

## PAUL'S THOUGHTS ON SLAVERY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF *RAMBU SOLO'* TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES IN TORAJA

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### ABSTRACT

This research shows an understanding of Paul's views on liberation from slavery in the context of the *Rambu Solo'* Traditional Ceremony in Toraja. The background illustrates the changes in Torajan culture and the values embodied in *Rambu Solo'*. The focus of the research is to understand how Paul's teaching on freedom from slavery can be applied to the practice of slavery in Torajan culture. Qualitative methods are used through data collection from literature review and in-depth analysis. The results show the relevance of the values emphasized by Paul in evaluating the practice of slavery in Toraja, especially in the context of spiritual freedom and equality before God. The implications of Paul's teachings trigger deep reflection on the dynamics of social relations and cultural practices embodied in Torajan funeral ceremonies, highlighting the importance of understanding spiritual values in the context of local traditions.

**Keywords:** Paul, *Rambu Solo'*, Toraja

### Introduction

Culture or culture, which comes from the Latin word "*colere*" which refers to the activity of processing or doing something related to nature, can be interpreted as an expression of human mind and reason. The Toraja people, who live in the northern mountainous region of South Sulawesi as well as parts of the Luwu and West Sulawesi plains, maintain a distinctive lifestyle that still displays the original cultural heritage of the Austronesian group and shows similarities with Nias Culture. Starting from the 1970s, the Toraja Tribe began to open up to interaction with the outside world and the Tana Toraja region became the main tourism destination in Indonesia. In the 20th century, the Toraja tribe underwent a significant cultural transformation from a society that has traditional agrarian beliefs to a community that adheres to Christianity and depends on the tourism sector as a source of livelihood (Lumbaa, Mukramin, and Damayanti 2023, 3)

*Rambu Solo Ceremony* " is one of the various famous distinctive traditions of Tana Toraja, is a series of rites in death or funeral ceremonies. This ceremony contains many values and meanings, considered as a final form of respect for the individual who has passed away. *Rambu Solo'* traditional ceremony is an important part of the life and culture of the Tana Toraja people in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. This ceremony is performed as a form of respect and introduction of the spirit of the deceased person to the spirit realm or *Puya*. This ceremony is only performed at the time of sun to the west or sunset and the body is buried in a high place such as a cliff, which is believed by the community as a symbol of closeness to the creator or the nature of *Puya*.

According to the original Torajan belief, *Aluk to Dolo* or *Alukta*, the deceased person is believed to still be alive in the world. If the *Rambu Solo'* ceremony is not performed, the body will only be considered a sick person and relatives of the body must provide food, and talk with the body. The *Rambu Solo'* ceremony is also unique because it has a series of other ceremonies that must be carried out in order to be said to be perfect. The uniqueness of this ceremony became a source of inspiration in various fields, including in the creation of clothing consisting of *one Ready to Wear clothing*, *one Ready to Wear Deluxe clothing*, and *one Semi Couture clothing* (Ayu et al. 2023, 86)

According to universal principles, slavery or servitude status refers to the condition of individuals or groups who are colonized and deprived of freedom due to being controlled by those who have control over them, namely their masters. This concept developed from the history of colonialism, where various means were used to control certain groups, including the oppression of groups that wanted to be controlled. In the context of Torajan society, a similar concept is known as *Tana' (Caste)*, which is divided into four levels, namely Tana' Bulaan (high noble caste), Tana' Bassi (middle noble caste), Tana' *Karurung* (free people's caste), and Tana' kua-kua (slave caste) (Rongrean and Pius Pandor 2023, 133)

This caste division in Torajan culture is intended as a manifestation of the division of duties and responsibilities in society. For example, Tana' kua-kua has the role and responsibility of a devotee or servant. However, in the reality of Torajan life, the status of caste as *kua-kua* (servant) is not only seen as a caste of service, but also as an object that has no freedom, is positioned as a low class, and can even be insulted. This phenomenon is reflected in the daily life of the Torajan people and is more pronounced in the implementation of rituals such as *Rambu Solo'* (Rongrean and Pius Pandor 2023, 133) In Torajan society there is still social stratification that affects the implementation of *the traditional Rambu Solo' ceremony*. Factors such as wealth, power, education, and heredity influenced their view of social hierarchy, though not in the context of slavery. Although the majority of Torajan people have embraced Protestant Christianity, *the traditional Rambu Solo'* ceremony is still carried out as part of their cultural identity. This ceremony is considered as a final tribute to the deceased as well as a means of communication between the human and spiritual worlds (Limbong, Akil, and Guntur 2023, 142).

Cultural aspects also play an important role in their view of changes in tradition. Although the *traditional Rambu Solo'* ceremony is still revered as a sacred funeral, there is a shift in values, such as the emphasis on financial preparation being a key factor in carrying out this ceremony, while the lack of coercion on animal sacrifices, such as buffalo. Torajan society tends to have concrete thoughts that prioritize concrete actions that are in accordance with prevailing social norms. Economic power and material possessions are indicators of a person's worth in society, which also influences their view of social stratification

Paul, through his teachings, emphasizes the significance of freedom from slavery and slavery. In Christian theology, Paul says that those who rely on the law and rituals such as circumcision to gain freedom will ultimately not find the value of Christ in their lives. For him, living "according to the Law" rendered Christ and His redemption meaningless. On the other hand, for those who live "in Christ Jesus," distinctions such as circumcision or uncircumcision are irrelevant, all that matters is active faith through love. Paul also taught that bondage to sin brings deliverance and life to those who were previously in bondage. According to him, when a person is a slave to sin, he is free from the truth. However, after being free from sin and becoming a servant of God, one obtains results that lead to holiness and ultimately, eternal life (Ndruru 2023, 1)

Furthermore, Paul highlights sin as a controlling force rather than an act. He taught that anyone who is outside of Christ, under the influence of sin and bound by it, will continue to sin. However, Christ Himself, who has overcome sin, gives deliverance from the power of sin and from all that is under it. Paul's teaching on deliverance has had a profound impact on Christian history. He emphatically proclaims freedom from slavery, emphasizing that Christ has set us free so that we are no longer bound by the yoke of slavery (Ndruru 2023, 1)

Paul's view of freedom from slavery in the context of Christian theology can be relevant when applied to the practice of slavery in the *Rambu Solo'* Traditional Ceremony in Torajan culture. Paul's concept of deliverance from sin and the bondage status of sin is an important

foundation in looking at this context. The practice of slavery that exists in the Tana' caste division in Torajan society, such as Tana' kua-kua (servant caste), raises the question of how Paul's teaching on liberation from slavery correlates with the social hierarchy that exists in the *Rambu Solo'* Traditional Ceremony. Although the caste division was originally intended as a division of duties, the prevailing view in Torajan society shows that the status of the servant caste is not only as a servant, but as a low and sometimes despised class.

In Paul's perspective, deliverance from the slavery status of sin brings holiness and eternal life. It can be seen that the practice of slavery, while not directly related to sin in Paul's context, still underscores the view of human freedom and dignity. The question that arises is the extent to which the practice of slavery in the social structure of Torajan society violates or is in line with the principles of liberation emphasized by Paul's teaching. The values emphasized by Paul, such as the importance of spiritual freedom and the understanding that Christ provides deliverance, can be the basis for an evaluation of the practice of slavery in Torajan culture. In this regard, there is room to explore how the practices and social hierarchies present in the *Rambu Solo'* ceremony can be seen in the light of Paul's teaching on human liberation and dignity.

In any case, it is important to remember that Paul's views are interpreted in a Christian theological context, whereas the practice of slavery in a Torajan cultural context may have broader complexities and dynamics that need to be carefully considered in his analysis. This study aims to explore and understand how Paul's views on freedom from slavery, as revealed in Christian theological teachings, can interact or be relevant in the context of slavery practices that exist in the *Rambu Solo' Traditional Ceremony* in Torajan culture.

## Research Methods

In this study, qualitative methods are used to understand and explain phenomena or events from a deep and contextual point of view. Qualitative methods place more emphasis on a deep understanding of the meaning, context, and subjective interpretation of the data collected (Moleong 2010, 10)

First, data collection is carried out through literature review. It involves searching and analyzing various literature sources, such as books, articles, journals, historical documents, field notes, and other written sources relevant to the research topic. The literature review allows researchers to gain a solid understanding of Paul's views on slavery in the context of Christian theology as well as the practice of the *Rambu Solo' Traditional Ceremony* in Toraja. After the data is collected from the literature review, qualitative analysis is carried out. This analysis involves an interpretive process and an in-depth investigation of the content of the sources that have been collected (Sugiyono 2014, 79) Analysis techniques ranging from grouping main themes, analyzing text content, comparing concepts or thoughts from various sources, to identifying patterns and relationships between relevant information (Sugiyono 2018, 482)

## Results and Discussion

### A. Paul's Thoughts on Slavery

The Epistle to Philemon in the Bible reflects Paul's view of slavery. There, Paul asked Philemon not to treat Onesimus as a slave anymore, but as a brother in faith. However, whether this signifies Paul's attempt to abolish or resist all forms of slavery in Roman culture remains a complex question. Nevertheless, the teachings brought by Jesus and his Apostles offer true deliverance from sin and encourage believers to play an active role in overcoming social problems, including slavery (Maikel 2023, 203)

Paul, in his thinking, did not directly criticize or oppose the practice of slavery that existed in his day. Nevertheless, Paul shows a social transformation in the relationship between servant and master, especially in the context of Christian communion. In encouraging Onesimus to return to Philemon, Paul pointed out that the relationship between servant and master in Christian fellowship was different from that of society. Paul enters the most fundamental part of the practice of slavery, which is what the relationship between master and servant should be for those who already live in Christ. Paul encouraged the Colossians to build the servant-master relationship in a new perspective because both were already in fellowship with Christ (Siagian and Malik 2023, 43).

## **B. The main aspects of *Rambu Solo*'' traditional ceremonies related to cultural values, norms.**

*Rambu Solo*'' ceremony is a cultural ritual that plays a central role in the people of Tana Toraja, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. This ritual is an important part of Torajan funeral ceremonies, considered a spiritual journey for the deceased spirits back to the ancestral world. The process of moving the body from the funeral home to the burial place on the rock cliff is accompanied by care, traditional songs, and dances. The ritual also involves symbolic elements, including "*tau-tau*" or wooden statues symbolizing ancestral spirits. People wear beautiful traditional clothes and wear traditional jewelry in this ceremony. Music, including traditional musical instruments, also accompanies this celebration (Kurniawan, Syamsul Alam 2020, 6)

Although it is a funeral ceremony, *Rambu Solo*'' is not only a commemoration of death, but also a celebration of life and life after. For Torajan people, this ritual is a moment to honor the deceased as well as knit family and fraternal relationships. Some key elements of *Rambu Solo*'' ceremony are related to cultural values (Kurniawan, Syamsul Alam 2020, 6) norms, and ethics are:

### **1. Veneration of Ancestors**

*Rambu Solo*'' is considered a way to honor ancestors and deceased individuals. The Torajan belief that through this ceremony, the spirits of people who have passed away can return peacefully to the ancestral realm.

### **2. Harmony and Solidarity**

This event is not only an opportunity for people to gather, but also a moment where solidarity and harmony between them are strengthened. Collaboration in carrying out a series of events is an important part of this ceremony.

### **3. Appreciation for Life**

Although it is a celebration of death, *Rambu Solo*'' is also a symbol of celebration of life. The belief that death is not the end, but rather the beginning of a new life in the spiritual realm, is reflected in this ceremony.

### **4. Cultural Heritage Preservation**

The *Rambu Solo*'' ceremony is an important place in preserving and passing on Torajan culture to the next generation. This is not only an event, but also a way to teach the values, norms, and ethics upheld in Torajan society to the younger generation.

## **C. How slavery is reflected in *Rambu Solo*'' traditional ceremonies**

Social stratification still influences *Rambu Solo*'' ceremonies where family status and wealth are reflected in the number of buffaloes sacrificed. Although there is no coercion, the number of these buffalo is often a clue to social status and wealth. This indicates that, although slavery in the literal sense no longer exists, differences in social

status and wealth are still very influential in the social and cultural life of the Torajan people, especially in the implementation of the traditional *Rambu Solo' ceremony* (Limbong, Akil, and Guntur 2023, 143). The difference between the concept of slavery in Torajan culture and its meaning in a general sense must be understood. In Torajan society, there are four distinct social strata namely *Tana' Bulaan (nobility)*, *Tana' Bassi (middle nobility)*, *Tana' Karurung (common people)*, and *Tana' Kuakua (slave or underprivileged class)*.

In the *Rambu Solo'' ceremony*, this social structure has a great influence. For example, the ceremony for *Tana' Kuakua* is not equivalent to that given to *Tana' Bulaan*, even though one has the same economic ability. This confirms that in Torajan culture, a person's social status is respected and cared for. However, this social stratum does not describe slavery as it is generally interpreted. The *Tana' Kuakua* class, although referred to as the slave class, cannot be equated with the conventional meaning of slave. They still have rights and responsibilities as members of society, although they have a lower social position. Thus, slavery in the Torajan cultural context is more related to social structure than to the actual interpretation of slavery (Lumbaa, Mukramin, and Damayanti 2023, 10).

#### **D. Paul's thoughts on slavery in the perspective of *Rambu Solo'' traditional ceremonies in Toraja***

In this study, the focus will be given to Paul's perspective on slavery and liberation from slavery in the context of Christian theology, as well as how relevant it is to the practice of slavery contained in the *Rambu Solo' Traditional Ceremony* in Torajan culture. Philemon's letter in the Bible reflects Paul's perspective on slavery, in which he invites Philemon to no longer view Onesimus as a slave, but as a brother in faith. Although Paul does not explicitly condemn or reject the practice of slavery at the time, he does point to a social change in the relationship between servant and master, especially in the context of the Christian community (Maikel 2023, 203)

In Paul's perspective, deliverance from the bondage of sin brings the consequences of holiness and everlasting life. The values Paul emphasized, such as the importance of spiritual freedom and the understanding that Christ provides deliverance, can be the basis for evaluating the practice of slavery in Torajan culture. For Paul, his teaching emphasized the importance of freedom from slavery and bondage. For people who live "in Christ Jesus," differences such as the presence or absence of rituals such as circumcision are not what matters, but rather an active faith through love.

Paul also taught that bondage to sin brings deliverance and life to those who were previously in bondage. For him, when a person becomes a slave to sin, he is outside the truth, but after being free from sin and becoming a servant of God, one obtains results that lead to holiness and ultimately, eternal life. Paul's views on liberty and slavery are not limited to the physical context, but also involve a spiritual dimension. In this context, slavery is associated with servitude to sin, and freedom is defined as deliverance from that sin (Siagian and Malik 2023, 43)

Paul also highlights that in Christ, there is no difference between the status of servant and free. All individuals are considered equal before God and have equal value in His eyes. In the context of Torajan culture, this concept can provide a new perspective regarding the practice of slavery, especially within the framework of the traditional *Rambu Solo'' ceremony* (Kurniawan, Syamsul Alam 2020, 6) Although slavery in this context refers more to the division of duties and responsibilities, the reality is that it often places the slave class in a low position and without adequate freedom. Taking Paul's teachings

into account, Torajan society may reflect back on this practice and may find ways to improve relations between servants and masters, so as to better reflect the values of equality and independence taught by Paul. However, this research also shows that the application of Paul's thought requires a deep dialogue and interaction between Christian theology and Torajan culture, and must consider the historical and social contexts of these two traditions (Limbong, Akil, and Guntur 2023, 143).

The practice of slavery in *the Rambu Solo'* Traditional Ceremony in Toraja does not directly describe conventional forms of slavery, but rather on work patterns and responsibilities that are shared. However, this often placed the slave class in a low position and without sufficient freedom. Social stratification in Toraja society affects the implementation of *the Rambu Solo'* Traditional Ceremony. Factors such as wealth, power, education, and lineage influenced their view of social hierarchy, though not in the context of conventional slavery.

Paul's thoughts on slavery and liberty, which highlight the importance of spiritual freedom and equality before God, may provide a new outlook on this practice. By understanding Paul's teachings, Torajan society may reflect back on this practice and find ways to improve the relationship between servants and masters, so as to better reflect the values of independence and equality emphasized by Paul. However, the study also shows that implementation and understanding of Paul's teachings requires a deep dialogue between Christian theology and Torajan culture, as well as considering the historical and social contexts of these two traditions (Lumbaa, Mukramin, and Damayanti 2023, 10)

## E. Discussion

In the Epistle of Philemon in the Bible, Paul draws a view that invites Philemon to treat Onesimus not as a slave, but as a brother in faith. Although Paul does not directly condemn the practice of slavery in his day, he does point out a change in the social relationship between servant and master, especially in the context of the Christian community. For Paul, deliverance from the bondage of sin brought holiness and everlasting life (Siagian and Malik 2023, 43) The values emphasized by Paul, such as spiritual freedom and liberation given by Christ, can be used as a basis for evaluating the practice of slavery in Torajan culture. For Paul, his messages highlighted the importance of freedom from slavery and slavery. For those who live "in Christ Jesus," aspects of difference such as the practice of circumcision are not primary, but faith expressed through love.

Paul also taught that bondage to sin brings deliverance and life to those who were previously bound. When a person becomes a slave to sin, he is separated from the truth, but after being freed from sin and becoming a servant of God, he gains holiness that leads to everlasting life (Lumbaa, Mukramin, and Damayanti 2023, 10) Paul's view of equality in Christ, where there is no distinction between the status of servant and freeman, may provide a new perspective on the practice of slavery in the *Rambu Solo'* Traditional Ceremony in Toraja. Although slavery in this culture is more focused on the division of duties and responsibilities, the slave class is often marginalized and their freedom is limited (Maikel 2023, 203)

Taking Paul's teachings into account, Torajan society can reflect back on this practice and try to improve the relationship between servants and masters, to better reflect the values of equality and independence taught by Paul. However, this study emphasizes that understanding and applying Paul's teachings requires a deep dialogue between Christian theology and Torajan culture, and must consider the historical and social contexts of these two traditions.

## Conclusion

Paul's views on deliverance from slavery and equality in Christ can inspire reflection on the practice of slavery in the *Rambu Solo*' Traditional Ceremony in Toraja. While not directly condemning slavery, Paul's teaching emphasizes the importance of spiritual freedom and equality before God. This calls on Torajan society to reflect on their practices, especially in improving relations between servants and masters, to better reflect the values of independence taught by Paul. It is also important to note that the application of Paul's teachings requires a dialogue between Christian theology and Torajan culture and considers the historical and social context of these two traditions.

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