

## Paul Knitter's Soteriocentrism Study of the GPIB's Formula of Understanding of Faith regarding Safety for All Creation

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### Abstract:

Human life with God's other creations has a mutually beneficial relationship, but humans often cause crises that threaten the safety of other creations due to anthropocentric thinking. The author uses Paul Knitter's theory of soteriocentrism, which affirms the primacy of the cosmic aspect while emphasizing a multi-normative approach or correlational dialogue in interfaith cooperation based on soteriocentrism, namely efforts to take global responsibility for the welfare of humans and the environment. The responsibility to improve and prevent the crisis requires awareness and real action from every human being, including church members, including the Protestant Church in Western Indonesia (GPIB). This research uses a library research approach and interviews. The results showed that GPIB has genuinely lived the work of God's salvation bestowed to save all creation and believes in the importance of working with all parties to realize the wholeness of all creation. Thus, GPIB has implemented the principle of soteriocentrism, whose indicators are contained in the Confession and GPIB's work program, which is seriously oriented towards the salvation of creation. The basic formulation of the good Confession can strive to continue to be aligned with the practice of sustainable action that does not stop at implementing an activity or work program for environmental care alone. Instead, action is seriously directed at ensuring that awareness of the importance of seeking the salvation of all creation is strongly internalized in all members of the congregation and GPIB ministers.

### Keywords:

Salvation, Creation, GPIB, Soteriocentrism

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## INTRODUCTION

Human life along with other living creatures has a reciprocal relationship that requires each other with nature. Living creatures cannot survive without the influence of nature as a supporter of their needs; likewise, the existence of living creatures influences the balance of nature through the fulfilment of their life needs. According to Law No. 23 of 1997 concerning Environmental Management, the environment is a unity of space with all objects, power, conditions, and living creatures, including humans and their behaviour, which affect the continuity of life and the welfare of humans and other living creatures. (Law of the Republic of Indonesia, 1997) . As a supporter of needs, nature is very limited to meet the needs of living creatures, especially humans, whose needs are unlimited, so it is important for humans to manage and utilise natural resources wisely. Therefore, God bestowed reason on humans to be able to provide protection for the environment and prevent damage.

Human thinking, which tends towards anthropocentrism, makes humans perceive their position as superior to other creations, leading to exploitation that results in an environmental crisis. Anthropocentrism is a perspective that places humans at the centre of everything, while nature is merely an object. (Kristiantoro, 2022) . Anthropocentrism is understood as a view that emphasises that humans have ethical values within themselves, while other creations do not have such values. (Singgih, 2020) . Consequently, the anthropocentric view makes harmony between humans and other creations and the sustainability of life on earth unimportant to consider (Keraf, 2010) . If the paradigm of human thought and action continues to dominate nature, the destruction of human life along with other living creatures in the world is inevitable, so this problem must be immediately addressed and handled. The Church, as the body of Christ in the world, has a calling to proclaim the Kingdom of God by taking responsibility for environmental problems that occur. All church members are encouraged to participate in liberating and saving nature in their respective contexts. (Erari, 2017) .

The Protestant Church in Western Indonesia (GPIB) is a Missionary Church called by God's grace and sent to carry out the mandate of the Lord Jesus Christ through its vision and mission to present the signs of the Kingdom of God on earth, especially in Indonesia. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021b) . GPIB, besides being a church institution, is also a fellowship of people who bear the responsibility to strive for the creation of the integrity of creation. GPIB strives to answer various challenges in the Indonesian context through the GPIB Understanding of Faith. The Understanding of Faith is a statement from the perspective of faith to answer the challenges faced by GPIB today. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) . In the Understanding of Faith, GPIB has a primary perspective that "The Presence of the Church that Celebrates the Work of Salvation of the Triune God in the Work with All Creation" (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) .

In order to present the signs of the Kingdom of God that manifest the integrity of creation, GPIB has planned and implemented activities to preserve and care for nature. Some of them, on July 14, 2023, in the Synodal of the GPIB Men's Fellowship (PKB) Categorical Service Meeting (Pelkat), the Department of Church, Society and Religions (GERMASA) planted mangrove trees in Yasmin Garden Park, Batam. Then, on October 14-15, 2023, the GERMASA Department, together with the GPIB Youth Movement Council (GP), carried out the Young Men and Women in Action activity at Sederhana Beach, Muara Gembong, West Java, which

was attended by GP members from several GPIB congregations, young men and women from *Eco Bhinneka Muhammadiyah*, *Youth Interfaith Peacemaker Community* Jakarta, and the Archdiocese of Jakarta. Participants engaged in activities such as planting mangrove seedlings, cleaning up trash, installing nets to prevent trash from entering the mangrove forest, and cleaning the reading room used by local children for learning. These activities involved internal participation, including members of the GPIB congregation of various ages and regions. They also involved external participation, including members of the community and non-GPIB congregations.

In its formulation, the GPIB already has a basic statement that God's work of salvation is given to all creation and has a basis for implementation to address environmental issues. However, the actual realisation of this recognition does not appear to be sustainable. GPIB is clearly trying to address environmental issues by creating and implementing actions to save the earth, but it appears that existing activities and programs are still at the incidental level. Activities carried out only occur on certain days or moments, not as programs and activities that are carried out routinely, continuously, with periodic long-term achievements and an evaluation process for their implementation. In fact, it is not uncommon for themes related to the environmental crisis to be used in church activities; there is no ongoing action after the activity ends. Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher who introduced the idea of *Deep Ecology* Naess (1995) Explains that addressing ecological emergencies requires a *deep ecological movement* (DEM), which views environmental problems from a broader, more holistic, relational perspective. DEM seeks to examine the root causes of environmental damage and pollution more comprehensively and holistically to address them more deeply (Keraf, 2006) .

God, as the Creator, presents His work in the world by creating everything from nothing into something (*creatio ex nihilo*). Panikkar added the statement that God created everything from nothing ( *creatio ex nihilo* ) with the subsequent statement that the basic material comes from God himself ( *creatio ex Deo* ) (Panikkar, 1973) . Thus, this understanding emphasises that from the beginning, everything that God created happened because of God and came from God. However, God's creative work did not stop only on the seventh day; God continues to work, create, lead and accompany His creation in the history of life. (Abineno, 1983) . R. Alan Culpepper, a professor emeritus at the *McAfee School of Theology*, explains that " *God's creative work is ongoing (creatio continua) and not limited to the originating act of creation* " (Culpepper, 2016) . This emphasises that God always maintains the life of His creation until now and continuously. Therefore, every believer and church community should be committed to continuing God's work of care through a renewal of environmentally friendly lifestyles. As explained above, environmental issues are a social reality that must be addressed theologically to ensure the integrity of creation. Efforts to preserve and maintain the integrity of creation cannot be undertaken individually or by a single party without the cooperation of others, as environmental issues are global issues that require solutions and shared responsibility from all parties.

The focus of this observation differs from several studies that also discuss environmental issues. Gladys Marseline Rompas researched the ecotheological study of the work program of the GPIB Maranatha Balikpapan Congregation. The results of this study stated that the church has realised the impact of ecological problems from the construction of the Pertamina oil

refinery project, so that in the work program book of the GPIB Maranatha Balikpapan Congregation for 2019-2020, it stipulates activities that strive for environmental care and sustainability. Agustinus Rosario and YB Prasetyantha researched the Points of Interreligious Dialogue that are Correlational and Globally Responsible in the Interfaith School (SLI) (Analysis based on Paul F. Knitter's Thoughts). The results of this study explain that SLI discusses actual social problems and certain issues that occur in society with an interfaith approach, with an effort to realise a better community life. Leonardous Rano Masiku researched about saving the Sa'dan River according to Soteriocentrism in the perspective of Paul F. Knitter. The results of this study explain that the action of working together in saving the Sa'dan River has been carried out by religious communities, while at the level of religious institutions, it is still limited to discussions, and there have been no concrete action steps, so it is important to prioritise real practices for the common good. Based on these three articles, the author concludes that although the church has provided concrete programs or actions to address environmental issues, interfaith dialogue has been carried out by SLI, and real actions have been carried out to save the environment by the community, it is necessary to think about the basis of understanding and appreciation of church members and the community which is the basis for designing actions, programs related to environmental safety, the safety of all creation is important to reflect the awareness of working together with all parties without questioning the existing and different identity backgrounds. Based on the framework of thought that has been explained, this study was conducted to see to what extent the formulation of the GPIB Understanding of Faith has reflected the understanding and awareness to care about safety for all creation, as well as openness to work together with all parties.

Based on the explanation above, the author wants to conduct further research on how GPIB understands salvation for all creation in the formulation of GPIB's Understanding of Faith. And how is Paul Knitter's Soteriocentrism analysis of GPIB's Understanding of Faith formulation about salvation for all creation? Based on the formulation of the problem, the purpose of this study is to describe how GPIB understands salvation for all creation as written in the formulation of GPIB's Understanding of Faith and to present the results of Paul Knitter's Soteriocentrism analysis of GPIB's understanding of salvation for all creation in the formulation of GPIB's Understanding of Faith.

## METHOD

The research method used is qualitative research with *a library research* and interview approach. The emphasis in qualitative research is data validity, namely, the correspondence between what is recorded as data and what actually occurs in the research setting. (Adlini et al., 2022) . The author uses a *Library research* approach to data collection by collecting information from various texts such as scientific books, research reports, scientific papers, yearbooks, theses and dissertations, and other documents that are then processed (Hamzah, 2019) . The author also uses interviews as a data collection technique. The form of interview that the author will use when obtaining data is a structured interview because the author already has a plan for this paper. This research focuses on the Understanding of Faith GPIB, so this interview is aimed at the pastor in charge of the Theology Department and also to two Synod Council members in charge of the GERMASA Department GPIB.

In the process of completing this paper, first, discusses the introduction first discusses the research background and research objectives. Then, in the results and discussion section, the author explains Paul F. Knitter's Soteriocentrism theory and reviews the discussion regarding GPIB's understanding of salvation for all creation in the formulation of GPIB's Understanding of Faith and explains the analysis of Soteriocentrism towards the formulation of GPIB's Understanding of Faith regarding salvation for all creation. The author uses the Soteriocentrism theory in this study because both the Soteriocentrism theory and GPIB's Understanding of Faith internalise salvation for all creation. Knitter's thoughts help and enrich the basis of thinking and the basis of action for GPIB in realising its commitment to realising salvation for all creation. The Soteriocentrism theory also emphasises that realising salvation for all creation is not enough and cannot be done alone because it requires interfaith cooperation, so that Knitter complements GPIB's basic thinking in collaborating with other religious communities. In the final section, the author presents the conclusion.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Soteriocentrism Theory

Paul Knitter is a pluralist theologian who, in the development of his thought, believes that true theology of religions must include liberation theology to touch the root of humanity's problems so that the dialogue that is attempted can successfully liberate the voices of the suffering. Knitter designed a multi-normative and *soteriocentric* (salvation-centred) approach to cooperation based on correlational dialogue and global responsibility among various religions for the welfare of humans and the environment. (Knitter, 2003) . The idea of *soteria* emphasises *the cosmic aspect*, namely the ecological aspect, because welfare is not enough to focus only on humans, as it makes humans fall into anthropocentrism. (Knitter, 2003) . Soteriocentrism is centred on the Kingdom of God as the embodiment of God in His relationship with the earth, because the Kingdom of God is everything that advances the welfare of humanity and eliminates suffering. (Knitter, 2005) .

The soteriocentrism referred to is indeed within the framework of interfaith dialogue, but this does not mean that concern for the safety of humanity and the earth is limited to dialogue alone. First, Knitter discusses soteriocentrism at the internal level of each religion as a reference for each religious community to correct itself with a serious focus and orientation on the safety of all creation, noting that religious communities are not superior to other creations. Global responsibility at this first level is not only a shared commitment but also a shared context for revitalising and renewing each religious tradition, despite its differences. At the second level, soteriocentrism speaks of interfaith dialogue designed as a form of shared responsibility. Interfaith dialogue can be realised if, internally, each religious community has completed its own understanding of its religion.

Questions about the environment are inseparable from human understanding of the divine, noble values, and the concept of salvation. In essence, religion is relational and dialogical (Knitter, 2003). so that this theory can be used to connect with non-human creation with love and repentance. Responsible efforts for the safety of humans and the earth should provide a common basis for the responsive work of every religious person in a world whose condition is

increasingly threatened. Dialogic conversations do not begin with the identity and traditions of each religion, but depart from the reality of the same suffering to be addressed immediately. Interfaith encounters can be carried out if humans are not anti-other humans, without questioning differences, to bring salvation to all creation. Global responsibility can be interpreted as living right, meaning that being religious must be able to live a moral and responsible life globally, if not doing so is the same as not being religious.

The soteriocentric paradigm employs a liberative dialogue method that has successfully achieved a hermeneutic circle that continually calls and invites religious communities to help those who are suffering. (Knitter, 2003) . The idea of this hermeneutic circle always contains the idea of understanding and a basis for action. Globally responsible dialogue provides a pathway to the hermeneutic circle so that religious communities can speak, act, and pray together to save the earth and humanity from the various sufferings and crises that plague it. (Knitter, 2008) . The following is an explanation of each movement:

First, Mercy. Compassion is the basis of interfaith encounters through an attitude of mutual concern for the suffering of humans and the earth that needs to be saved. Second, Repentance. Carrying out worldly repentance in the form of unlimited self-dedication is a calling for religious people because there is a common feeling that encourages them to gather, feel suffering, cry, and hope together. Third, Cooperation. Religious communities are called to act together to seek salvation from the reality of suffering. Dialogue participants, as working partners, seek to examine the causes of suffering from various perspectives. Compassion and repentance are demonstrated through concrete, shared actions to uphold justice, peace, and ecological preservation. Fourth, Understanding Safety. After practising compassion, repentance, and cooperation, religious communities are called to share the suffering experienced by others, which requires shared responsibility and understanding of one another's existence. This togetherness serves as a gateway to religious togetherness, allowing religious communities to speak and act together in real ways according to their respective religions to uphold justice, peace, environmental preservation, and maintain an attitude of compassion, repentance, and collaboration for the common goal of human and earth well-being.

## **GPIB's Understanding of Salvation for All Creation in the Formulation of GPIB's Understanding of Faith**

GPIB interprets its calling and commission as a missionary church as the result of the work of the Triune God who lives, works, and acts to save humanity and creation throughout the history of life. Based on this, God's work in saving all creation is the central point of GPIB in formulating the GPIB Understanding of Faith. GPIB appreciates that God's work of salvation continues throughout the space and time of life, starting from creation until the end of time. The pinnacle of God's work of salvation is manifested in Jesus Christ, who was sent to save the world. However, one resource person explained that GPIB understands the work of salvation not only occurred at the event of Jesus' death and resurrection. This then became one of GPIB's unique characteristics because it understands that God has begun His work of salvation from the event of creation (Interview with Willem Talakua, Online via Zoom Meeting, November 21, 2024). This explanation is contained in the Principles of Salvation paragraph one, which

states: "That the Triune God, in His incomparable love, has begun the work of salvation for the universe since Creation and after the fall of humanity into sin. This work of salvation will continue until the end of time" (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a).

GPIB has laid the foundation that the work of salvation began with the creation event, so GPIB reflects that everything God created is part of the work of salvation (Interview with Willem Talakua, Online via Zoom Meeting, November 21, 2024). Although humans have fallen into sin and caused the entire creation to be damaged, God, in His work, is inseparable and does not stop saving all of His creation, both past, present, and future. This explanation is in line with the Principle of the Future, paragraph 1, which states: "That the Triune God in his work of salvation since creation created space and time and guided believers and other creatures through various historical events of the world and nations in the past and present towards the future" (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) .

In this work of salvation, God made a covenant as a means of realising His work of salvation for humanity and all creation so that they would not perish because of sin. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) . God made a covenant with Adam in the Garden of Eden and with Noah, providing the concept that all creation is embraced in the covenant of salvation that God has worked. This aligns with the explanation contained in the Principles of Salvation, paragraph 2, which states: "That in the work of salvation, God made a covenant with Adam in the Garden of Eden, with Noah, and continued by calling Abraham to be the people of the Old Testament to be a blessing to the nations..." (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a)

God's covenant with Adam in the Garden of Eden is known as the *Covenant of Life*. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a), This is addressed to all humans because the meaning of the word Adam represents all humans. The creation that God did in His work is truly very good so that in this covenant Adam has a role to see the existence of a position as an equal creation between humans and other creations and the relationship that is established should not be a relationship between humans who want to control creations whose position is considered to be below humans (Interview with Willem Talakua, *Online via Zoom Meeting*, November 21, 2024). Nature and all its contents have dignity and value amidst and within the community of life on earth (Keraf, 2010) Because all creation is part of God's work that represents God's self. However, in this covenant, Adam also represents human creation, who disobeyed and broke the covenant, resulting in death and the need for renewal. This covenant was continued in the events experienced by Noah through the *Covenant of Preservation* as a renewal of God's promise to humans who experienced destruction due to the flood. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) . In this covenant, Noah and his family represent all creation that received God's promise that God would not punish the earth again, but would always maintain the continuity of human life and all creation. These two covenants emphasise that God made a covenant of salvation to embrace humans and creation, so that this clarifies that all entities in the world were created in goodness, so that the relationship formed should be a good and non-exploitative relationship between humans and other creations (Interview with Willem Talakua, Online via Zoom Meeting, November 21, 2024).

Based on the Gospel of John 3:16, the GPIB understands God's work of salvation to have two aspects: universal and particular. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) . The universal aspect means that the world is the target of the work of salvation, and all life in the world receives

salvation through Jesus Christ. The particular aspect means that salvation assures those who believe in God's work of salvation in Jesus Christ. This explanation is contained in the Principles of Salvation, paragraph 3, which states: "That the Father sent Jesus Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit, to be present in this world to save the world from sin and to guarantee the salvation of believers so that they may receive eternal life, through His ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. This work of salvation restores the relationship between humans and God and the relationship between humans and His fellow creatures..." (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a).

GPIB understands that God's work of salvation through the sending of Jesus Christ guarantees the salvation of believers, restores humanity's relationship with God, and restores humanity's relationship with His fellow creatures (Interview with Willem Talakua, *Online via Zoom Meeting*, November 21, 2024). The fellow creatures referred to are not limited to fellow humans, but all entities that God created. Thus, through Jesus Christ, the inhospitable nature due to human exploitation experiences renewal and restoration. Therefore, the salvation experienced by GPIB is not limited only to saving and renewing humans because all creation is within it, including nature and all its contents (Interview with Manuel Raintung, *Online via Zoom Meeting*, November 21, 2024). This awareness then makes GPIB reflect on its presence as a church to see the world as the locus of God's work of salvation and see that all creation is valuable because it has an equal place in God's grace and love (Interview with Willem Talakua, *Online via Zoom Meeting*, November 21, 2024). This awareness and understanding cannot be merely conceptual, as this would render the GPIB's understanding of faith a mere wishful thinking. Therefore, seriousness and full commitment are needed to realise salvation for all creation based on the understanding of faith fully lived by the GPIB. This is also stated in the Church's Principles, paragraphs 1 and 2, which state: "That the Triune God calls, gathers from among the nations 2) a people for Himself, namely Israel and the Church as the people of the covenant and sends them to be a blessing for all creation" (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a). "Throughout history and everywhere in the world, from east, west, north and south, God calls believers and is guided by the Holy Spirit to carry out the task of service and witness in the midst of a diverse world to realise justice, peace and the integrity of creation" (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a).

One of the speakers explained that God calls believers to be guided by the Holy Spirit to carry out the duties of service and witness, so the church, in this case the GPIB, is also called to ensure that the mission of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation can be realized holistically in the struggle to pursue the church's mission (Interview with Willem Talakua, *Online via Zoom Meeting*, November 21, 2024). Being a blessing to all creation is a response to God, who is loving and compassionate, who provides this world as a home to live in (oikoumene) (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a). GPIB interprets that the world as a work of God's creation is the stage of God's glory ( *theatrum gloriae Dei* ) (de Jonge, 2001). And the entire universe belongs to God, so this world is a place, even a monastery, where God's love is met or continued in love for others and other creations. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) . GPIB understands that God created humans for His noble purpose, namely, the salvation and life of all creation. Therefore, God gave humans a mandate to manage the universe within the boundaries of responsibility in accordance with God's Word for the sake of the integrity of the

universe's creation. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) . This explanation is in line with the Principles of Humanity, paragraph 5, which states: "That humans are given the ability and authority to synergise with nature to manage life together, which humans carry out in a balance between freedom and responsibility, between rights and obligations" (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a).

In order to synergise with nature, GPIB understands that resources are everything that has value or potential in certain elements of life, both created by God and the work of humans that aims to realise God's mission for the good and integrity of creation, and radiate God's glory. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) . Everything that God created is good, including the universe, so the use of natural resources must also bring goodness to all creation and must be placed in the right function so that God's work of salvation is seen. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) . Humans as creations cannot radiate God's glory and realise goodness for all creation if resources are only seen as a support for life, which has an impact on actions to erode nature for their needs. Likewise, nature cannot radiate God's glory because it has been damaged, so both humans and all creation need renewal and repair from God. This explanation can also be found in the Resource Principle, paragraph 3, which states: "That sin results in the influence of hedonism, capitalism, consumerism, and authoritarianism, resulting in the arbitrary exploitation of resources by humans. Therefore, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, God restores and guides the utilisation of these resources for the good of all creation" (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a).

Sin causes humans to fail to utilise the resources bestowed by God to bring good to all creation because humans tend to be greedy. The desire to control and exploit is more dominant than the desire to care for and maintain the resources of God's creation. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) . Therefore, God, with His great and incomparable love, saved and restored humanity and the world damaged by sin through the work of Jesus Christ to radiate God's glory in accordance with the essence of all things God created. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) . God's work of renewing the history of the world and humans damaged by sin is not carried out outside of history, but rather the restoration is carried out from within the world and human history itself. (Nuban Timo, 2016) . By the leadership of His Spirit, He renews humans from evil hearts and unrighteous thoughts and guides and enables humans to manage resources correctly and well according to God's will. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) . One of the speakers emphasised that God's restoration restores human relations with God and restores human relations with all of creation so that nature will become a good nature when humans become good humans (Interview with Willem Talakua, Online via Zoom Meeting, 21 November 2024). God guides humans with His wisdom to make good use of resources through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Without God's wisdom, humans drift far from God's thoughts, decrees, and plans for the world, and humans cannot understand God's purpose in designing and building this universe as a whole as a manifestation of His work of salvation and glory. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) . This explanation is then continued in the Main Resource paragraphs 4 and 5, which state: "That by the grace of God the Father in the person of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, the church, religious communities, society and government are given wisdom, called and sent to work together to realise resource recovery" (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a). "That all resources radiate the glory of God in the past, present, and whose perfection will be realised in the future" (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a).

GPIB understands that even though God's work of creation is perfect, it is not yet complete because its perfection will be realised in the future, so God continues to work until now and into the future. Because God continues to work for this world, humans, as the actors of God's mission, are also guided to continue working to cultivate the earth to realise the integrity of creation. Thus, GPIB interprets that with God's wisdom, humans are guided and directed to work together by involving religious communities, indigenous communities, civil society and the government to realise the restoration of these resources. In the course of its ministry, GPIB has collaborated with community institutions, with the government, and others as a form of GPIB being an inclusive church, willing to be open in every relationship with other humans without questioning their identity in order to maintain the integrity of creation. Working together with other humans and relating positively leads the church to the goal of celebrating God's work of salvation as part of GPIB's presence. Then, in the Future Principles paragraph 7, it also emphasises: "The Holy Spirit will awaken believers to His calling to bring justice, truth, peace, and the integrity of creation. The Holy Spirit also empowers believers to adopt new lifestyles and utilise technological advances according to God's will in their families, churches, communities, and with all creation, to experience the future that God has in store for them in the new heavens and the new earth" (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a).

The church is sent to declare the work of salvation with all creation, and in its relationship with other creations, the church is present as a friendly friend, just as Jesus is the Personal Friend who is friendly. (GPIB Synod Assembly, 2021a) . Since the GPIB Understanding of Faith was established in 1986, this determination shows that GPIB is serious and committed as a down-to-earth church of God, which shares the various struggles faced, especially those related to creation in the work of salvation (Interview with Willem Talakua, Online via Zoom Meeting, November 21, 2024). One form of GPIB's seriousness and commitment to salvation and justice towards nature and the environment is that GPIB has declared its existence and presence in this world as an Environmentally Friendly Church since 2023 (Interview with Manuel Raintung, Online via Zoom Meeting, November 21, 2024). Speaking about the seriousness of GPIB's commitment to becoming a contextual church in the GPIB's Understanding of Faith, it is actually quite adequate, specifically regarding salvation for all creation. However, the implementation of this Understanding of Faith needs to be continuously pursued and continue to be a theological reflection in GPIB's stewardship (Interview with Willem Talakua, Online via Zoom Meeting, November 21, 2024). One of the speakers also emphasised that GPIB, both at the synodal level and within the existing congregations, has designed and implemented various activity programs to celebrate salvation for all creation and realise an environmentally friendly church. However, these efforts are merely in order to fulfil the annual work program, meaning that after the program is completed, there is no ongoing action and concrete steps that will be taken going forward. Furthermore, there has been no process to evaluate these programs, which has an impact on the understanding that these programs are not carried out because of a holistic awareness to fulfil the calling to continue God's work of salvation (Interview with Alex Mandalika, Online via Zoom Meeting, November 22, 2024). The resource person also added that GPIB prioritizes liturgical worship only, while the real worship, namely social worship, has not yet been carried out (Interview with Alex Mandalika, Online via Zoom Meeting, November 22, 2024), so that realizing salvation for all creation and implementing an

environmentally friendly church is still being struggled with and pursued by GPIB in its service work.

## **Analysis of GPIB's Understanding of Salvation for All Creation in the Formulation of GPIB's Understanding of Faith**

The issue of ecological damage is a reality that is currently in a very worrying state as a result of human greed for the resources that God has bestowed. The suffering of the earth, which also impacts human suffering, continues to be echoed so that every human being has the awareness to repair and follow up on this problem as a form of responsibility for the damaged nature. The Church, as a fellowship of people who have received salvation, is called by God to play a role in the renewal of creation. The theme " Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation " voiced by the World Council of Churches at the General Assembly in Vancouver in 1983 has become a shared mission that continues to be practised by churches worldwide as a form of the church's calling to respond to emerging issues, including environmental issues. GPIB, as part of the universal church, is also called to be responsible for realising the mission of peace, justice, and integrity of creation for all creation.

The calling and commissioning of GPIB as a missionary church in an effort to present and realise peace, justice, and the integrity of creation is interpreted as the work of the Triune God who lives, works and acts to save humans and creation in the history of life. GPIB appreciates that God's work of saving all creation has begun since creation, continues in the space and time of present life, even until the end of time. This appreciation makes GPIB reflect that everything God created in the world is part of His work of salvation that never stops, even though humans fell into sin and all creation experienced corruption. Based on this appreciation, GPIB makes God's work of salvation for all creation the central point in formulating GPIB's Understanding of Faith, whose purpose is to face and answer existing problems. GPIB understands that the world that God created is the locus of God's work of salvation, and all life in the world receives salvation through Jesus Christ, so that everything that becomes a problem faced by GPIB, including the problem of human and earth suffering, is a source for GPIB to theologise so that God's peace can be felt by all creation. Since the GPIB's Understanding of Faith was established in 1986, this determination shows that GPIB is serious and committed as a down-to-earth church of God, which shares the various struggles faced, especially those related to creation in the work of salvation. This is in line with Knitter, who places human and earthly suffering as a context for conducting a dialogue that requires shared responsibility in order to realise the safety and well-being of all creation. Human and earthly suffering is not something foreign or distant from human life, so being aware of and sensitive to the context of suffering is a calling for churches to respond to existing problems.

In His work of salvation, God made a covenant with Adam in the Garden of Eden and continued it to Noah in the events after the flood as a means of realising the work of salvation that God did in embracing all creation. GPIB understands that Adam represents all humans who are given the mandate to guard, cultivate, and protect the nature that God has bestowed. This covenant also confirms that since creation, all creation that God has done in His work is truly very good and nothing is bad. Then, in the event of the flood that destroyed humanity, Noah

and his family represent all creation that received God's promise that God promised not to punish the earth again, even though humans continue to sin, but God, with His love, will always maintain the continuity of life of all creation. Based on these two covenants, GPIB understands that all entities in this world are valuable and created in God's goodness because they have an equal place in God's grace and love. GPIB also understands that God's work of salvation through the sending of Jesus Christ guarantees the salvation of believers, restores the relationship between humans and God, and restores the relationship between humans and their fellow creatures. For GPIB, the relationship between humans and other creatures is created in equality as fellow creatures of God who are valuable, have value, and both receive restoration and renewal from God. This value emphasises that the relationship that is established should not be a relationship that makes other creatures objects to be exploited because their position is considered below humans. This understanding is in line with the *cosmic aspect* of the idea of Soteria Knitter that welfare is not enough to focus only on humans, because it will make humans easily fall into the mistaken understanding that humans are the centre of everything. If humans continue to maintain this mistaken understanding, it is not surprising that this ecological problem will never be resolved.

The church, as God's representative in the world, comprised of human beings who also experience suffering, is called to share responsibility because its presence in the world is to bring about the Kingdom of God. GPIB also carries the mandate of sending the Triune God to continue God's work of salvation by presenting signs of the Kingdom of God, namely striving to realise justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. The Kingdom of God, as interpreted by GPIB, is not only the salvation of souls, but is interpreted as a holistic-liberative salvation concerning broader service. The presence of the church must be responsive to the concerns of human suffering. Therefore, the presence of the church in the world is not only celebrating God's salvation for itself, but together with the world, celebrating the work of salvation through concrete works that present signs of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God, as understood by GPIB, aligns with Knitter's explanation of his salvation-centred or soteriocentric approach. Knitter emphasised that soteriocentrism centres on the Kingdom of God as the manifestation of God in His relationship with the earth because the Kingdom of God is everything that advances the welfare of humanity and eliminates suffering. Therefore, it becomes clear that the Kingdom of God is not something to be awaited, but is continually being brought about so that God's peace can be felt through the church's service and witness.

### **Paul Knitter's Soteriocentrism Analysis of the GPIB's Formulation of Understanding of Faith on Salvation for All Creation**

GPIB realises that its existence as a church must continue the work of salvation that God has begun and done in the world so that the form of God's peace can continue to be felt by all creation. Conceptually, GPIB's Understanding of Faith is present as a form of GPIB's awareness and responsibility in realizing God's work of salvation so that the author analyzed the understanding of salvation for all creation contained in GPIB's Understanding of Faith to ensure GPIB's commitment and seriousness in efforts to realize salvation for all creation and to ensure the commitment to save the environment that GPIB has poured into its Understanding of Faith

truly contains an awareness of the importance of working together as a form of globally responsible effort.

In the awareness of continuing God's work of salvation, GPIB has a primary perspective in its Understanding of Faith that GPIB's presence as a church that celebrates God's salvation in all works of life and the integrity of creation, with the aim of GPIB must truly be present to declare God's love and justice in Indonesia. In order to ensure that the mission of justice, peace, and integrity can be realised holistically, God calls a church consisting of believers to carry out the task of service and witness with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in the main point of Man paragraph 2, it is emphasised that humans are given the ability and authority to synergise with nature to manage life together, which humans carry out in a balance between freedom and responsibility, between rights and obligations. In line with this, the approach that Knitter designed by integrating the context of pluralism with the context of suffering is called a multi-normative and *soteriocentric* (salvation-centred) approach to cooperation based on correlational and globally responsible dialogue among various religions for the welfare of humans and the environment. God has given humans a mandate to steward nature within the bounds of responsibility, in accordance with God's Word, for the sake of the integrity of creation. However, the fall of humanity into sin has caused humans to fail in carrying out their duties of service and witness, leading to the desire to control and exploit them overtaking the desire to care for and maintain God's created resources. GPIB affirms that when natural resources are used for purposes that can damage the entire ecosystem of creation, such actions violate God's covenant of salvation. Therefore, even though sin has destroyed, God, with His love, saves and restores all creation in the work of Jesus Christ to radiate the glory of God according to the nature of everything that God created. By the leadership of His Spirit, He renews humans from evil hearts and unrighteous thoughts and guides and enables humans to manage resources correctly and well according to God's will.

Because God continues to work for this world, humans, as the perpetrators of God's mission, are also led to continue working to cultivate the earth to realise the integrity of creation. One manifestation of GPIB's seriousness and commitment to saving and being just towards nature and the environment is that since 2023, GPIB has declared its existence and presence in this world as an Eco-Friendly Church. Through this declaration, GPIB has been able to reflect that, as a fellow creature, the church should embrace other creations to continue the work of salvation. In line with what Knitter conveyed regarding soteriocentrism at the internal level of each religion, GPIB no longer sees its position as being above other creations because all creations were created by God to radiate God's glory and receive the same grace from God. Thus, because at the first level GPIB has thoroughly understood other creations as also valuable and receiving the same salvation, at the second level GPIB can collaborate with other religious communities in the form of shared responsibility. In line with Knitter's statement, interfaith dialogue can be realised if each religious community has reached a complete understanding of their own religion internally. However, if this is not yet resolved within each religion, this will become an obstacle to dialogue because it will still question the background of each religion's identity. Therefore, in line with Knitter's statement, responsible efforts for the safety of humans and the earth cannot be carried out individually based on the perspective of each religion. Knitter emphasised that concern for human and ecological well-being and justice should

provide a common basis for the responsive work of every religious person because being religious requires being able to live a moral and responsible life globally. Thus, GPIB interprets that humans are guided and directed to work together by involving religious communities, indigenous communities, civil society, and the government in realising the integrity of creation.

GPIB recognises that efforts to realise salvation for all creation cannot be done alone because GPIB is not the only one that wants to strive for the salvation of all creation. Therefore, when GPIB wants to realise salvation for all creation, GPIB needs a network and acceptance with others to be able to work together. Thus, GPIB interprets that with God's wisdom, humans are guided and directed to work together by involving religious communities, indigenous communities, civil society and the government to realise the restoration of these resources. In its ministry journey, GPIB has played an active role in maintaining ecological sustainability through efforts to maintain natural sustainability, develop environmentally friendly lifestyles and support ecological advocacy efforts in Indonesia by building awareness and participation of congregation members through environmental education and developing the idea of GPIB as an environmentally friendly church, actively participating in striving for and maintaining ecological sustainability in Indonesia through collaboration with religious communities, indigenous communities, community institutions, government, and others as a form of GPIB becoming an inclusive church, which is willing to be open in every relationship with other humans without questioning their identity, especially their religious background to maintain the integrity of creation. Talking about the sincerity of GPIB's commitment to being a contextual church in the GPIB's Understanding of Faith is actually quite adequate, specifically on salvation for all creation. Only the implementation of this Understanding of Faith, which then needs to be continuously pursued and continues to be a theological reflection in GPIB's stewardship. GPIB, both at the synodal level and within the scope of existing congregations, has designed and implemented various activity programs to celebrate salvation for all creation and realise an environmentally friendly church quite well. However, these efforts seem to be merely for the sake of fulfilling the annual work program, meaning that after the program is completed, there are no ongoing actions and concrete steps that will be taken in the future that will lead to growing awareness and perspectives that are in line with the core of the Understanding of Faith as described. Furthermore, there has been no process to evaluate these programs, which has an impact on the understanding that these programs are not carried out because of a holistic awareness to fulfil the calling to continue God's work of salvation. Furthermore, evaluation is important to help GPIB truly know and understand whether all the various activities in the existing work program plan have been fully on target for the long term; whether they have been integrated with various service lines carried out by GPIB other than in the field of GERMASA; whether the program design related to environmental friendliness has "moved forward" or is still "stuck" in maintaining the integrity and safety of creation.

Based on this analysis, it is important to check the suitability of the GPIB's Understanding of Faith formulation and its implementation by referring to Knitter's idea of the concept of a globally responsible practical dialogue method for the salvation of humans and the earth. Based on the analysis results and reinforced by the opinions of the speakers, of the four methods, namely compassion, repentance, cooperation, and understanding of salvation, GPIB has not yet fully completed the methods of compassion, repentance, and understanding of salvation. As

explained, the actions and activities carried out by GPIB to realise the integrity of creation still appear to be dominant in the act of carrying out annual work programs, because there are no sustainable actions and concrete steps for the long term, and there is no process to evaluate these programs. Thus, the activities carried out have not been fully rooted in the awareness to live and realise the Kingdom of God. Knitter emphasized that to realize the four movements, it must start from compassion and an attitude of mutual concern for the suffering of humans and the earth; then with worldly repentance as a form of call to renew the perspective and actions that contribute to exacerbating the suffering of the earth and all creation; followed by cooperation as a form of concrete action through joint action to overcome the same suffering; finally, these three movements must be in harmony and at the same time bring to life an understanding of salvation that is in accordance with each person's beliefs and religions to uphold justice, peace, and the preservation of all creation. However, if the movement of compassion and repentance that requires continuous, non-stop and non-temporary efforts by GPIB is not yet fully completed, then the effort to work together will be done more because of the demands of carrying out the work program than because of the full awareness of all members of the GPIB family that is based on a perspective on the integrity of creation. Thus, inevitably, like it or not, these four movements must be carried out simultaneously, continuously, sustainably and holistically so that the fourth movement on understanding salvation can be truly internalised and become the source or driving force of the three previous movements.

Thus, the author argues that GPIB, in its Understanding of Faith, in principle does not deny its identity as a missionary church that interprets its existence and presence in the midst of the world as a faithful and responsive participant of *Missio Dei* in celebrating the saving work and actions of the Triune God in the history of human life and His creation. Based on this analysis, in line with the formulation of the Understanding of Faith accommodated in the Principles of Salvation, Humans, Church, Resources, and the Future, and sharpened by explanations by the speakers, it can be seen how GPIB openly acknowledges that God's work of salvation is bestowed upon all creation and GPIB strives to continue that work of salvation as a form of GPIB's responsibility to strive for salvation for the earth and all its contents.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion and analysis, it can be concluded that GPIB has developed an Understanding of Faith that reflects a significant theological finding, namely a shift from a human-centred view of salvation toward a comprehensive understanding of salvation that embraces all creation. GPIB interprets God's saving work as holistic in nature, affirming that the entire created order participates in God's covenant of salvation and shares an equal place within divine grace. Consequently, ecological destruction is not merely regarded as an ethical or social issue, but as a violation of God's salvific covenant. Church service and witness are therefore directed toward manifesting signs of the Kingdom of God through the pursuit of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation, in line with a liberative understanding of salvation.

Furthermore, this study shows that GPIB understands the realisation of salvation for all creation as a collaborative calling rather than an exclusive ecclesial task. Guided by divine wisdom, GPIB emphasises cooperation with interreligious communities, indigenous peoples,

civil society, and governmental institutions to restore the integrity of creation. Compassion for the shared suffering of humanity and the earth becomes the theological basis for a contextual and transformative faith that calls for worldly repentance and collective responsibility. At the same time, the findings underscore that the sustainability of this theological orientation depends not only on concrete environmental programs, but on the consistent internalization of ecological awareness as an essential dimension of faith, shaping the identity, practice, and long-term mission of GPIB.

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