



Theological interpretation of the *Ma'parappo* tradition in Christian marriage in the Tanalotong tribe, West Sulawesi

**Authors:**

Deflit D. Lilo¹ 
Yusriani Sapitri¹ 

Affiliations:

¹Department of Theology,
Faculty of Christian Theology
and Sociology, Institut Agama
Kristen Negeri Toraja, Tana
Toraja, Indonesia

Corresponding author:

Deflit Lilo,
deflilito@iakn-toraja.ac.id

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According to the doctrine in Christianity and the church in West Sulawesi, especially in Kalumpang and Bonehau areas, men and women who are legally married have the right to live together in a home. However, in the context of the tradition of the Tanalotong tribal community in West Sulawesi, there was still a traditional procession that must be followed by married couples. The couple would be separated for a certain period of time after the wedding party is over. This traditional procession is called *Ma'parappo*. The researcher used a qualitative approach to present a theological interpretation of the implementation of the *Ma'parappo* tradition in Christian marriage. Therefore, this type of research is theological and ethnographic. Based on this interpretation, the researcher concluded that theologically, the *Ma'parappo* tradition is a traditional procession that is loaded with values and norms that govern the integrity of a marriage. This tradition is not a cultural ritual that goes against the teachings of the Bible. Therefore, Christians and churches in Kalumpang and Bonehau should not be antipathetic to the implementation of *Ma'parappo* in marriage.

Contribution: This study also aims to reveal the positive values contained in the marriage tradition of the Tanalotong tribe which can benefit religion and churches in West Sulawesi, especially in Bonehau and Kalumpang sub-districts. Therefore, the findings of this article can contribute to the development of the encounter between Christianity and the culture of the Tanalotong tribe.

Keywords: Christian marriage; indigenous people; *Ma'parappo*; Tanalotong; theological interpretation.

Introduction

Marriage is one of the important moments in a person's life, the moment when one person decides to unite and build a life with another in a bond of love and affection. Marriage is meant here a union, of course, between a man and a woman (Lawler 1993). In the context of Christianity, marriage is a mandate from God to be carried out properly and responsibly (Paath, Zega & Pasaribu 2020:182). In this case, men and women were created equal to live together in a new family (Gn 2:18, 24; Mt 19:4-5).

Christian marriages that carried out according to the church's rules of every denomination are guided by the essence of the Bible's teachings about marriage itself both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. One of the important stages in church's rules is pre-marital counselling (Manalu 2020:28). Before a pair of men and women enter the wedding procession, both need to be guided by the Pastor of the local Church¹ about the basics of Christian marriage. The important point emphasised in premarital counselling is how sacred marriage is and therefore no one should separate what God has joined together until death (Mt 19:6) (Togatorop et al. 2019:38). Referring to the context of the general order of churches in West Sulawesi, including in Kalumpang and Bonehau, a man and a woman who have been legally married in the process of blessing marriage at the church can legally live together in a home. They live as a new family and all families and church members are obliged to support them.

However, there are interesting things that happened related to the wedding procession in the *Tanalotong* indigenous community in the Bonehau and Kalumpang sub-districts, Mamuju

¹The church that the authors refer here is several church denominations in Bonehau and Kalumpang. For example, Christian Church of West Sulawesi (GKSB), The Toraja Mamasa Church and several Pentecostal-Charismatic denominations.

Regency, West Sulawesi. The interesting thing is the implementation of the *Ma'parappo* traditional procession in Christian marriages. This procession is one of the stages of hereditary customs and traditions that must be carried out by the bride and groom who have married.

After the wedding blessing at the church and the wedding reception, the husband is not allowed to live with his wife. Traditionally, the family of the man will bring his son back to their home on the night after the whole series of weddings has been carried out. The newly married couple is not allowed to live together until a certain time limit. This traditional tradition is called *Ma'parappo*.

This traditional tradition itself is often a debate for people in Bonehau and Kalumpang or for men and their families who come from other tribes or regions, who marry women from the Bonehau-Kalumpang area. Sadly, this tradition has since been abandoned because it is considered troublesome, incompatible with modern culture or even against the teachings of the Bible. From the point of view of modern culture, this tradition is considered an outdated ritual, a hassle for the whole family, a waste of time and will only cost more for the family. Besides that, from the perspective of Bible teachings, this culture is rejected because it is contrary to God's command to unite those who are married. This is certainly interesting to review further.

Previous research about the system and model of marriage in the Tanalotong tribe has not been widely published. Until 2022, the authors only found one study written by Mubarak (2019) about the meaning of the *Sayo Sitendean* dance performance during the *Pangakkasan* procession in Kalumpang. However, this article does not discuss the implementation of wedding traditions based on theological interpretation but from the side of the performing arts. Another study published in a book entitled 'Mengenal Budaya Suku Tanalotong' was written by Sipayo (2020). In the book, Sipayo introduces the cosmology of the culture and society of the Tanalotong tribe. The book also became one of the research data sources for this article.

Other research that examines theologically the relationship between Christian marriage and the implementation of customs, for example, was written by Daniel Trisio. Trisio (2020:1–20) examines from a biblical perspective the pros and cons of carrying out the *Pelulukng* procession (traditional marriage legalisation ceremony) in marriages by the Christian community of Dayak Tunjung tribe in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. According to him, the implementation of the traditional *Pelulukng* ritual in marriage can continue to be preserved by the church and Christians if the elements of idol worship in the form of chanting are removed, while the tools used in the ritual must be interpreted symbolically as a sign of the marriage bond. There is also an interesting study by Sibiziwe Shumba and Christina Landman which tries to bridge the efforts of the National Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe to inculturate the marriage rituals of the Shona and Ndebele tribes in the Midlands and Matabeleland regions, South Africa (Shumba & Landman 2019:1–15). After

conducting an analysis using missiological research methods, they argue that the inculturation effort is constrained due to concerns about syncretism practices, church doctrine and several other problems. They also dissect what traditions the church can and cannot inculturate in their study.

The two studies described above are fundamentally of the same theme as our current research, namely finding a meeting point between Bible teachings and culture. The difference is that the locus and focus of this research are one of the traditional wedding processions in the *Tanalotong* indigenous people. Besides that, when compared to the previous researches, this research offers an approach and theological interpretation of traditions and customs held in Christianity.

Thus, it can be said that there is no research that examines the topic of the implementation of the *Ma'parappo* traditional procession in Christian marriages in the *Tanalotong* indigenous community in Bonehau and Kalumpang districts, West Sulawesi. Although this article will also examine the issue of applying traditional processions in marriage, this research is different because the object and context are different. Of course, this research is of value not only for the preservation of culture in the Tanalotong tribe in particular and Indonesia in general but also for the application of religious values in Christianity without clashing and confounding both.

Therefore, this study tries to carefully examine matters relating to urgent questions such as: Is the *Ma'parappo* procession really against God's word and therefore should be abandoned by Christians? Or, is there a true local wisdom value that is to be expressed through the procession, which is not at all contrary to Christian values and therefore should be preserved, especially among Christian families in the Bonehau and Kalumpang areas? How should the churches in Kalumpang and Bonehau respond to traditional traditions like this?

Research methods and design

This research discusses the issue of implementation of cultural traditions, especially rituals in Christian marriages in relation to the marriage procedures of the *Tanalotong* tribe in Bonehau District and Kalumpang District, West Sulawesi, Indonesia. This research used a qualitative approach. The type of research used is ethnographic and theological studies to obtain research data. The authors used ethnographic studies to examine the meaning and values contained in the implementation of the *Ma'parappo* procession at the wedding of the Tanalotong tribe. Meanwhile, theological studies are used to interpret the text of Genesis 2:24 and Mark 10:6–8.

The data collection process was carried out in several stages. The first stage was collecting data about the Tanalotong tribe from various literature such as books, articles and other relevant sources. The second stage was conducting observations and interviews with Tobarar' (the highest traditional leader), other traditional leaders and religious

leaders in Bonehau and Kalumpang. Therefore, the target of this research is the indigenous population in Bonehau and Kalumpang who are considered capable of providing information related to this research. The third stage was making an analysis related to the theological interpretation of the implementation of the *Ma'parappo* procession in Christian marriages in the Tanalotong tribe. The process of analysing these data uses the steps offered by Miles and Huberman, namely data collection and condensation, reduction and drawing conclusions (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña 2014).

Results and discussion

History and geographical-sociological overview of the *Tanalotong* indigenous people

According to archaeological data, the first inhabitants who decided to live in the Kalumpang area came from the Austronesian people who entered through the Philippines route (Mahmud et al. 2019). The decision to occupy the area is based on the need for the natural potential that can support survival (Mahmud et al. 2019:16). This is not surprising because the valley plain along the Kaama River is an area surrounded by mountains and very fertile soil. However, after the flash flood, the ancestors of the Kalumpang people spread to higher areas to open new residential areas (Sipayo 2020:28).

Bonehau and Kalumpang are two sub-districts in Mamuju Regency which are adjacent to and bordered by Mamasa Regency, West Sulawesi and Seko District, South Sulawesi. Geographically, the Kalumpang and Bonehau areas are 121 km from the capital of West Sulawesi Province and are located in a valley area flanked by towering mountains. Based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics of Mamuju Regency, the majority of the population of these two regions are Christians with a total population of 9712 people each for Bonehau District in the 2019 survey (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Mamuju 2020:31) and 12175 people for Kalumpang District according to the 2018 survey (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Mamuju 2019:25).

The ethnicity of the people who live in the Kalumpang and Bonehau areas is quite varied. In these two areas, you can find the Mamasa, Toraja, Mandar, Bugis and Makassar tribes. However, the indigenous tribes in Kalumpang and Bonehau are still a matter of debate. An earlier view states that the indigenous people in Kalumpang and surrounding areas are referred to as the Kalumpang tribe and may be part of the Sa'dan Toraja tribe (Hidayah 2015:121). On the other hand, according to Silas Salamangi as quoted by Muh. Rezha Firmansyah et al., the correct name of the original tribe is the Makki Tribe, which then spread and mixed with other tribes such as Toraja, Mamasa and Mandar (Firmansyah, Sumiani & Padalia 2020:3)

However, the two views mentioned also get opposition from one of the Kalumpang culturists named Robert Ely Sipayo.² When

²Ely Sipayo was appointed by acclamation of the indigenous people as *Tobara' Pandan of the Tanalotong Tribe* in order to organise the entire existing system of customs.

interviewed on 10 June 2022, Mr Robert Ely Sipayo stated that although the mention of the name of the tribe is still unclear so far, the indigenous tribes in Kalumpang and Bonehau are not part of the Toraja tribe. Apart from language and culture, archaeological data are a very basic reason (R. Ely Sipayo [Interview with *Tobara'*, Kalumpang] pers. comm., 10 June 2022).

In addition, Sipayo also argues that the use of the names Kalumpang and Makki as tribal names also needs to be questioned. Using the word Kalumpang as a tribal name is not appropriate because the word has become the name of one particular village among the many villages that exist. Likewise, the doubt about the use of the word Makki as a tribal name is based on the consideration that the word comes from a river name, namely Sungai Makki. Then it developed into the mention of the Makki tribe by the Toraja people who were in Baruppu and its surroundings. Apart from these reasons, these two names cannot be used to accommodate all other *Katobarasan* clans outside Kalumpang such as Bonehau, Karataun, Karama, Sandana, Leling, Tamalekkong, Tamemongga, Pedasi', Kalonding, Kallan and Taloang (Sipayo 2020:21). *Katobarasan* is a system of customary and cultural institutions that operate in these areas.

Responding to this dynamic, Sipayo proposed the name *Tanalotong* as another alternative that is more appropriate. The proposal is based on historical considerations that the name *Tanalotong* is a greeting and designation from the people of Seko in South Sulawesi to the people in the Karama River valley in West Sulawesi. These greetings and designations were born from a very long and intimate process of interaction between the two communities. This interaction is two-way and mutually beneficial to one another in many aspects of life, including culture (R. Ely Sipayo [Interview with *Tobara'*, Kalumpang] pers. comm., 10 June 2022). Based on this shared experience, the mention of *Tanalotong* is pinned to the people in Kalumpang and its surroundings.

In its development, the name *Tanalotong* received opposition from several circles of society, but its use has received confirmation from the Mamuju Regency government. The inauguration was held on 31 October 2008 through a traditional ceremony at the Kalumpang village football field. This activity was officially witnessed by local government officials of Mamuju Regency, religious leaders, traditional leaders and community representatives from each clan-region (Sipayo 2020).

Darius (2020:46) argues that the name *Tanalotong* itself can be interpreted as 'very fertile land'. However, Sipayo argues that the name of the tribe is more accurately interpreted as "a prosperous life, a hospitable people, an orderly and safe life under the obeyed order of *ada' tuona...*" (Sipayo 2020:19). Besides, the writing of the name of the tribe also needs to be straightened out because it is often written separately into two words (*Tana Lotong*), while the correct one is 'Tanalotong'.

Listening to Sipayo's opinion above, the *Tanalotong* tribe does not only cover the territories of indigenous peoples in Bonehau and Kalumpang, but it also covers a much wider

area, namely Karataun, Karama, Sandana-Leling and even several villages in Sampaga, Mamuju and Tabuhanan in Mamasa Regency. Based on these considerations, the selection and determination of *Tanalotong* as a tribal name is a much more appropriate choice.

The *Tanalotong* tribe also has a social and cultural pattern that is different from other tribes around it. This social and cultural pattern is not only related to the way of life and farming, but also to its distinctive customs. These customs are the basis for the survival of society in terms of economic, political and social. The social construction of the *Tanalotong* indigenous people recognises the existence of a dynastic structure called *Katobarasan*. The *Katobarasan* system was originally kinship. But with the development of time and people's thinking, it changed to sociopolitics [feudalism] (Sipayo 2020:30–31). The social structure of the community is divided into several parts, namely the slave class [*kaunan*], the common people or those who are not blue-blooded [*taukamban*], people who have mixed blood or a little royal blood [*taupia*], the aristocratic class who are not in power [*tomakaka*] and the nobility class who is in power or who was once powerful and rich [*tomakaka sitoang tondon*] (Sipayo 2020:33–34). Even though the social layering system exists and applies, this system is not a caste level (Sipayo 2020:34–35). Because in practice, the difference in the social level itself is not seen in everyday life except during parties and other traditional activities.

Furthermore, the *Katobarasan* system recognises the existence of a traditional leader called *Tobara'*. Currently, *Tobara'* leadership includes two systems. Firstly, each village has a *Tobara'* who leads its territory autonomously. This means that *Tobara'* from a particular village cannot interfere with or influence customary processes and decisions that apply in the *Tobara'* leadership area in other villages. In this case, each *Tobara'* is responsible for leading their indigenous peoples to create peace and tranquillity (Darius 2020:47).

Secondly, the leadership of *Tobara'* is also selected and determined specifically as part of the *Tanalotong* Traditional Institution. The structure of the *katobarasan* in this institution is divided into:

- *Tobara' Pondan* as the highest leader.
- *Tobara' Timba* is the executive and judicial representative and executor.
- *Topokallu* which is usually held by the wife of *Tobara' Pondan*.
- *Tobara' Pararuk* as the executor of rituals related to disaster and disease prevention.
- *Toma'dewata* who is in charge of carrying out spiritual ceremonies.
- *Tomenani* who is in charge of determining the composition of officials.
- *Pa'baranian* as the leader of the army, and
- *Pande* who given the task of making equipment for farming and war (Sipayo 2020:27).

Tobara' arrangement within this structure does not have power over a particular territory. However, they are responsible for customary institutions and maintaining the preservation of customs in the *Tanalotong* tribe in general, broadly and thoroughly.

Besides the custom government system, the *Tanalotong* tribe is familiar with various rules and laws that control the lives of its citizens also. This custom order includes both individual and family law. These rules concern the status and relationship of children with their parents, marriage laws, husband–wife relations, adultery, divorce, property, land ownership and debts. Even though these laws are not written down, in essence, they are the most fundamental rules for the *Tanalotong* people.

The rules above are arranged in a magical-religious order of life, which is called the Law of *Seda*.³ The function of *Seda* Law is to act as an intermediary in resolving cases, problems and conflicts among the *Tanalotong* community (Darius 2020:50–51). The Law of *Seda* is applied to parties in conflict or violation of norms in the form of customary sanctions. Interestingly, according to Sipayo, the custom sanctions given through the implementation of *Seda* always bring satisfaction and leave no grudges on the parties being punished (R. Ely Sipayo [Interview with *Tobara'*, Kalumpang] pers. comm., 10 June 2022). That means, with the application of the law, peace and tranquillity will be created in society. All parties accepted the sanction and were satisfied with the customary decision.

Based on the explanation above, the culture of the *Tanalotong* tribe certainly has its characteristics. This cultural image governs the way of life of indigenous peoples both personally and as a group within and outside the *Tanalotong* community. In addition, this includes arranging matters relating to marriage.

Marriage in *Tanalotong* culture

Although there are many cultural similarities with other cultures such as Toraja, Mamasa and Mandar, the *Tanalotong* tribe still has its own cultural characteristics. In terms of marriage, the *Tanalotong* tribal society positions it as a part of life that is very sacred and special. Therefore, all forms of violations in marriage are strongly opposed by *adat*, for example, domestic violence, divorce, polyandry and polygamy (Sipayo 2020:135). The sacredness of this marriage is manifested through various stages that must be passed and carried out by the couple who will get married. Starting from the stages of *Ma'bisik*, Engagement, Proposal, *Sumomba'* or *Pangakkasan* and Marriage, until *Ma'parappo*.

The first stage of the whole series of marriages is *Ma'bisik*. *Ma'bisik* is a process in which the male family sends parents to ask if the female family is willing to accept the fiancé of their son. The answer from the woman's family will not be

³*Seda* can be interpreted literally as a violation. Therefore, *Seda* Law can be interpreted as a law against violations committed.

given right away but will be given after 3 days and 3 nights (H. Tolemo [Interview with *Tobara'*, Bonehau] pers. comm., 11 July 2022). Approval given after this period will result in the engagement. However, in this engagement system, people in Bonehau and Kalumpang do not recognise the existence of matchmaking by parents. Everyone has the right to choose their life partner (R. Ely Sipayo [Interview with *Tobara'*, Kalumpang] pers. comm., 10 June 2022). The uniqueness of the implementation of engagement in this ethnic group is also seen in the method used during planting or harvesting rice in the fields. A man will send a female friend of the woman who will be proposed to hang the sarong to his prospective fiancé who is working in the fields, witnessed by other people and followed by the delivery of the name of the man who gave the sarong (Sipayo 2020:42).

There are two kinds of marriage proposals. Firstly, the proposal is made for prospective spouses who live in the same village. In the proposal, the applicant's family of two will bring a sarong or woven cloth (*sekomandi* or *rundunlolo*) to the house of the woman who will be proposed to without being noticed by others in the village. After the cloth is submitted, the applicant will wait 3 days to get confirmation. If the cloth is not returned then the proposal is accepted and vice versa.

Secondly, the proposal by men from different villages was carried out by sending several envoys who were going to *Ma'ole*. *Ma'ole* is a kind of oral rhyme that is sung in the form of a song in a reciprocal manner by two pre-determined people (Sipayo 2020:43). When the man gets a reply in the form of acceptance and approval in *Ma'ole*, then the applicant can submit the dowry that was brought in the proposal.

The completed marriage proposal indicates that the bond between the two potential partners has reached 50%. If at a later date, before entering the marriage, one of the candidates cancels the proposal, a customary sanction (*dipaseda*)⁴ will be given to him. If not, then the two families will meet to discuss and determine the right time to carry out a series of wedding processions (H. Tolemo [Interview with *Tobara'*, Bonehau] pers. comm., 11 July 2022).

The next stage is *Sumomba'* or *Pangakkasan*. After the marriage proposal is accepted, the man's family brings and presents various dowries for the prospective wife before entering into a church marriage. The types of dowry that are brought in the application are as follows: one bunch of rice [*sa'kutu pare*], one bunch of corn [*salokon bata'*], two bamboo palm wines [*tuak dua terrekan*], one bunch of quality firewood [*saba'ba' kayu*] and a set of betel nut [*sirih pinang*] placed on a tray. These five items are the main dowry that must be given to the woman who will be taken as wife.

4. *Seda* is a customary law system for resolving conflicts and creating peace.

Based on data collected from an informant, these dowries have important symbolic meanings in the *Tanalotong* indigenous people (R. Ely Sipayo [Interview with *Tobara'*, Kalumpang] pers. comm., 10 June 2022). Two bamboo palm wines [*tuak dua terrekan*] symbolise the glue of everyday relationships in society. One bunch of rice [*sa'kutu pare*] and one bunch of corn [*salokon bata'*] symbolise blessings and life. One bunch of quality firewood [*saba'ba' kayu*] is a symbol of business in the family. While a set of betel nuts placed on the tray is the highest dowry which symbolises peace and the unification of the differences that exist between the two prospective partners and their respective families. However, in the progress of the times, the type and amount of dowry brought has undergone adjustments and acculturation with other tribes and modern culture. This can be seen in the change in the name of the procession from *Sumomba'* to *Pangakkasan* or *Mangakka'*. Likewise, the types of dowries are increasingly more modern and varied.

During the execution of *Sumomba'* or *Pangakkasan*, the male family group will deliver the entire dowry by walking to the woman's house which is the venue for the party. Herman Tolemo added that in this procession, there were two different treatments for the prospective groom. A prospective husband who lives in the same village with the prospective wife or comes from surrounding villages is not allowed to join the procession. On the other hand, if the man is from outside, a distant tribe and village, he will be included in the procession. The purpose of his attendance in this procession is to receive a symbol of honour by wearing the *Sekomandi* sash.

Interestingly, when interviewed on 11 June 2022, Mrs Sugiarti argued that women always have an important role in every existing traditional procession. For example, women will be one of the representatives when attaching a sarong or necklace to the prospective fiancé, as well as giving and receiving dowry during the *ma'bisik* procession, engagement, proposal and the *sumomba'* or *pangakkasan* stage.

The wedding itself will be carried out when the *Sumomba'* or *Mangakka'* process is completed. Given that the majority of the *Tanalotong* indigenous people are Christians, marriages are carried out in the local church procedure. The wedding itself is then held at the bride's house. The next procession held was *Ma'parappo*. For the Toraja people, *Ma'parappo* is a traditional procession related to engagement but for the Kalumpang and Bonehau people, the term is intended for a traditional procession carried out after the wedding, namely the delivery of the groom to the bride's house.

Before being sent to the woman's house, the newly married couple will be separated for 3 days. The bridegroom must return to his house and wait until that time period. After the time limit for the separation is over, the man's family will take and escort the man (husband) to the woman's house (wife) to then enter and live with his wife. Sugiarti argues that in its development, in general, the determination of the number of days is only for 1 day. This is based on an agreement between the two families who have their respective activities so that they must immediately carry out

their activities as they should (Sugiarti [Interview with Church Figure, Bonehau] pers. comm., 11 June 2022). However, Sipayo denied this. According to him, the determination of the number of days above is in accordance with the prevailing custom and therefore every couple who will get married and their families are obliged to provide time to fulfil the implementation of the process (R. Ely Sipayo [Interview with *Tobara'*, Kalumpang] pers. comm., 10 June 2022). Tolemo further assessed by arguing that the decision to carry out this process was based on the economic capacity of the parents and their respective families (H. Tolemo [Interview with *Tobara'*, Bonehau] pers. comm., 11 July 2022).

There are also certain rituals carried out specifically for grooms who come from outside the *Tanalotong* tribe. In general, after a period of 1 or 2 months, the husband will bring his wife to his village to be introduced to the whole family. This stage is called *ma'pakendek banua* (H. Tolemo [Interview with *Tobara'*, Bonehau] pers. comm., 11 July 2022). The whole series of these rituals is a marriage tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation by and within the *Tanalotong* indigenous community.

The meaning and value of the *Ma'parappo* tradition

The meaning of the separation for 3 days is related to the understanding of the *Tanalotong* community regarding sacred numbers. This is also related to the concept of birth–adult–death (R. Ely Sipayo [Interview with *Tobara'*, Kalumpang] pers. comm., 10 June 2022). In the context of marriage, the number three is closely related to the understanding of the three elements of enforcement in the formation of a family, namely husband, wife and their family (Sipayo 2020:135). It is therefore not surprising that there is always a 3-day break in parts of the wedding ritual such as *ma'bisik*, proposal and *Ma'parappo*. In connection with the *Ma'parappo* tradition, the separation for a period of several days is intended so that both families can make good preparations before the groom is brought into his wife's house.

This tradition looks simple but in addition to the meaning that the authors have explained above, there are also a number of socio-cultural values expressed through it. Firstly, it contains the value of gratitude for God's inclusion in the entire process and series of marriage customs that went well (H. Tolemo [Interview with *Tobara'*, Bonehau] pers. comm., 11 July 2022). In practice, the church in Bonehau and Kalumpang, in this case, the Christian Church of West Sulawesi (GKSB), also held services when the husband and his family arrived at his wife's house. Marriage advice will also be conveyed by representatives from both families, representatives from traditional institutions and priests.

Secondly, this tradition teaches about appreciation and respect that is actually addressed to women. This is based on the understanding that women are the next generation who must receive special treatment and a special place in the social hierarchy of the *Tanalotong* tribe. The next generation

here means that it is women who have the privilege to bring humans into this world. Thirdly, ties and kinship between families are also expressed through traditional traditions including *Ma'parappo*. The family who brought their son into his wife's house expressed their sincerity to build kinship between them, including expressing seriousness in establishing new household ties.

Fourthly, the equal rights and standings of women are also stated in the culture of the *Tanalotong* tribe. The marriage tradition regulated in the customary law of *Tanalotong* places women in a special place. All traditional processions from the stages of *Ma'bisik*, engagement, proposal, *Sumomba'* or *Pangakkasan* and marriage to *Ma'parappo* emphasise the appreciation and respect that is actually addressed to women (H. Tolemo [Interview with *Tobara'*, Bonehau] pers. comm., 11 July 2022). The privileges of the *Tanalotong* women in their position and rights are rooted in their culture and traditions. *Tanalotong* women have a high position in the *Katobarasan* system in every village. This is related to the right of women to sit in the composition of customary institutions.⁵ In the first three sequences of customary leaders, women participate in holding positions as Customary Stakeholders called *Topokallu*. In this position, *Topokallu* has the power to be involved in policy-making and decisions within customary institutions.

In the context of marriage, women and their families also get special standing and rights. The whole implementation of the traditional procession in Christian marriages also always involves women appearing in front and taking an important role. In addition, the procession of bringing a husband into the house of a woman who has become his wife also confirms this. At this point, women are placed first in marriage. The status and dignity of the wife are the main considerations that the husband must take into account. Although both will leave their respective family homes and live together in different places, this traditional tradition places the women of the *Tanalotong* tribe in the main place in terms of marriage and equal in terms of position. Likewise, the protection of women in customary law is very large. This can be seen in one of the customary laws called the Absolute Law for women which is called the *Ra'paka Sulo* law (R. Ely Sipayo [Interview with *Tobara'*, Kalumpang] pers. comm., 10 June 2022). This law regulates the authority of a wife to expel her husband who acts unfairly and arbitrarily to his wife. It is clear here that culture can be a partner of the church to fight for the privilege of women who are identical with those who are weak and easily discredited.

Theological interpretation of the implementation of the *Ma'parappo* tradition

Marriage in the context of Christianity is seen as the oldest institution in the world (Phiri 2021:99). The oldest institution here means that marriage was established and ordained by

5. An explanation of the structure of this customary institution can be found in the point 'History and Geographical-Sociological Overview of the *Tanalotong* Indigenous People'.

God as the human foundation for gathering, agreeing and living together, long before humans created various other human institutions. 'The Oldest' here also means marriage as a sacred institution for humans because it was also created before humans fell into sin (Phiri). God is the architect of the institution. Its existence and establishment began from the very beginning when God created the earth and man himself (Ngir 2013:28).

After creating man, God gave the mandate of marriage as the first commandment to be carried out. God blessed the marriage as a means to 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it' (Gn 1:28). Genesis 1:28 is part of the cultural mandate that God gave humans to fulfil (Gn 1:26–28; Hah 2019:4). This mandate contains God's command to Adam and Eve, and the next humankind to reproduce on this earth. This text later became one of the Bible verses used as the basis for Christian marriage, especially the phrase 'Be fruitful and multiply'. This phrase is translated from two Hebrew words *פָּרָה* (*parah*) which means 'be fruitful' (Ernest 1987:523) and *רָבָה* (*ravah*) which means 'multiply' (Ernest 1987:602; Schmutzer 2009:95). In Christianity, the command to be fruitful and multiply is interpreted as the basis for men and women to build a new household through marriage. But this does not mean that the purpose of marriage is solely to produce offspring. Likewise, the purpose of marriage is not only about the process and how to reproduce. If the purpose of marriage is understood in this way, the command would only give legitimacy to the practice of polygamy for any reason (Ademiluka 2020:6).

This mandate must be understood in the context that marriage involves a shared responsibility between a man and a woman. The different human beings are united in the institution of marriage so that they can fight together to support, complement, sustain and help each other (Natanael 2002:2). All the differences that each partner has should not be a factor that damages and separates the relationship in marriage.

The basis of Christian marriage is reaffirmed in the book of Genesis 2:24. This verse states a very fundamental and essential process of marriage. To understand it, we divided it into the following three parts. Firstly, males leave their parents. This verse highlights how important it is for a man to leave his parents when he wants to enter into a marriage with a woman. Leaving (Hebrew: *יָצָא*; BibleWorks 2011) parents here does not mean abandoning his father and mother altogether. However, it states that because marriage is a significantly meaningful thing, a man must be prepared to separate physically and mentally from his parents to build a new life with his wife.

Secondly, unite with his wife. The word 'to unite' is translated from the word *דָּבַק* [*dābaq*] means to stick, cling, cleave and glue together (Ernest 1987:113). Therefore, a man who leaves his parents clings or glues himself to his wife. Clings or glues with his wife means that the union is not just united in one house but expresses a close attachment to one another

together and in balance. In addition, the word 'wife' here comes from the word *אִשְׁתּוֹ* [*ishshah*], emphasises the singular form of the word, which can be interpreted as a form of the husband's loyalty that adheres and unites only with a wife he loves (eds. Pfeiffer & Harrison 1962).

Thirdly, they became one flesh. The word 'flesh' is translated from the word *בָּשָׂר* [*basar*], although it means flesh, body, can also be interpreted as 'relationship'. In the context of this verse, the phrase 'become one flesh' can be interpreted that through marriage, men and women become one in a complete and priority relationship together. Men and women who enter marriage create a relationship that 'binds the history of two people definitively and at the deepest level together' (Kasper 1983:22). This oneness includes not only physical unions and corporeal things but all things in total too. Thus, this verse emphasises the importance of the physical and mental readiness of a man and a woman starting out and continuing on the marriage journey. Loyalty in a relationship is one of the foundations of unity between husband and wife.

New Testament books that emphasise the same thing are found in Mark 10:7–9 and Matthew 19:6. To limit the same and repeated explanations with Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:6, this analysis will focus on Mark 10:9. The context of this verse tells about Jesus arguing with the Pharisees who asked about the legality of divorce in marriage (v. 2). In the discussion, the Pharisees indirectly defended their position in favour of divorce based on the tradition that Moses had passed down (vv. 3–4). However, Jesus immediately rejected their opinion by arguing that the legality of the divorce that they had been doing so far was essentially a concession given by Moses because of the disobedience of the forebears of the Israelites (v. 5; Sproul 2011). Furthermore, Jesus explained how sacred marriage has been since the beginning of human creation (vv. 7–8). Jesus then closed it by adding a firm statement: 'What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder' (v. 9).

The word 'divorced' is translated from the Greek word *χωρίζετω* from the word *χωρίζω* (Watts 2008). This word is used not only to describe divorce but also the separation of a person from something. The sentence 'no man should be divorced' means that Jesus commanded people to respect the sanctity of marriage. This emphasis is also directed to all efforts to separate a man and a woman who are married. The basis is clear: God designed the institution of marriage and brought the married couple together in the marriage. No one outside the institution of marriage has the right to separate the marital relationship (Mk 10:9; Mt 19:6).

Based on this explanation, Christian marriage must be understood as God's holy will for believers. Relationship with Christ becomes the pattern of relationship between every couple in marriage (Presbyterian Church & Cumberland Presbyterian Church 1986:82). Both Genesis 2:24 and Mark 10:6–9 state that the relationship pattern must begin with a man's decision to leave his family to become one with his

partner in a new family institution. Then, how to correlate this theological basis to the *Ma'parappo* tradition?

Based on the theological elaboration above, several things need to be stated here to understand the *Ma'parappo* tradition from a biblical perspective. Firstly, the separation of husband and wife for some time does not indicate any violation of God's commandments. Because the break is tentative, it does not mean divorcing, and not placing ancestral customs above religious rules. The assumption that the implementation of this wedding procession indicates human action to separate married couples is only a narrow interpretation. Jesus' command in Mark 10:9 cannot be used to reject the implementation of *Ma'parappo* because the text talks about the total separation of marriage due to human selfishness. In reality, if there are families in Kalumpang and Bonehau who decide not to carry out these custom traditions, it is for purely economic reasons. So, if *Ma'parappo* is held after the marriage blessing, it will give time for each family to be ready to let go of their respective children to enter and build a new family.

Secondly, taking the man to the woman's house in the *Ma'parappo* tradition further emphasises a man's readiness to unite with the woman he has just married. Through this ritual, the entire *Tanalotong* tribal family supports their children's decision to take responsibility for marriage. This tradition also states by acclamation that a married man of the *Tanalotong* tribe will only love and be faithful to one wife he has married. Of course, this is analogous to God's mandate to humans according to the context of Genesis 2:24 (cf. Mt 19:6; Mk 10:7–8) that has been explained previously.

Thirdly, there are many concatenations of traditional processions in weddings in the *Tanalotong* indigenous people that actually emphasise the vitality and importance of the marriage itself. The attitude of upholding the value of marriage is even regulated in customary laws that minimise the potential for separation and divorce for each couple. All traditional processions, including the *Ma'parappo*, bind every Christian who performs them to comply with the rules and norms that apply in society and respect the values of marriage.

Furthermore, the author also needs to emphasise that this understanding does not mean that every Christian marriage that does not carry out these customary traditions is more vulnerable to violence, unfair treatment, family divisions and even divorce. Because the potential for damage in a household is not influenced by the presence or absence of customary laws and traditions, but it depends on the paradigm and attitude of believers in living it. This paradigm and attitude must be based on the manifestation of the love that God gives and instills in every believer (Col 3:14; Eph 5:28).

The position and actions of the church in Kalumpang and Bonehau towards the implementation of *Ma'parappo*

In the Christian community, the church is the only religious institution that has the authority to organise marriages for its

citizens. Even the church has played an active role in guiding the bride-to-be to prepare for their wedding to how they end up living in that marriage (Lie Lie & Oktariadi 2019:38–39). The church becomes God's representative to unite humans (male and female) in a holy marriage.

However, the church and church members are also in the middle of a community environment where there are habits and lifestyles that are thick with the norms of life. Especially in Indonesia, the customs prevailing in an area greatly affect both social and religious life. This is where the church meets the customs and culture that have taken root in people's lives (Hawu Haba 2021:40). This encounter can be seen in religious rituals which are still wrapped in cultural rituals. For example, the implementation of a wedding blessing that begins first and/or ends with a series of traditional processions.

Regarding the implementation of the *Ma'parappo* tradition in Christian marriages in the *Tanalotong* tribe in Kalumpang and Bonehau, the local churches cannot be antipathy. The Churches and Christianity that are present in the middle of the *Tanalotong* tribal community should be able to take an affirmative attitude towards the implementation of cultural rituals. In fact, the *Ma'parappo* tradition itself can be a means of delivering the gospel message to the indigenous people who carry it out (Mawikere 2022:503). Through the implementation of customs that are thick with the norms of life like this, it makes it easier for the church to give doctrinal emphasis on marriage and family life to be in line with God's word. Of course, the church can collaborate with the prevailing customs to provide character and spiritual development and strength for Christians.

Conclusion

Ma'parappo's traditional procession is not a tradition that is paradoxical to Christian teachings and values. Behind the procession of separating husband and wife, this tradition emphasises and upholds the values of respect for partners, families and marriage. Even gender equality is another goal behind the implementation of the traditional procession. The *Tanalotong* indigenous people have been fighting for these positive values from the start through the application of customary law and traditions. Therefore, this tradition should be preserved in the *Tanalotong* community where Christians also live and interact. Christian weddings that involve elements of custom are not only related to cultural preservation but also increase the dogmatic treasures of the church. Thus, the preservation of the unity and harmony of marriage is a shared responsibility of religion and customs in the *Tanalotong* tribal community. The church needs to be involved in this *Ma'parappo* tradition because the church should not close itself to the culture that is inherent in society; on the contrary, the church can utilise traditional customs as a bridge for evangelism and discipleship of the congregation.

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The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Authors' contributions

D.D.L. contributed to the conceptualisation of the main ideas, designed the structure, edited the article for grammar and overall supervised the research. Y.S. contributed to the investigation, collected research data, managed administration and proofread the article.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article as its supplementary materials.

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