humanity resides but also encompassing human life, activities, and the fruits of human labor.

According to the biblical narrative, there is a contrasting portrayal of the ruler of the world or earth. John 12:31 designates Jesus Christ as the ruler, while other passages in the Bible assert that Satan holds dominion over the world. Jesus embarked on a divine mission upon coming to earth, aiming to atone for humankind's sins and liberate people from the grip of sin and the devil's influence. In fulfilling this mission, Jesus willingly identified with humanity through baptism, accepting the inherent risk of suffering as He ventured into the realm of sinful humanity governed by the sinful father, Satan.

Both the ancient scriptures of the Old Testament and the illuminating narratives of the New Testament intricately unveil the Messiah's arduous journey—a chosen servant of God burdened with humanity's sins (Isaiah 53; Luke 24:26). Jesus' resolute purpose was to anchor the kingdom of God here on earth, a pursuit that necessitated a direct and unflinching confrontation with his eternal foe, Satan—the illusory "ruler of the world." This cosmic clash is a vivid testimony to Jesus' ultimate conquest, a testament to his boundless love poured out through his sacrifice. In the aftermath, this victory laid the cornerstone for the kingdom of God, a beacon of hope and deliverance for humankind.

Summing it all up, the New Testament's artful use of the term "cosmos" draws a multifaceted tapestry. It paints both the canvas of God's vast creation and the realm of humanity's activities and pursuits. The biblical saga unfolds as a riveting interplay—a divine mission of redemption embodied in Jesus Christ, set against the backdrop of the opposing currents of sin and Satan. Within the folds of this grand narrative, Jesus emerges triumphant, planting the flag of God's kingdom. This victory opens the floodgates of redemption and salvation for all who dare to embrace its promise (Brownlee, 2011)

CLOSING

Throughout our exploration, the researchers explored deeply. The enigmatic

realm of *To Pembuni*, is a revered presence in Nosu beliefs. *To Pembuni* exists in two worlds, bridging the seen and the unseen, emphasizing the significance of connections with all forms of existence. The mystique of *To Pembuni* reflects the interconnectedness of life and highlights the vital role of respecting both seen and unseen beings for human survival and environmental preservation.

The Nosu's outlook aligns with the divine mandate to protect and nurture our surroundings. Our journey also ventured into the intricate corridors of mystical theology, tracing its significance across various belief systems, particularly in Christianity. Among the diverse perspectives on mysticism, a common theme emerged—the yearning for a deep spiritual connection with the divine and the mysteries of existence. The shared current of spiritual connectivity unites mystics through the ages, transcending boundaries.

Our exploration extended beyond *To Pembuni* to other mystical entities, enriching our understanding of Indonesian societies like the Moro community in North Halmahera. We found that the intimate connection with the divine is a personal journey, nurturing a profound bond with God and reverence for His creations. Mystical encounters are interwoven into biblical narratives, underscoring the sovereignty of God and His benevolence.

In conclusion, our journey revealed the tapestry of human-divine connection, the interwoven fabric of creation, and the reverence for all forms of existence. Mysticism offers a path to unity with the divine, boundless benevolence, and a call to safeguard our home. As our exploration continues, may we carry the lessons of the Nosu's connection with *To Pembuni* and the duty to proclaim love and compassion for all creation.

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