

The Philosophy of Nias Megalithic Stones for Catholic Youth in Gunungsitoli

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the philosophy of the Nias megalithic stones and their relevance for Catholic Youth (OMK) in the city of Gunungsitoli through a qualitative-ethnographic approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with traditional elders, community leaders, and Catholic youth; participatory observation in customary activities and religious devotions; as well as archival documentation, photographs, and field notes. Thematic analysis identified three clusters of values: resilience (perseverance, discipline, hope), community (mutual cooperation, deliberation, *communio*), and spirituality (awareness of Christ's presence in cultural history). The findings show that megalithic stones continue to function as cultural archives, centers of social interaction, and pedagogical symbols for the character formation of Catholic youth. Within the framework of inculturation, these values are reinterpreted in catechesis, culturally rooted liturgy, and social action, without contradicting the Church's teaching. The study concludes that faith-culture integration strengthens the dual identity of Catholic youth and encourages their role as agents of change in preserving the megalithic heritage and in pastoral ministry. Recommendations include digital documentation of sites, culturally based youth training, and ongoing collaboration between parishes, schools, and traditional leaders in the region..

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1. Introduction

Nias Island is often understood as one of the “living” landscapes of megalithic traditions in Indonesia. Among the various regions, Gomo holds a special position due to the density of its megalithic sites, which are layered and preserved in the community's collective memory. Recent archaeological surveys highlight aerial photography and excavations confirming the abundance of megalithic remains in Gomo: standing stones (*menhir*), stone tables/benches (*daro-daro*), and stone arrangements in communal meeting spaces, which serve both as historical traces and as enduring social symbols (Archaeology Magazine, 2024). Within the same horizon, recent studies on *orahua* (traditional deliberation) connect stone artifacts with local deliberative practices seating arrangements, the order of speech, and collective decision-making structures which affirm the role of stones as the “social architecture” of Ono Niha identity (Syahrul et al., 2024). In particular, recent research emphasizes that Gomo's megaliths are not merely prehistoric or historical relics but markers of values: dignity, courage, resilience, and solidarity. A cultural linguistic study in Orahili Gomo, for example, reveals the variety of *menhir*, statues, and stone tables along with their symbolic significance in the daily life of the local community (JILP, 2023). Thus, the stones of

Gomo serve a dual function: preserving memory (as a memory keeper) and guiding conduct (as a moral compass) for future generations.

Meanwhile, Nias heritage such as Bawömataluo illustrates how context-sensitive preservation (adaptive reuse and community partnerships) determines the sustainability of cultural values. This lesson is equally relevant for Gomo, since the heritage ecology of Nias is interconnected (Atmanti, 2024). In the context of Catholic Youth (OMK) in Gunungsitoli, the megalithic stones of Gomo present a “language” that is at once familiar and challenging. The icon of Hombo Batu (stone jumping), though more widely known in neighboring Bawömataluo, remains relevant as a symbol of youth virtues: courage, discipline, and responsibility. Recent interdisciplinary research has even incorporated Hombo Batu into ethnosience-based learning to sharpen analytical reasoning and independent learning innovation that inspires the development of cultural-faith literacy among Catholic youth (Wijayanti, 2025).

In the field of cultural communication, the idea of ethically promoting Nias wisdom to wider audiences emphasizes sensitivity to local contexts while fostering intercultural dialogue (Harefa, 2025). Together, these perspectives enrich the ways in which Catholic youth read the stones as “metaphors of virtue” relevant to the digital-global era. This research, entitled “The Philosophy of Nias Megalithic Stones for Catholic Youth in the City of Gunungsitoli”, focuses on Gomo. Through direct observation and semi-structured interviews with traditional elders and local residents knowledgeable about the history and symbolic interpretation of the stones, this study explores how menhir, stone circles, and stone tables in Gomo are experienced as sources of resilience, *communio*, and spiritual wisdom. The qualitative approach particularly participant observation and in-depth interviews allows the researchers to capture gestures, speech orders, spatial etiquette, and local narratives “from within” (Brinkmann, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2024). With such a framework, empirical data from Gomo can be translated into contextual theological-pastoral reflections for the formation of Catholic youth in Gunungsitoli.

Preliminary literature and mapping findings show that orahua often centered around the stone circle teaches a deliberative ethos: listening, weighing, deciding together, and bearing responsibility for the outcomes. This pattern aligns with the spirit of synodality (walking together) currently emphasized by the Church, particularly in youth ministry. On the practical level, orahua inspires Catholic youth forums: meeting formats that train dialogue between faith and culture, participatory pastoral decision-making, and designing social action attentive to the vulnerable (Syahrul et al., 2024). In other words, Gomo’s stone circle can be read as a “formation space” for Catholic youth to integrate intellect, affect, and habitus of service. Moving into the theological dimension, inculturation as emphasized by the Magisterium is not ornamentation but the way the Church dwells in culture: interpreting, purifying, and elevating what is good and noble in local traditions. Recent liturgical studies in Indonesia show that inculturation encompasses language, symbols, gestures, music, and worship architecture that “speak” to the faithful (Martasudjita, 2022; 2024). Within this framework, the philosophy of Gomo’s stones can inspire pastoral practices for Catholic youth: designing meeting spaces that encourage deliberation, developing catechesis and music that interpret megalithic motifs, and shaping categorical rites that affirm resilience and solidarity in light of the Gospel. From the standpoint of faith, the Church affirms what is good in local culture and directs it to Christ (LG, art. 13). Scripture provides the foundation. for culturally sensitive proclamation: “to become all things to all people” (1 Cor 9:22) and to pass on faith across generations (Ps 78:4). Such faith must be lived out in action (James 2:17). If Gomo’s stones are the collective memory of Nias, then Catholic youth are called to become “living stones” (cf. 1 Pet 2:5): steadfast in identity, fraternal in *communio*, and creative in ministries that glorify God and serve others.

Theoretical Framework

The Basic Concept of Philosophy

In simple terms, philosophy can be understood as the human conscious effort to seek wisdom: weighing reasons, meanings, and values underlying actions and life experiences. It is not merely a collection of facts, but a way of thinking that tests the consistency of ideas, clarifies concepts, and evaluates the ethical implications of our choices. In contemporary academic tradition, philosophy is practiced as a reflective discipline that demands rational argumentation and clarity of terms, as well as sensitivity to practical consequences in social life (OpenStax, 2022; Elliott, 2021). Therefore, philosophy functions as a compass of reasoning that helps us not only to know “what” happens, but

more importantly “why” and “how” we should respond. From this general definition, the close relationship between philosophy and culture becomes evident. Culture gathers symbols, languages, rites, stories, and customs that frame the moral imagination of a community. Philosophy provides the conceptual tools to critically interpret those symbols—so that they are not merely inherited but consciously understood in meaning.

Recent literature in social and cultural theory shows that normative thought (philosophy) and cultural practice are interconnected: culture provides the “raw material” in the form of symbols and customs, while philosophy processes them into horizons of understanding and guides for action (Elliott, 2021). In Indonesian religious studies, the involvement of Catholic youth in the public sphere demonstrates how the values of faith, when dialoguing with local culture, can form an identity that is open, reflective, and sensitive to human dignity (Nilan & Wibowanto, 2021). In other words, culture needs philosophy to maintain depth of meaning; philosophy needs culture in order to remain grounded and relevant. This relationship is very evident in the megalithic heritage of Nias. Recent research on Orahua, the customary deliberation institution in South Nias, shows how this cultural institution preserves shared structures of meaning, symbolic hierarchy, and deliberative mechanisms that order communal life (Sunarti, 2024). At the same time, international recognition of the Bawömataluo Site on the UNESCO Tentative List underscores the outstanding universal value of the Nias megalithic tradition (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2024; UNESCO WHC, n.d.).

Philosophically interpreted, megalithic stones are not mute objects; they are symbolic texts that contain ancestral memory, resilience, solidarity, and dignity. With philosophical tools particularly the hermeneutics of symbols and virtue ethics these values can be interpreted, ethically assessed, and embodied in the praxis of younger generations. Within the theme “The Philosophy of Nias Megalithic Stones for Catholic Youth in the City of Gunungsitoli”, the practical direction can be formulated as a holistic invitation. Catholic youth are invited to interpret the symbols of megaliths as instruments of moral education that instill resilience, affirm solidarity, and nurture spiritual sensitivity. The values embedded in them inspire the formation of daily character: diligence in study, commitment to social service, and concern for preserving cultural sites as common heritage. At the same time, the liturgical and catechetical dimension gains new vitality when expressed through language and symbols close to the cultural experience of Nias, so that faith does not appear as something foreign but grows from within the life of the community itself (Sunarti, 2024; UNESCO WHC, n.d.; Widyawati, Lon, & Midun, 2025).

On the level of the foundations of life values, philosophy offers three interrelated functions: clarification of meaning asking what the symbols/rites signify for human and community identity; ethical testing evaluating which values are worth holding because they advance dignity and the common good; and practical orientation directing toward good habits (*habitus*) consistent with those values. Philosophy-based education and formation emphasize social responsibility embedded in cultural networks: we shape culture, and at the same time, we are shaped by it. Therefore, value reflection must culminate in real concern for others and creation. For Catholic youth in Nias, this means reading megalithic symbols as sources of virtues such as perseverance, courage, and fidelity to communality, which guide ethical choices in family, school, work, and even digital spaces (OpenStax, 2022; Elliott, 2021; Sunarti, 2024). Here the Catholic pastoral horizon meets philosophy through the idea of inculturation: faith that takes root and grows in the “soil” of local culture. Recent theological studies on mission and inculturation in Indonesia illustrate how the Church preserves local language and art, shapes culturally nuanced liturgy, and develops cultural study centers as forms of dialogue between faith and culture (Widyawati et al., 2025). This direction is in line with the ecclesial vision: believers are called to live their faith within the framework of local culture (cf. *Lumen Gentium* art. 13), to see the “other” culture as a bridge of love (cf. 1 Cor 9:22), to pass on God’s works to future generations (Ps 78:4), and to embody faith through concrete deeds (James 2:17). With this framework, Catholic youth in Nias are expected to become agents of change who preserve cultural richness while living their faith as daily witnesses who balance clarity of reasoning (philosophy), spiritual depth (pastoral), and love for their ancestral land (culture).

Finally, integrating philosophy and culture does not mean equating them uncritically. Rather, philosophy provides the tool of discernment to distinguish cultural elements that build Christian

virtues resilience, *communio*, and spirituality from those that contradict human dignity. Through this process, megalithic stones can become a “language” that conveys the good news of God’s work in local history. When these symbols are read, proclaimed, and embodied in action from family prayer and parish service to cultural heritage advocacy the identity of Catholic youth in Nias will grow stronger: rooted in culture, growing in faith, and bearing fruit in love (Nilan & Wibowanto, 2021; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2024; Widyawati et al., 2025).

Inculturation in Catholic Theolog

Inculturation is a key concept in contemporary theology that explains how Christian faith is lived, expressed, and nurtured within local cultures. Simply put, inculturation is not merely “decorating” faith with cultural elements, but a deep process in which the Gospel takes root in the symbols, languages, and traditions of a community without losing its essence (Shorter, 2021). The Catholic Church affirms that faith and culture are not two separate entities; rather, faith must be embodied in cultural forms so that it can be understood, lived, and passed on. Inculturation can thus be understood as a creative encounter between God’s revelation and the dynamics of human culture. The theological foundation of inculturation can be found in conciliar documents, especially *Lumen Gentium* art. 13, which affirms that the Catholic Church is “catholic” because it gathers the diversity of nations and cultures into the one body of Christ. This teaching emphasizes that salvation does not destroy culture but sanctifies and elevates it to become a medium of the Gospel. In this context, culture plays a crucial role in evangelization. Pope Francis (2019), in *Christus Vivit*, even stressed that young people need to be equipped with faith integrated into their culture, so that they can be authentic witnesses in plural societies. In other words, inculturation is both a missionary strategy and a pastoral necessity, ensuring that the Gospel truly becomes “good news” embodied in the concrete experiences of the faithful.

Recent studies highlight the significance of inculturation in the Church’s practice. Widyawati, Lon, and Midun (2025) demonstrate how the Catholic Church in Indonesia seeks to preserve local languages in the liturgy, organize Mass chants with traditional rhythms, and integrate local arts into faith education. These are concrete forms of inculturation: faith is not imposed with foreign patterns but finds its home in local cultures. The research also points out that inculturation gives the faithful a stronger sense of ownership of the Catholic faith because they see the Gospel speaking in the language of their hearts. Concrete examples can be found worldwide. In Africa, the Church employs traditional dance and music in liturgical celebrations as an expression of faith-filled joy (Orobator, 2020). In Latin America, local symbols such as devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe are understood as forms of inculturation that reveal Mary’s face in the context of the poor and the oppressed (Maduro, 2021). In Asia, including Indonesia, inculturation is seen in Masses celebrated with traditional clothing, prayers in regional languages, and liturgies accompanied by *gamelan*, *sasando*, or *gongs*. All these practices show that the Church, in its diversity, truly becomes a sign of unity in cultural diversity.

Specifically in Nias, inculturation can be understood through the reflection on megalithic stone symbols. The values of resilience, solidarity, and dignity embedded in megalithic culture can be lived as expressions of the Gospel’s vision of steadfast faith, the *communio* of believers, and spirituality rooted in God. When megalithic stones are used as catechetical tools or as inspiration in liturgical prayer, they are not merely historical artifacts but become bridges between Catholic faith and ancestral culture. In this way, Catholic youth in Nias can realize that preserving culture also means preserving faith, since the two mutually strengthen each other. However, the process of inculturation is not without challenges. There is the risk of obscuring the essence of faith if culture is absorbed without discernment, or conversely, rejecting culture so that faith feels alien to the people. For this reason, philosophy and theology play important roles in critically evaluating cultural values. The principle, as emphasized by Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, is that “the Church takes from every culture whatever is in harmony with the Gospel, while purifying and perfecting elements that are contrary to Christian faith”.

This affirmation is now deepened in academic discourse, which underscores that discernment in inculturation requires a two-way dialogue: the Gospel enriches culture, and culture enables the Gospel to speak more tangibly (Waweru, 2023). Thus, inculturation in Catholic theology is not merely a discourse but a lived practice that enables the Church to be truly present in the world. For Catholic youth in Nias, inculturation is a concrete way of living faith: learning from megalithic stone

symbols, using them as inspiration in catechesis and liturgy, and grounding social action in them to nurture solidarity and cultural sustainability. In this way, Catholic faith does not stop at the altar of the Church but becomes incarnate in daily life at school, on campus, in the workplace, on social media, and in the cultural spaces of society. Ultimately, inculturation helps Catholic youth understand that to live faith also means to love their ancestral land, safeguard cultural heritage, and embody the Gospel in concrete acts of love and solidarity.

Catholic Youth Identity (OMK)

Identity is a fundamental aspect of personal formation, especially for young people who are in the process of searching for direction and self-understanding. From a social perspective, identity is shaped by the interaction between personal experience and cultural environment. For Catholic Youth (OMK), identity relates not only to their spiritual journey within the Church but also to the cultural heritage that has been present since birth. Catholic faith and local culture stand as two pillars that complement one another: faith provides transcendent direction, while culture provides the concrete space to express that faith (Sison, 2020). In this sense, Catholic Youth are called not only to become “modern young people,” but also to be individuals deeply rooted in both faith and ancestral culture. However, the process of forming Catholic Youth identity is not free from challenges. Globalization presents great opportunities but also carries the threat of cultural erosion. Digital, consumerist, and instant lifestyles often lead the younger generation to lose touch with their traditions. Research on youth identity in Southeast Asia shows that globalization tends to sideline local values, leaving many young people confused or even in crisis regarding their identity (Tjahjono, 2022). This phenomenon is also seen in Indonesia, where some Catholic Youth feel more connected to global popular culture than to the local heritage imbued with religious and communal meaning. In such situations, Catholic faith provides a framework to understand that culture is not something to be abandoned but a gift of God to be treasured.

The Catholic Church affirms that culture is the soil in which faith takes root and grows, and therefore preserving culture is part of the responsibility of faith. Recent studies on mission and inculturation in Indonesia show how the Church preserves local languages, art, and traditional songs as forms of inculturation that help the faithful experience faith more authentically (Widyawati, Lon, & Midun, 2025). Thus, cultural appreciation becomes an integral part of Catholic faith practice, especially for Catholic Youth living amid rapid change in the modern era. In Nias, megalithic symbols can serve as a support for Catholic Youth identity. The traditions of orahua and megalithic symbols are not merely historical relics but part of the collective identity of a community still alive today (Sunarti, 2024). The enduring stones reflect resilience and solidarity—values that resonate with Catholic spirituality. When Catholic Youth interpret these symbols in the light of the Gospel, their identity as young Nias Catholics becomes stronger: modern individuals who are not uprooted from their cultural and faith heritage.

Pope Francis emphasizes that young people must experience a faith that is close to their realities, including their culture (Christus Vivit, 2019). The Church is called to accompany youth so they may discover their true identity rooted in Christ and at the same time in their local culture. In this sense, the identity of Catholic Youth is not built in opposition between faith and culture but in a dialectic that mutually reinforces both.

Globalization may pose challenges, but with a strong identity, Catholic Youth can engage in dialogue with the modern world without losing their roots. Thus, Catholic Youth identity is formed in a balance of faith, culture, and modern life. They are not only called to be heirs of tradition but also witnesses of Christ in the midst of globalization. Cultural appreciation is not merely a social matter but an authentic expression of faith. By living a faith that integrates with culture, Catholic Youth of Nias can emerge as a confident generation: young, Catholic, and at the same time faithful to their ancestral heritage (Nilan & Wibowanto, 2021).

Values of Resilience, Community, and Spirituality

The philosophy of megalithic stones in Nias does not merely speak of lifeless objects composed of large stones but conveys profound meaning about life, struggle, and faith. For the people of Nias, megalithic stones symbolize courage and resilience, the sign of community solidarity, and a reminder of the spiritual dimension that permeates everyday life. Interpreted in the light of Catholic

faith, this philosophy offers relevant inspiration for Catholic Youth (OMK) to build character that is resilient, communal, and rooted in relationship with God. First, megalithic stones represent resilience and perseverance. In Nias history, the erection of large stones was never detached from hard work and struggle both physically and symbolically. Erecting a megalith required collective labor, perseverance, and courage in facing risks. Thus, the stones became symbols of steadfastness in overcoming life's challenges (Sunarti, 2024). This meaning resonates with the reality of young people today, who often confront academic pressures, economic competition, and ecological crises. By learning from the megaliths, Catholic Youth are encouraged to see obstacles not as barriers but as opportunities to strengthen faith and personal character. This symbol of resilience reminds them that Catholic faith is not only about prayer but also about courage and perseverance in everyday struggles (Nilan & Wibowanto, 2021).

Second, megaliths are always associated with customary communities and the value of togetherness. In Nias tradition, a stone could not be erected alone. The process required the cooperation of many people, accompanied by rituals and celebrations affirming social solidarity. This tradition highlights that a person's dignity can only be recognized in the context of community. This value aligns with the Catholic teaching of *communio*, the call to live in fellowship as the body of Christ. By emulating the megalithic tradition, Catholic Youth can understand that their identity is not shaped solely as individuals but also through active participation in the life of the faith community and society. The solidarity practiced by ancestors in erecting megaliths is a concrete reflection of the importance of building community in the midst of global individualism. Third, the philosophy of megalithic stones contains a dimension of spirituality that enriches Catholic faith. For the people of Nias, stones were not merely social markers but also bore religious significance: serving as a bridge between the human world, the ancestors, and the transcendent. From the Catholic perspective, these symbols can be reinterpreted as signs of God's presence accompanying the journey of His people. The Church teaches that cultural symbols can serve as instruments of Gospel proclamation as long as they are interpreted in the light of Christ (Widyawati, Lon, & Midun, 2025). Thus, megalithic stones can be seen as icons of faith reminding Catholic Youth of the importance of perseverance in prayer, respect for human dignity, and awareness of God's mystery at work in history. The values of resilience, solidarity, and spirituality embodied in megalithic philosophy find renewed relevance amid the challenges of globalization. The younger generation faces pressures toward instant living, the pursuit of individual achievement, and the neglect of cultural roots. In this context, megalithic stones serve as "cultural teachers" that impart lessons in perseverance, solidarity, and spirituality as the foundation of a strong identity. For Catholic Youth in Nias, these values not only strengthen Catholic faith but also empower them to be witnesses of Christ in contemporary society. Moreover, the values within megalithic symbols become bridges between Catholic theology and local cultural contexts. Resilience embodied in megaliths resonates with the teaching of faith and local hope that never fails. Community built through megalithic traditions reflects the life of the Church as the body of Christ, where all members support one another. Spirituality flowing from stone symbolism aligns with the Church's call to see God's presence in human history and culture (Sison, 2020). In this way, Catholic Youth in Nias can understand that living Catholic faith does not mean abandoning ancestral culture, but rather finding Christ who is present in their cultural symbols. Ultimately, the philosophy of megaliths offers concrete impetus for pastoral activity: teaching Catholic Youth to remain steadfast in faith, faithful in community, and attentive to God's presence. By embodying these values, they not only preserve ancestral heritage but also realize the Gospel in tangible action. The megaliths, standing firm across ages, are silent witnesses to enduring faith, genuine fraternity, and deep spirituality. Now, Catholic Youth are called to carry these values forward in new ways through education, social service, cultural heritage advocacy, and liturgy rooted in local symbols.

Biblical Foundations and the Magisterium of the Church

The inculturation of faith within culture, as reflected in the philosophy of the Nias megaliths, finds a firm foundation in Scripture and in the Magisterium of the Church. The Bible provides the direction that faith must be lived contextually, while the Church's teaching emphasizes the necessity of dialogue between the Gospel and culture. On this basis, Catholic Youth (OMK) can understand that preserving culture while living out faith is not two separate tasks but one unified calling. *First*, Paul affirms the principle of understanding other people's cultures in the proclamation of the

Gospel: “I have become all things to all people, so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22). This statement reflects the Apostle’s willingness to adapt to cultural contexts in order to bring Christ to everyone. Such spirituality of adaptation is consistent with the spirit of inculturation: the Gospel is not proclaimed with rigid patterns, but with the language, symbols, and customs understood by the local community. In missiological theology, Paul’s attitude is regarded as the biblical foundation for the Church to respect local cultures without compromising fidelity to the Gospel (Bevans, 2020). For Catholic Youth in Nias, this message means that Catholic faith must be able to speak through their cultural symbols, including megaliths, which embody resilience and solidarity.

Second, Psalm 78:4 underscores the importance of passing faith across generations: “We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power, and the wonders He has done”. This verse emphasizes the responsibility of the older generation to pass on faith to the younger ones. In the Nias context, cultural heritage such as megalithic stones can serve as a medium of faith transmission: not merely as traditional symbols but also as points of reflection on God’s greatness in history. Contemporary pastoral studies affirm that the transmission of faith is more effective when connected with symbols and traditions familiar to young people, since they then experience faith as arising from within their own lives (Groome, 2021). Thus, the use of megalithic symbols in catechesis and liturgy becomes a concrete way of passing on faith to Catholic Youth in a way that is both relevant and meaningful. Third, James 2:17 reminds us that “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” This teaching challenges believers to live out faith in tangible action. For Catholic Youth, faith is not only recited in prayers or sung in liturgy but must be lived through social action, solidarity, and the preservation of culture. The philosophy of megaliths, emphasizing resilience, solidarity, and spirituality, provides concrete inspiration for applying the teaching of James: faith realized in perseverance in study, care for others, and involvement in preserving cultural heritage. This aligns with the Church’s social teaching that insists Christian faith must bear fruit in action for the common good (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004; Sison, 2020).

The Church’s Magisterium reinforces this biblical foundation through official documents stressing the importance of the relationship between faith and culture. *Lumen Gentium* art. 13 states that the Church is catholic precisely because it gathers all nations, cultures, and traditions into the one body of Christ. Meanwhile, *Gaudium et Spes* emphasizes that the Gospel must take root in culture so that it may truly speak to the human heart. In contemporary pastoral context, Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) and *Christus Vivit* (2019) again stresses that the proclamation of the Gospel must be culturally sensitive and give space for young people to find Christ in the context of their lives. This message is highly relevant for Catholic Youth in Nias: their faith will become more meaningful when it is embodied in cultural symbols, not detached from their ancestral roots. In summary, biblical and magisterial foundations affirm that Catholic faith is indeed called to take root in culture. Paul teaches cultural adaptation for the sake of proclamation; the Psalms stress passing faith across generations; James demands concrete action; and the Magisterium underscores the need for dialogue between the Gospel and culture. Together, these form a strong foundation for Catholic Youth in Nias to live their faith within the context of megalithic heritage. Their identity as young Catholics is discovered not only in prayer and liturgy but also in their tangible involvement in preserving culture, building solidarity, and demonstrating resilient faith in the modern world.

Ultimately, by combining Scripture and the Church’s teaching, Catholic Youth in Nias are called to be creative witnesses of faith: faithful to the Gospel, rooted in culture, and active in concrete action. The megaliths, firm and enduring, become symbols of steadfast faith; the communal traditions reflect the living body of Christ; and ancestral spirituality serves as a bridge toward God who is present in history. With this foundation, Catholic Youth can become the new generation who not only preserve cultural heritage but also live Catholic faith in contextual, relevant, and transformative ways.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach, focusing on understanding the cultural meanings of megalithic stones in Gomo Village, Nias. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with traditional elders, community leaders, and Catholic

Youth (OMK); participatory observation in customary activities and community life; as well as documentation in the form of field notes, photographs, and archives related to megalithic sites. Thematic analysis was applied to identify the core values contained within the philosophy of megalithic stones and how these values are re-appropriated by Catholic Youth. The results show that megalithic stones are not merely archaeological relics but living symbols embodying values of resilience, solidarity, and spirituality. Interviews with traditional elders emphasized that stones serve as symbols of courage and communal solidarity, while field observations revealed their function as centers of social interaction. Documentation further confirmed their role as a “cultural archive” linking generations. Catholic Youth reinterpret the philosophy of megaliths: resilience as perseverance, solidarity as *communio*, and spirituality as a path to God. This research affirms that the inculturation of Catholic faith in Nias can run parallel with cultural preservation, enabling Catholic Youth to become agents of change safeguarding ancestral heritage while living out their faith in the modern world.

3. Results and Discussion

Field Observation and Interview Narratives

Field observations in Gomo Village, South Nias, provide a vivid picture of how megalithic stones are not merely historical artifacts but integral elements of community life. Upon entering the village, the arrangements of large stones scattered around traditional houses and public spaces immediately convey a sacred and historical atmosphere. The presence of megaliths in Gomo is not isolated but interwoven with the rhythm of life among people who still uphold customary traditions. Traditional elders emphasized that these stones are not simply relics of ancestors but enduring symbols of resilience and tangible evidence of the courage and solidarity of earlier generations. Thus, megaliths function as “silent narratives” that preserve stories, values, and the collective identity of the community (Sunarti, 2024). Interviews with elders revealed that the history of megaliths in Gomo is closely linked to the traditional social system of Nias. The erection of large stones was always associated with social achievements whether in war, economic advancement, or service to the community. The process of erecting megaliths invariably involved the participation of the broader community through ritual feasts (*owasa*). This collective participation demonstrates that megaliths are not private property but communal symbols reinforcing solidarity. As one elder noted, every standing stone is a “living sign” that speaks to future generations about struggle, sacrifice, and honor. This highlights the function of megaliths as both carriers of collective memory and as social bonds (UNESCO WHC, n.d., 2025).

Field notes also document the social function of megaliths as meeting centers and as markers of status within the community. Villagers explained that the stones serve as seats during customary feasts, as focal points for deliberations, and as symbols of authority for elders in formal gatherings. Thus, megaliths hold not only spiritual meaning but also clear socio-political functions: structuring hierarchy, regulating spatial arrangements, and imbuing public spaces with sacredness. This local perspective resonates with anthropological studies that show how cultural artifacts often serve dual functions as religious symbols and as social instruments that maintain community order (Gupta, 2021). Interviews with younger generations, however, revealed a diversity of views. Some youth still regard megaliths as sacred and worthy of respect, while others view them simply as historical remains with little relevance today. This reflects a tension in identity: on the one hand, modernization and globalization attract youth toward popular culture; on the other, they still acknowledge megaliths as valuable heritage and part of Nias identity. Such tension underscores the need

for revitalization so that megaliths remain meaningful for younger generations (Tjahjono, 2022). From a philosophical perspective, the people of Gomo interpret megaliths as symbols of resilience, solidarity, and spirituality. Resilience is embodied in the size and strength of the stones, reflecting human determination in facing challenges. Solidarity is seen in the collective work involved in erecting them. Spirituality is manifested in the belief that stones connect the human realm, ancestral presence, and the transcendent world.

Traditional elders stressed that as long as the stones remain standing, the ancestral values remain alive in collective memory. This finding aligns with ethnographic studies which argue that cultural symbols serve as “value keepers,” transmitting ancestral wisdom across generations (Elliott, 2021).

The pedagogical function of megaliths also emerged. Community leaders recounted how the stones were often used in informal education for youth. Sitting around the stones, young people would listen to stories about ancestors, struggles, and the importance of communal life. In this way, megaliths serve as “silent teachers” facilitating cultural transmission and moral education. For Catholic Youth, this symbolism becomes particularly relevant, since they can draw inspiration for their faith from cultural symbols deeply embedded in daily life. Although many in Gomo have embraced Catholicism, they continue to uphold the megalithic tradition as part of cultural identity. This illustrates a strong harmony between Catholic faith and local culture. In fact, the Catholic Church in Nias incorporates megalithic symbols into catechesis, neighborhood prayers, and cultural-religious activities. In doing so, megaliths are not merely cultural artifacts but instruments of inculturation. What community leaders expressed is consistent with the Church’s teaching on inculturation: faith that takes root in local culture without losing the essence of the Gospel (Widyawati, Lon, & Midun, 2025). Overall, the findings highlight that megaliths in Gomo possess multiple meanings historical, social, and spiritual. They function as living records of ancestral struggles, as communal spaces reinforcing solidarity, and as philosophical symbols connecting humanity to the transcendent. For Catholic Youth, this awareness is crucial. It provides them with a foundation for contextual Catholic faith rooted in ancestral culture, engaged with modern realities, and faithful to the Gospel.

Relevance of Megalithic Philosophy to Catholic Youth

The philosophy of megalithic stones in Nias does not end with historical or social functions; it continues to speak to the present generation, particularly Catholic Youth (OMK). From a pastoral reflection, the symbols embodied in the megaliths resilience, community, and spirituality can be reinterpreted as sources of inspiration for faith and identity. This relevance is significant because young people live in rapidly changing environments, challenged by globalization, which often separates them from their cultural heritage. Through deeper reflection, Catholic Youth can recognize that the values embedded in megalithic stones are highly compatible with their vocation as witnesses of Christ in the modern world. *First*, the megalith as a symbol of resilience strengthens the perseverance of youth. Traditionally, the presence of large stones in the village symbolized physical strength, endurance, and social achievement of the ancestors. For Catholic Youth, resilience today is not limited to physical power but extends to faithfulness in belief and consistency in facing moral and social challenges. Anthropological research highlights that megalithic stones in Nias are perceived as “icons of struggle” that train communities not to surrender easily when confronted with life’s pressures (Sunarti, 2024). This is highly relevant to youth who deal with temptations of hedonism, academic stress, and intense workplace competition. Inspired by the steadfastness

of megaliths, Catholic Youth are called to build an unshakable faith that resists global pressures while holding firmly to hope (Nilan & Wibowanto, 2021).

Second, the symbolism of community within megalithic philosophy emphasizes the importance of solidarity. The erection of stones always required collective participation, demonstrating that dignity is recognized only within the framework of community. This is consistent with Catholic teaching on *communio*, the life of fellowship as the body of Christ (Elliott, 2021). For Catholic Youth, the communal tradition of their ancestors serves as a corrective against modern individualism that often isolates the young. The megaliths remind them that true achievement is born of cooperation, and that authentic identity grows within solidarity. These lessons can be concretely embodied in parish ministry, social activities, and even interfaith solidarity as real expressions of living faith. *Third*, megaliths also embody a deep sense of spirituality. For the ancestors, stones were bridges to the transcendent world and signs of reverence for the divine. In the light of Catholic faith, these symbols can be reinterpreted as pathways to encounter God who is present in history. The Church affirms that cultural symbols may enrich the expression of faith as long as they are read in the light of the Gospel (Widyawati, Lon, & Midun, 2025).

Thus, the spirituality of megaliths does not contradict Catholic faith; rather, it opens space for contemplation of God’s presence. This helps Catholic Youth realize that their faith does not come from outside but is rooted in the soil of their culture. Interviews with Catholic Youth in Gomo revealed that the stones still hold meaning. Many testified that megaliths reminded them to persevere in study and ministry, inspired solidarity in parish life, and encouraged awareness of God’s presence in everyday activities. Some even referred to the stones as “icons of silent prayer”

reminding them of fidelity in faith. Such findings align with pastoral studies showing that young people internalize faith values more effectively when these are connected with familiar symbols (Groome, 2021). The philosophy of megaliths gains renewed significance when placed within the pastoral dynamics of the Church. Pope Francis in *Christus Vivit* emphasized the importance of young people discovering Christ within their cultural context (Pope Francis, 2019). For Catholic Youth in Nias, this means reading faith through their own cultural symbols. The megaliths, with their meanings of resilience, community, and spirituality, serve as bridges between Catholic faith and lived reality. They remind young people that faith is not confined to prayer and liturgy but must be embodied in everyday struggles, communal solidarity, and spiritual sensitivity to God's presence in culture. In this way, the relevance of megalithic philosophy for Catholic Youth lies in its ability to address their deepest longings: to discover identity, to overcome challenges, and to encounter God. These symbols affirm that Catholic faith does not negate culture but enriches and sanctifies it. By reinterpreting the megalithic philosophy, Catholic Youth of Nias can emerge as a generation that is strong in faith, firm in identity, communal in solidarity, and profound in spirituality.

Inculturation of Faith in the Nias Cultural Context

The inculturation of Catholic faith in the cultural context of Nias is an important process that bridges ancestral heritage and the Gospel. Inculturation does not mean merely “decorating” faith with cultural attributes, but rather reinterpreting cultural symbols in the light of Christ so that faith takes root in the soil of local traditions. In Nias, the megalithic tradition becomes a key entry point for this process. Megaliths, as symbols of resilience,

solidarity, and spirituality, contain values consistent with the Gospel. In the Church's inculturation practice, these values are not rejected but purified, elevated, and integrated into the pastoral life of the faithful. The Church recognizes that culture is not an obstacle to faith but its home, where faith grows and becomes embodied (Shorter, 2021). In practice, Catholic parishes in Nias have begun incorporating local symbols into liturgy and catechesis. Masses are celebrated with chants inspired by Nias traditional rhythms; prayer gatherings are held near megalithic sites; and catechesis uses stone symbols as teaching tools for resilience and solidarity. Such initiatives demonstrate that inculturation is not abstract theory but lived praxis in pastoral ministry. Interviews with community leaders and Catholic Youth revealed that these efforts create a stronger sense of ownership of Catholic faith. When young people see that the Church values their cultural symbols, they feel proud of their identity as both Catholics and Niasans. This sense of belonging strengthens their commitment to faith and motivates them to serve in the Church.

This experience is in harmony with the Magisterium's teaching. *Gaudium et Spes* emphasizes that the Gospel must penetrate cultures so that it speaks to people's hearts. Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* stressed that inculturation requires discerning cultural elements that are in harmony with the Gospel while rejecting those that contradict human dignity. Pope Francis further affirms that inculturation must allow the Church to “take on the face” of each culture without losing its catholicity (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013). In the context of Nias, inculturation also plays a role in cultural preservation. When megalithic symbols are embraced in catechesis and liturgy, young people are encouraged to care for these cultural sites as part of their faith practice. Thus, faith motivates not only spiritual life but also concrete action to safeguard heritage. This aligns with pastoral studies that emphasize the ecological and cultural dimensions of evangelization (Waweru, 2023). Observations in Gomo Village confirm that the inculturation of faith fosters continuity between ancestral traditions and Catholic spirituality. Community elders and parish leaders work together so that cultural symbols are not forgotten but find new meaning in faith. For example, the arrangement of stones in communal circles is used as inspiration for forums of Catholic Youth, where dialogue and collective decision-making are practiced in line with the spirit of *synodality*.

This shows that inculturation is not a one-sided process but a mutual enrichment: faith gives transcendent meaning to cultural symbols, and culture provides faith with concrete expression accessible to the people. Thus, inculturation in Nias can be seen as a dynamic process: the Gospel is embodied in megalithic symbols, while megaliths are revitalized as living witnesses of faith. For Catholic Youth, this means that living faith is not something detached from their identity as Niasans but an integral part of it. Their Catholic identity is strengthened precisely through cultural rootedness. In this way, inculturation ensures that the Catholic Church in Nias does not appear as a foreign institution but as a community that grows from within the cultural heart of the people.

Catholic Youth are therefore invited not only to preserve the megalithic tradition but also to reinterpret it as a source of strength for faith, solidarity, and social action.

Implications for the Identity and Role of Catholic Youth

The reinterpretation of megalithic philosophy in Nias has profound implications for the identity and role of Catholic Youth (OMK). These implications can be understood in three interrelated dimensions: personal identity, ecclesial participation, and social

responsibility. *First*, on the personal level, Catholic Youth discover that their identity is not split between faith and culture but integrated in a holistic way. Globalization often tempts youth to adopt foreign lifestyles and distance themselves from ancestral traditions. However, by reinterpreting megaliths in the light of faith, Catholic Youth learn that their cultural heritage is not opposed to Catholic faith but enriches it. Their personal identity becomes stronger: modern young people, yet deeply rooted in culture and faith. This integrated identity equips them to face global challenges with confidence, without losing touch with their roots. *Second*, in the ecclesial dimension, the values of resilience, solidarity, and spirituality drawn from megaliths inspire Catholic Youth to be active participants in the life of the Church. The symbolism of megaliths teaches them that perseverance is needed in ministry, solidarity is essential in community, and spirituality is the foundation of service. These values are consistent with the Church's vision of *synodality*, which emphasizes walking together, listening to one another, and discerning collectively.

In this sense, Catholic Youth are called not only to be recipients of pastoral care but also protagonists in ministry. They are invited to design youth forums modeled on *orahua* (traditional deliberation), where faith and culture meet in dialogue. Such spaces become arenas for Catholic Youth to shape pastoral decisions and to practice participatory leadership. This role enables them to embody the Church's call for lay involvement in evangelization (Pope Francis, 2019). *Third*, in the social dimension, megalithic philosophy calls Catholic Youth to become agents of solidarity and cultural preservation. The communal spirit of erecting megaliths reminds them of the importance of cooperation and social service. In the Nias context, this means Catholic Youth are challenged to take part in concrete activities such as safeguarding cultural heritage, advocating for ecological sustainability, and promoting peace in their communities. The role of Catholic Youth thus extends beyond parish boundaries into society at large. By living out values rooted in culture and faith, they can contribute to the common good: preserving identity, strengthening social bonds, and ensuring that local wisdom continues to be relevant in modern times. This is consistent with the Church's social teaching that the faithful must embody faith through action in the world (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). Field interviews with youth in Gomo show that many already practice this role. Some lead prayer services in their parishes, others participate in cultural events that promote megalithic heritage, while others engage in volunteer activities for education and environmental care. These real practices demonstrate that the values of resilience, solidarity, and spirituality are not merely abstract but embodied in daily life.

The implications of megalithic philosophy for Catholic Youth identity can thus be summarized: they are called to be resilient in personal faith, communal in their ecclesial participation, and responsible in their social engagement. In other words, Catholic Youth are invited to become "living stones" (cf. 1 Pet 2:5), continuing the ancestral heritage while at the same time building the Church and society. Through this, Catholic Youth of Nias may become a generation that is both culturally grounded and spiritually mature. They can stand confidently in the modern world not as imitators of foreign lifestyles but as witnesses of Christ who bring forth the richness of their cultural identity. In this way, their presence becomes a blessing for the Church, society, and the broader human community.

Contributions to the Church and Society

The reinterpretation of the philosophy of megalithic stones in Nias yields significant contributions not only for Catholic Youth but also for the broader Church and society. These contributions can be grouped into three domains: ecclesial enrichment, cultural preservation, and social transformation. *First*, in the ecclesial domain, the philosophy of megaliths enriches the practice of faith and pastoral ministry. Megalithic symbols provide contextual material for catechesis, youth formation, and liturgical expression. For example, resilience symbolized by stones can serve as catechetical content for lessons on perseverance in faith; solidarity practiced in megalithic traditions can inspire parish life rooted in *communio*; and spirituality embedded in stone

rituals can be reinterpreted in prayers and liturgies that emphasize God's presence in history. This contribution aligns with the Magisterium's teaching on inculturation, which affirms that faith must be lived in local cultural forms without losing its universality. Thus, the Church in Nias becomes a Church that truly grows from within the culture of its people, not appearing foreign but genuinely embodying the faith of its community (Widyawati, Lon, & Midun, 2025).

Second, in the cultural domain, the reinterpretation of megaliths contributes to heritage preservation. Catholic Youth, motivated by faith, can play an active role in documenting, maintaining, and promoting megalithic sites as part of their cultural responsibility. This activity not only safeguards ancestral heritage but also affirms that preserving culture is part of their faith practice. In this way, the Church becomes a partner in cultural preservation efforts, collaborating with government, schools, and traditional institutions. The preservation of megaliths also has economic potential, particularly in cultural tourism. If developed with sensitivity, megalithic sites can become destinations that educate visitors about Nias heritage while empowering the local economy. Catholic Youth can be involved as guides, documenters, or cultural activists, thereby combining cultural preservation with community development. *Third*, in the social domain, the philosophy of megaliths contributes to building solidarity and peace in society. The communal tradition of erecting megaliths reminds communities that great achievements are born of cooperation. This spirit can inspire collective social action in addressing contemporary challenges such as poverty, environmental degradation, and conflict. Catholic Youth, imbued with megalithic values, can initiate social projects that reflect solidarity: from environmental campaigns to educational assistance and interfaith cooperation.

Such contributions resonate with Catholic social teaching that calls believers to live faith in concrete service to the world (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). In this sense, the philosophy of megaliths not only benefits the Catholic community but also offers wisdom to the broader society of Nias and Indonesia. From a theological perspective, the contribution of megalithic philosophy is to show that the Gospel can be proclaimed in culturally meaningful ways. From a sociological perspective, it strengthens identity and social bonds. From a pastoral perspective, it equips Catholic Youth to be witnesses of faith in their daily lives. In conclusion, the reinterpretation of megalithic philosophy makes an invaluable contribution to both Church and society. For the Church, it enriches pastoral practices with cultural symbols. For society, it preserves heritage and builds solidarity. For Catholic Youth, it strengthens their identity as believers who are culturally grounded, socially engaged, and spiritually mature. Thus, the megaliths of Nias, which have stood for centuries, do not merely speak of the past but continue to inspire the present and future. Their philosophy serves as a bridge connecting tradition and modernity, culture and faith, local identity and universal humanity. Catholic Youth, as heirs of both culture and faith, are called to carry this contribution forward as living witnesses of hope, solidarity, and love in the Church and society.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the philosophy of the Nias megalithic stones embodying resilience, solidarity, and spirituality remains highly relevant for Catholic Youth in Gunungsitoli. These values, when reinterpreted in the light of Catholic faith, not only strengthen youth identity but also inspire active participation in the life of the Church and social engagement in society. The megaliths, which once served as cultural symbols of achievement and communal cooperation, now provide theological and pastoral insights that encourage Catholic Youth to be resilient in facing challenges, communal in living *communio*, and spiritually rooted in God's presence in history. Recommendations include systematic documentation of megalithic heritage, the integration of megalithic symbols in catechesis and youth formation, and collaboration between parishes, schools, and traditional leaders to preserve cultural heritage. In this way, Catholic Youth can grow as a generation that is both faithful to the Gospel and deeply rooted in their ancestral culture, becoming "living stones" (1 Pet 2:5) that build the Church and society in unity and love..