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Between Heaven and Puya: A Comparative Study of Christian Eschatology and Aluk To Dolo and Its Implications for the Toraja Christian Faith

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Abstract

The concepts of Heaven in Christianity and Puya in Aluk To Dolo represent two important understandings of life after death that continue to influence the worldview of the Torajan people. While the majority of Torajans today identify as Christians, traditional beliefs regarding Puya remain an integral part of cultural memory and social practice. This study aims to compare Christian eschatology and Aluk To Dolo eschatology through an analysis of the concepts of Heaven and Puya and to examine their implications for the faith of Torajan Christians. Employing a qualitative approach based on literature review, comparative theology, and contextual theological reflection, this study analyzes biblical teachings, Christian eschatological thought, and scholarly discussions on Aluk To Dolo. The findings reveal that both traditions share a belief in the continuation of human existence after death and view death as a transition rather than the end of life. However, they differ significantly regarding the basis of salvation, the role of ritual, the concept of resurrection, and the ultimate destiny of humanity. Christian eschatology is centered on salvation through Jesus Christ, bodily resurrection, and the hope of a new heaven and a new earth, whereas Aluk To Dolo emphasizes ritual mediation, ancestral relationships, and the journey of the soul toward Puya. This study further argues that Puya should be understood not merely as a realm of the dead but as part of a broader eschatological system within Aluk To Dolo. The study contributes to the development of contextual theology in Toraja by providing a constructive dialogue between Christian faith and local cultural traditions while maintaining the distinctiveness of Christian eschatological hope.

Keywords: Heaven, Puya, Christian Eschatology, Aluk To Dolo, Toraja.

INTRODUCTION

Death is not just the end of biological life, but an existential reality that always raises fundamental questions about the meaning and purpose of human life. In almost all religious and cultural traditions, death is understood as a transition to another form of existence. Therefore, the question of what happens after death,

where man goes after death, and how the relationship between the visible and the invisible world has been an important part of human religious and theological reflection throughout history. Recent studies show that the understanding of death and life after death is always present in a close relationship with cultural identity,

collective memory, and meaning systems that live in society (Hallam and Hockey, 2020; Mangentang, 2024).

In the Christian tradition, life after death is understood in an eschatological framework centered on God's work of salvation through Jesus Christ. Christian eschatology speaks not only of the events of the last days, but also of the fulfillment of God's plan that has begun through the death and resurrection of Christ. Heaven is understood as an eternal communion between God and His people, which reaches the culmination of its fulfillment in the new heavens and earth (Middleton, 2014; Timo, 2015). Thus, Christian hope is not solely future-oriented, but has begun to be experienced by believers in the present life through a relationship with Christ. This understanding shows that Christian eschatology is a reality that is "already but not yet", that is, salvation that has begun but awaits its fullness at the end times (Ladd, 1996; Jacob, 2021; Mawikere & Hura, 2026).

On the other hand, the Toraja people have a rich religious tradition regarding life after death through the *Aluk To Dolo* belief system. In this view, death is not the end of human existence, but the beginning of a journey to the spirit world called *Puya*. *Puya* is understood as the place where the spirits of ancestors who have passed away dwell. The journey to *Puya* is closely related to the implementation of the rite of death, especially the *Rambu Solo'* ceremony, which has a religious and social function in escorting the spirits to the realm of the dead. Various studies show that death in Toraja culture is understood as a transitional process that maintains the relationship between the living and the dead, so that death is viewed communally, relationally, and symbolically (Kristanto and Dewi, 2025; Baan et al., 2022).

Interestingly, as found in the *Aluk To Dolo* tradition documented in various Toraja sources, *Puya* is not always understood as the ultimate goal of human existence. In some traditions of *Aluk To Dolo*, *Puya* is seen as a stopover or intermediate world before the spirits continue their journey to the upper world or heaven where the gods are located. Thus, the eschatological structure of *Aluk To Dolo* is actually more complex than just an understanding of the world of ancestral spirits. This understanding shows the existence of dimensions of journey, hope, and final destination that are also of concern in Christian eschatological reflection (Kristanto, 2023).

Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that this study does not intend to compare heaven and *Puya* as two identical places. In contemporary Christian theology, heaven is better understood as an eternal communion with God who attains its fullness in the new creation, whereas in *Aluk To Dolo*, *Puya* is part of the cosmological structure that explains the journey of the soul after death. Therefore, this study views heaven and *Puya* as central concepts that represent two different eschatological systems, namely Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo* eschatology.

The encounter between the Christian faith and the Toraja culture has been going on for more than a century. Currently, the majority of Toraja people embrace Christianity, but various cultural elements and traditional beliefs related to death are still alive and influencing social practices and religious understanding of the community (Maćkowiak, 2024; Kristanto and Mangolo, 2018). In this context, not a few Toraja Christians are at the intersection between the church's teaching about heaven and the cultural heritage of *Puya*. As a result, various forms of understanding have emerged that combine elements of Christianity and *Aluk To Dolo* in interpreting life after death. This phenomenon shows that the

issue of heaven and *Puya* is not only a doctrinal issue, but also a matter of cultural identity, the inheritance of traditions, and the formation of faith in contemporary Toraja society.

Several previous studies have discussed the Toraja death ritual, the cultural significance of *Rambu Solo'*, as well as the relationship between Christianity and local culture (Munaing et al., 2025; Syam and Husna, 2025). However, studies that specifically compare the concept of heaven in Christian eschatology with the concept of *Puya* in *Aluk To Dolo* are still relatively limited. Most research focuses on anthropological, ritual, or sociological aspects, while a theological-comparative analysis of the two concepts has not been widely done. In fact, such comparative studies are important to understand the fundamental points of convergence and differences between the two belief systems while building a constructive dialogue between the gospel and local culture.

Based on this background, this article aims to comparatively examine the concept of life after death in Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo* through an analysis of the concepts of heaven and *Puya*, as well as formulate its implications for the faith life of Toraja Christians. Through comparative theology and contextual theology approaches, this research is expected to contribute to the development of contextual theological reflection, as well as assist the church in formulating the teaching of faith on death and life after death that is relevant to the Toraja cultural context.

IDENTIFY, RESEARCH AND COLLECT IDEA

1. The Concept of Heaven in Christian Eschatology

Eschatology is a branch of theology that deals with the fulfillment of God's plan for man and all creation. The term eschatology comes from the Greek *eschatos* which means the latter and *logos* which means teaching or study. In the Christian sense, eschatology does not only speak of the end times, but includes all the expectations of faith about death, life after death, resurrection, judgment, and the creation of a new heaven and earth (Hoekema, 1994). Therefore, eschatology is not just a doctrine about the future, but also gives meaning to the life of believers in the present.

According to George Eldon Ladd (1996), Christian eschatology must be understood in terms of *already but not yet*. The kingdom of God has been present through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, yet its fullness still awaits fulfillment in the last days. This perspective suggests that eschatological reality is not just something that will happen in the future, but has begun to be experienced by believers in the present life. Thus, Christian eschatology is dynamic because it connects the present with the hope of God's promised future.

Life After Death in the Bible

The Bible bears consistent witness to the continuation of human life after death. In the Old Testament, the concept of life after death has not been systematically developed, but there is a belief that man remains in a relationship with God even after death (Ps. 16:10–11; Dan. 12:2). A clearer development is found in the New Testament through the teachings of Jesus and the apostles on the resurrection and eternal life. Jesus himself affirmed that God is the God of the living and not the God of the dead (Matt. 22:32). In John 11:25–26, Jesus reveals Himself to be resurrected and alive, so that everyone who believes in Him will live even though he is dead. The Apostle Paul also affirms that death cannot separate

believers from the love of God expressed in Christ (Rom. 8:38-39). Therefore, death in the Christian perspective is not the end of human existence, but rather a dividing line towards a new reality in communion with God. N. T. Wright (2008) affirms that the main hope of Christianity is not to go to heaven at death, but to the resurrection of the body and the renewal of the whole creation. According to him, many popular understandings of heaven tend to ignore the Bible's teachings about the resurrection and new creation. Therefore, life after death in Christianity must be understood in a broader framework, namely God's redemptive work that encompasses man and the entire cosmos (Millet, 2009).

Heaven as a Communion with God

One of the central themes in Christian eschatology is heaven. In traditional understanding, heaven is often understood as the place where believers abode after death. However, contemporary theology emphasizes that the essence of heaven lies not in its location, but in the perfect relationship between God and His people. Hoekema (1994) explains that the ultimate goal of salvation is not the existence of man in a certain place, but a perfect communion with God. This understanding is based on the Bible's testimony that the essence of eschatological hope is the presence of God among His people (Rev. 21:3). Thus, heaven is understood as a condition of complete communion, in which sin, suffering, and death no longer have power. A similar view is put forward by Moltmann (2004), who asserts that Christian hope is centered on God's future, i.e. when God is fully indwelling with His creation. Therefore, heaven should not be understood as man's escape from the world, but as the fulfillment of the relationship between God, man, and all creation.

In Christian eschatology, heaven is understood not simply as a place to be experienced after death, but as a communion with God that has begun since one believes in Jesus Christ (John 17:3; Eph. 2:6) and believers experience fuller communion with Christ after death (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8), and will attain perfection at the resurrection of the body and the creation of new heavens and earth (Rev. 21:1-3). Thus, believers have experienced heavenly reality since living on earth through a relationship with Christ, yet the perfect fulfillment of that hope still awaits the coming of Christ and the renewal of all creation (Hoekema, 1994; Ladd, 1996; Wright, 2008).

Intermediate State

In Christian theology there is a discussion of the human state between death and the final resurrection known as the intermediate state. This concept arises because the Bible teaches that after death the believer is with Christ, while the resurrection of the body only occurs at the end of time. Paul expressed his longing to leave this world and live with Christ (Phil. 1:23). Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 5:8, he states that leaving the body means dwelling with God. Based on these texts, many theologians argue that believers experience conscious communion with Christ after physical death. Hoekema (1994) explained that the intermediate state is not the final condition of man, but a temporary stage before the resurrection of the body. This view is also supported by Wright (2008), who asserts that Christ's co-existence after death is an important reality, but not the ultimate goal of Christian hope. The ultimate goal remains the resurrection and renewal of creation.

The Resurrection of the Body

The resurrection of the body is at the core of Christian eschatology. The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 explains that if Christ is not

resurrected, then the faith of believers is in vain. The resurrection of Christ is the basis and guarantee of the resurrection of His people in the last days. According to Ladd (1993), the resurrection of the body shows that God's salvation concerns not only the human soul, but also his entire existence. God did not intend to free man from the body, but to redeem and renew the body. Thus, the resurrection affirms the value of creation and shows that matter is not something to be abandoned, but restored. Wright (2012) even called the resurrection the center of the Christian faith. For him, the resurrection is not just a symbol of the victory of life over death, but a historical event that is the basis for the hope for the renewal of all creation. Therefore, eternal life in Christianity is not understood as the existence of a spirit without a body, but as a new life in a glorified body.

New Heaven and Earth

The pinnacle of Christian eschatological hope is the creation of a new heaven and earth as described in Revelation 21–22. In John's vision, God did not bring His people out of the world, but renewed the world so that it became God's dwelling place with man. Moltmann (2004) emphasizes that the future promised by God is not the destruction of creation, but its transformation and renewal. Christian hope is therefore cosmic, encompassing the entire redeemed and restored universe. This view is in line with Wright (2008), who asserts that the ultimate goal of God's work of salvation is the renewal of creation, not the replacement of creation. Randy Alcorn (2011) also asserts that eternal life must be understood in the context of a new earth renewed by God. According to him, many Christians have a misconception of heaven because they separate it from the concept of the new earth that the Bible teaches. In fact, the ultimate goal of Christian hope is a perfect life with God in a fully restored creation.

Thus, Christian eschatology views life after death in a comprehensive framework, namely communion with Christ after death, the resurrection of the body in the last days, and eternal life in the new heavens and earth. All of these hopes are centered on God's work of salvation which reaches its fullness when God dwells with His people and makes all things new.

2. The Concept of *Puya* in *Aluk To Dolo*

In the *Aluk To Dolo* belief system, death is not understood as the end of human existence, but rather as a transition to another form of life. *Aluk To Dolo*, which means ancestral religion, is a traditional religious system of the Toraja people that governs human relations with *Puang Matua* (the supreme god), fellow humans, the universe, and ancestors. In this cosmological framework, human life is seen as continuous, so that death does not decide a person's existence, but leads him to the spirit world known as *Puya* (Senolinggi et al., 2021; Kristanto, 2022). *Puya* is one of the central concepts in the eschatology of *Aluk To Dolo*. In the traditional understanding of the Toraja people, *Puya* is understood as the world of spirits or the destination of the deceased after the entire rite of death has been completed. The existence of *Puya* cannot be separated from the cosmological structure of Toraja which divides reality into several levels, namely the upper world related to *Puang Matua* and the *deata* (gods), the middle world inhabited by humans, and the spirit world where ancestral spirits dwell. In this structure, *Puya* functions as a space for transition and sustainability of life after death (Tangdilintin, 1981; Kristanto, 2023)

Beliefs about *Puya* are closely related to the Toraja people's view of death. In the tradition of *Aluk To Dolo*, a person who has just died is not considered completely dead. As long as the death ceremony has not been carried out perfectly, the deceased is still treated as a sick person or a resting person. The actual status of death only occurs after all funeral rites are completed. Therefore, the journey of the spirits to *Puya* is highly dependent on the implementation of the *Rambu Solo'* ceremony carried out by families and indigenous communities. The ceremony is understood as a means of delivering spirits to the realm of the ancestors (Nooy-Palm, 1979).

Rambu Solo' is not just a funeral ritual, but an integral part of the *Aluk To Dolo* belief system (Ghiland, et al., 2025; Alfarah, et al., 2021). In the Toraja tradition, the implementation of *Rambu Solo'* contains religious, social, and cosmological meanings. Religiously, this ceremony aims to deliver spirits to *Puya*. Socially, the ceremony strengthens family and community solidarity. Cosmology, *Rambu Solo'* is a medium that connects the human world with the spirit world (Kristanto, 2023; Kristanto, 2025). Therefore, the existence of *Puya* cannot be understood in isolation from the rite of death that accompanies it.

In various Toraja traditions, the journey to *Puya* is also related to the sacrifice of buffalo and pig in death ceremonies. The buffalo has a very important symbolic meaning because it is believed to help the journey of spirits to the spirit realm. The higher a person's social status during his life, the greater the ritual demands that must be fulfilled in the implementation of *Rambu Solo'* (Tanggulungan, 2017). Therefore, the concept of *Puya* is not only related to religious beliefs, but also related to the social structure of the Toraja society which traditionally recognizes certain social stratification.

In addition to being understood as the world of spirits, several Toraja oral studies and traditions show that *Puya* is not always seen as the ultimate goal of human existence. In a number of interpretations of *Aluk To Dolo*, *Puya* is understood as a place of rest before the spirit continues its journey to the upper world related to *Puang Matua* and the *deata* (gods). This understanding shows that the eschatological system of *Aluk To Dolo* has a more complex structure than just beliefs about the nature of the dead. Thus, *Puya* can be understood as part of a broader eschatological journey in Toraja cosmology (Kristanto, 2023).

The existence of *Puya* also shows that the Toraja people have a strong view of the sustainability of the relationship between the living and the dead. The ancestors are not seen as figures who are completely cut off from the human world, but rather still have a symbolic and spiritual relationship with the surviving family therefore, respect for the ancestors is an important part of the life of the Toraja people. These relationships are manifested through various customary rites, maintenance of funeral sites, and the implementation of ceremonies related to death (Kristanto, 2024; Buntu and Pangrante, 2025; Rizal, 2026). In this perspective, *Puya* is not only a place where spirits dwell, but also a symbol of the sustainability of family and community identity across generations.

From a comparative theology perspective, *Puya's* concept shows that *Aluk To Dolo* has a profound reflection on death and the afterlife. Although different from Christian eschatology, both recognize that death is not the end of human existence. The difference lies in the basis of salvation, the ultimate goal of life, and the mechanism of transition to life after death. If Christian

eschatology centers on God's work of salvation in Jesus Christ and the hope of bodily resurrection, then *Aluk To Dolo's* eschatology places the rite of death, the relationship with ancestors, and the journey to *Puya* as essential elements in understanding the sustainability of human life after death. It is this difference that will later become the basis for a comparative analysis between Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo*.

3. Comparative Theology and Contextual Theology

The study of heaven in Christian eschatology and *Puya* in *Aluk To Dolo* requires an approach that is able to appreciate the differences in religious traditions without ignoring their respective theological identities. In this context, comparative theology is one of the relevant approaches because it allows dialogue between two different belief systems in an open, critical, and reflective manner. In contrast to the apologetic approach that seeks to prove the superiority of one religion over another, comparative theology seeks to understand the beliefs of others deeply while remaining rooted in one's own faith traditions (Clooney, 2010). Through this approach, the differences and similarities between Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo* can be analyzed constructively to gain a more complete understanding of the meaning of life after death.

According to Francis X. Clooney (2010), comparative theology is a cross-tradition learning process carried out through an in-depth reading of certain religious texts, practices, and beliefs. The goal is not to create syncretism or equate all religions, but to deepen the understanding of one's own traditions through encounters with other traditions. In this perspective, the study of heaven and *Puya* is not intended to assert that the two concepts are identical or have the same theological basis, but to understand how each tradition answers fundamental questions about death, the sustainability of human life, and the ultimate purpose of existence.

The comparative theological approach is important in the context of Toraja society because the encounter between Christianity and *Aluk To Dolo* has been going on for more than a century. The process of spreading Christianity did not erase the entire cultural and religious heritage of the Toraja people, but rather created a complex space of interaction between the Christian faith and ancestral traditions. In reality, many Toraja Christians continue to live in a cultural environment that maintains a variety of symbols, values, and practices related to traditional understandings of death and life after death. Therefore, the dialogue between Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo* is inevitable, but rather needs to be understood theologically in order to produce a more contextual reflection of faith.

In this connection, contextual theology provides a framework within which the gospel can be understood and lived in a particular cultural context. Stephen B. Bevans (2002) asserts that no theology is context-free because every theological reflection is always carried out in a particular social, cultural, historical, and religious situation. Therefore, theology departs not only from the Bible and the traditions of the church, but also from the experience of human beings living in certain contexts. This understanding opens up space for the church to *carry out* theological reflections that are relevant to the cultural reality of the Toraja people without losing their loyalty to the Gospel.

Bevans (2002) explains that the cultural context is not just a passive background, but an important source in the theological process. In that perspective, culture is seen as a place where God

continues to work and reveal Himself to man. Therefore, elements of local culture should not always be seen as a threat to the Christian faith, but can be a starting point for dialogue and theological reflection. This approach is very important in the study of *Puya* because it is not only part of the *Aluk To Dolo* belief system, but also a cultural symbol that has shaped the way the Toraja people understand death, family, ancestors, and the sustainability of life.

Within the framework of contextual theology, the dialogue between heaven and *Puya* is not done to blur the distinction between Christianity and *Aluk To Dolo*. Rather, the dialogue aims to understand more deeply how the Gospel can be preached and lived in the context of Toraja society. Thus, contextual theology does not mean accommodating all cultural elements without criticism, but rather conducting a theological assessment process of culture based on the light of the Gospel. Through this process, the church can identify cultural elements that are in line with the values of the Kingdom of God, as well as provide corrections for elements that are not in accordance with Christian teachings.

The comparative theology and contextual theology approaches also help to avoid the two extreme tendencies that often arise in the relationship between religion and culture. On the one hand, there is a tendency to reject the entire local cultural heritage because it is considered contrary to the Christian faith. On the other hand, there is a tendency to accept all cultural elements without adequate theological evaluation. Both approaches seek to establish a middle ground that allows for a critical dialogue between the gospel and culture. In the context of this research, the approach is used to analyze the concepts of heaven and *Puya* in depth, so that points of encounter, fundamental differences, and their implications for the faith life of Toraja Christians can be found.

Thus, comparative theology provides a framework for understanding two different eschatological systems, while contextual theology helps to formulate the relevance of these comparative results to the life of the church and Toraja society today. These two approaches are important foundations in analyzing the relationship between Christian eschatological expectations and traditional understandings of *Puya*, so that this research does not stop at conceptual descriptions alone, but also produces contextual and constructive theological reflections.

WRITE DOWN YOUR STUDIES AND FINDINGS

1. Similarities of Christian Eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo*

Although Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo* developed in different religious, historical, and theological contexts, they both show a number of fundamental similarities in understanding death and the sustainability of human life. These similarities do not mean that the two belief systems have identical teachings, but they do indicate a common religious awareness of the reality beyond death. In the context of the predominantly Christian Toraja community but still living in the cultural heritage of *Aluk To Dolo*, the introduction of these points of similarity is important as the basis for dialogue between the Christian faith and the local culture.

The first similarity lies in the belief that death is not the end of human existence. In Christian eschatology, death is understood as a transition to a life of permanence with God and anticipation of the resurrection of the body at the end of time (Hoekema, 1994;

Wright, 2008). Similarly, in *Aluk To Dolo*, death is not seen as the end of one's existence, but rather as the beginning of the journey to *Puya* through a process determined by the rite of death and the cosmological order of the Toraja people. Thus, both Christianity and *Aluk To Dolo* reject the view that death is the absolute end of human life.

The second equation is the belief in the continuation of human existence after death. In the Christian faith, believers are believed to remain alive before God after death while awaiting the resurrection at the end of the age (Phil. 1:23; 2Cor. 5:8). Meanwhile, in *Aluk To Dolo*, the spirits of the deceased are believed to still exist and continue their journey to *Puya*. This belief shows that both traditions recognize the existence of a dimension of life that transcends temporal and physical reality.

The third equation has to do with the understanding that life after death has a relationship with human life in the world today. In Christianity, the life of believers today is seen as having eschatological consequences because it relates to man's response to God's work of salvation in Christ (Ladd, 1996). In *Aluk To Dolo*, a person's life is also related to the journey of the soul after death, especially through social relations, family status, and the implementation of death rites which are considered important in the process of getting to *Puya*. Although the theological basis is different, both systems see that life now is inseparable from the reality of life after death.

The fourth equation is the belief in a transcendent reality that transcends the human world. Christian eschatology speaks of communion with God, the resurrection of the body, and the new heavens and earth as the final fulfillment of God's work of salvation (Moltmann, 2004; Wright, 2008). *Aluk To Dolo* also knows the cosmological reality that goes beyond the human world, namely *Puya*, the upper world related to *Puang Matua* and the *deata*, as well as the existence of ancestors in the structure of the Toraja cosmos. This belief in a transcendent reality shows that both traditions understand humans as beings who are not limited to mere earthly life.

The fifth equation is the existence of a dimension of hope in the face of death. In Christianity, hope is rooted in the resurrection of Christ that guarantees victory over sin and death (1 Cor. 15:20–28). In *Aluk To Dolo*, hope is embodied through the belief that death is not destruction, but rather a path to the sustainability of life in the broader cosmic order. Therefore, both Christianity and *Aluk To Dolo* view death not solely as a tragedy, but also as a transition to a reality that has religious meaning.

However, these similarities should not be understood as evidence that Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo* share the same teachings. The similarities that exist show more similarities in the existential questions that humans face about death and life after death. The way the two traditions answer this question actually reveal a number of fundamental differences related to the source of salvation, the ultimate goal of man, the role of ritual, and the relationship between man and divine reality. Therefore, having identified these points of similarity, it is important to examine the essential differences between Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo* in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the two belief systems.

2. Differences between Christian Eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo*

Although Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo* both acknowledge the sustainability of life after death, they have fundamental differences in understanding the source of salvation, man's ultimate purpose, the role of ritual, and the relationship between man and divine reality. These differences show that both belief systems are built on different theological and cosmological foundations. Therefore, understanding these differences is important to avoid simplification that can obscure the identity of each tradition.

The first difference has to do with the basis of salvation and life after death. In Christian eschatology, salvation is a gift of God given through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Eternal life is not obtained through human effort or the performance of certain rituals, but through faith in Christ manifested in a life of obedience to God's will (Eph. 2:8–9; Yoh. 3:16). Thus, the basis of Christian eschatological hope lies in the work of God that has been fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ (Hoekema, 1994; Wright, 2008). On the other hand, in *Aluk To Dolo*, the journey of the spirit to *Puya* is closely related to the implementation of the rite of death in accordance with customary and religious provisions. In this context, rites have a very important role because they are understood as a means of transporting spirits to the spirit world. Thus, if Christian eschatology centers on God's work of salvation in Christ, then the eschatology of *Aluk To Dolo* places the implementation of *aluk* (teachings/rules/religion) and the rite of death as important elements on the journey to life after death.

The second difference concerns the ultimate goal of man. In contemporary Christian theology, the ultimate goal of believers is not simply to be in heaven after death, but to live in perfect communion with God in the new heavens and earth. N. T. Wright (2008) asserts that Christianity's primary hope is not to go to heaven at death, but to the resurrection of the body and the renewal of the whole creation. Thus, the ultimate goal of salvation is a perfectly restored life in God's new creation. On the other hand, in *Aluk To Dolo*, the purpose of the spirit's journey is generally understood as the existence in *Puya* as the spirit world of the ancestors. Although some traditions and interpretations of *Aluk To Dolo* suggest that *Puya* can be understood as a stage before the upper world (heaven) in relation to *Puang Matua* and the *deata*, the concept is not synonymous with the Christian hope of resurrection and new creation. Therefore, the two systems have different eschatological orientations in understanding the ultimate purpose of human existence.

The third difference has to do with the concept of resurrection. The resurrection of the body is the center of Christian eschatology. The Apostle Paul affirms that if Christ is not raised, then the faith of the believer is in vain (1 Cor. 15:14). The resurrection of Christ is a guarantee that believers will also be resurrected in a glorified body at the end of time (Ladd, 1996; Wright, 2012). Thus, salvation in Christianity includes the restoration of the whole human being, both body and soul. On the other hand, in *Aluk To Dolo* there is no concept of bodily resurrection as taught in Christianity. The sustainability of life is better understood as the continuation of the existence of the spirit in *Puya* or in cosmological reality related to the world of the ancestors. This difference shows that Christian eschatology has a historical and cosmic dimension centered on resurrection, while *Aluk To Dolo's* eschatology emphasizes more on the sustainability of the soul's life after death.

The fourth difference has to do with the role of ritual in the afterlife. In the Christian tradition, rituals such as baptism, the

Lord's Supper, and funeral services have pastoral and symbolic functions, but do not determine a person's salvation. Salvation remains dependent on God's grace revealed through Christ and responded to through faith. On the other hand, in *Aluk To Dolo*, the rite of death has a very important position because it is directly related to the journey of the spirit to *Puya*. *Rambu Solo'* not only serves as a tribute to the deceased, but also has a religious meaning related to the success of the spirit's journey to the spirit world. Thus, the role of ritual in the two belief systems has different theological functions.

The fifth difference has to do with the relationship between man and divine reality. In Christianity, life after death centers on the relationship between man and God revealed through Jesus Christ. The pinnacle of a believer's hope is perfect fellowship with God, as described in Revelation 21:3 that God will dwell with His people. In contrast, in *Aluk To Dolo*, the relationship with ancestors has a very important position in the cosmological structure and religious life of the community. The ancestors are not only seen as part of the past, but also as part of a cosmic order that remains connected to the human world. Therefore, respect for ancestors is an inseparable element of the religious life of the traditional Toraja people.

The sixth difference has to do with the source of religious authority. Christian eschatology is rooted in God's revelation revealed in the Bible and understood through church tradition. The understanding of death, resurrection, judgment, and eternal life comes from the Bible's testimony of God's work of salvation. On the contrary, *Aluk To Dolo* derives its authority from ancestral traditions that are inherited from generation to generation through the customs, rites, and cosmological narratives of the Toraja people. These differences in the source of authority lead to differences in the way the two systems understand life after death and the ultimate purpose of man.

Thus, the above analysis shows that although Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo* have a number of common points in the belief in the sustainability of life after death, they differ fundamentally in aspects of salvation, the ultimate goal of man, the concept of resurrection, the function of ritual, the relationship with divine reality, and the source of religious authority. These differences confirm that heaven and *Puya* cannot be understood as identical concepts, but rather as part of two eschatological systems that have different theological and cosmological structures. However, these differences do not rule out the possibility of a constructive dialogue between the Christian faith and Toraja culture, especially in the effort to formulate a contextual understanding of death and life after death.

3. Implications for the Toraja Christian Faith

An analysis of the similarities and differences between Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo* shows that the encounter between the two belief systems cannot be understood simply as a relationship between acceptance and rejection. Rather, it reveals the complex dynamics between the Christian faith and Toraja culture in understanding death and life after death. Therefore, the results of this comparison have a number of important implications for the faith life of Toraja Christians, both at the theological, pastoral, and cultural levels.

First, this study shows the importance of clarifying the basis of Christian eschatological expectations in the Toraja community. So far, not a few Christians have understood life after death through

the combination of church teachings and cultural heritage that has been passed down from generation to generation. In such a situation, the church needs to affirm that the basis of Christian hope is not the performance of a particular rite, but the work of salvation of God revealed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christian hope is rooted in the belief that Christ has overcome sin and death, so that everyone who believes in Him has eternal life (John. 11:25–26). This affirmation is important so that the Christian faith does not lose its center in Christ when confronted with various cultural understandings of death.

Second, the results of this study show the need to develop contextual theology that is able to have a critical dialogue with Toraja culture. Over the years, the relationship between church and culture has often moved between two polar extremes. On the one hand, there is a tendency to reject all cultural elements that are considered to come from traditional beliefs. On the other hand, there is a tendency to accept entire cultural traditions without adequate theological evaluation. Both approaches have the potential to cause problems. Therefore, a contextual theological approach is needed that is able to appreciate Toraja cultural values while making critical judgments based on the light of the Gospel. In this perspective, culture is not seen as an opponent of the gospel, but rather as a context in which the gospel is preached and lived.

Third, this study has implications for pastoral ministry, especially mourning and funeral services. Death is one of the most powerful moments that brings together the Christian faith and Toraja culture. In many cases, Christian families continue to participate in various cultural elements related to funerals for reasons of respect for family, social solidarity, and cultural identity. This situation often raises questions about the boundaries between cultural respect and religious beliefs. Therefore, the church needs to develop pastoral ministries that are able to contextually explain the meaning of death, resurrection, and eternal life without ignoring the cultural realities facing the congregation. Such pastoral accompaniment will help the congregation to understand that veneration for the dead can be done without having to shift the basis of Christ-centered hope.

Fourth, the results of this study show the importance of a deeper faith education on Christian eschatology. During this time, church teaching often placed more emphasis on the moral and practical aspects of life, while discussions of death, resurrection, and eternal life were relatively limited. As a result, many Christians derive their understanding of life after death more from cultural traditions than from deep theological reflection. Therefore, the church needs to develop an education of faith that explains more comprehensively about death, the state after death, the resurrection of the body, and the hope for a new heaven and earth. This kind of education will help members of the congregation build a more complete understanding of Christian hope.

Fifth, this research shows that the concept of *Puya* can be the starting point for theological dialogue in the context of Toraja society. Although *Puya* is not synonymous with heaven in the Christian sense, both share the belief that death is not the end of human existence. Awareness of the existence of life after death can be a bridge of dialogue that helps the church explain Christian expectations in a language that is closer to the cultural experience of the Toraja people. In this case, the concept of *Puya* can be understood as one of the cultural contact points that allows the Gospel to be preached in a more contextual way without having to eliminate fundamental theological differences.

Sixth, this study confirms that Christian identity and Toraja cultural identity do not have to be in absolute conflict. Being a Christian does not mean losing the entire cultural identity, just as maintaining a cultural identity does not necessarily mean maintaining the entire traditional belief system. The challenge facing the church is helping the congregation distinguish between cultural elements that are acceptable as expressions of social identity and those that have certain theological consequences. Thus, Toraja Christians can still cherish their ancestral cultural heritage without losing their loyalty to the Gospel.

Finally, this study shows that the dialogue between Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo* does not aim to equate the two belief systems, but rather to deepen the understanding of how the Gospel is lived in the context of Toraja culture. Through critical and constructive dialogue, the church can develop theological reflections that are more relevant to the life experience of the Toraja people while still holding to the core of Christian hope, namely God's work of salvation in Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the body, and eternal life in perfect communion with God in the new heavens and earth.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo* both recognize the sustainability of human life after death. Both traditions view death not as the absolute end of human existence, but as a transition to a reality that transcends earthly life. In Christian eschatology, that hope is manifested through the belief in eternal life with God, the resurrection of the body, and the renewal of all creation in the new heaven and earth. Meanwhile, in *Aluk To Dolo*, the sustainability of life is understood through the journey of the spirit to *Puya* as part of the cosmological structure that connects the human world, the spirit world, and the divine world.

Although it has a number of common points, this study finds that the two eschatological systems differ fundamentally in understanding the basis of salvation, the ultimate goal of man, the concept of resurrection, the function of ritual, and the source of religious authority. Christian eschatology centers on God's work of salvation in Jesus Christ and the hope of bodily resurrection, while *Aluk To Dolo* eschatology places the rite of death, relationships with ancestors, and the journey to *Puya* as essential elements of the afterlife. Therefore, heaven and *Puya* cannot be understood as identical concepts, but rather as parts of two belief systems that have different theological and cosmological foundations.

This research also shows that the dialogue between Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo* has important relevance for the faith life of Toraja Christians. In the context of a society living in the midst of an encounter between the Christian faith and the cultural heritage of our ancestors, the church is called to develop a teaching capable of explaining death and life after death both biblically and contextually. The contextual theological approach allows the church to appreciate the values of Toraja culture without losing the center of Christian hope rooted in Christ and His work of salvation.

The main contribution of this study lies in its attempt to place *Puya* as part of the broader eschatological system of *Aluk To Dolo*, rather than simply as the world of the dead as has often been understood in previous studies. In addition, this study shows that the dialogue between Christian eschatology and *Aluk To Dolo* can be a foundation for the development of Toraja contextual theology that is able to bridge faith and culture in a critical and constructive way. Thus, the study of heaven and *Puya* not only enriches the

academic discourse on life after death, but also makes a practical contribution to the church in building faith teaching, pastoral ministry, and Christian education that is relevant to the context of Toraja society.

Based on these findings, further research can be directed to an empirical study of how contemporary Toraja Christians understand the relationship between heaven, *Puya*, and Christian eschatological expectations in everyday life. This kind of research will enrich the development of contextual theology and expand understanding of the relationship between Christianity and local culture in Indonesia.

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