

Effort of Poverty Alleviation with Towuntu Theology in the GMIM Moriah Towuntu Church

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ABSTRACT

Poverty remains a multidimensional and persistent social issue in many rural communities in Indonesia, including Southeast Minahasa Regency. Previous studies on poverty alleviation have primarily emphasized economic and structural approaches, while limited attention has been given to contextual theological frameworks as community-based empowerment models. This study aims to analyze the role of Towuntu Theology as a contextual and faith-based approach to sustainable poverty alleviation within the GMIM Moriah Towuntu congregation. This research employed a qualitative exploratory design using in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Eight informants were selected through snowball sampling based on their socioeconomic conditions and involvement in church life. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation of sources and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that poverty within the congregation is influenced not only by structural-economic limitations but also by low social motivation, dependency culture, and weak participation in communal and spiritual activities. The study identifies three major dimensions of Towuntu Theology for community transformation: (1) biblical reflection through worship and spiritual formation, (2) practical empowerment through work ethics and economic productivity, and (3) missiological service through social care and educational support. The novelty of this study lies in the formulation of Towuntu Theology as a contextual theological model integrating spirituality, community empowerment, and sustainable social transformation. This model contributes to the development of faith-based poverty alleviation discourse within Global South theology and practical theology studies.

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INTRODUCTION

Poverty remains one of the most persistent global challenges and continues to become a multidimensional and sustainable social problem in many developing countries, including Indonesia (Harun, S., 2020; Kasim, L., 2022; Septian, 2022). Poverty is not only associated with economic deprivation, but also with social exclusion, limited access to education, weak community empowerment, and low social resilience. Therefore, poverty alleviation requires not merely economic interventions but also social, cultural, and spiritual approaches that strengthen community transformation.

In Indonesia, poverty measurement is conducted by Statistics Indonesia using the basic needs approach, which defines poverty as the inability to fulfill minimum basic needs for decent living. Statistics Indonesia functions as a non-ministerial government institution responsible for providing official socioeconomic data to the public. This approach demonstrates that poverty remains a crucial issue requiring sustainable and multidimensional solutions.

One of the regions facing poverty challenges is Southeast Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. Southeast Minahasa Regency was established on January 2nd, 2007 through the expansion of South Minahasa Regency based on Law Number 9 of 2007 and officially inaugurated on May 23rd, 2007. The regency covers an area of 730.63 km² and consists of 12 districts, including Pasan District. Towuntu Village is one of the villages located in Pasan District (Statistics of Southeast Minahasa Regency, 2023). Etymologically, "Towuntu" refers to people gathering together to achieve prosperity and well-being (Statistics of Southeast Minahasa Regency, 2025).

Population data on June 30th, 2024 recorded 120,351 inhabitants in Southeast Minahasa Regency, with a poverty rate of 10.31% (Statistics of North Sulawesi Province, 2025). Nationally, the number of poor people in Indonesia decreased from 25.90 million people (9.36%) in March 2023 to 25.22 million people (9.03%) in March 2024, indicating a reduction of approximately 0.68 million people. Although the data show a gradual decline, poverty remains a significant challenge, particularly within rural communities. These conditions indicate the need for more contextual and community-based approaches to poverty alleviation in Southeast Minahasa Regency.

Previous studies have attempted to examine poverty from religious and theological perspectives. Idris, M. (2007) argues that religion can contribute to poverty alleviation by providing ethical understanding and social concern toward marginalized communities. Similarly, Gultom, R. (2020) emphasizes that Christian faith perspectives may encourage social responsibility and compassion toward poor communities. These studies indicate that religion and theology can function not only as spiritual doctrines but also as transformative social forces within society.

Research conducted by Kula, A. (2023) identified several factors contributing to poverty in Southeast Minahasa Regency, including limited economic opportunities, low financial initiative, and weak saving behavior. Using a quantitative approach across all districts in Southeast Minahasa Regency, the study concluded that poverty affects human quality, productivity, and income levels. However, the study mainly focused on structural-economic factors and did not specifically explore the role of contextual theology and faith-based community empowerment in poverty alleviation. Therefore, further qualitative research is necessary to understand poverty from social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions within local communities.

Based on preliminary observations conducted by the researcher within the GMIM Moriah Towuntu congregation, several social and spiritual conditions were identified. Participation in Sunday worship and family evangelism activities remains relatively low, with attendance ranging between 20–30% of congregation members. In addition, several

households receiving government social assistance demonstrated limited participation in communal and church activities. However, this study does not assume that poverty is caused by weak religiosity. Instead, the findings indicate that low communal participation may contribute to weakened social solidarity, limited community resilience, and reduced collective empowerment within vulnerable households.

The existing studies on poverty in Southeast Minahasa Regency have largely emphasized economic and structural dimensions, while limited attention has been given to contextual theology as a framework for sustainable community transformation. This condition creates a research gap regarding the integration of local wisdom, spirituality, and community empowerment within poverty alleviation discourse.

To address this gap, this study proposes "Towuntu Theology" as a contextual theological framework rooted in local wisdom and communal spirituality. Towuntu Theology emphasizes togetherness, social solidarity, spiritual formation, and practical empowerment as integrated approaches to sustainable poverty alleviation. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on economic interventions, this research develops a contextual theology model that combines biblical reflection, practical empowerment, and missiological service for community transformation.

The novelty of this study lies in the formulation of Towuntu Theology as a faith-based and contextual model for sustainable poverty alleviation within rural Christian communities. This model contributes to the broader discourse of contextual theology, practical theology, and faith-based development, particularly within the context of Global South Christianity. Therefore, this research aims to analyze how Towuntu Theology functions as a community-based approach to social transformation and poverty alleviation in the GMIM Moriah Towuntu congregation.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative exploratory approach (Arkunto S, 2019) to understand the relationship between contextual theology and poverty alleviation within the GMIM Moriah Towuntu congregation in Southeast Minahasa Regency, Indonesia. A qualitative design was selected because the study aimed to explore participants' lived experiences, spiritual perspectives, and socioeconomic realities in depth.

The research was conducted in Towuntu Village, Pasan District, Southeast Minahasa Regency. Informants consisted of eight households identified as economically vulnerable and recipients of social assistance programs. Participants were selected using snowball sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals with relevant social and religious experiences.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. To ensure credibility and validity, the study applied triangulation of sources and methods. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis involving data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing.

The study focused on identifying how Towuntu Theology functions as a contextual model for spiritual formation, economic empowerment, and social transformation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Informants and Congregational Poverty Conditions

To understand the reality of poverty within the GMIM Moriah Towuntu congregation, this study first identified the socioeconomic characteristics of informants who were recipients of government social assistance programs. These characteristics include gender, housing and land ownership status, and educational background. This information is important for describing the social conditions of the community and

understanding the factors influencing the persistence of poverty within the research setting.

Table 1 shows that most informants were still in vulnerable economic conditions, characterized by dependence on social assistance and limited access to productive resources, particularly land ownership and education. These conditions indicate that poverty within the congregation is not merely related to low income but is also associated with structural and social factors affecting the community's capacity to achieve sustainable welfare.

Table 1. Basic Data of Informants

No Informants / Aid Recipients	Gender	Poverty Status	Level of Education
1 PD / Family Hope Program	F / 25	Own House, Borrowed Land	Junior High School
2 OS / Direct Cash Assistance	F / 58	Own House, Borrowed Land	Elementary School
3 JR / Direct Cash Assistance	M / 45	Own House, Own Land	Junior High School
4 FD / Housing Assistance	F / 30	Own House, Borrowed Land	Junior High School
5 KN / Housing Assistance	F / 53	Own House, Borrowed Land	Elementary School
6 JE / Direct Cash Assistance	F / 42	Own House, Borrowed Land	Senior High School
7 AL / Direct Cash Assistance	F / 54	Own House, Borrowed Land	Junior High School
8 JG / Family Hope Program	M / 39	Own House, Borrowed Land	Senior High School

Source: Researcher, 2025.

Based on Table 1, the informants consisted of two men and six women. All informants owned houses; however, seven informants still depended on borrowed land for agricultural and economic activities, while only one informant owned productive land. In terms of educational background, four informants graduated from junior high school, two from elementary school, and two from senior high school.

These findings indicate that poverty within the GMIM Moriah Towuntu congregation is closely related to limited educational attainment, dependence on external resources, and restricted access to productive assets. Dependence on borrowed land demonstrates limited economic independence and vulnerability in sustaining household livelihoods. Furthermore, low educational levels potentially influence employment opportunities, productivity, and income generation within the congregation. These findings are consistent with Kula, A. (2023), who stated that poverty in Southeast Minahasa Regency is influenced by weak economic motivation, limited productivity, and low human resource quality.

Christian Faith Perspective on Poverty and Congregational Social Resilience

The findings of this study indicate that poverty within the GMIM Moriah Towuntu congregation is not only related to economic limitations but also associated with social conditions, life motivation, and community participation. Poverty in this context reflects a multidimensional reality involving structural, cultural, and spiritual dimensions within rural society.

From the perspective of Christian faith, the congregation is encouraged to maintain hope, build life based on the Word of God, and view Jesus Christ as the source of salvation and strength in facing life difficulties. Christian faith becomes an important spiritual foundation that shapes moral values, social responsibility, and resilience among congregation members experiencing economic hardship.

Based on in-depth interviews with eight informant families, the study found that the participation of men, particularly heads of households, in worship and prayer activities was relatively low. In contrast, women tended to be more active in worship

services, church ministries, and family spiritual activities. These findings indicate that women play an important role in maintaining the spiritual life of the family and sustaining communal church activities.

The findings also show that women were more actively involved in church fellowship and social interaction within the congregation. Their participation contributed to maintaining family spirituality, emotional support, and communal solidarity amid economic vulnerability. This condition demonstrates that women function not only as household caregivers but also as important actors in sustaining the social resilience of the church community.

This study does not conclude that poverty is caused by weak faith or lack of worship participation. However, limited involvement in church activities may contribute to weakened social solidarity, low communal support, and limited collective motivation in responding to economic pressures. Within rural church communities, worship and church fellowship function not only as spiritual activities but also as social spaces for building relationships, cooperation, and moral support among congregation members.

The interview results also revealed that several informants showed high dependency on social assistance and limited initiative in developing household economic activities. This condition is related to structural poverty influenced by low educational attainment, limited land ownership, and restricted access to productive resources. Seven informants who depended on borrowed land demonstrate economic dependence on landowners as a source of family livelihood.

Limited ownership of productive land also indicates weak economic independence among congregation members. Dependence on borrowed land potentially restricts productivity, income development, and long-term household welfare. In addition, low educational attainment among informants contributes to limited employment opportunities and weak economic competitiveness within the local community.

These findings support the argument of Harianti (2010) that poverty is multidimensional because it is influenced by structural, social, and cultural factors. Similarly, Kula, A. (2023) explained that low economic motivation, weak productivity, and limited human resource quality are factors strengthening poverty within Southeast Minahasa Regency communities. Therefore, poverty cannot be understood merely as a financial problem but must also be viewed within broader social and community contexts.

From the perspective of Christian faith, the church has a social responsibility to strengthen spiritual resilience and communal solidarity. Christian faith is not only understood as a personal belief system but also as a social force encouraging congregation members to support one another, work responsibly, and build collective welfare within the church community. Therefore, the role of the church becomes important not only in spiritual ministry but also in strengthening community empowerment and sustainable social transformation.

Towuntu Theology as a Contextual Model for Poverty Alleviation

This study found that Towuntu Theology functions as a contextual theological model developed as a faith-based and community empowerment approach to poverty alleviation. Towuntu Theology emphasizes togetherness, social solidarity, spirituality, and social responsibility as foundations for community transformation. This model does not merely focus on economic assistance but also on strengthening spirituality and sustainable community empowerment.

Towuntu Theology emerged from the local wisdom and communal values of Towuntu society, which emphasize collective life, mutual support, and shared prosperity. In this context, theology is not understood only as a doctrinal discourse but also as a

practical and transformative framework responding to the social realities of poverty within rural Christian communities.

The findings reveal that Towuntu Theology seeks to integrate spiritual formation with social transformation. Poverty is viewed not only as an economic problem but also as a condition affecting social participation, communal relationships, motivation, and human dignity. Therefore, Towuntu Theology encourages congregation members to develop spiritual resilience, social responsibility, and collective participation in improving community welfare.

Towuntu Theology develops three major approaches to poverty alleviation: biblical reflection, practical empowerment, and missiological service. These three approaches are interconnected and function as an integrated framework for strengthening the congregation socially, spiritually, and economically.

The first approach is biblical reflection and spiritual formation. Biblical reflection is understood as the process of understanding and applying biblical values in everyday life. This approach is implemented through worship activities, prayer meetings, Bible study, and spiritual formation programs for youth and teenagers within the congregation (Mandalele, JB., Ratag, PL., & Suwetja, IK., 2026). Through this approach, congregation members are encouraged to develop hope, moral responsibility, and spiritual resilience in facing social and economic pressures.

The findings indicate that spiritual formation contributes to strengthening communal solidarity and personal responsibility among congregation members. Worship activities and Bible reflection also function as social spaces where members support one another emotionally and spiritually. In rural communities, these activities become important mechanisms for maintaining social cohesion and preventing social isolation among economically vulnerable families.

The theological foundation of this approach is reflected in Leviticus 26:3–4a which states: “If you follow My decrees and are careful to obey My commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit.” This biblical passage emphasizes obedience, peace, and prosperity within communal life. In the context of Towuntu Theology, this teaching is interpreted as encouragement for congregation members to live responsibly, maintain faithfulness, and build harmonious social relationships within the community.

The second approach is practical empowerment and work ethics. Towuntu Theology encourages congregation members to develop economic independence through responsible work, productivity, and skills development. The implementation of this approach includes job training, educational assistance, patchouli seed distribution, and additional learning programs for children and teenagers (Mandalele, JB., Ratag, PL., & Suwetja, IK., 2026). These programs aim to reduce dependency culture and strengthen household economic resilience.

The third approach is missiological service and social solidarity. In Towuntu Theology, church ministry is understood not only as evangelism but also as social action and concern for vulnerable groups. This service is implemented through food distribution, social assistance, and scholarship support for students from low-income families (Mandalele, JB., Ratag, PL., & Suwetja, IK., 2026). These activities demonstrate that church mission includes practical efforts to strengthen welfare, social care, and communal responsibility within the congregation.

The findings demonstrate that Towuntu Theology integrates spirituality, social solidarity, and community empowerment within one contextual theological framework. This model contributes to the development of contextual theology and faith-based

development by emphasizing not only economic assistance but also strengthening social motivation, community participation, work ethics, and congregational spiritual resilience. Therefore, Towuntu Theology may serve as an alternative church-based poverty alleviation model relevant for rural Christian communities in Indonesia, particularly in promoting sustainable social transformation and collective welfare.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that poverty within the GMIM Moriah Towuntu congregation is shaped by both structural and cultural dimensions, including limited educational attainment, economic dependency, weak social motivation, and low community participation. Poverty therefore cannot be understood solely as an economic issue, but also as a challenge related to social resilience and community empowerment.

The study demonstrates that Towuntu Theology functions as a contextual and faith-based model for sustainable poverty alleviation through three integrated dimensions: biblical reflection, practical empowerment, and missiological service. These dimensions strengthen spiritual resilience, social solidarity, and productive community engagement.

The novelty of this research lies in the formulation of Towuntu Theology as an indigenous contextual theology model that bridges spirituality and sustainable social transformation. This model contributes theoretically to practical theology and faith-based development studies, particularly within the context of Global South Christianity.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

JB, designed the research, collected the data, conducted the analysis, and prepared the manuscript. LP, contributed to academic supervision, data validation, and the refinement of the theological content of the article. IK, contributed to the research methodology, scholarly review, and final revision of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the article.

AI USAGE STATEMENT

The authors declare that Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology was used only in a limited capacity to assist with language improvement, text editing, and the development of the academic writing structure. All content, data analysis, interpretation, and conclusions presented in this article are entirely the responsibility of the authors.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the research and publication of this article.

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