

Theological Study of The *Hanikit* Tradition In The *Atoen Pah Meto Bi Pah Soe* Culture - South Central Timor, East Nusa Tenggara

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ARTICLE INFO

Kata Kunci: *Hanikit*, Tribal Religion, Believers, *Atoen Pah Meto*, *Futus*

Received : 30, October

Revised : 15, November

Accepted: 19, December

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ABSTRACT

The *Hanikit* tradition significantly influences the social, cultural, and religious life of the *Atoen Pah Meto* community in South Central Timor, East Nusa Tenggara. Through rituals like *Futus*, it serves as an expression of gratitude to God and a key part of the local cultural identity. This study explores the theological aspects of the *Hanikit* tradition, focusing on its alignment with biblical teachings. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that while the tradition reflects biblical values, such as reverence for God, certain elements of the *Futus* ritual require critical review to align with Christian faith. The study concludes that the *Hanikit* tradition can be contextualized within the Christian framework by removing incompatible elements, preserving its role as a cultural expression that strengthens faith.

INDTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country composed of various ethnic groups and languages. Each ethnic group has its unique cultural identity, making each group distinct from one another. These distinctions are often reflected in the specific names or titles attributed to different groups. For instance, people from Surabaya are known as *Arek Surabaya*, the Batak people are referred to as *Bangso Batak*, and Eastern Indonesian communities are known as *Atoen Pah Meto*.

The term *Atoen Pah Meto* literally translates to "Timorese people." This group primarily inhabits four regions: Kupang City, Kupang Regency, Kefamenano, and Soe Regency. Soe is further divided into three regions: Amanatun, Amanuban, and Molo. This study focuses on the practice of the *Hanikit* tradition in the Amanatun area of South Central Timor.

The word *Hanikit* originates from the Dawan language, meaning "cooling down" or "cleansing oneself" from the "heat" (*ma'putu*). The *Hanikit* tradition is a ritual prayer practice in the belief system of the *Atoen Pah Meto*. Another term for *Hanikit* is *Natnonob ma'putu*, which refers to "hot air." Both terms signify a ritual aimed at purifying oneself from wrongdoing. The *Hanikit* ritual, rooted in primitive beliefs, has been part of the *Atoen Pah Meto* lifestyle since their adherence to ancestral religion, known as *Halaika*.

The *Hanikit* ritual is conducted during specific events, such as involvement in a killing, acquiring new items, recovering from illness, harvesting crops, opening new farms, and the *Futus* ceremony. When an *Atoen Pah Meto* individual is involved in a killing, performing the *Hanikit* ritual is mandatory. Similarly, new items cannot be used until this ritual is performed. After recovering from illness, the *Atoen Pah Meto* person performs the *Hanikit* ritual as an act of thanksgiving. It is also observed during harvests as an expression of gratitude for the fruits of their labor. The ritual is required when opening new farmland, symbolizing gratitude for the new opportunity. Lastly, it is performed during the *Futus* ceremony, which involves adult circumcision. The details of the *Futus* tradition will be discussed further in subsequent sections.

Despite the introduction of Christianity to East Nusa Tenggara in 1556 by the Portuguese and later the Dutch, the *Hanikit* ritual continues to be practiced. The spread of the Gospel intertwined with economic and political history. The Christian faith in *Pah Meto* has been influenced by elements of tribal religion and Western ideologies (Th. van den End, 2006). The introduction and expansion of the Gospel in *Pah Meto* cannot be separated from the cultural and political dynamics embedded in the local belief systems.

Missionaries who came to Timor Island—often referred to as *Kase*—successfully spread the Gospel, leading to the establishment of the Evangelical Christian Church in Timor (*GMIT*). Today, Christianity is practiced freely on the island. Protestant Christianity dominates in *Pah Meto*, while Catholicism is more prevalent in the northern areas.

The development of Christian teachings has gradually shifted the beliefs of the *Atoen Pah Meto* from their ancestral religion, *Uis Pah* (Lord of Nature), to faith in Jesus Christ. However, despite their Christian faith, many *Atoen Pah Meto*

still practice the *Hanikit* ritual as a symbol of ancestral belief. This practice is not limited to ordinary church members but also includes clergy members.

The religious life of *Atoen Pah Meto* is marked by its unique blend of Christian faith and lingering ties to ancestral rituals, resembling animistic beliefs. Although Christianity influences their daily lives, many *Atoen Pah Meto* Christians continue to engage in the *Hanikit* ritual, maintaining it as part of their inherited cultural tradition.

The interaction between Christianity and *Atoen Pah Meto* beliefs represents a historical and cultural encounter characterized by meaningful traditions. The *Hanikit* ritual, often conducted as a prayer, reflects the community's enduring connection to their ancestral faith. The *Atoen Pah Meto* believe in the presence of other forces that provide help, deeply ingrained in their worldview.

The *Hanikit* ritual encompasses various categories. To sharpen the focus of this study, the research centers on the *Hanikit* tradition as it pertains to the *Futus* ritual. This unique tradition requires that married adults undergo circumcision. In the healing process following the *Futus* ceremony, the participant must engage in sexual relations with an unfamiliar woman a specific number of times. Once the conditions are met, the *Hanikit* ritual can be performed as an act of thanksgiving.

This study aims to examine the theological significance of the *Hanikit* ritual, particularly in the context of the *Futus* tradition. What is the nature of gratitude expressed by the *Atoen Pah Meto* in the *Futus* ritual? How do they perceive and fulfill the requirements of the *Futus* ritual?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the research conducted, several theories and perspectives are relevant to understanding the concept of thanksgiving both from a Christian theological perspective and cultural practices, especially in the context of the *Hanikit* ritual explored in this study. The concept of thanksgiving is central in Christian teachings, both in the Old and New Testaments. According to 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul teaches Christians to "give thanks in all circumstances" as an act of obedience to God's will. In this context, thanksgiving is not only an expression of gratitude for material blessings but also a recognition of God's sovereignty and provision in the lives of His people. David Susilo Pranoto (2017) suggests that thanksgiving in this biblical sense is a response that transcends the circumstances of one's life, emphasizing an attitude of humility and acknowledgment of God's salvation. Timothy A. Brookins (2021) further emphasizes that thanksgiving is part of the three central commands in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, which include rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks. These practices reflect the importance of a life filled with gratitude that permeates every aspect of a believer's life, not depending on one's situation but as a continual expression of worship to God.

On the other hand, the *Hanikit* ritual, commonly practiced in some Indonesian cultures, also involves expressions of gratitude that share similarities with biblical thanksgiving but incorporate unique cultural elements. Th. van den End (2006) discusses how thanksgiving rituals in Indonesian culture often

involve offerings or practices that acknowledge the power and protection of rulers or deities, which in some ways can be compared to thanksgiving expressions found in traditional religious practices. However, significant differences arise when considering the *Hanikit* ritual, especially with the prayers to rulers or the physical requirements, such as the ritual of engaging in sexual relations, which are not aligned with biblical teachings. Jonar Situmorang (2019) points out that although both biblical and cultural practices aim to express gratitude for divine blessings and protection, the process and expression of these rituals vary, with the *Hanikit* ritual incorporating elements of social and physical obligation that diverge from the biblical model of thanksgiving, which focuses on spiritual worship and prayer.

Furthermore, the distinction between the biblical concept of thanksgiving and that found in cultural rituals is underscored by Leon Morris (2009), who highlights that the biblical perspective of thanksgiving, as taught in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, is an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty in all circumstances, whether joyful or sorrowful. This contrasts with certain cultural practices, such as the *Hanikit* ritual, where thanksgiving may involve physical and social elements, such as sacrifices or obligations to rulers, which do not have a foundation in Christian teachings. P.H. R. van Houwelingen (2018) further explains that in biblical contexts, thanksgiving is an internal expression that flows from understanding God's gift of salvation, whereas cultural rituals, like *Hanikit*, may intertwine physical acts and social relationships with the expression of gratitude.

In summary, this literature review illustrates that while there are shared values between the biblical concept of thanksgiving and the *Hanikit* ritual, significant differences exist in how thanksgiving is expressed and practiced. The *Hanikit* ritual, with its focus on physical acts and social obligations, does not align fully with the biblical understanding of thanksgiving, which centers on spiritual worship, prayer, and a personal relationship with God. These distinctions highlight the differences between cultural expressions of gratitude and the biblical teachings, which emphasize honoring God through prayer, sacrifice, and righteous living.

METHODOLOGY

The research is exploratory with a qualitative approach. Through exploratory research, the author delves into the practice of *Hanikit* and the way of life from the perspective of *Atoen Pah Meto* believers. The author seeks to understand the belief system, starting from the rituals performed in the *Halaiika* belief system, with a specific focus on exploring the *Hanikit* culture in the *Futus* ritual.

The data analysis process follows stages: data collection, reduction, and presentation. The data collected from various sources, including books, journals, and other scholarly works, are strengthened through interviews. Following this, the author performs data reduction to refine the discussion on *Hanikit* in this study. The obtained data is then presented descriptively.

RESEARCH RESULT

The Meaning of Hanikit

The term *Hanikit* in the Atoen Pah Meto language is understood as "cooling down" or cleansing oneself from certain "hot air." The "hot air" referred to here is not the heat of fire or the sun but rather the result of wrongful actions. The "hot air" must be "cooled down," meaning it needs to be cleansed to avoid accidents or illnesses as consequences of wrongdoings. Failure to fulfill requests or requirements could lead to dangers in the life of the Atoen Pah Meto people.

Hanikit is a belief system of the Atoen Pah Meto, wherein all human life must face the ruler of the world who governs both good and bad situations. This ruler is not the same as the Christian understanding of God but is seen in the context of the *halaika* belief, which originates from the indigenous religion of the Atoen Pah Meto.

The practice of *Hanikit* is understood as a ritual prayer for cleansing oneself from human sins, carried out with animal blood, which is sacrificed as Atoenment. The elements used in the purification process include animal blood, river water, oil, salt, and others. The *Hanikit* ritual takes place in various contexts, such as after a murder, when purchasing new items, recovering from illness, harvesting crops, opening a new field, or the *futus* ritual. This study specifically explores *Hanikit* in the context of the *futus* ritual.

The Practice of Hanikit in Futus (Sifon)

Futus is a requirement for adult men who are married, without exception. The word *futus* is a term commonly used by the Atoen Pah Meto people from South Amanatun. *Futus* can be understood as circumcision in Indonesian. Within Atoen Pah Meto culture, *futus* involves a special ritual. This specific ritual is the focus of this study.

The process of *futus* is carried out in a simple manner, using basic tools, and is performed by someone who has special expertise. Those undergoing *futus* must first fulfill certain requirements. Men ready for *futus* must prepare themselves by releasing "hot air" (*ma'putu* or *nanonob ma'putu*) before undergoing the ritual. The *futus* process typically lasts about an hour or more, depending on whether the individual has successfully released the "hot air."

The healing process often includes several actions, one of which is the compulsory *Hanikit*. Before performing *Hanikit*, the adult undergoing *futus* must have sexual intercourse with several women, whether they are known or unknown. Once this requirement is met, the individual must then perform the *Hanikit* ritual, which includes a prayer accompanied by an animal sacrifice, such as slaughtering a pig, goat, or chicken as a sign of gratitude.

The following stages must be understood in the practice of *Hanikit*:

- *Futus* is carried out with a prayer ritual that cannot be performed by just anyone, as it involves special offerings.
- *Futus* must take place in a water source far from residential areas.
- The tools used for *futus* are simple, such as a bamboo stick tied with "benang sulam" (embroidery thread).

- After undergoing *futus*, the individual is not allowed to communicate or greet their wife or children.
- The individual is not permitted to live in the same house with their family.
- The individual is not allowed to eat with their family.
- After *futus*, the wife and children cannot call the individual by their real name, but instead refer to them as "kase," meaning an outsider or stranger.
- After undergoing *futus*, the individual must follow the rules given by the *futus* ceremony officials.
- One uncommon requirement for healing is that the person must have sexual intercourse with several women as prescribed, which could include other men's wives, virgins, unknown women, or widows. At least three different women must be involved.

If an adult undergoing *futus* does not meet all these conditions, the *Hanikit* ritual cannot be performed. As a consequence, the person may face challenges, trials, or life-threatening situations. Therefore, those wishing to undergo *futus* must prepare themselves well, work hard, and be ready to make sacrifices to ensure proper healing. Many people face difficulties and seek alternative solutions, such as consulting a witch doctor (*dukun*) or using magic to attract women.

The *futus* ritual among the Atoen Pah Meto people is carried out for adult men during the harvest season and takes three weeks to a month. The *Hanikit* ritual can only be performed three weeks after the man, who is 18 or older and has a wife and children, undergoes the traditional *futus*.

In essence, the *futus* ritual is a sexual ritual performed with the belief that it will heal circumcision wounds, remove illness, and eliminate bad luck. As a result, the women involved in the *futus* ritual are not the man's wife, fiancée, or close relatives. This is because the woman participating in *Hanikit* is believed to have absorbed the "hot air" from the man undergoing *futus*, so sexual relations with the same man in the near future are prohibited. In addition to illness or bad luck, *ma'putu* refers to renewal, redemption, and the release of "hot air."

Origins of the Futus Ritual

The origins of the *futus* ritual are rooted in the Atoen Pah Meto people's belief that the penis is a vital organ for the creation of life. The reason why *futus* is performed in adulthood and not in childhood, as is common in other cultures, is because the Atoen Pah Meto people believe that circumcising children could have negative health consequences in adulthood, such as impotence and premature ejaculation.

The Atoen Pah Meto people believe that the traditional *futus* ritual, including *Hanikit*, serves several functions, such as promoting fertility and fulfilling social and cultural roles. However, the practice of *Hanikit* essentially functions as a form of sexual initiation within the Atoen Pah Meto culture.

The *Hanikit* practice involves sexual intercourse with another woman, not the man's wife or long-term partner, and must be performed two to four days after the traditional circumcision. This tradition requires a woman to act as an intermediary for the "hot air" to be released. In practice, a person called *ahélet* (a

facilitator) prepares women who are to be used in the *Hanikit* ritual, for a payment called "one perak" or as agreed.

Currently, the women who participate in *Hanikit* are no longer prepared by *ahelet*. The men undergoing *futus* are expected to find their own partners and arrange the ritual themselves.

During the *Hanikit* ritual, *ahelet* emphasizes that the most important part of the ritual is:

- The penis must be immersed in the vaginal fluid for healing.
- It is not necessary to perform penetration repeatedly with the same partner.
- Ejaculation should be avoided during the sexual act, as it is believed to cause premature ejaculation or infection.

The woman selected for *Hanikit* is required to be unmarried, as married women participating in the ritual would violate marital laws. The women involved in the *Hanikit* ritual must also have had previous sexual experience to avoid complications during the process. As such, many of the women participating are widows or older women whose husbands have passed away.

The purpose of *Hanikit* is to remove "hot air," cure illness, and "cool" the circumcision wound with vaginal fluid, which is believed to heal the wound. Women who perform this act are compensated with money.

This study aims to open the community's understanding of the *Hanikit* practice, explore, and analyze the reasons, factors, background, and impact on women in the Atoen Pah Meto culture, especially women involved in the *Hanikit* ritual.

Key Findings

There are five main reasons why women in the Atoen Pah Meto community agree to become *Hanikit* women:

1. The community still has a positive perception and attitude toward the *Hanikit* practice.
2. The reasons for women becoming *Hanikit* are both external (economic and social factors) and internal (sexual needs).
3. The cultural background of the Atoen Pah Meto people places tradition above religion, and a lack of knowledge about sexual relations leads to a disregard for the negative consequences of the practice on women.
4. The benefits for women involved in *Hanikit* include sexual satisfaction, the role of helping heal *futus* wounds, and social benefits where women involved in the ritual are not ostracized but sought after.
5. The positive outcomes for women involved in *Hanikit* perpetuate the practice, leading to its continuation.

DISCUSSION

Theological Understanding of Hanikit

To understand the concept of "*Hanikit*" from a Christian faith perspective, which is understood as an act of thanksgiving to the true God, one might wonder whether there is a difference in the way thanksgiving is practiced, such as in the traditions of "atoen pah meto." Could the difference in thanksgiving practices be a concern based on the practices of Atoen Pah Meto? Is Atoen Pah Meto caught in a transitional phase from tribal religion to following Jesus, which might pose a problem? Is the thanksgiving they usually perform based on the principles of tribal belief systems?

The influence of the lifestyle attached to the beliefs of Atoen Pah Meto, which are seen as comfortable, is open to views that might be advantageous, even if they contradict God's Word. It seems easier to pray and receive material blessings without considering the elements of sin that lead to harmful consequences. In the strong concern, could this be a failure of Christian mission from the Dutch missionaries to Atoen Pah Meto, who were successful in converting them to Christianity but failed to change their lifestyle? This has resulted in the continued practice of tribal-style worship, such as seeking blessings from "uis pah," known as "uis hau-uis leu," even after believing in "uis neno" (Jesus). This is due to the deeply rooted tribal beliefs in their lives.

The church possesses strong, measurable power, as when one believes and acknowledges Jesus Christ, they automatically become Christian and are considered part of Christ's body. Despite many challenges, the church remains steadfast because of God's love, which continually reveals God's mission of salvation, based solely on God's love.

In the book *Teologia Abu-Abu*, Stevri L. Lumintang states that the mission provides a space for the love of God towards mankind. The mission of God is to create a fellowship of love (Stevri L. Lumintang, 2004). Therefore, Atoen Pah Meto felt compelled to leave their tribal religion, known as halaika, and convert to Christianity. However, it seems that they only changed their identity to Christianity without fully practicing Christian values that are rooted in perfect love in daily life. The application of love in the life of Atoen Pah Meto is not yet visible in all aspects of their lives. They are still influenced by tribal teachings, believing that through practices like *Hanikit*, they will receive blessings, be spared from problems, and obtain forgiveness of sins. This is a misunderstanding that must be addressed by the church through teaching, training, and pastoral care.

Harun Hadiwijono (1990) in his book *Iman Kristen* states that the church has all wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3), for the church's life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). The church is called to maintain its fellowship with Christ. "Do not let anyone disqualify you" (Col. 2:18). This shows that church growth must be mature in faith and possess true knowledge of Christ as a unique strength, so as not to be tossed around by life situations, conditions, or experiences in worshipping the true God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

Theologically, the act of thanksgiving in the Old Testament appears different from the New Testament. In the Old Testament, thanksgiving still requires sacrificial offerings, while in the New Testament, offerings remain but are not animal sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. The forms of thanksgiving that must

be understood in the Christian faith and practiced by the church should not contradict the Bible as the absolute truth for all believers.

Many Christians may feel content when they become Christians, but they must realize that the greatest mistake in Christian life is not understanding the meaning of true thanksgiving according to the Christian faith.

In the book by Jonar Situmorang, five types of sacrificial offerings are mentioned, stating that "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). The book of Leviticus lists types of sacrifices, including burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings. These five sacrifices are divided into two groups: sacrifices that are sweet-smelling (Lev. 1:9,13,17; 2:2,9; 3:5,16), which include burnt offerings, grain offerings, and peace offerings, are voluntary. In contrast, the sin and guilt offerings, which have no aroma, are mandatory (Jonar Situmorang, 2019). It can be understood that practices done according to proper rules and standards will certainly result in forgiveness and blessings, much like thanksgiving.

If we closely observe the practices of Atoen Pah Meto, they resemble the actions of Israel in the Old Testament. They seem to struggle for salvation, seeking life, and praying for blessings and forgiveness of sins from the Lord, even though their practices are misguided, lacking perseverance in God, as they are not based on God's Word. The practices of *Hanikit* also seem related to blood sacrifices, which are believed to have elements of Atoenment for sin, with offerings typically involving animals such as pigs, chickens, or goats, and sometimes more than one type of animal.

In the practice of *Hanikit*, it seems that Atoen Pah Meto believes they are offering thanksgiving to the Lord God through their sacrifices. However, there is an unhealthy or misguided communication, as they involve spirits in the offerings. Ritual prayers are often directed toward the dead, or the so-called "pah tuaf" or "hau-leu." Generally, Atoen Pah Meto often compromise, engage in dialogue, or offer sacrifices based on their desires. This is in direct contradiction with the Bible: "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:31). Therefore, such practices must be avoided by Christians, as they could result in God's curse in the future.

Thanksgiving is a Christian obligation because it is praise to God who blesses and sustains humanity according to His will, and it can take various forms. As the Apostle Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." This verse encourages all believers to remain thankful to God because He created humanity in His image, and Jesus Christ is the center of Christian praise.

Thanksgiving in the Christian faith can be expressed through praise to God, prayer, tangible actions such as offering gifts to God, commitment, self-denial such as fasting, and many other ways that honor God sincerely, biblically, and in a way that pleases God alone.

Generally, the practices of *Hanikit*, understood as thanksgiving by the Atoen Pah Meto community, do not reflect the true identity of a Christian. In his book, Samuel Tumanggor states, "A noble reality in Christianity is that the Gospel of

Jesus Christ was never intended to change our identity. Rather, the Gospel transforms our lives, not our identity" (Samuel Tumanggor, 2007).

This is clear evidence that the practice of *Hanikit* among Atoen Pah Meto happens because they have not truly experienced the Gospel. They have not sincerely lived according to the Gospel, and therefore, the practices of *Hanikit* still involve elements of idol worship, as understood by their tribal religion, which contradicts Christian faith. The practice of *Hanikit* among Atoen Pah Meto indicates that the presence of the church in Pah Meto, through teaching the Gospel and discipleship, has not yet taken root in the lives of the believers, which hinders spiritual growth, let alone salvation. This shows that the understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ's resurrection, centered on Jesus as Lord and Savior, has not been adequately understood or embraced.

To avoid the ritual practices of *Hanikit*, the church must understand that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of Christianity, and this must continuously be taught from generation to generation.

In Christian faith, there is no requirement for the ritualistic prayer practices of *Hanikit*, such as those practiced by Atoen Pah Meto, especially when these rituals rely on animal blood as Atoenment for sins or to alleviate hardships. This understanding contradicts biblical teachings, which assert that only through the blood of Jesus Christ is true thanksgiving possible. As stated in 1 Peter 2:24, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds, you have been healed."

This is similar to the guidance found in Isaiah 8:19, which describes the life of Israel as God's chosen people who did not repent, continuing in idolatry: "When they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?" This is a great sin committed by Israel, and today many Christians continue to follow similar mistaken practices, as Israel did, as God's people.

The church, as the spearhead of proclaiming the Gospel, must work diligently and responsibly to lead the believers of Atoen Pah Meto out of their misunderstanding and the false practices of *Hanikit*, which directly undermine the correct teachings of blessings, forgiveness of sins, and salvation in the Christian faith. The church's presence in the world is to be the salt and light, preserving the goodness and dispelling darkness. The church's task is to continually proclaim the message of repentance to all people, especially the Atoen Pah Meto community, assuring them of the Gospel of Christ.

H. Venema (1997) states that the Gospel of Christ must be preached and presented to people in their concrete, real situations. Every person has a distinct life and cultural pattern, and it is impossible to separate someone from their culture. The Bible further emphasizes, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). It is certain that only in Christ Jesus is salvation, and this cannot be substituted by the ritual practices of *Hanikit*, which mislead many believers, especially Atoen Pah Meto.

The Meaning of Gratitude According to the Christian Faith

The Meaning of the Expression "Give Thanks in All Circumstances" According to 1 Thessalonians 5:18

The book of 1 Thessalonians can be divided into four main parts: first, the greeting from Paul (1:1); second, Paul's thanksgiving for the life of the Thessalonian church (1:2-3:13); third, practical instructions and advice from Paul for the Thessalonian church (4:1-5:22); and finally, the closing of the letter (5:23-28).

When considering 1 Thessalonians 5:18, it falls within the third section, which provides practical advice for the Thessalonian church. There are several pieces of practical advice given by Paul, including: advice on sexual purity (4:1-8), brotherly love (4:9-10), working honestly (4:11-12), the coming of Christ (4:13-5:11), honoring spiritual leaders (5:12-13), Christian life (5:14-18), and spiritual discernment (5:19-22).

The command "give thanks in all circumstances" is given in the context of the Christian life. This means that a true and ideal Christian life should always practice and be filled with thanksgiving. But what does it mean to understand gratitude in this context? This will be elaborated in this section. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 can be divided into two main parts: (1) Give thanks in all circumstances, and (2) for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

First, Give Thanks in All Circumstances. It should be emphasized here that giving thanks is a command. This is reflected in the expression "give thanks," which in Greek uses the word εὐχαριστεῖτε (eucharisteite), which is in the present active imperative tense, second person plural of the verb εὐχαριστέω (eucharisteo) (William D. Mounce, 1993). Bauer-Danker suggests that the word εὐχαριστέω can be understood in three ways: (1) to show one is under obligation, be thankful, feel obligated to thank; (2) to express appreciation for benefits or blessings, give thanks, express thanks, render/return thanks; (3) to pray. In the context of 1 Thessalonians 5:18, the second meaning is more appropriate, namely, to express appreciation for benefits and blessings (Walter Bauer, 2000).

This means that Paul is commanding the Thessalonians to give thanks to God because they have received and experienced such great gifts from God, especially the salvation in Jesus Christ. Therefore, their thanksgiving is a way to show appreciation and gratitude to God. Additionally, they are also commanded to be thankful because God's help is always evident when they face suffering. As Timothy A. Brookins (2021) mentions, gratitude toward God may not have been the Thessalonians' most natural instinct under their circumstances, but Paul's commendation of this activity implies that they possess something that far transcends the afflictions they are currently suffering. Similarly, Leon Morris (2009) states:

"This conviction of divine sovereignty and providence leads to the command, give thanks in all circumstances. It may not be easy to see the bright side of a particular trial, but if God is over all, then his hand is in that trial; his own cannot but recognize his goodness and make their thanksgiving. Perhaps we should notice that in all circumstances is not quite the same as 'at every time' (the two are differentiated in 2 Cor. 9:8)."

In other words, the belief in God's sovereignty and providence leads to the command to give thanks in every situation. It may not be easy to see the positive aspect of a particular trial, but if God is in control of everything, His hand is in that trial; His own people cannot help but recognize His goodness and offer their thanksgiving. It is important to note that "in all circumstances" is not the same as "at every time," as the two are distinguished in 2 Corinthians 9:8.

There is no reason for any Christian to fail to give thanks in all things. Why? P.H.R. van Houwelingen notes that this exhortation appears in almost every letter of Paul (e.g., Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 3:17), and even Paul, Silvanus, Timothy, and Jesus Himself set an example of how Christians should always give thanks. They were always thankful to God because the Thessalonians had received the word preached with faith (1:2; 2:13). Thus, Christian gratitude does not depend on circumstances (P.H.R. van Houwelingen, 2018).

Therefore, every Christian should live a life of continual thanksgiving, and this should be unconditional. As Gloriya Dwi Kristanti (2021) explains, giving thanks impacts the Christian lifestyle in ways such as: strengthening faith, being rooted in Christ, experiencing the fullness of God, and having a heart overflowing with gratitude. Since every Christian has received the gift of salvation freely from God in Christ, and they also experience God's provision, both physically and spiritually, including His preservation through suffering and persecution. This is also emphasized by David Pranoto (2017), who states that Christians give thanks because God still gives them the opportunity to enjoy life and salvation. Every Christian should maximize their time to give thanks to God.

Second, For This Is the Will of God in Christ Jesus for You.

According to Bauer-Danker (1957), the word *θέλημα* (*thelēma*) can be understood in two ways: (1) what one wishes to happen, the objective sense, what is willed; and (2) the act of willing or desiring, the subjective sense, will. In the context of 1 Thessalonians 5:18, the first meaning is more relevant, which emphasizes what God desires to happen, the objective sense of what is willed.

Morris (2009) adds that, because this is the will of God, it almost certainly refers to the three commands in verses 16-18: rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances. Although these are a single unit, they are inseparable and interrelated. The word *will* here does not have an article, just as in 4:3 it does not refer to the totality of God's will. God wants us to do other things, but these three are certainly part of His will for us. The addition of "in Christ Jesus" is characteristic of Pauline theology. God's will is revealed in Christ, and it is through Christ that we are given the strength to fulfill God's will.

Brookins further adds, "Following these three commands, Paul adds the words 'for this is the will of God for you.' Although this statement specifically qualifies the command to give thanks, the structural parallel between verses 12-13, 14, and 16-18 suggests that this statement qualifies all three commands in 5:16-18" (Brookins, 2021). Houwelingen (2018) also says that in the same way, God desires that Christians express their faith by rejoicing, praying, and living in thanksgiving.

As Yance Ivoni Nenosono and Simon Subagio (2021) also state, those who believe in God's promises – those who trust in Jesus Christ – are always joyful in

all things, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances. In other words, any trials they face are part of God's will for them, or His desire for those who live in Christ Jesus.

This means that thanksgiving cannot be separated from rejoicing and praying. Typically, all three are part of the same moment and occur together. What is interesting is that every Christian is called to give thanks in all circumstances, conditions, and times. Therefore, there is no time for a Christian to not rejoice, not pray, or not give thanks. The totality of a Christian's life is to give thanks, pray, and rejoice. This should be the essence of every Christian's life because this is what God desires for us in Christ Jesus.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The Hanikit ritual reflects gratitude values similar to biblical thanksgiving, as emphasized in both the Old and New Testaments. However, specific elements of the ritual, such as the *futus* practice, diverge from biblical teachings. These include prayers directed toward rulers in the *halaika* context and the requirement for sexual relations with a Hanikit woman.

While biblical thanksgiving emphasizes humility, worship, and recognition of God's sovereignty, the Hanikit ritual incorporates cultural elements unique to its tradition. This contrast underscores the divergence between biblical thanksgiving focused on honoring God through prayer, sacrifice, and righteous living and cultural practices that may involve earthly hierarchies or physical acts.

Recommendation

To reconcile differences between cultural traditions like the Hanikit ritual and biblical teachings, fostering dialogue is crucial. Communities are encouraged to reflect on the biblical concept of thanksgiving and adapt cultural practices to align with Christian faith. Spiritual leaders should educate congregations on thanksgiving and prayer, emphasizing a direct relationship with God rather than intermediaries or physical rituals. By balancing cultural heritage with biblical principles, communities can cultivate a more authentic and spiritually aligned expression of gratitude.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Further research is essential to examine the integration of cultural rituals like Hanikit with Christian thanksgiving practices. This includes exploring how cultural expressions of gratitude align with biblical teachings across diverse regions and communities. Investigating the influence of these rituals on believers' spiritual lives and perceptions of God's sovereignty could provide valuable insights. Comparative studies on cultural thanksgiving traditions and biblical principles may identify areas for harmonization or adaptation, contributing to a deeper understanding of how faith communities balance tradition with scripture while preserving culture and maintaining spiritual integrity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my deepest gratitude to everyone who contributed to the successful completion of this research. I am especially thankful to my colleagues for their invaluable suggestions, constructive feedback, and ongoing encouragement, which significantly enhanced this study. I also sincerely appreciate the financial support that enabled the execution of this research. This project would not have been possible without the assistance and generosity of all involved. I am truly thankful for your steadfast support and the privilege of collaborating with such dedicated individuals. Thank you for your contributions.

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