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The Corpse in the Grave: A Theological-Ethical Study of the *Ma'nene* Tradition in the Torajan Context

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Abstract

The underlying concept behind this research is that the *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition is one of the ancestral legacies of the Toraja people who adhere to *Aluk To Dolo* or Torajan ancestral belief and is still practised by some Christian communities in North Toraja. The *ma'nene*, or corpse preservation tradition, has been the subject of debate and tension within the Christian faith. Some Christian Toraja people agree with it, while others disagree with its practice among Christians. Therefore, this research aims to examine the *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition from the perspective of the Christian faith to find common ground between the noble values of the *ma'nene* tradition and Christian theology regarding the deceased. The qualitative research aims to analyze and describe the phenomena of belief attitudes, social activities, events, perspectives, and thoughts of the Christian community in *Baruppu'* and *Rindingallo* district regarding the *ma'nene* tradition. The results of this study affirm that the contemporary *ma'nene* tradition does not conflict with the Christian faith if the purpose of the *ma'nene* tradition is not intended to worship ancestors, communicate with them, and expect blessings from them but rather as an ethical act that respects the body as part being created in the image of God. It is also carried out based on the belief in eternal life and the resurrection of the body that will be experienced upon the coming of Christ.

Keywords: Christian Faith, Deceased, *Ma'nene*, Preserved Corpse, Toraja.

Abstrak

Konsep pemikiran yang melatarbelakangi penelitian ini adalah bahwa tradisi *ma'nene* merupakan salah satu warisan leluhur orang Toraja yang menganut *Aluk To Dolo* dan terus dipraktikkan sampai sekarang oleh sebagian masyarakat Kristen Toraja Utara. Faktanya adalah tradisi *ma'nene* dalam praktiknya mengalami perdebatan dan ketegangan dengan iman Kristen. Sebagian orang Kristen Toraja setuju dan sebagian tidak setuju dipraktikkan oleh orang Kristen. Oleh sebab itulah, tujuan penelitian ini adalah mengkaji tradisi *ma'nene* menurut perspektif iman Kristen untuk menemukan titik temu nilai luhur tradisi *ma'nene* dengan teologi Kristen tentang orang mati. Jenis penelitian yang dipakai adalah penelitian kualitatif yang bertujuan untuk menganalisis dan mendeskripsikan fenomena sikap kepercayaan, aktifitas sosial, peristiwa, pandangan dan pemikiran komunitas atau masyarakat Kristen di Baruppu' dan Rindingallo tentang tradisi *ma'nene*. Hasil penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa tradisi *ma'nene* kontemporer tidak bertentangan dengan iman Kristen selama tujuan tradisi *ma'nene* tidak dimaksudkan untuk menyembah leluhur, berkomunikasi dengan leluhur, dan mengharapkan berkat dari mereka, melainkan sebagai tindakan etis yang menghormati tubuh sebagai bagian yang diciptakan menurut gambar Tuhan. Hal ini juga dilakukan berdasarkan kepercayaan akan kehidupan kekal dan kebangkitan tubuh yang akan dialami pada saat kedatangan Kristus.

Kata-kata Kunci: Iman Kristen, *Ma'nene*, *Kunarpa*, Orang Mati, Toraja.

Introduction

The Toraja people are people who inhabit Tana Toraja Regency and North Toraja Provinces in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, who still preserve their customs and traditions. Torajan society in its social and religious life can be recognized by its religious culture and traditions, which are preserved from generation to generation. These customs or traditions are maintained and held as guidelines in determining attitudes, philosophies of life, and behaviour for the community in social and religious life. Toraja people still consistently maintain and preserve some of their culture and customs. One of the traditions that is still preserved by some Toraja people, especially North Toraja, is the *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition. *Ma'nene* or corpse preservation comes from the root words *nene* which means grandmother or ancestor, and *ma'* which means to do or carry out. *Ma'nene* or corpse preservation is a



special ceremony or ritual in *Aluk To Dolo* or Torajan ancestral belief¹ to remember and give thanks to the spirits of ancestors who have become gods as defined by *Aluk To Dolo* belief. The family worships and gives thanks to the ancestors because it is believed that the ancestors have blessed the surviving families, especially thanks to the harvest of rice fields. That is why, this *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition is carried out every year after the rice harvest.²

The process of implementing the *Aluk To Dolo* or Torajan ancestral belief version of the *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition usually begins with a family meeting to discuss the *ma'nene* or corpse preservation plan, including discussing the timing of implementation.³ After the time of implementation, the family visits the burial place, namely the *liang*⁴ (the grave) or *patane*.⁵ Then the grave or *patane* is opened and the body is removed. The body is cleaned and then the clothes or wrapping of the old body are replaced with new ones. Likewise, coffins or bodies that have been damaged are replaced. Then the body is returned into a grave or *patane*. Often also carried out cleaning of graves or *patane* from dirt or weeds. Sometimes only the door of the grave or *patane* is opened without changing the clothes of the corpse or body, or

¹ *Aluk To Dolo* is the ancestral religion of the Torajan people. *Aluk* means religion, system or handle of life, rules, ceremonies, customs, while *To Dolo* means ancestor. Compare Asher Tumbo and Elfran Bima Muttaqin, "The Impact of Patane Grave Development on the Availability of Residential and Agriculture in North Toraja," in *ICONEBS 2020: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Economics* (Indonesia, 2020), 36–42.

² Elim Trika Sudarsi, Nilma Taula'bi, and Markus Deli Girik Allo, "Representation of Character Education Values in the Tradition of 'Sikarume' Toraja," *KEMBARA: Jurnal Keilmuan Bahasa, Sastra, dan Pengajarannya* 8, no. 1 (April 14, 2022): 25–36, <https://ejournal.um.ac.id/index.php/kembara/article/view/18098>.

³ Dirk Sandarupa et al., "Toraja, The City of Rituals (One Ritual Can Introduce Many Kinds of Rituals) A Cultural Anthropology Study," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* V, no. II (2021): 2454–6186, <https://www.rsisinternational.org/journals/ijriss/Digital-Library/volume-5-issue-2/01-03.pdf>

⁴ M. Dahlan Bahang, Basri Wello, and Mansyur Akil, "Professional Role of Tour Guides and Theoretical Consequences of Intercultural Communication," *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 9, no. 4 (2018): 832–839. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0904.22>

⁵ Anastasia Baan, Markus Deli Girik Allo, and Andi Anto Patak, "The Cultural Attitudes of a Funeral Ritual Discourse in the Indigenous Torajan, Indonesia," *Heliyon* 8, no. 2 (February 1, 2022): e08925. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e08925>

only changing the clothes on the *tau-tau* (only for the highest social status), which is a statue of the deceased that is considered to represent the spirits of ancestors.

Furthermore, sacrifices in the form of pigs and buffaloes (if any are prepared) are slaughtered and cooked for consumption by all those present at the ceremony. Certain parts of the sacrifice were taken to serve as offerings to ancestors who had returned to gods (became ancestors who had become gods). The final stage is the *tomina* (the priest of *Aluk To Dolo* or Torajan ancestral belief) inviting the spirits of the ancestors by saying prayers, to attend and eat the prepared offerings. After that, everyone presents ate together.⁶

The *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition is usually carried out after every rice harvest as a form of appreciation for ancestors who are considered to have blessed the family with abundant harvests.⁷ During the implementation of the *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition, all families present will worship the spirits of the ancestors. One of the beliefs that accompanies this *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition is the belief that if the family does not carry it out, it can bring disaster in the form of crop failure. *Ma'nene* or corpse preservation is interpreted as honouring ancestors. Therefore, it is believed that if the family does not respect the spirits of the ancestors, then the spirits of the ancestors will ignore the family. Conversely, if relatives cherish and honour their deceased ancestors, then ancestors will bless living relatives.⁸ At the time of *ma'nene* or corpse preservation sometimes buffalo slaughter was carried out for noble and wealthy families, but more often pigs were used as offerings to ancestors and consumed by all families present. The ears of the sacrificed buffalo or pig were brought and placed in the grave or *patane* with the intention that the ancestors would hear the family's pleas. The wings of the sacrificed chicken were also placed near the grave

⁶ Kathleen M. Adams, "Come to Tana Toraja, 'Land of the Heavenly Kings': Travel Agents as Brokers in Ethnicity," *Annals of Tourism Research* 11, no. 3 (January 1, 1984): 469–485. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(84\)90032-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(84)90032-X)

⁷ Kathleen M. Adams, "The Discourse of Souls in Tana Toraja (Indonesia): Indigenous Notions and Christian Conceptions," *Ethnology* 32, no. 1 (December 1, 1993): 55–68. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3773545>

⁸ Novia Bella Alifvia et al., "Ma'nene Tradition in the Land of Toraja as Indonesian Local Wisdom," *I-Win Library International Waqaf Ilmu Nusantara Library* (Malaysia, 2021), https://waqafilmunusantara.com/wpcontent/uploads/2021/09/139_AR1.pdf

or *patane* with the intention that the ancestors bestow their blessings on the family.⁹ In addition, living relatives can also sacrifice animals to be sent to the spirits of relatives who have been dead for a long time because relatives could not sacrifice enough animals at the time of death.¹⁰ The *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition is generally carried out around the grave or *patane*, and followed by a shared meal. In ancient times there were also areas that carried out this *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition in the thickets near houses or *tongkonan* (traditional houses). Nowadays the *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition is generally carried out around the grave or *patane*, and after that, the meal together is done in the family home.

Although most of the people of North Toraja have embraced Christianity, this *ma'nene* tradition is still routinely carried out every year.¹¹ One of the areas that is still faithfully preserving this ancestral heritage is the people of Baruppu' and Rindingallo Districts in North Toraja Regency. At first, the Church did not agree with this *ma'nene* tradition to be practised by Christians, but later the Church softened so that worship was carried out at the time of the implementation of the *ma'nene* tradition.

The Christian version of the *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition usually begins with a family meeting to discuss the performance of the *ma'nene*.¹² At the time of implementation, the family invites all families or communities in one village and is treated to coffee, cakes, and cigarettes. After that, the pastor leads a prayer or worship.¹³

⁹ T. A. Volkman, "Visions and Revisions: Toraja Culture and the Tourist Gaze," *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990): 91–110. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ac.1990.17.1.02a00060>

¹⁰ I. J. N., Tahir, T., Hasan, M., Ahmad, M., & Inanna, "Social, Economic and Cultural Perspectives in Funeral Ceremony Rambu Solo'in Toraja Utara Regency," *International Journal of Arts and Social Science* 3, no. 5 (2020): 197–202. <https://www.ijassjournal.com/2020/V3I5/4146575955.pdf>

¹¹ M. D. Tahir, H. Hunaeni, and S. T. Poetra, "Learning Local Wisdom through the Symbols of Ma'nene'Rituals in North Toraja: A Semiotic Perspective," *Utamax: Journal of Ultimate Research and Trends in Education* 2, no. 3 (2020): 108–120. <https://doi.org/10.1849/utamax.v2i3.5514>

¹² A Kaul and J. Skinner, "Leisure in the 'Land of the Walking Dead': Western Mortuary Tourism, the Internet, and Zombie Pop Culture in Toraja, Indonesia," in *Leisure and Death An Anthropological Tour of Risk, Death, and Dying* (Denver: University of Colorado Press, 2018).

¹³ Aldiantika Saputri and Alila Pramiyanti, "The Perception Of Young People From Toraja Toward The Ma'nene Tradition," in *EProceedings of Management*, vol. 8, 2021,

After that, they eat together pork dishes cooked in bamboo and buffalo meat.¹⁴ After finishing the meal together, the family goes to the *patane* or grave to open the grave or *patane*, change clothes or wrapping of the body, replace the damaged coffin, and clean the burial site.¹⁵ Sometimes it is also done first by cleaning the burial site, changing the clothes of the body or *tau-tau*, and only then returning home to eat together.

Although some Christians agree with the holding of worshipping God at these events, some disagree because this *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition is the legacy of *Aluk To Dolo* or Torajan ancestral beliefs in which there is an element of worship to ancestors that is contrary to the Christian faith. The tension between *ma'nene* tradition and the Christian faith continues to occur in some areas or places in North Toraja. As tensions continue to occur, it is necessary to find the intersection between this *ma'nene* tradition and the Christian faith related to the dead. Previously, there has been research already done related to *ma'nene* or corpse preservation concerning cultural and character education. Other studies discuss *ma'nene* from a semiotic perspective. The novelty and urgency of this study are that it is very important to examine theologically-ethically the *ma'nene* tradition to find the intersection between the *ma'nene* and the Christian faith regarding the dead person, and its practical implications so that it no longer causes tension. Therefore, the formulation of the problem to be examined is what is the intersection between the *ma'nene* tradition and the Christian faith about the dead person?

Method

The type of research used is a qualitative research method,¹⁶ which focuses on the search for concepts, understandings, goals and meanings

¹ accessed September 17, 2023, <https://openlibrarypublications.telkomuniversity.ac.id/index.php/management/article/view/17253/16964>.

¹⁴ Paulus Palimbong, *His Is Toraja : The Sacrificial Burial Customary like Raison d'être : Get Rich through Success in Death* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016).

¹⁵ Jane C. Wellenkamp, "Notions of Grief and Catharsis among the Toraja," *American Ethnologist* 15, no. 3 (August 1, 1988): 486–500, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1988.15.3.02a00050>

¹⁶ J. W. Creswell and C. N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Sage publications, 2016).

of *ma'nene*. This *ma'nene* tradition is studied and analyzed theologically-ethically from the point of view of the Christian faith. This study discussed how the Christian view of man, the corpse, eternal life and resurrection can be applied in the context of the *ma'nene* tradition, as well as the ethical considerations that arise in this *ma'nene* or corpse preservation *ma'nene* practice. The techniques and stages in conducting theological-ethical study are:¹⁷ First, identifying the *ma'nene* tradition related to the origin and meaning of *ma'nene*. Second, outlining the perspective of Christian theology on man, death, the body, eternal life and resurrection. Third, comparing the practice of *ma'nene* and the testimony of the Bible to find the intersection between the practice of *ma'nene* and Christian theology, i.e. identify similar values, concepts, or practices. At this stage, there is also a Christian ethical analysis of *ma'nene* practices. Fourth, making a synthesis of findings on theological ethical studies of *ma'nene* practices in Torajan society. The synthesis includes Christian views on the practice of *ma'nene* in the context of Torajan society, and ethical considerations of the treatment of the dead.

The locus of research is in Baruppu' and Rindingallo Sub-district, North Toraja Regency, South Sulawesi Province. These two sub-districts were chosen as the locus of research because the people in these two sub-districts routinely carry out the *ma'nene* tradition every year. Some areas in Tana Toraja Regency also still carry out the *ma'nene* tradition, but the Baruppu community was the first to carry out this *ma'nene* tradition and it is still being preserved today. The respondents of the study were traditional leaders in the two sub-districts and several pastors of the Toraja Church who were often directly involved in serving worship in the *ma'nene* tradition or had lived in the two sub-districts.

Result and Discussion

The Origin of the Ma'nene Tradition

The tradition of *ma'nene* or corpse preservation originated from a story about a hunter who was a Toraja named Pong Rumasek who was believed to have lived hundreds of years ago. It is said that one day when

¹⁷ Yosefo Gule, "A Theological-Ethical Study of Church Against Corruption," *Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Science* 2, no. 2 (2022): 1910–1920. <https://doi.org/10.55324/ijoms.v2i2.263>

Pong Rumasek was hunting animals around the Balla mountains, he found a human corpse left with bones, lying in the middle of the forest. He took the corpse, treated it and wrapped it in the clothes he was wearing. After Pong Rumasek returned to his home, he found that the harvest was abundant and the plantation bore fruit faster. After the event, every time Pong Rumasek hunted, he always got results. Likewise, the harvest is always abundant. Pong Rumasek always meets the spirit of the person who has been cared for by the body. He and other residents believed that the bountiful harvest was because Pong Rumasek had done well to take care of the dead man's body. It was the spirit of the deceased who blessed Pong Rumasek. Based on that story, the residents of Baruppu' and some areas in North Toraja carry out the tradition of *ma'nene* or corpse preservation every year, in the hope that ancestors who have died and have become gods (*membali Puang*) bless the surviving families.¹⁸

Another source explained that Pong Rumasek along with his friend were walking to a place in Bone regency to make a buffalo sale transaction and on the way, they found the body. Pong Rumasek then took the body wrapped it in the clothes they were wearing and buried it. After they returned to their homes, it turned out that the harvest, livestock and other businesses had doubled, even they were able to harvest earlier than usual. They believed that the results were obtained because they had done well to the bodies they found.¹⁹

Aims and Purposes of Ma'nene or Corpse Preservation

The *ma'nene* tradition is intended as worship and thanksgiving to ancestors because it is believed that ancestors have blessed living families, especially thanks to harvesting rice paddy products. *ma'nene* is interpreted to honour and thank ancestors. The *ma'nene* tradition is not only meant to thank ancestors but also has a meaning that reflects how important social relationships between family members are, especially for deceased relatives.²⁰ Adherents of *Aluk To Dolo* or Torajan ancestral

¹⁸ Dimitri Tsintjilonis, "A Head for the Dead : Sacred Violence in Tana Toraja," *Archipel* 59, no. 1 (2000): 27-50. <https://doi.org/10.3406/arch.2000.3553>

¹⁹ Tsintjilonis, "Death and the Sacrifice of Signs: 'Measuring' the Dead in Tana Toraja," *Occina* 71, no. 1 (2000): 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1834-4461.2000.tb02720.x>

²⁰ M. D. Tahir, H. Hunaeni, and S. T. Poetra, "Learning Local Wisdom through the Symbols of Ma'nene'Rituals in North Toraja: A Semiotic Perspective," *Utamax*:

belief believe that the social relations between living and dead people are not severed and negated by death but continue until the afterlife. Living families can still communicate and relate with deceased ancestors by invoking their blessings. The *ma'nene* tradition is carried out to ask for blessings from ancestors who have become gods. And ancestors will bless living families who always remember and know to be grateful to him. So social relations remain established from life on earth to death. For this reason, Torajan people, especially *Aluk To Dolo* or Torajan ancestral belief adherents, treat the dead with great respect.

Another gesture of the *ma'nene* tradition is a sign of love and affection of relatives to long-deceased ancestors. The love and affection of relatives for the deceased ancestors are manifested through the tradition of *ma'nene* by cleaning and changing the clothes of the ancestors' corpses. In addition, this *ma'nene* tradition is also a place to get to know each other and introduce family members who come from the same ancestor.²¹

Therefore, the tradition of *ma'nene* focuses on worshipping and giving thanks to ancestors. Another motive for cleaning and caring for the bodies of deceased ancestors in the *ma'nene* tradition is driven by the value and importance of relationships between family members, and the belief that relationships between families are not broken and separated by death.²² Cleaning and caring for ancestral corpses is also meant as appreciation, respect, and love for ancestors. Appreciation, respect, and love are manifested by visiting tombs, and caring for and cleaning the skeletons of ancestors.

Perspectives of Christian Theology on the Human Body and the Corpse

The Bible teaches that man was created by God and created in His image (Gen. 1:27). Therefore, the human body should be valued,

¹ [Journal of Ultimate Research and Trends in Education 2, no. 3 \(2020\): 108-120.](https://doi.org/10.31849/utamax.v2i3.5514)
<https://doi.org/10.31849/utamax.v2i3.5514>

²¹ S. Sumiaty, "The Ritual Meaning of 'Ma'nene' For Toraja Societies In Indonesia (Makna Ritual Ma'nene Bagi Masyarakat Toraja Sebagai Budaya Indonesia)," *Uniqbu Journal of Social Sciences 2, no. 1 (2021): 22-28.*

²² Xoliswa. Makhathini, "The Customary Significance of Using 'Ihlahlalomlhlankosi' in Death Processes within the ENqabeni Community." (The University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg, 2021), accessed September 17, 2023, [https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/handle/10413/20424.](https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/handle/10413/20424)

respected, and treated ethically. When a man dies, his body must still be valued and treated with respect as part of God's image and likeness even if it remains in the form of a body or corpse. For this reason, many passages in the Bible testify to how corpses are treated with respect and deserve. Nuban Timo said that the human body formed and created by God is good, holy and valuable because it is an imitation of God (the image of God) even though man is dead but his body is still valuable.²³

Many passages in the Bible testify to how a dead body or body is treated with respect and deserves it. Although the human body should be cherished, respected, and treated well, the Bible also does not teach to keep human corpses forever (Gen 3:19). In contrast, the Bible teaches that the body of a dead human being should be buried properly. Taking good care of a corpse and burial can be understood as an act of respect for humanity and life given by God and providing comfort and support for the family and friends left behind.

Several passages in the Bible can guide how the Christian faith should view and behave toward the dead person and the corpse. Genesis 23:1-20 tells the story of Abraham buying land in Hebron to properly bury his wife, Sarah. It is said that Sarah died at the age of 127 at Kiryat Arba (Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham bought a cave there to bury Sarah. According to Genesis 35:28-29 tells of the death of Isaac. After Isaac died at the age of 180, he was buried by his sons, Esau, and Jacob, in the cave of Machpelah in Mamre, located in Canaan. The cave of Machpelah was purchased by Abraham from the Hittites at that time as a burial place for their family. Isaac was buried with Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah (Gen 49:29-31).

Genesis 50:1-14 tells of the death of Jacob or Israel and his burial in the land of Canaan. In the traditions and customs of Jewish families of that time, burial was a very important part of death ceremonies. When a person dies, his body is immediately bathed and wrapped in a simple shroud. In the account of Jacob's death, Genesis 50:2-3 records that after Jacob died, Joseph ordered the embalming master to prepare his father's body before burial. This practice of preserving corpses is not common in Jewish tradition and may have been inspired by ancient Egyptian practices, where Joseph had lived for many years as a slave and then as an

official. In addition, Genesis 50:10-11 mentions that the Canaanites living in the area saw Jacob's family mourn his death and called it a great celebration of mourning. Later, Jacob's family buried Jacob in the family tomb in the wilderness, along with the tombs of Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah. In this whole story, it can be concluded that Jacob's family honored Jacob by burying him according to Jewish tradition and custom and mourned his death with great sadness.

Another passage that could be referenced is the story of Joseph telling his brothers to take his bones with him when the Lord would take care of His people and bring them out of Egypt (Gen 50:25). And because of his faith, Moses and the Israelites took Joseph's bones when they came out of Egypt (Ex 13:19; Heb 11:22).

When they arrived in Canaan, the Israelites buried Joseph's bones in Shechem. Moses and the Israelites obeyed Joseph's request by bringing his bones as a sign of their love and gratitude towards Joseph who was their ancestor and who had done much for the survival of the Israelites. Joseph asked his brothers to bring his bones based on his belief that one day God would care for His people following His promise to bring them back to the land of Canaan that had been promised to his ancestors. That confidence became evident when the Israelites were delivered and led by God back to the land of Canaan, and Moses took Joseph's bones with them.²⁴

The act of carrying Joseph's bones by the Israelites shows the importance of honoring the ancestors of those who have died. The Bible teaches that death is a necessary and natural part of a person's journey, but that does not mean that a dead body is left or disposed of. An attitude of respect and respect for the dead and bodies is also found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Mark 16:1-3 relates that some women went to the tomb of the Lord Jesus to spice up the dead body of the Lord Jesus so that it would not rot quickly. This action shows an attitude of care and respect for the dead body.

²⁴ TN Andriamanantena, "Carrying the Bones of Joseph Back to Canaan: An Exegetical Analysis of Genesis 50: 24-26; Exodus 13: 19; and Joshua 24: 32" (Vid Specialized University Stavanger, 2020), accessed September 17, 2023, https://vid.brage.unit.no/vid-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2678808/MATRS6000_2020_Tahiandrazana_Nosiarilala_Andriamanantena.pdf?sequence=1.

Christian Theological Perspective on Death as God's Will

Physical life is a reality that will end because life from the beginning has been colored by death (Gen 3:19).²⁵ Death is a natural event that is a medical-biological reality. And in this understanding, all men will experience it, whether they believe or do not believe. Physical death is medical-biological death that will be experienced by all creation including humans. Death is natural for all creation without exception, including man, whether he sins or not. Death is not a punishment because death is nature. Sin has made death a terrible experience and reality, a terrifying threat and punishment known as death (Rm 6:23). Because of sin, man became afraid of death. On the other hand, for a sinner who believes in Christ and is therefore in Christ, death is the gateway that leads him to eternal fellowship with Christ.²⁶

The Bible teaches that death is part of human experience and must be accepted as God's will. Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 says that everything has a time, and there is a time for all affairs under heaven: there is a time to be born and there is a time to die. So, death is part of the natural cycle of life. Although each culture has different traditions and customs in behaving towards the dead person or corpse, the above principles can be used as a guide for every believer in respecting human life and honouring death as part of the life desired by God. Death for the believer is not the end of everything because when the believer dies and is buried, though they return to the dust of the earth, they do not disappear. Indeed, they ceased to exist in this world, but they did not disappear. Death should not be understood in terms of ceasing to exist. When he dies, man ceases to exist biologically, but theologically man exists in a new state. The Bible teaches that believers do not disappear after death. Death is the phase in which a new life begins. When man dies, his soul/spirit separates from his body and his outward man disappears but with it develops the inner man, as the apostle Paul said, "For which because we faint not; but though our outward man perishes, yet the inward man is renewed day by day," (2 Cor 4:16; 2 Cor 5:8). Biologically, man no longer exists in this world, but theologically he exists in a new state. This new

²⁵ Georg Kirchberger, *Allah Menggugat: Sebuah Dogmatik Kristiani* (Maumere: Ledalero, 2007).

²⁶ Timo, *Allah Menahan Diri, Tetapi Pantang Berdiam Diri*.

form of life is evident ¹¹ in the story of Lazarus, the rich man and Abraham (Luke 16:19-31) and the man crucified with Christ (Luke 23:43).²⁷

Perspectives on Christian Theology on The Resurrection

The Bible also teaches that the human body will experience a resurrection at Christ's return. Many passages in the Bible teach and testify that one day the human body will experience a resurrection. It is at that resurrection that the peace and salvation experienced by believers will be perfectly bestowed upon and will be glorified together with the living (1 Thess 4:16, 17).²⁸ The believer is assured of a resurrection because it is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who was the firstborn, the first to rise from the dead (1 Cor 15:20, 23). It is this resurrection of the Lord Jesus that is the basis and guarantee that every believer will experience a resurrection as well (1 Thess 4:14).²⁹ Based on 1 Corinthians 15:40, Origen described the resurrection body as a new body and a spiritual body.³⁰ J. Moltmann believed in the resurrection and according to him, the human condition at the resurrection was angelic.³¹ Paul describes this dead and resurrected body using the analogy of a seed that dies but will grow a new sprout if it has been planted. The resurrected body will one day be changed so that it can no longer perish, and there will still be a connection with the old body.³²

Perspectives on Christian Theology on Eternal Life

For by the salvation of Jesus Christ, eternal life has been possessed by believers from this time on. For this reason, John 3:16 affirms that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ will have eternal life. Karl Barth defined eternal life not as an endless life, but as life in a new heaven and

²⁷ ² ¹ mo, *Allah Menahan Diri, Tetapi Pantang Berdiam Diri*.

²⁸ C. R. Moss, *Divine Bodies: Resurrecting Perfection in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019).

²⁹ Harun Hadiwijono, *Iman Kristen* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2015).

³⁰ Katarina Pålsson, "Angelic Humans, Glorious Flesh: Jerome's Reception of Origen's Teachings on the Resurrection Body," *Journal Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity* (2019): 54–81, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zac-2019-0004>.

³¹ ¹ Moltmann, *God in Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985).

³² Danik Astuti Lumintang, "Kebangkitan Tubuh Menurut I Korintus 15:25-58 Dan Implikasi Etis," *Jurnal Missio Ecclesiae* 2, no. 1 (2013): 39–60. <https://doi.org/10.52157/me.v2i1.25>

earth.³³ But some parts of the Bible testify that eternal life is living in infinite fellowship with the Lord God, which is everlasting and limitless. So eternal life already exists and is experienced by believers because of the saving work of Jesus Christ. However, the perfection of eternal life will only be bestowed upon and experienced by believers in the new heaven and new earth. One day in the new heaven and the new earth the believer will experience fellowship with the Lord God forever and ever (1 Thess 4:17). Since eternal life has existed and been experienced by believers from now on, the eternal life that will be bestowed in the new heaven and earth is a continuation of the present eternal life. Because of Jesus Christ's saving work, believers today are allowed to approach the Lord God in the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:18; 1 Ptr 3:18). But someday in the last days in the new heaven and earth, the believer will approach the Lord God perfectly. The believer will experience and enjoy perfect fellowship with God.³⁴ Berkhof called it as living in all its fullness without any more distractions and imperfections.³⁵

1 *Ma'nene or Corpse Preservation Encounter with the Christian Faith of the Dead*

After the majority of the people of Baruppu' and Rindingallo became Christians, they continued to practice this *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition every August after harvest. According to the results of interviews to the traditional leaders in the two sub-districts and several pastors of the Toraja Church who were often directly involved in serving worship in the *ma'nene* tradition or had lived in the two sub-districts and according to the results of observations of several cultural actors, the purpose and meaning of the *ma'nene* tradition carried out today is different from the beliefs of *Aluk To Dolo* or Torajan ancestral belief. The purpose and meaning of them doing this *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition are as a tribute and respect to the ancestors by caring for and preserving the corpse of the ancestors. This tradition is also meant as a sign of their love for deceased ancestors. This *ma'nene* tradition is also intended as a family reunion, where all living family

³³ K Barth, *The Faith of the Church: A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed According to Calvin's* *7* *Chism* (New York: Living Age Books, 2006).

³⁴ Hadiwijono, *Iman Kristen* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2015).

³⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Ontario: Devoted Publishing, 2017).

members meet again to strengthen family ties. The contemporary *ma'nene* tradition¹ that the Baruppu and Rindingallo Christian communities' practice **does not conflict with the Christian faith if** this *ma'nene* or corpse preservation tradition is not intended as a form of worship and thanksgiving to deceased ancestors, communicating with them or expecting blessings or curses from them. For the Bible expressly forbids believers to worship and communicate with the spirits of the dead or to anything other than God alone (Ex 20:3-4; Deu 18:10-11).

The *ma'nene* tradition of caring for and cleaning the corpses of ancestors due to the motive of appreciation and reverence for ancestors is in line with the teachings and testimony of the Bible. The Bible testifies that caring for the dead bodies of ancestors is the responsibility of believers as a form of respect for humanity and life given by God. Even though they are dead, the human body must be cherished and honored and treated with respect and worthiness because they are part of the image and likeness of God. Believers have a moral and ethical responsibility to treat and care for the dead or corpses with respect.³⁶ The Bible teaches to bury the dead properly as an act of respect for humanity and life given by God. Burial also provides comfort and support for bereaved family and friends. Taking good care of a corpse and burying it is understood as an act of respect for humanity and the life given by God. Paul Budi Kleden says that we not only honor them because they were our forefathers, but because they are a historical sign of God's love that is empowering to revive and heal.³⁷ So, the care and preservation of the body in the *ma'nene* tradition is in line with the witness of the Bible and must be understood in terms of appreciation and reverence for the deceased.

The Bible also teaches that death is a natural cycle⁵ **of life and** part of **the human** experience **of life** orchestrated **and** desired by God. Therefore, the *ma'nene* tradition carried out by the people of Baruppu' and Rindingallo sub-districts must be understood and lived in terms of understanding that death is part of human experience and must be accepted as God's will. The above principles should be made for every believer in respecting human life and honouring death as part of the life desired by God. The *ma'nene* tradition in which the cleansing and care of

³⁶ ² Timo, *Allah Menahan Diri, Tetapi Pantang Berdiam Diri*.

³⁷ Ibid.

the corpse are carried out must be understood by Christians that since death is part of the cycle of life desired by God, the care and cleansing of the corpse in the *ma'nene* tradition is understood as a response of faith and human acceptance of God's will. The Bible also teaches that believers do not disappear after death. Death is the phase in which man begins a new life. Biologically, man no longer exists in this world, but theologically he exists in a new state. Because of the belief that man does not disappear after death, the cleansing and care of the corpse in the *ma'nene* tradition is an act of belief in the existence of a human being who remains theologically after death.

The tradition of *ma'nene* must also be practised and interpreted in terms of the belief in eternal life that a believer has had and experienced since he believed in Jesus Christ. Eternal life was already possessed from the time he believed until his death and eternal life will be experienced perfectly at the coming of Jesus Christ. The Bible testifies that eternal life is living in fellowship with the Lord God without any everlasting limits. Therefore, the care and maintenance of corpses in the *ma'nene* tradition are interpreted and carried out in the appreciation and belief of the eternal life that God has given to man. The eternal life experienced by the believer is not limited by death, for at the time of death, the believer is in a new state (Luke 16:19-31; 23:43). A man who dies is alive (John 11:25).³⁸ For this reason, the care and cleansing of the corpse in the *ma'nene* tradition are carried out because the corpse being treated is the body of a believer who remains anew and is experiencing eternal life. Death in no way negates the eternal life that believers already possess and experience until eternal life is experienced perfectly in the new heaven and earth. So, the tradition of *ma'nene* in which the care and cleansing of the body are carried out is interpreted in the belief that there is infinite eternal life experienced by the believer from life to death.

The Bible also teaches that the human body will experience a resurrection at Christ's return. Many passages in the Bible teach and testify that one day the human body will experience a resurrection (1 Cor 15:20, 23). It is at that resurrection that the peace and salvation experienced by believers will be perfectly bestowed upon and will be glorified together with the living (1 Thess 4:16, 17). Because of the belief

³⁸ **2** Timo, *Allah Menahan Diri, Tetapi Pantang Berdiam Diri*.

in this resurrection, the corpse needs to be cared for because it is the corpse that will rise at the return of Christ. *Aluk To Dolo* or Torajan ancestral belief believes in the existence of the immortality of the soul, while believers believe in the resurrection of the body. Thus, caring for and preserving the corpse in the *ma'nene* tradition must be understood in terms of understanding that the corpse is cared for because it is the corpse that will one day experience the resurrection at the coming of Christ. The resurrected body will one day be changed so that it can no longer perish, and there will still be a connection with the old body. Therefore, the bodies of deceased Christians who are cared for and preserved in the *ma'nene* tradition are in line with the Christian faith.

However, this Christian approach to *ma'nene* is quite different from ancestor worship. There are three motives for ancestor worship, namely feelings of respect and love for ancestors, fear, and the desire to obtain blessings from ancestors.³⁹ Ancestor worship is contrary to the Christian faith because the Bible expressly forbids the worship of ancestral spirits or ancestors (Lev 20:6) including worship of ancestors and communicating with the deceased. In Exodus 20:3 God strictly forbids His people to worship anything and anyone other than Him. The Bible also makes it clear that God alone is the source of blessing (Ezek 34:26; 2 Cor 9:8; Yak 1:17). Therefore, the *ma'nene* tradition of ancestor worship and the desire for blessings is contrary to the teachings of the Bible.

Practical Implications

The potential practical implication of this theological ethical study is that this theological ethical study can provide insight for Torajan society and those involved in *ma'nene* practice to consider how this practice can be developed or changed so that the motives of *ma'nene* are not in the context of the worship of spirits or ancestors and communicating with the deceased, which is contrary to the Christian faith. Christians must be instructed that their ancestors will not bless them, but that God alone will bless. The North Toraja Christian community, especially the people of Baruppu' and Rindingallo sub-districts, can also take strategic steps to respect the principles of the Christian faith about the human body, death, eternal life, and

³⁹J. Verkuyl, *Etika Kristen Kapita Selektta* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2016).

resurrection. The practical implications of this theological ethical study can also involve relevant parties, such as the government, customary institutions, and religious leaders, to assist the people of North Toraja in considering alternative practices that still respect tradition while paying attention to ethical and theological aspects.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the discussion mentioned above, it can be concluded that there is an intersection between *ma'nene* or corpse preservation and the Christian faith regarding the dead person. The meaning and purpose of the contemporary *ma'nene* tradition practised by the Christian community do not conflict with the Christian faith in so far as the motive is not in the context of worshipping ancestral spirits or communicating with them or expecting blessings or curses from them. The Bible teaches that caring for a corpse is an ethical attitude that respects and values the human body created by God. The motive of appreciation and reverence for ancestors is in line with the teachings and testimony of the Bible, as a form of respect for humanity and life given by God. The believer has a moral and ethical responsibility to care for the dead person or corpse because the human body, even if it has died, is a valuable part of God's image and likeness and should be cherished and respected. Caring for the body is a form of respect and reverence for ancestors practised by believers in the Bible. The *ma'nene* tradition carried out by the North Toraja Christian community, especially the people of Baruppu' and Rindingallo sub-districts in which the cleaning and care of the corpse are carried out, must be understood and lived within the framework of understanding that death is part of the cycle of human life and must be accepted as God's will. Furthermore, the care and cleansing of corpses in the *ma'nene* tradition is carried out in conjunction with the belief in eternal life. Death in no way negates the eternal life that believers already possess and experience until eternal life is experienced perfectly in the new heaven and earth. So the tradition of *ma'nene* in which the care and cleansing of the corpse are carried out is interpreted in the belief of eternal life. And finally, caring for and cleaning the corpse in the *ma'nene* tradition is also based on the belief that the corpse that is

cared for and cleansed will experience the resurrection later at the coming of Christ.

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