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## **NAVIGATING PASTORAL GRIEF: AN ANALYSIS OF I THESSALONIANS 4:13 AND PIXAR'S COCO**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A wise sentence states that fear cannot stop death, but rather stops life. Through this wise sentence, it can be learned that fear of death is actually useless and can even cause harm. This applies to all forms of death, including the death of a loved one. In theology, there is a term known as Pastoral Grief which seems to be the branch of theology that deals most with grief that arises due to death. Pastoral Grief's efforts to overcome grief become increasingly difficult when many parties put forward the concept of "forgetting" as the best way to recover from grief. So this study attempts to provide a solution to this problem by examining I Thessalonians 4:13 and the film Coco.

The method chosen in this study is qualitative with a comparative approach. In this case, the Bible text of I Thessalonians 4:13 will be compared with the narrative of the film Coco. Cross-Textual Hermeneutics by Archie Lee will be used as an interpretation method in this study. The selection of this method is based on efforts to appreciate the perspective of Asians in reading the

Bible text, while freeing the Bible text from the tendency of biased readings that are still oppressed by western colonialism.

Through this research, it is expected that new patterns and approaches will be found that can be used as strategies in Pastoral Grief services. It is also expected that the results of this study will provide a new color in viewing grief which has always received a negative stigma. It is also hoped that this study can have an impact on church services in an effort to maximize Pastoral and Counseling services, including Pastoral Grief.

**Keywords:** Grief; Paul; Pastoral; Thessalonians; Coco

## A. INTRODUCTION

Death has always been a specter for many people. It is seen that humans tend to like and enjoy life and then feel afraid of losing it. Therefore, the awareness arises that the most potential thing to take life from human hands is death.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, humans are not only afraid when death comes to them, but also feel uncomfortable when death comes to those closest to them.<sup>2</sup> In many circumstances, it is found that humans can also be willing to die first before their loved ones. There is a principle of being willing to die for the sake of loved ones that is found in humans.<sup>3</sup>

These symptoms then began to feel normal in society because they were normalized by them. As a researcher, of course there is no assessment of whether this is right or wrong, good or bad, because the estuary of this research is not heading in that direction. Discussion of death will always be related to other things that are an inseparable part of death itself. Some things that are usually always related to death are sadness, crying, loss and grief. Among all these things, the closest relationship to death is grief.<sup>4</sup> Grief can be understood as a form of sadness due to the loss of something that is considered valuable and worthwhile.<sup>5</sup> Experiencing grief after losing something valuable or someone you love is normal.<sup>6</sup> However, even though this is humane, it does not mean that there are no detrimental effects from it. Some things that can be affected by Grief are the psyche, physical health and productivity of humans. So at a certain point, this normal thing can also be detrimental.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, something is needed to overcome the problem of grief that can harm humans.

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<sup>1</sup> Wahyu Wicaksono and Sito Meiyanto, "Ketakutan Terhadap Kematian Ditinjau Dari Kebijakan Dan Orientasi Religius Pada Periode Remaja Akhir Yang Berstatus Mahasiswa," *Jurnal Psikologi*, no. 1 (2003): 57–65.

<sup>2</sup> Program Studi Psikologi et al., "Gambaran Grief Pada Remaja Yang Mengalami Kematian Orangtua Akibat Kecelakaan" 2, no. 2 (2024): 290–302.

<sup>3</sup> Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan, "Resiliensi Pada Wanita Dewasa Awal Setelah Kematian Pasangan Dyah Reza Aini Yohana Wuri Satwika," no. 2015 (2018).

<sup>4</sup> Naji Abi-hashem, "Grief, Loss, and Bereavement :," no. January (2021).

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Hall, "Bereavement Theory: Recent Developments in Our Understanding of Grief and Bereavement," *Bereavement Care* 33, no. 1 (2014): 7–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02682621.2014.902610>.

<sup>6</sup> James R Averill and James R Averill, "GRIEF :," 70, no. 6 (1968): 721–48.

<sup>7</sup> Donna M Wilson, "A Study to Understand the Impact of Bereavement Grief on the Workplace," no. May (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222819846419>.

Pastoral Grief is here to minimize the losses caused by grief and offers solutions so that someone can get out of the condition of grief.<sup>8</sup> Because pastoral care is the task of the church, in this case the church is also responsible for helping people who are experiencing grief.<sup>9</sup> Some of the church's activities show that there have been efforts to do this, but the implementation of

Pastoral Care in today's congregations cannot be said to be easy.<sup>10</sup> There are many challenges for both the church and the congregation members who experience grief. Church clergy have tried to handle grief in various “church” ways, but this becomes complicated when the grief is experienced by the church clergy (pastors, elders, deacons, and other church servants). An old opinion once said that faith would be the best weapon to overcome grief. However, this opinion could not continue because believers were also drowned by grief. So faith and grief are not two contradictory things.<sup>11</sup> A person can hold fast to faith and experience grief at the same time. So the church can no longer use “faith” as a solution to grief.

As one of the Christian majority areas in Indonesia, the city of Manado is quite active in various Pastoral actions, including Pastoral Grief.<sup>12</sup> One of the most obvious pastoral efforts for a person or family who has lost a loved one is through a consolation service. It is unfortunate that this pattern is still very limited in its implementation. The consolation service is only held a few days before the funeral (usually three nights in a row). After the funeral there are no more pastoral steps for the bereaved. During the consolation service, the pastoral dimension is seen through the sermon and the selection of songs in the liturgy. However, it is unfortunate that the sermon is certainly very limited by time and is not two-way in nature. The family or bereaved do not have the opportunity to share feelings or confirm something in the consolation service. In addition, sermons are often based on Bible reading activities that are still wrapped in colonialism. For example, the story of Job is often raised as a message to submit to God's authority. This kind of message seems to give a tendency that there is no room for sadness before God. Such messages in the consolation service seem to put more pressure on the bereaved that they have no right to be sad. Such things should certainly not be found in consolation services or even in all Christian services.

Therefore, it is necessary to read texts that are detached and free from colonialism. The activity of reading and interpreting this text must provide space for new meanings that emerge from the perspective of people who are no longer oppressed by the colony. So the first thing that needs to be done is to appreciate the perspectives that emerge from the local faith community. In

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<sup>8</sup> Hedviga Tk, “Losses and Support in the Grieving Process - Pastoral and Media Context Losses And Support In The Grieving Process – Pastoral And Media Context” 1, no. October (2024), [https://doi.org/10.34017/1313-9703-2024-1\(23\)-2\(24\)-39-50](https://doi.org/10.34017/1313-9703-2024-1(23)-2(24)-39-50).

<sup>9</sup> Helen Harris, “What Is a Congregation to Do ? Grief in Family and Congregational Life By Helen Wilson Harris , LMSW - ACP , DCSW Director of Field Education and Lecturer Baylor University ’ s School of Social Work Waco , Texas 76710 Permission to Reproduce for Congregat,” 2003, 1–23.

<sup>10</sup> Yonatan Alex Arifianto, Jerry Fanny Tiwa, and Roike R Kowal, “Tantangan Pastoral Dalam Menghadapi Kehidupan Jemaat Era Posttruth : Jawaban Gereja Dalam Krisis Kontemporer” 4, no. April (2024): 24–31.

<sup>11</sup> Rodger Murchison and First Baptist Church, “The Grief / Faith Relationship and the Disabling Effect of Unresolved Grief” 2 (2024): 74–91.

<sup>12</sup> Yohan Brek and Toar Umbas, “Grief Pastoral Dalam Pandangan Majelis Jemaat Gmist Musafir Kota Manado,” *POIMEN Jurnal Pastoral Konseling* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.51667/pjpk.v1i1.102>.

the context of Pastoral Grief, this means that the Bible needs to be understood from a perspective that gives space to sadness as something normal. Likewise, grief that arises due to loss also needs to be truly understood as something human. So this study tries to facilitate this. Through this study, the text of I Thessalonians 4:13-14 which tends to prohibit grief, will be interpreted with cross-textual hermeneutics and in a position that is parallel to the film *Coco*.

## B. STATE OF RESEARCH

Several previous studies were found that had similarities with the topic raised in this study. For example, regarding I Thessalonians chapter 4, it was studied by R Garland Young who discussed Paul's message about death to the Thessalonian congregation and Christians today.<sup>13</sup> There is also research by Richard Ascough which highlights the text from the perspective of human efforts to question death and the afterlife and how Paul strengthens the unity of the congregation through this discussion.<sup>14</sup> Simon Gathercole also wrote about Thessalonians and discussed the possibility of hope in death from the perspective of the apostle Paul.<sup>15</sup> The three writings highlight death, hope and the unity of the congregation. None have highlighted the issue of grief in the text.

The film *Coco*, which aired in 2017, has also attracted the attention of several researchers to the point of including it in their research. For example, research by Esra Nihlenur and Bayram Tay, which discusses the film *Coco* and its impact on family unity<sup>16</sup> and research from Xuexin Du that highlights the motives behind the film *Coco*.<sup>17</sup> Research by Ruta Vaidya and Yousra Osman also found moral role models in Disney cartoon characters, especially *Coco* and *Encanto*.<sup>18</sup> The three studies looked at the film *Coco* from a social and educational perspective, but not from a theological perspective. This is what distinguishes it from this study.

Just as the film *Coco* attracted the attention of many people, the issue of Grief also attracted the attention of many researchers. George Bonanno and Stacey Kaltman discuss and divide grief into several types.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, Nicole LeBlanc and friends highlight the emotional and physiological reactions to complicated grief.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, there is also research from Maarten Eisme and colleagues which discusses acute grief in someone who has lost a family member or

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<sup>13</sup> R Garland Young, "The Times and the Seasons : 1 Thessalonians 4 : 13-5 : 11" 96 (1999): 265–76.

<sup>14</sup> Richard S Ascough, "A QUESTION OF DEATH : PAUL ' S COMMUNITY-BUILDING LANGUAGE IN 1 THESSALONIANS 4 : 13-18" 3 (2004): 509–30.

<sup>15</sup> Reconsidering Paul and Syntax Simon Gathercole, "Is There Imminent Expectation in 1 Thess 4 : 13 – 18 ?" 66 (2024): 231–56, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685365-12341736>.

<sup>16</sup> Esra Nihlenur Şen, Master Student, and Corresponding Author, "Examination of ' Coco ' Animated Movie in Terms of the Value of Giving Importance to Family Unity" 1, no. 1 (2023): 1–40, <https://doi.org/10.29329/ijlssse.2023.1074.01>.

<sup>17</sup> Xuexin Du, "Analysis of the Motifs of Animation Film ' Coco '" 170, no. Sohe (2018): 254–58.

<sup>18</sup> Ruta Vaidya and Yousra Osman, "Disney Characters as Moral Role Models : A Discourse Analysis of *Coco* and *Encanto*," no. June (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2024.1375133>.

<sup>19</sup> George A Bonanno and Stacey Kaltman, "Varieties of Grief" 21, no. 5 (2001): 705–34.

<sup>20</sup> Nicole J. LeBlanc, Leslie D. Unger, and Richard J. McNally, "Emotional and Physiological Reactivity in Complicated Grief," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 194 (2016): 98–104, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2016.01.024>.

loved one due to Covid-19.<sup>21</sup> The three studies discuss grief comprehensively and in depth. However, they see grief as a psychological symptom but have not seen it as a theological symptom. Therefore, through this study, a different dimension of grief will be seen. The researcher will reconstruct grief not only as a psychological symptom, but also a theological symptom that is normal for believers.

### C. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research method with a comparative approach between the text of I Thessalonians 4:13 and the film *Coco* which aired in Indonesia in 2017. The film *Coco* is considered a text so that it can be compared with the Bible text for several reasons as follows:

1. Films contain language elements that require the audience to read the elements and then obtain the meaning. Ken Mizusawa researched this in relation to English language learning.<sup>22</sup>
2. Films present literary elements in cinematic form. The audience is unconsciously reading the text of the story through the process of understanding the narrative through the film being watched. Lucia Nagib said that film is literature.<sup>23</sup>
3. Just as text is written so that readers understand the author's intent, so too is a film made so that the audience understands the filmmaker's intent. Lena Jayyusi said in her research that a film is a text that contains and writes about culture that is intended to be conveyed to the audience with a combination of audio and visual patterns.<sup>24</sup> Since both are cultural products, films can be considered as texts.

Furthermore, because this research involves biblical texts, the hermeneutic method chosen is Cross-Textual Hermeneutics by Archie Lee. Through this hermeneutic method, Archie Lee attempts to free the text from Western domination. According to Lee, for a long time biblical texts have been considered absolute truth and therefore reject other sources of truth, including Eastern texts. This situation builds the idea that truth only belongs to Western texts and texts born in the East (Asia) are not theological.<sup>25</sup> Through Cross-Textual Hermeneutics Archie Lee attempts to bring together the biblical text with Eastern texts (texts from Asian cultures and religions). This encounter is not comparative, nor does it attempt to find what is right and what is wrong. This encounter is a cross-over that attempts to find transformation and enrichment of meaning.<sup>26</sup>

One thing that then becomes a problem that needs to be explained here is about the film *Coco* which is not an Asian product and tells about *Día de los Muertos* or Day of the Dead, which

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<sup>21</sup> Maarten C. Eisma et al., "Acute Grief after Deaths Due to COVID-19, Natural Causes and Unnatural Causes: An Empirical Comparison," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 278 (2021): 54–56, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2020.09.049>.

<sup>22</sup> "Understanding\_Film\_as\_a\_Text\_Type\_Reinve.Pdf," n.d.

<sup>23</sup> Lúcia Nagib, "Film as Literature: Or the Truffaldian Malaise (L'Homme Qui Aimait Les Femmes)," *A Companion to François Truffaut*, no. March (2013): 530–45, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118321591.ch30>.

<sup>24</sup> Lena Jayyusi, "Toward a Socio-Logic of the Film Text," *Semiotica* 68, no. 3–4 (1988): 271–96, <https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.1988.68.3-4.271>.

<sup>25</sup> Archie S. S. Lee, *Cross-Textual Hermeneutics and Identity in Multi Scriptural Asia*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Daniel K. Listijabudi, "Towards Enlarged Cross-Textual Reading in a Multi-Faith Context," *Exchange* 50, no. 2 (2021): 153–71, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1572543X-12341594>.

is one of the Mexican people's commemoration days. This celebration is a tradition of Latin American society which generally contains a message to see death broadly and not narrowly only on the fear of death.<sup>27</sup> Although it tells about the tradition, the narrative of the film *Coco* does not center on it. The film *Coco* instead emphasizes the intimacy of the family even though it has been separated by death. So this is what bridges it with the Asian text. This film can be considered to represent Asian culture because it highlights the warmth of the family. It is even more interesting because the warmth and affection of the family occur even though it is limited by death. Asian culture always places special emphasis on family relations. Asia considers that family has an important role in a person's life. So family relations must continue to be maintained and must not be broken.<sup>28</sup> Through this research, it will also be seen how families survive and continue life if one of their members has to leave due to death.

### A. Exegesis of I Thessalonians 4:13

This verse is part and also the opening of a short passage containing six verses. The Indonesian Bible Society gives the title "The Coming of the Lord" to this passage. Although it speaks of the parousia event,<sup>29</sup> but the opening and closing sections (verses 13 and 18) are often seen as an attempt to comfort the grief. If observed further, verses 13 and 18 in this passage, Paul seems to want to give encouragement to the Thessalonian congregation who are experiencing grief due to the death of a loved one. This verse was chosen because it is often a source of comfort for Christian congregation members who are experiencing grief. Unfortunately, the use of this verse is considered not contextual because it is used to "silence" grief. In the sense that this verse is often used to comfort by force, namely by leading the congregation who are experiencing grief to forget the person who has died. This pattern of forced forgetting is quite dangerous because it has the potential to experience more severe grief if there is something that stimulates the memory to return in the future.<sup>30</sup>

The First Letter to the Thessalonians is a handwritten letter from the Apostle Paul to the church in the city of Thessalonica.<sup>31</sup> The largest city in the province of Macedonia and also the center of the province. The city has undergone a name change. The name Thessalonica was proposed by one of Alexander the Great's generals named Cassander. Just like Corinth, the city of Thessalonica was also known as a port city. Therefore, the city of Thessalonica became a strategic route for trade at that time. From the city of Thessalonica, there was a trade route that crossed from Europe to Asia. Paul saw this as an opportunity to spread the gospel. Paul probably thought that the smooth trade route in the city of Thessalonica could be used to help the smooth spread of the

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<sup>27</sup> Eileen Gauna, "El Dia De Los Muertos: The Death and Rebirth of the Environmental Movement," 管理现代 76, no. 3 (2008): 61–64.

<sup>28</sup> Stella Quah, "Families in Asia," *Families in Asia*, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203888506>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibrahim Ibrahim, "Kajian Tentang Kedatangan Kristus Kedua Kali Berdasarkan 1 Tesalonika 4:13-18 Serta Relevansinya Bagi Orang Percaya," *Davar: Jurnal Teologi* 3, no. 1 (2022): 13–32, <https://doi.org/10.55807/davar.v3i1.45>.

<sup>30</sup> Hana Nur Baety Asyfiyah, "Proses Duka Remaja Yang Mengalami Kematian Orang Tua," 2017, 1–358.

<sup>31</sup> Lembaga Biblika Indonesia, "Surat-Surat Paulus I," *Yayasan Kanisius* 04, no. 2 (1983): 130–42.

gospel. Because many people came to transact in or just passed through Thessalonica, spreading the gospel to them could help bring the gospel through the trade route they passed.<sup>32</sup>

The interesting thing in verse 13 is Paul's statement that the congregation needs to know about those who have died, so that the congregation does not grieve like those who have no hope. So there are at least two things that are a puzzle from Paul's statement, namely what needs to be known about those who have died and what people who have no hope are like. Therefore, it is important to discuss and solve these puzzles each in a paragraph.

The first thing that needs to be solved is about knowing about those who have died. Through the apostle Paul's explanation in the same passage, more precisely starting from verses 15-17, it can be seen that there seems to be a fairly unique general understanding that is growing in the Thessalonian congregation. It can be seen that they are trapped in the belief that at the parousia event, the living will meet God before those who have died. In response to this understanding, many of them feel anxious about whether those who have died will also meet the Lord or whether they will be left behind because they have experienced death before the Lord returns.

Paul gave an explanation that shook the understanding of the Thessalonians. Paul explained that before the living meet the Lord, the dead will be resurrected first. In verse 16 it is explained that when God gives a sign (the call of the archangel and the trumpet) then the dead will be resurrected in Christ. After that, it is the turn of the living to meet the Lord. So this was conveyed by Paul to the congregation not merely as a consolation for their sadness, but also as a consolation for the worries of the congregation.

Next, regarding people who have no hope. This title has actually automatically stuck to the Thessalonians when they were worried about people who had died. They became like people who had no hope because they had unconsciously accused God of not caring. They knew God as a God who never failed to care for His people. They understood about Christ's return to save them. But strangely, they were not sure that God had the power to save those who had died.

By using the phrase "as one without hope," Paul is actually satirizing the Thessalonians who were indeed proven to be behaving like that. The apostle Paul's sarcastic tone was conveyed to the congregation accompanied by a detailed explanation of the opposite situation from what the people in Thessalonica were worried about. Therefore, the text that has been used as the basis for Christian grief consolation is actually not very appropriate. As the facts obtained through this ecegesis, in fact this text does contain a dimension of consolation, but not about grief consolation. This text also contains quite strong satire from Paul, not only a gentle rebuke for those who are grieving.

## **B. The Film Entitled "Coco"**

Coco is a 3D computer-animated film. This film can be called a masterpiece because it is a collaboration between two major American studios, Pixar Animation Studio and Walt Disney. The collaboration between Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina became the forerunner to the creation

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<sup>32</sup> "Seminar\_Perjanjian\_Baru\_Kematian\_dan\_Esk," n.d.

of the Coco film. Lee formulated the story idea then Adrian poured it into a scenario. They then invited Darla K. Anderson to produce their work. This film was released in the USA in November 2017 and was shown in Indonesian cinemas in the same month.

The story of the film Coco is set in a small town in Mexico called Santa Cecilia. The main focus of this film is on a child named Miguel who loves music very much even though he grew up in a family that hates music. The reason for his hatred of music is because Miguel's grandmother was traumatized because his father left him and his mother (Coco's mother) to pursue a music career. Miguel did not give up on his dream and tried to keep playing music. One time, during the celebration of *Dia de los Muertos*,<sup>33</sup> Miguel, who was heartbroken because his guitar was destroyed by his grandmother, went to the grave of Ernesto de la Cruz, whom he considered his great-grandfather. He saw Ernesto's guitar which was similar to the one held by his great-grandfather in his family photo, so he was convinced that Ernesto was his great-grandfather.

Due to stealing from the dead, Miguel had to accept the curse that he entered the world of the dead. In the world of the dead, Miguel met his family, including Mama Imelda, Miguel's great-grandmother who was the starting point of his hatred for music. Miguel's way to return to the human world was to get his family's blessing, unfortunately Mama Imelda was willing to give her blessing on the condition that he stop playing music. Because of that, Miguel decided to wander the world of the dead and meet Ernesto. At the meeting, Miguel realized that Ernesto was not a good person and neither was his great-grandfather. Miguel discovered the painful fact that all the fame that Ernesto had obtained was the result of stealing from Miguel's great-grandfather named Hector. Ironically, for the sake of wealth and fame, Ernesto even killed Hector.

Miguel's long and tense adventure with his family in the world of the dead continues when they try to return Miguel to the human world before dawn. Because when Dawn comes, Miguel who is still trapped in the world of the dead will completely turn into a dead person. Miguel's adventure in the world of the dead teaches him about how important it is to remember family. Miguel learns that the real separation from family is not death, but when they die and are forgotten. Through the tradition of commemorating *Dia de los Muertos*, it can be understood that deceased family members can cross over to the human world and meet again with their families as long as they are still remembered by the living.

### **C. Cross-Textual Hermeneutics of I Thessalonians 4:13 and The Film Coco**

Although it does not directly discuss grief, there is a dimension of grief in both texts. Although the text of I Thessalonians 4:13 does not explicitly discuss grief, its dimension is apparent through the use of this text which is often used to comfort those who experience grief. Likewise, Coco, which focuses on family relationships, but the dimension of grief can be seen when the emphasis on family relationships actually crosses the boundary called death. Therefore,

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<sup>33</sup> A day in the tradition of Latin American society, especially Mexico, which is dedicated to honoring the deceased. This commemoration is part of the Mexican tradition which is celebrated every early November. In Mexico, this celebration is celebrated mostly by the people of central and southern Mexico. This commemoration is also celebrated by Mexican citizens who are living and residing outside of Mexico or even outside of Latin America. In this celebration, people deliberately use attributes that are considered to reflect the dead.

the issue of grief will be a crossroads between the two texts in an effort to interpret them with Cross-Textual Hermeneutics.

This discussion will start from the meeting point of the two texts, namely that both agree that there is life after death. I Thessalonians 4:13 states this in verse 14 and states that God will gather the dead to Himself. Meanwhile, the film *Coco* presents a more complete and detailed pattern of life after death. The film shows that there is a world of the dead where those who have died reside. The film also shows how the dead have access to return to the human world. So, from this meeting point, it can be concluded that both believe in the existence of the world of the dead. However, what differentiates the two texts in viewing the world of the dead is how the dead can interact with the living. It has been previously stated that according to the film *Coco*, there is access for the dead to return to the human world. Through this access, those who have died can meet their living families even though they cannot interact directly.

The access of the dead to the world of the living may not directly contradict the text of I Thessalonians 4:13, but it becomes contradictory through the “dogma” echoed by the Christian church. The dogma of the Protestant Church teaches that the dead have been completely separated from the living. There is no access whatsoever for the two to meet. The dead cannot meet the living, and the living can no longer meet the dead.<sup>34</sup> However, this concept of dogma seems to need to be considered. Because if dogma always refers to the Bible, then the Bible itself does not agree on the relationship between the living and the dead. In the Old Testament, it is told several times that there were conversations with the dead. Including an Old Testament figure whose spirit was once called to be asked several questions (I Samuel 28:7-20).<sup>35</sup> Likewise in the New Testament, several times the relationship that is still built between the living and the dead is shown. For example, the event of Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the belief that the dead have lost their relationship with the dead actually still requires further discussion and debate. So in this case the film *Coco* cannot be considered a mistake.

At this stage, the Cross-Textual function can really be felt. Through reading with an Asian perspective, it can be seen that the reading of the Bible is often colored by a Western (European) perspective which then forms the dogma of the Christian Church. For a long time, Asians have believed in the existence of spirits. These spirits vary, there are spirits that come from nature, spirits of gods or gods, or even spirits of the dead.<sup>37</sup> Conversations with ancestral spirits are something that is familiar to Asian people, especially those who still adhere to past religious

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<sup>34</sup> Petrus Maria Handoko, “Hidup Di Balik Kematian,” *Seri Konsultasi Iman X*, no. 1 (2015): 126–28.

<sup>35</sup> Sujud Swastoko, “Pandangan Tentang Kematian Dan Kebangkitan Orang Mati Dalam Perjanjian Lama,” *HUPERETES: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristen* 1, no. 2 (2020): 130–39, <https://doi.org/10.46817/huperetes.v1i2.25>.

<sup>36</sup> Decky Krisnando, Enggar Objantoro, and I Putu Ayub Darmawan, “Konsep Teologi Injili Tentang Roh Orang Mati,” *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili Dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat* 3, no. 1 (2019): 90, <https://doi.org/10.46445/ejti.v3i1.136>.

<sup>37</sup> Cheong Weng Kit, “The Holy Spirit and Other Spirits in Asia: Discernment of Spirits in Non-Christian Religions,” *Jurnal Teologi Amreta (ISSN: 2599-3100)* 1, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.54345/jta.v1i2.8>.

beliefs.<sup>38</sup> So through the film *Coco*, it can be seen that Asian society is actually familiar with this concept, only reluctant to believe it because it is hindered by the dogma of the current Church. However, referring to the Bible, in fact this perspective can still be reconsidered. Especially when the tendency of a western perspective is still visible.

This article was not written to blame the dogma of the Church or discredit certain teachings. It is understood that dogma is present for the sake of realizing order. So it needs to be emphasized that the presence of this article is for academic purposes only. Not to blame the existing dogma of the Church. As previously discussed, the intersection of the two texts in this study is on the issue of grief and how Pastoral Theology answers this challenge. First, the world of Theology cannot deny the fact that since the beginning Asians have known the concept of talking to the dead. Whether it is through rituals or simply habits, many things are found in Asian culture that refer to this.<sup>39</sup> In Manado, North Sulawesi for example, there is a custom of lighting candles on graves to commemorate the farewell of the year (every December 31st every year). There are no ritual and mystical elements here, only a language of sadness and longing. The conversation is conducted in a light language and ends with a prayer.

In the film *Coco*, it can be seen that remembering the dead is something very important. This needs to be done by those who are still alive so that the deceased family does not disappear forever. As long as they are still remembered, the dead will always have the opportunity to meet again with their living family. The living family will also feel their presence and can communicate and express their longing in the moment of meeting. Although in the film, this event only happens once a year and only lasts for one night, namely on the commemoration of *Dia de los Muertos*.

This message also appears in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 through Paul's admonition to "know those who have fallen asleep." It is interesting that Paul conveys this so that the Thessalonians do not grieve like those who have lost hope. It is clear here that what Paul considers wrong is not mourning, but mourning like those who have no hope. In the ecclesiastical section, it has been discussed that mourning like those who have no hope refers to those who are not sure about God's work for those who have died. Thus, those who do not believe in life after death can also be called those who have no hope. Departing from this, mourning is not wrong as long as it is not like those who have no hope. So there is no prohibition on mourning as long as the mourner knows about those who have died. In other words, remembering those who have died is also something important. The bottom line of this is that the belief of Asians to stay connected and communicate with the dead can in fact be considered an effort to "know about those who have died."

#### **D. Pastoral Grief as a Form of Divine Healing**

For such a long time, Divine Healing and Grief have been viewed as two distinct, even contradictory, topics. This view arises because grief is seen as a sign of human weakness and defeat

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<sup>38</sup> Peter van der Veer, "Introduction to the Modern Spirit of Asia / 《亚洲的现代灵性》之 导论," *Cultural Diversity in China* 1, no. 2 (2015): 115–40, <https://doi.org/10.1515/cdc-2015-0011>.

<sup>39</sup> Nadia Bartolini, Sara MacKian, and Steve Pile, "Talking with the Dead: Spirit Mediumship, Affect and Embodiment in Stoke-on-Trent," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 43, no. 2 (2018): 170–83, <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12207>.

due to the pain of death. This paper refutes this view by presenting a new image of grief. Through Pastoral, grief is no longer seen as a sign of weakness and failure, but rather as a process and effort to achieve self-reconciliation. Grief is not a result, but rather a process that requires time and guidance. It is in this process that humans will see and feel God's role in providing Divine Healing. God does not come when humans are healed, but rather accompanies humans who are wounded and struggling in their recovery process.<sup>40</sup> This is the essence of Divine Healing, often overlooked by Christians today.

This article attempts to view Grief as a sacred and reflective moment. A moment where humans can encounter God in their true and honest state. This encounter occurs when humans cannot hide anything because their brokenness is so visible and their fragility is so palpable. Therefore, this moment of encounter in fragility can be the most appropriate moment for Divine Healing. This moment is when humans become utterly dependent on God.<sup>41</sup> For these reasons, Pastoral Grief Ministry has become a contemporary manifestation of Divine Healing. Pastoral Grief practitioners become God's partners in helping people overcome and reconcile with their fragility, including the fragility of Grief over the loss of a loved one.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Based on all the previous discussions, it can be concluded that grief is something normal but also biblical. Remembering and connecting in the language of love and longing with loved ones who have died is something important. The culture and customs of Asian people about communicating with the dead are, in fact, not about occultism or syncretism, but about love that cannot be removed even by death.

The Church through Pastoral Grief must be able to see and observe this. Pastoral Grief The Church today should be able to provide space for grief as an inseparable part of death. Instead of trying to help someone to "recover" from grief, the Church also needs to realize that grief can be a way for someone to make peace with the situation. It is indeed recognized that sometimes grief is found to be detrimental, both to oneself and to others. However, it is also necessary to realize that many who appear to have recovered are actually struggling to hide the grief they are experiencing from others. This recovery is a false recovery. So the real recovery is when Pastoral Grief is able to facilitate someone to understand that grief is a natural process of life. Experiencing grief is never a disgrace. Grief can last forever in someone's life. So eliminating it is not always the solution. The Church and the bereaved need to consider living with grief as part of "knowing the dead" and as an effort to live "grieving as one who has hope". Moreover, grief can be understood as a sacred moment where divine healing occurs. A moment when humans can encounter God in all their fragility.

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<sup>40</sup>Ashumate Hwavyon and Vincent Andrew Makeri, "The Theology, Practice, and Implications of Divine Healing Within The Pentacostal Movemnet: A Rapidly Expanding Force in Global Christianity," *Jalingo Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Research and Innovations* 1 (2025): 51–60.

<sup>41</sup>Stephan P. Pretorius, "Is 'Divine Healing' in The 'Faith Movement' Founded on The Principles of Healing in The Bible or Based on The Power of The Mind?," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 65, no. 1 (2009): 399–405, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v65i1.277>.

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