

Towards an Imaginative Friendship: A Dialogue Between the Concept of Dalihan Na Tolu and the Perichoresis of the Trinity for Christians, Muslims, and Parmalim in the Toba Batak Context

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ABSTRACT

Religious diversity is central to the Indonesian context. Since the Reformation, Indonesia has been mired in multifaceted crises such as self-determination conflicts (Aceh and Papua), identity politics, religious fundamentalism, terrorism, and social conflicts. One method of conflict resolution is interfaith dialogue. However, interfaith dialogue is insufficient to resolve the disputes. The limitation of this approach is that it disregards the importance of local issues and wisdom. Toba Batak is a tribe in North Sumatra where Christians, Muslims, and Parmalim coexist and live together. Dalihan Na Tolu explains that each human being has one essence in three persons, namely Hula-hula (blessing giver), Dongan Tubu (companion), and Boru (servant). Dalihan Na Tolu brings Christian, Muslim, and Parmalim into a trilogue. This research seeks to engage the concept of Dalihan Na Tolu with the idea of perichoresis of the Trinity, examining how this dialogue can shape a contextual understanding of God and Jesus Christ in the Toba Batak context. The pivotal inquiry pertains to integrating the concepts of Dalihan Na Tolu and perichoresis, fostering an imaginative model for interfaith dialogue within the Toba Batak context. Ultimately, this study proposes a contextual paradigm that promotes a trilogue among Christians, Muslims, and Parmalim, addressing Indonesia's complex tapestry of religious coexistence.

Keywords: perichoresis, Trinity, Dalihan Na Tolu, identity, communion, friendship, Christians, Muslims, Parmalim.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a pluralistic nation of various ethnic groups, races, languages, and religions. It has over 17,000 islands, including Sumatra, Sulawesi, Java, and Borneo and New Guinea parts. Indonesia has approximately 1,300 distinct native ethnic groups, making it an ethnically diverse country. The six largest ethnic groups are Javanese (40%), Sundanese (16%), Batak (4%), Sulawesi (3%), Madurese

(3%), and Betawi (3%). Indonesia is also home to a wide range of religious beliefs. Currently, Indonesia recognizes several religions, including Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Aliran Kepercayaan.¹ Amidst the richness of its diversity, Indonesians uphold the national motto “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika,” meaning “Unity in Diversity.” Despite its official motto, the country is becoming increasingly inhospitable toward adherents of religious minorities.

With a population of approximately 270 million, Indonesia is the world’s fourth-most populous country and the most populous Muslim-majority country. Understanding Indonesia’s multicultural background, it has been in the grip of a multifaceted crisis since the Reformation Era (1997). According to Lambang Trijono, the map of conflict in Indonesia is marked by “latent conflict” in various sectors, where some internal disputes occur. First, there are self-determination conflicts, such as those in Aceh and Papua who want to be liberated. Second, there are socio-communal conflicts, as in Maluku, Kalimantan, and Poso, where the issues of ethnicities, tribes, and religions were increased. Third, there are conflicts between public policy and civil society. Fourth, religious fundamentalism, radicalism, Syariah law, and terrorism can lead to social tension, conflicts, and threats to national security. Fifth, social and economic issues include immigration, refugees, unemployment, poverty, injustice, socioeconomic inequality, and corruption.² All these conflicts have further sharpened identity politics involving ethnicity, race, class, and religion in society. In addition, tensions between the government and local communities, Java and Non-Java, Islam and Non-Islam, have further led to sentiments and degradation of friendship in grassroots communities.

In the realm of political Islam and religious-based violence, Abdil Mugis Mudhoffir claims that religious violence was caused by the democratic transition period. Decentralization has created an opportunity for ethnic and religious groups to redefine their identities, which can then be used to initiate and provoke ethnic

1 Ministry of Religious Affairs. 15 May 2018. Archived from the original on 3 September 2020. Retrieved 24 September 2020.

2 Trijono Lambang, *Potret Retak Nusantara: Studi Kasus Konflik Di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: CSPS Books University of Gadjah Mada, 2004), 2.

and religious conflicts. In this situation, violence is defined as the result of coercive actions, extortion, and intimidation based on ethnicity and religion. To address these issues, the state must implement strong security measures, such as anti-terrorism legislation. Simultaneously, an intensive inter-religious dialogue is required.³ The failure of conflict resolution, according to Trijono, was caused by the “free market approach” based on neoliberal theory. This approach is insensitive to local issues, has a tendency to generalize all aspects of Indonesia, and exacerbates inequalities and social tensions. Trijono, on the other hand, believes that understanding and analyzing the conflicts in their specific context is critical.⁴

Interfaith dialogue is mainly considered one of the methods for resolving a conflict. Interfaith dialogues generally occur in several types:

a. Top-Down Approach

The government led and initiated the interfaith dialogue with the agenda of maintaining national stability and unity. Sometimes, an assertive and aggressive approach can be taken to demonstrate this agenda.

a. Elitist

The interfaith dialogue was initiated and attended by theologians and religious leaders. As a result, a mutual peace agreement has been reached, but it is only for academic purposes.

a. Double Standard

Peace treaties are only reached at the level of leaders, while the spirit of converting others still occurs at the grassroots level.

However, in my opinion, implementing the interfaith dialogue is ineffective because many local conflicts are handled globally, leaving the fundamental local issues unaddressed. This effort can indeed defuse the open conflict on the surface, but it does not address the root causes of disputes, which remain at the grassroots level. This effort’s drawback is that it fails to take into account local aspects, such as local issues and local wisdom.

3 Abdil Mughis Mudhoffir, “Political Islam and Religious Violence in Post-New Order Indonesia,” *MASYARAKAT: Jurnal Sosiologi* 20, no. 1 (2016): 2, <https://doi.org/10.7454/mjs.v20i1.4796>.

4 Lambang, *Potret Retak Nusantara: Studi Kasus Konflik Di Indonesia*, 12.

The conflicts between Muslims and Christians at the grassroots level, which are caused by the misinterpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity and the lack of a contextual approach, have been extensively studied. In fact, such studies are unsatisfactory because there is a chance to construct a contextual inter-faith dialogue by examining the local wisdom of Toba Batak concept of Dalihan Na Tolu that is always used as the socio-cultural foundation of Toba Batak's relationship, interaction, community, ritual practice, and norms. Research on religious conflicts has been chiefly restricted to interfaith dialogue, so Dalihan Na Tolu – Toba-Batak's daily practice – can provide space to acknowledge the otherness. This paper highlights two crucial concepts for constructing an imaginative friendship in the Toba Batak context. On the one hand, the Dalihan Na Tolu provides the cultural root to discuss friendship, relationships, interaction, and community. On the other hand, the concept of perchoresis of the Trinity will enrich the notions of otherness, mutual indwelling, interpenetration, and reciprocal relationships.

In the recent development of theological studies, the revival of the doctrine of the Trinity and the issue of religious pluralism remarks a shifting paradigm. Religious pluralism has challenged Christians to relate the doctrine of the Trinity to the presence of other believers. The revival of the doctrine of the Trinity was led by Karl Barth, who considered it to be the core of the Christian understanding of God. Barth asserted that God is the initiative in all things, whereas the Trinity describes the interdependent relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christ is central to Barth's theology. In addition, Barth also emphasized that the unity of the Triune God is not only found in God's revelation but also because it is in God-self. Therefore, talking about the doctrine of the Trinity always underlines the unity of the Immanent Trinity and the Economic Trinity.⁵

For Barth, God's revelation is God's direct speech. He opines that revelation is *Dei loquentis persona*. Revelation is the revelation of lordship, and lordship means freedom. In God's revelation, God's Word is identical with God-self. In his critical

5 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics (Volume I, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part I)* (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 1932), 979.

thinking, Barth underlines that God reveals God-self as the Lord, which means that God reveals what only God can reveal: God-self. In this sense, God has and exercises God's freedom and lordship. The Triune God is the ground without grounds. Barth concludes that revelation always means "revealing even in the form" or means revelation. The form, as such, the means, does not replace God's place. It is not the form but "God in the form" that reveals, speaks, creates, comforts, works, and assists. God reveals God-self in Jesus Christ, not in other persons, and as the Holy Spirit, not as any spirit. It is the Son of God and the Spirit of God, therefore the same God. In Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, God's being historically revealed. Thus, God's presence is always God's decision to be present.⁶

The Trinity is not simply a mode through which God elects to manifest God-self, but it fundamentally comprises the eternal essence of God's being. As expressed in Karl Barth's notion, the Trinity reflects the true identity of God rather than a mere functional mode of operation. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons sharing one divine essence, and the relations between them exemplify God's immanent being and God's engagement with creation. In conclusion, discussing the doctrine of the Trinity means not only about the God who reveals God-self but also the way God does it and the human to whom God does it.

Wolfhart Pannenberg states that only through The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit do humans have the access to acknowledge God is Triune God. The presence of Father, Son, and Spirit emphasizes the reciprocal self-distinction of the persons of the Trinity and also as the concrete form of Trinitarian relations. As he follows the argumentation of John of Damascus, Pannenberg denotes the thesis that God's essence is incomprehensible; however, the distinction between God's essence is how humans comprehend God's existence. God's incomprehensibility has to do with God's infinity and with the infinite unity of God's essence. Distinction must not refer to separation. In reference to the Trinity, it is evident that differentiation is not eliminated inside unity; instead, the oneness of the living God is a unity within distinction. Barth's excessive focus on the Christocentric aspect of revelation leaves

⁶ Barth, 978.

the impression that there is no reference to creation as the work of the Father and that the Father remains outside human history.

In contrast to Barth's thinking, Pannenberg argues that the doctrine of the Trinity does not merely start from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and then return to the Trinity in the eternal essence of God. Pannenberg emphasizes that it is vital to connect the Trinity in the eternal essence of God to the historical revelation of God. He believes that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ also demonstrate the Father's involvement in human history. On the other hand, the death and resurrection of the Son prove that in their trinitarian relationship, each person is interdependent and connected to the other.⁷ Thus, the Triune God, in fact, correlates to human history, the present life, and the plurality of finite creatures.

Recognizing the significance of religious traditions is a crucial means to relate the Trinity to human history. Religious pluralism depicts the diversity and distinction of human expression of God. At the same time, it also challenges Christians to engage with religious pluralism by articulating the relationship of the Triune God. Joas Adiprasetya and Nindyo Sasongko delve into the theological understanding of friendship, particularly through the lens of the Triune God. They emphasize that true friendship is characterized by vulnerability, openness to the future, reimagination, prophetic dimension, and compassion. It highlights the dynamic nature of friendships and critiques hierarchical structures while fostering equality and community. This theology of friendship underlines hospitality, compassion, and understanding among diverse groups, emphasizing the importance of knowing others to better understand oneself.⁸

Furthermore, Adiprasetya, in his book "An Imaginative Glimpse," elaborates on Volf's idea of dynamic embrace. Volf states four actions of the dynamic embrace: opening the arms, waiting, closing the arms, and opening the arms again. Volf reminds us that the four actions must be there, and each must follow them. To

7 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1 (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2004), 327–29.

8 Joas Adiprasetya and Nindyo Sasongko, "A Compassionate Space-making: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Friendship," *The Ecumenical Review* 71, no. 1–2 (January 2019): 27–29, <https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12416>.

stop in one or two actions would abort the embrace and conduct exclusion. The four actions are the essential steps of an integrated movement. For Adiprasetya, the final move is crucial as each party releases the previously embraced partner and lets them be themselves. By elaborating on Volf's embracing theology, Prasetya suggests a praxis of embracing. The unconditional giving of self and appreciation of others characterizes it. From this thinking, Adiprasetya finally offers a perichoretic perspective of religious embracing.⁹

Both Barth and Pannenberg emphasize self-revelation and self-distinction within the Triune God. Self-distinction also provides the reason for the self-interconnection and relation of the persons of the Trinity. They also underline the distinction between the Triune God and creatures and, at the same time, portray God's relation with the world. In understanding God, Barth only acknowledged *analogia fidei*. It accentuates God's exclusive self-revelation in Jesus Christ as the true knowledge of God. One must rely on God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and faith is a response to God's grace. Barth's interest is the essence of the Triune God and God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ; however, Pannenberg focuses on the historical revelation of God. Both do not elaborate on the social aspects of humans and the context of religious plurality when discussing the doctrine of the Trinity.

Adiprasetya and Sasongko examine the doctrine of the Trinity in the context of religious plurality. Their theological argumentation leads to recognizing and accepting religious diversity and identities. They also use the concept of the perichoresis of the Trinity as the theological framework and lens to establish relationships among the believers. This perichoretic embracing has opened the way for social restoration within society. However, the discussion does not address the significance of the local wisdom. This study emphasizes the potential of local wisdom, such as Dalihan Na Tolu in Toba Batak society, to provide a cultural root in order to comprehend the concept of perichoresis and to exercise the practical expression of the perichoretic relationship in the context of religious plurality.

9 Joas Adiprasetya, *An Imaginative Glimpse: The Trinity and Multiple Religious Participations*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 198 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 244-45.

METHODS

This paper examines and implements dialogue between the concept of Dalihan Na Tolu and the concept of perichoresis of Trinitarian doctrine. This paper proposes an imaginative idea of the perichoresis of the Trinity. How can we employ the concept of perichoresis of Trinity and Dalihan Na Tolu to construct an imaginative trinitarian friendship among the Christians, Muslims, and Parmalim in the Toba Batak context? This research focuses on the Toba Batak tribe in North Sumatra, where Christians, Muslims, and Parmalim live together. This paper established a qualitative research methodology to respond to the issues of diversity, identity, relationships, and communion in the Toba Batak society. The process begins with gathering facts, data, and information from books or articles. To analyze the issues, this paper employs the multi-textual method. A multi-textual theology is also non-linear in its operation. In such a complex process, any subject matter (the Christian Bible, poverty, gender inequality, other religious traditions, a specific Christian tradition, and so on) can become the primary text.

Meanwhile, others become con-text, para-text, syn-text, anti-text, dia-text, pre-text, post-text, or many-texts, depending on their function(s) within a theological imagination.¹⁰ This is an attempt to do constructive theology, which accepts a specific context as a source that gives life to the Bible reading and deconstructs a new paradigm. To bridge the dialogue between the Dalihan Na Tolu concept and perichoresis, I elaborate on Asia's way of thinking "both/and." This logic is paramount to explain the action and role of "include-to be included" and "in" between different persons in Trinity and Dalihan Na Tolu. This study underlines the significance of a critical engagement between the concept of Dalihan Na Tolu and the concept of perichoresis of the Trinity in order to construct an imaginative friendship. This imaginative friendship can propose a cultural picture and praxis of perichoretic friendship between Christians, Muslims, and Parmalim in Toba Batak society.

10 Joas Adiprasetya, "Towards an Asian Multitextual Theology," *Exchange* 43, no. 2 (May 12, 2014): 119-31, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1572543X-12341313>.

DISCUSSION

The Perichoresis of the Trinity

The Trinitarian doctrine is the heart of Christianity. It explains the revelation of the Triune God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in human history. There are various considerations in discussing the Trinitarian doctrine, such as the historical context, the socio-political issues, and the shifting paradigms. All these conditions influenced the interpretation and theological understanding of the Triune God. On the other hand, the multiple religions in Asia appear as the text and context in contextualizing the Trinitarian doctrine.

Perichoresis is the Greek word for the eternal mutual indwelling of the persons of the Trinity (in Latin, *circumincession*). The term perichoresis is originally a Stoic term meaning “interpenetration” and is also connected with “rotation.”¹¹ Perichoresis is derived from the Greek noun *chora*, which means “space” or “room,” and the verb *chorein*, which means “to contain,” “to make room,” or “to go forward,” with the word *peri* adding the idea of reciprocity. Lampe translates the word *perichoreo* as “encompass,” “alternate by revolution,” and “pass into reciprocally.” Perichoresis is one of the words that can be used to describe the specific relationship that involves the three hypostases of the Trinity. The term was first used in theological studies by Gregory of Nazianzus.¹²

In Latin translation, it becomes *circumincessio*, from the word *circum-inedere*, which means “to permeate,” “to move around,” “moving in and through the other” or “to interpenetrate,” and the word “*circumincessio*” from “*circum-in-sedere*,” which means “to be seated” or “to sit around.” This expresses a more dynamic, active, and mutual indwelling.¹³ The verb *perichorein* and the noun *perichoresis* can be found in Herodotus’ writing, *Histories*, I.210, with the meaning

11 Verna E. Harrison, “Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1991): 9.

12 Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (New York, NY: Clarendon, 1961), 1077.

13 Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 272.

of “dynastic succession” and in the Stoic author Anaxagoras, related to “dynamic communication” between the *Nous* and *cosmos*.¹⁴

Perichoresis denotes a “mutual containing” or “enveloping of realities,” also known as “coinherence” or “coindwelling” of two or more persons (in the case of the Trinity) or natures (in the case of the God-world relationship), where each interpenetrates the others without confusion, separation, or division. It also refers to “the dynamic process of making space for another around oneself.”¹⁵ The word *perichoreo* is not derived from *perichoreuo*, which means “to dance around”. However, it later illustrates the dynamic sense of perichoresis. The word *circumincessio* provides a beautiful metaphor for the ‘divine dance,’ which was used first in the Middle Ages as an image of the divine perichoresis. LaCugna argues even though this metaphor was a faulty etymology, it provides a good illustration of the dynamic sense of perichoresis and is more effective.¹⁶

Gregory of Nazianzus, in Oration 31.14, mentions that it is not the Father alone who will be “God all in all” but also the Son and the Spirit. Here, Gregory does not separate the perichoretic Trinitarian from the concept of *homoousion*. In this text, the symmetry between the Persons is explicitly demonstrated (i.e., equal glory), and they are undivided persons. Perichoresis does not only explain God’s internal relationship but also God’s relationship with the created world. The ‘mutual indwelling’ (*perichoresin*) that characterizes the persons of the Trinity transcends what is possible (*adynaton*) for human beings and creatures. However, God permeates (*hakein*) and fills (*plaroun*) all things.¹⁷

Gregory also clarifies the depth of the relationship within the Trinity by using the verb “*periphero*.” The One is in the Other. The persons of the Trinity are intimately interconnected and interrelated. He also describes the Trinity as the revolving circle of the glory moving round (*perichoran*) from one to another. The

14 Danut Manastireanu, *A Perichoretic Model of the Church: The Trinitarian Ecclesiology of Dumitru Staniloae* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Lap Lambert Academic Pub, 2012), 78.

15 Adiprasetya, *An Imaginative Glimpse*, 1.

16 LaCugna, *God for Us*, 271.

17 Daniel F. Stramara, “Gregory of Nyssa’s Terminology for Trinitarian Perichoresis,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 52, no. 3 (August 1998): 260, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1584502>.

relations are not static but “revolve around” one another. The glory, the loving praise they share and bestow upon one another, is “peripheric.” It means to carry around or whirl about. The Person whirls “about” each other and inside of each other. No One person is outside the Other. Moreover, he mentions that each person is “falling all over” the other and glorying in the other.¹⁸

John of Damascus, in his writing *De Fide Orthodoxa*, mentions that the word perichoresis has various meanings such as “interpenetration,” “coinherence,” “mutual indwelling,” and “mutual immanence.” Through this term, John represents both “identity” and “difference,” “true union,” and yet “intrinsic variety.” John concluded his idea of mutual indwelling by saying that the three Persons or hypostases (ton trion hypostaseon-genitive plural) are at the same time “inseparable” (*adiastatoi*) and “without confusion” (*asyngkuton*). Inseparable is qualified by attributing “one movement” to the divine triad. In this understanding, perichoresis denotes both “the qualities of identity” (oneness of place and action) and “difference” (the continuing separateness of each of the hypostases).¹⁹

John of Damascus establishes two words, *ousia*, and *hypostaseis*, as foundational words in describing the relationship between the one and the three.²⁰ John also denotes his affirmation of the identity and difference of the divine Trinity in the formula of “one essence, three hypostases” (*mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*). At this point, John declares God’s role in creating, preserving, and filling all things. These Three are one in all things save in “the being unbegotten, the being begotten, and the procession.” That difference exists by revelation. The Trinitarian personhood exists in the relationship of *hypostaseis*, and each *hypostaseis* is stamped with uniqueness derived from the nature of its origin.²¹

18 Stramara, 261.

19 Charles C. Twombly, *Perichoresis and Personhood: God, Christ, and Salvation in John of Damascus*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 216 (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 36.

20 Daniel J. Janosik, *John of Damascus, First Apologist to the Muslims: The Trinity and Christian Apologetics in the Early Islamic Period* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 173.

21 Twombly, *Perichoresis and Personhood*, 113.

John develops the sense of God's intermingling of "the one and the three" in his notion of the "circle dance" of God's triune nature. The image of interpenetrations was demonstrated by a "circle dance," a dance of begetting, proceeding, and yet remaining unbegotten. The perichoretic relationship is clearly described by the spirit abiding on the son and the son in the spirit as the father is in the son. The mutual indwelling of the father and son is expanded to include the holy spirit in the same coinherence as the other hypostases. The plausible way for this "unity within a community" to exist is for the three persons to exist in one another, uncompounded and without confusion.²²

The Perichoretic Trinitarian emphasizes the "communion." This "communion" is a way to think of relational God, existing as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The word "prosopon" is likewise relational; it is directional: towards the face of another. At the heart of God, there is an interpersonal communion or *koinonia*, with communion as the function of all three divine persons. For the perichoretic Trinity, that promotes the interpersonal model, we can see that God's inner being is relational and communion, with each of the three persons relating to the other two in reciprocal delight.²³ Thus, "Father-Son-Holy Spirit" is a term for relation and communion.

The word *prosopon* also correlates with existence. The Church Fathers used *ousia*, a philosophical language that meant "essence." This word has an ontological resonance with the verb *eimi*, which means "to be." This verb is used to stress the unity of divinity. From these words, the Trinity thus opens and serves as a new aspect for humanity: personhood. The word "prosopon" denotes the notion of the person (*persona*). The word *prosopon* here refers to "the other." The perichoretic of the Trinity is also a plausible reason for the participation of human life in Trinitarian friendship. Because God is known through God's personal relationship, so revelation is also a "theocosmic" relationship.²⁴

22 Janosik, John of Damascus, *First Apologist to the Muslims*, 181.

23 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 155.

24 Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary

The perichoresis of Trinity describes the mutual indwelling and interpenetration of the three persons. The three persons are not identical to each other but one in essence. All three occupy the same divine space. God is fullness of personal being, and they are persons in relation to others. The Son does not beget the Father, nor does the Father proceed from the Holy Spirit. However, the Father is the Father of the Son, the Son is the Son of the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son. The perichoresis denotes that the three persons are fully God, and the whole God is in each other of the three. The three persons of the Trinity mutually contain each other.²⁵ I can conclude that the concept of “perichoresis” was first used to explain the hypostatic union of humanity and divinity in Jesus Christ. In this case, humanity gets the space to relate to divinity. Furthermore, the concept of “perichoresis” explains the Trinitarian relationship of God where God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are mutually indwelling and interpenetrating one another. Thus, the concept of “perichoresis” can also be elaborated to understand God and the trinitarian relationship of religious multiplicity in the Toba Batak context.

Dalihan Na Tolu: Hulahula, Dongan Tubu, and Boru

The Batak tribe lives in North Sumatra Province. Sumatra Island is the second-largest island in the Indonesian archipelago, known as Pulau Harapan (the Island of Hope) or Pulau Emas (the Island of Gold). Medan, the capital of North Sumatra province, is also the third largest city in Indonesia. Anthropologists usually refer to six Batak ethnic groups, namely Batak Mandailing and Angkola in South Tapanuli, Batak Toba and Pakpak in North Tapanuli, Batak Simalungun and Karo in northeastern North Tapanuli. These Batak ethnic groups share certain cultural characteristics, clans, and local languages. However, all the Batak ethnic groups practice the Dalihan Na Tolu concept in their daily activities.²⁶

Press, 1978), 43.

25 Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 435.

26 Kathryn J. Brineman Bovill, “Toba Batak Relationship Terminology,” *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 141, no. 1 (1985): 38, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90003396>.

The majority of Bataknese are Christians, followed by Muslims and Parmalim. In the pre-Christianity era, the traditional Batak worshiped Debata Mulajadi Na Bolon as the Supreme God. The Parmalim community remains practicing this belief. Christians only use the term “debata” as the title of God. The first contact with Christianity occurred in the seventh century, when Nestorian missionaries arrived in Barus, on the west coast of the Toba Batak region, though little information is available. In the early ninth century, the Muslim Paderi movement from West Sumatra succeeded in converting the Batak Angkola and Mandailing regions.²⁷

The triadic concept can also be found in Batak spirituality, cosmology, and social order. According to indigenous Toba Batak belief, the God Mulajadi Na Bolon manifested God-self as Batara Guru, Mangala Bulan, and Soripada. This triune god is called Debata Na Tolu.²⁸ Debata Mulajadi Na Bolon’s omnipotence is embodied in Batara Guru. Soripada symbolizes God’s power, and Mangala Bulan represents God’s court authority. The Debata Na Tolu then appear in the triadic cosmic order. The triadic cosmos is the union of Banua Gijnjang, Banua Tonga, and Banua Toru. God lives in Banua Gijnjang (the upper cosmos). Humans and non-human creatures live in Banua Tonga (the middle cosmos). Banua Toru (the below cosmos) is the home of evil spirits who cause disasters and diseases.²⁹ Although each banua is different, the triadic cosmos is interconnected and inseparable. Debata Mulajadi Na Bolon, through Debata Na Tolu, demonstrates God’s creative works and purposes within the triadic Banua.³⁰ As a result, the triadic image is also implanted in Dalihan Na Tolu as the foundation of human existence and socio-cultural order in the world.³¹

Dalihan Na Tolu is a socio-cultural order practiced by the Toba Batak. Dalihan refers to the stone furnace pole. Tolu means “three,” and Na means “that or which.” Dalihan Na Tolu translates as “the three stone furnace poles.” These three stones

27 P. B. Pedersen, *Batak Blood and Protestant Soul: The Development of National Batak Churches in North Sumatra* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 18.

28 J.C. Vergouwen, *The Social Organization and Customary Law of The Toba-Batak of Northern Sumatra*. (Dutch: Springer-Science, 1964), 68.

29 William Marsden, *The History of Sumatra* (London: Longman, 1811), 28.

30 DJ. Gultom Rajamarpodang, *Dalihan Na Tolu: Nilai Budaya Batak* (Medan: CV. Armanda, 2018), 197.

31 Anicetus Sinaga, *Imamat Batak Menyongsong Katolik* (Medan: Bina Media Perintis, 2007), 17.

are all the same height and distance to maintain balance. Dalihan Na Tolu provides space for each other. The unity is their strength. Thus, Dalihan Na Tolu reflects unity, equality, relationships, and communion.³²

Dalihan is also derived from *dalik* and *dais*, which means to unite, touch, or connect. *Mandalikkon* refers to bringing something together or uniting, connecting, and touching something with another. Dalihan also refers to a space where things come together in communion.³³ Simply put, through Dalihan Na Tolu, one can observe an attempt to create space and room for otherness, connect, touch each other, and engage in reciprocal relations.

The three stones represent the persons of Dalihan Na Tolu, namely *Hula hula*, *Dongan Tubu*, and *Boru*. *Hula hula* gives a wife. *Hula hula* is the wife's brothers, mother, and grandmother. *Hula hula* bestows blessings on the wife recipient (*Boru*). *Dongan Tubu* is the brother or cousin from the same family or clan. *Dongan Tubu* must accompany his siblings in each ceremony. *Boru* is the sister of a man or the one who receives a wife. *Boru* acts as a servant and is also responsible for supporting *Hula hula*.³⁴ In short, Dalihan Na Tolu provides space and room for both men and women to maintain societal harmony.

Dalihan Na Tolu is recognized as the manifestation of *Debata Na Tolu*. *Batara Guru* represents *Hula hula*. *Dongan Tubu* is a reflection of *Soripada*. *Mangalabulan* is represented by *Boru*. *Boru* stands to unite two distinct families and clans.³⁵ Each Toba Batak possesses the three hypostaseis of *Hula hula*, *Dongan Tubu*, and *Boru*. Since each Toba Batak has these three hypostaseis, they are interrelated and interconnected. The encounter with others will determine the presence, role, and function of each one. For example, when A meets B, A could be a *Hula hula*, who bestows blessings on B. At the same time, B could be a *Boru*, who serves A. When A

32 Sinaga, 52.

33 T.M. Sihombing, *Filsafat Batak: Tentang Kebiasaan-Kebiasaan Adat Istiadat* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2000), 74.

34 R.M. Simatupang, *Dalihan Na Tolu: Adat Budaya Batak* (Jakarta: Indosari Mediatama, 2020), 16.

35 Togar Nainggolan, *Sejarah Dan Transformasi Religi: Batak Toba* (Medan: Bina Media Perintis, 2012), 79.

meets C, A may appear as Dongan Tubu, who accompanies C.³⁶ The Dalihan Na Tolu relationship brings each one into a reciprocal relationship and mutual becoming. Encounters with others will always bring continuous changes to both parties. These encounters will determine each person's attributes, roles, functions, and manners of relating. Each person of Dalihan Na Tolu interpenetrates with one another. This mutual becoming rejects the principle of domination and hierarchy. In short, Dalihan Na Tolu points out that personhood and presence always relate to communion.

The reciprocal dynamics inherent in Dalihan Na Tolu's personhood are revealed through specific modes of shared action. When Boru meets Hula hula, he/she is expected to show "somba marhula hula" (respectful deference and allegiance to Hula hula). A demeanor characterized by "elek marboru" (displaying patience, benevolence, protection, and persuasion towards Boru) is required in a reciprocal encounter where Hula-hula interacts with Boru. An attitude known as "manat mardongan tubu" (fostering reverence, sagacity, and conflict avoidance) is displayed in fraternal or sibling relationships (Dongan Tubu). Adherence to the precepts of Dalihan Na Tolu is regarded as a path to happiness. Happiness is expressed in the Toba Batak community through Hamoraon (material, intellectual, and spiritual well-being), Hagabeon (lineage perpetuation), and Hasangapon (esteem, renown, and elevated status).³⁷

The presence of Dalihan Na Tolu personhood becomes the primary requirement for each cultural ceremony. The intimacy between Hulahula, Dongan Tubu, and Boru is performed in tortor dance during the ceremony. The tortor dance enacts the act of giving blessing by Hulahula, accompaniment by Dongan Tubu, and deference by Boru. Since the Dalihan Na Tolu is sacred to the Bataks, the dance reflects the unity and communion of visible and invisible natures: Dalihan Na Tolu (human beings), the triadic cosmos, and Debata Na Tolu (triune god).³⁸ This could

36 Rajamarpodang, *Dalihan Na Tolu: Nilai Budaya Batak*, 53.

37 Armaidly Armawi, "Kearifan Lokal Batak Toba Dalihan Na Tolu Dan Good Governance dalam Birokrasi Publik," *Jurnal Filsafat* 18, no. 2 (October 15, 2016): 159, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jf.3522>.

38 Johann Angerler, "Images of God in Toba Batak Storytelling," *Wacana* 17, no. 2 (July 1, 2016): 323, <https://doi.org/10.17510/wacana.v17i2.444>.

represent a circle dance or a perichoretic dance in which each person moves toward the other with the frame that God and the cosmos also participate in human life.

Within Toba Batak society, Dalihan Na Tolu is the source of religious harmony. Because the others are a part of one's existence, Dalihan Na Tolu facilitates a coexistence of diverse belief systems within the intricate tapestry of existence. This concept accommodates the presence of multiple religious traditions, as each is recognized as an integral facet of an individual's being. In everyday life, it is expected to see a Muslim as a Hula hula bestowing blessing on a Christian, a Parmalim as Dongan Tubu accompanying a Muslim, and a Christian as a servant (Boru) to a Muslim or a Parmalim. As a result, Dalihan Na Tolu fosters mutual respect and love as one family. For example, if the host and Hula hula are Muslims in a ceremony, then the Christians are Boru. They will consider the halal and haram foods in Islam.³⁹ No religious tradition can be eradicated because no Toba Batak can deny the other as his or her Hula hula, Dongan Tubu, or Boru.

In the framework of Dalihan Na Tolu, each individual manifests in three forms: Hula hula, Dongan Tubu, and Boru. Although different in their respective attributes, these three identities are intricately intertwined, characterized by a state of living together, interdependence, and inseparability. Being a member of Toba Batak society essentially means realizing the roles of Hula hula, Dongan Tubu, and Boru in a unified ensemble. Moreover, Dalihan Na Tolu reflects a perichoretic dance in which the mutual occupation of Hula hula and Boru extends to include Dongan Tubu within the same framework, similar to other hypostases. More than just a customary practice, Dalihan Na Tolu serves as a tangible representation of the co-existence of diversity, depicting a condition where each element mutually penetrates the other without confusing differences or divisive separations.

39 Indra Muda and Agung Suharyanto, "Analysis of Life's Inter-Religious Harmony Based on the Philosophy of Dalihan Na Tolu in Sipirok Sub-District, South Tapanuli Regency, North Sumatera Province," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 30, no. 5 (July 3, 2020): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2019.1708526>.

An Imaginative Trinitarian Friendship Among Christians, Muslims, and Parmalim

The theological understanding of Trinitarian doctrine was adopted from Hellenistic thinking. In some ways, the terminologies that the Church Fathers used are not familiar in the Asian context. To bridge the concept of perichoresis with the notion of Dalihan Na Tolu, I elaborated on East Asian thought. Contrary to Western thinking, which sees different things as contradictory as if they have no relationship, East Asian thinking views differences as complementary. In this section, I elaborate on the idea of “both/and” by Jung Young Lee and Puryon Kiyon’s logic to bridge the concept of Dalihan Na Tolu and the perichoresis of the Trinity.

The Western worldview, which followed Hellenistic ways of thinking and substantial logic, places different things in dualism, opposition, and contradiction, for example, in binary oppositions such as dark-light, black-white, hot-cold, night-day, and men-women. Lee argues that in the East Asian paradigm, the necessary and complementary opposite forces that characterize everything in the world are known as yin and yang, constituting “the basic principle of the universe.” Change is understood to be prior to being in this cosmology. The symbol of yin and yang represents relational and continuous movement. Because yin-yang is a relational character, it determines the holistic “both/and” thinking, whereas the Western thinking character is “either/or.” The “either/or” thinking splits the opposites as they share nothing. But the “both/and” thinking recognizes the coexistence of opposites and their complementarity.⁴⁰

Lee accentuates that in a relational framework, a trinitarian relationship is formed when two (yin-yang) “include” and “are included” in each other. Lee attempts to illustrate this from the familiar Taoist diagram of the Great Ultimate, where the great or outer circle symbolizes one, and three is symbolized by the yin-yang and connecting dots in each. Lee mentions that when “yin is in yang” and vice versa, the preposition “in” must be understood as a relational and connecting principle. The symbol of the yin-yang relationship is trinitarian because of “in,” which unites

40 Jung Young Lee, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 60.

them and completes each other. The same relational understanding must be applied to the word “and” in the phrase “yin and yang.” According to Lee, “and” is not only a linking principle in “both/and” thinking but also the principle that is “between” two. It is also trinitarian because “and” is a relational symbol that connects other relational symbols. Lee concludes that the two are three because of the third aspect of between-ness, but each is one because of their mutual inclusiveness. Lee highlights this logic by the pronouncements of Jesus, such as “Believe me, that I am in the Father and the Father is in me” and “I and the Father are one.” Thus, these statements conclude that “in” and “and” are trinitarian symbols.⁴¹

Lee also explains how Christ’s two natures are essential to comprehending the Trinity. To begin, Lee claims that Christ is a symbol of divine reality and Jesus is a symbol of humanity. He is both Jesus and Christ, or “Jesus-Christ,” but he is not the same as Jesus. Jesus as Christ denotes that Jesus is equal to or identical to Christ, whereas “Jesus-Christ” indicates that Jesus and Christ are neither equal nor identical. They are distinct but complementary, like *yin* and *yang*.⁴² Jesus also becomes a perfect symbol of “marginality,” being in touch with the world of heaven and earth, belonging to both worlds yet neither in this world nor the heaven, transcending both. Thus, “Jesus-Christ” possessing the two natures of humanity and divinity, becomes the margin of marginality; the creative core unites conflicting worlds.⁴³

In the same tone, Hyun Shik-Jun introduces the significance of the Eastern Lemma logic of tolerance in contrast to the Western Logos logic of intolerance by exploring the idea of Sun Hwan Pyun. According to the West’s logic, Logos rationally speaks of something as “A” (being) and others as “Non-A” (Non-Being). As a result, they must separate and exist against each other. The logic of Lemma, on the other hand, includes four phrases: (1) affirmation, (2) negation, (3) neither affirmation nor negation, and (4) both affirmation and negation. It’s either A or non-A in Logos

41 Lee, 62.

42 Lee, 74.

43 Lee, 77.

logic. According to Lemma's logic, it is both A and non-A. Lemma logic is a non-dual middle path of tolerance based on double negation and affirmation.⁴⁴

Furthermore, Jun explores the third stage (neither-nor) and the fourth stage (both/and) of Lemma logic with the Kiyon and Puryon Logic that leads to the middle path (or rongzhonglu); that is, the non-dual (or buer) and beyond either-or (or paizhonglu). The law of the middle path is the logic of negative identity (or jifei). "A" exists because it is "not A". Literally said, one consists of "it is" (yes) and "it is not" (no). Puryon means subsistence, noumena, or the universal, whereas Kiyon means actuality, phenomena, or the particular. In short, Kiyon is a specific manifestation of Puryon, whereas Puryon is the universal reality of Kiyon. The two categories are opposite, antinomic, and self-contradictory. However, they are interconnected and interpenetrating, in contrast to Western dualistic thinking.⁴⁵

Jun explicates that the Puryon Kiyon conceptualization embodies the Lemma logic by dynamically identifying Puryon with Kiyon. It is an "absolute affirmation through absolute negation." There are three stages of Puryon Kiyon, namely: Kiyon (being, affirmation indifference), Puryon (emptiness, absolute negation, non-being, neither being nor non-being, both being and non-being), and Kiyon (suchness, absolute affirmation of Kiyon as it is). The negative identity of Puryon Kiyon is a logic of identity and difference that preserves identity and difference as a whole by keeping the opposition intact and then completely identifying them, not partially eliminating and maintaining them. The negative identity of Puryon Kiyon is also the intuitive logic of sunyata, allowing for the interpenetration of identity and difference fully realized in the religious experience. It also leads us to the absolute affirmation of the earthly as it is, or tathata. The logic of Puryon-Kiyon is a Korean model of the middle path of intuition emphasizing the dialectical identity of emptiness and suchness.⁴⁶ The Asian "both/and" thinking depicts that different things are not necessarily understood as contradictory and bringing separation. This mindset

44 Hyun-Shik Jun, "Tonghak Ecofeminist Epistemology," *Theology Today* 71, no. 3 (October 2014): 312, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573614542307>.

45 Jun, 313.

46 Jun, 314.

suggests that different things always embrace and complement each other without negating their differences. The two different things always “include” the other and, at the same time, “are included” by the other. Thus, the “both/and” mindset emphasizes that each thing is “in” the other.

The doctrine of the Trinity was deconstructed in Western Logos logic, so for it to be applicable and understandable, it must be understood in Asian logic. Dalihan Na Tolu is Toba Batak’s philosophy and way of life that examines otherness, diversity, transversality, and a sense of dynamic-paradoxical unity. Dalihan Na Tolu reveals the significance of relationships, mutuality, continuity, and becoming. As a result, the dialogue between the concept of the perichoresis of the Trinity and Dalihan Na Tolu, promotes a contextual comprehension in the Toba Batak context.

The concept of perichoresis initiates a discussion about different entities making room for one another: mutual interpenetration, coinherence, indwelling, and immanence. Furthermore, in the perichoresis concept, relations and connections are never static but always in flux. The idea of perichoresis is also used to explain Jesus Christ’s hypostatic union of humanity and divinity, as well as to describe the relationship between God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As a result, the concept of perichoresis allows us to construct a contextual understanding of the trinitarian friendship in Toba Batak’s notion of humanity.

First, Dalihan Na Tolu is an awareness of self and otherness, one and many, unity and diversity, affirmation and negation, and dynamic-paradoxical unity. Both the concept of the Trinity and Dalihan Na Tolu reveals the idea of “one ousia, three hypostaseis.” The Godhead exists as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Father is not the Son and not the Holy Spirit. The three persons are not identical to each other but in one essence. God is the fullness of personal beings who are persons in relation to others. The persons of the Trinity interpenetrate each other without confusion, separation, or division. It also denotes “the dynamic process of making space for another around oneself.” Here, we can see that one consists of “it is” (yes) and “it is not” (no).

The doctrine of the Trinity describes the Triune God from above. On the other hand, Dalihan Na Tolu is the trinity concept, a reflection of humanity. Humanity is the starting point, continuing to rise towards the divine. In their consciousness, Toba Bataknese does not separate the communion of human beings from Debata Na Tolu and the triadic cosmos. Dalihan Na Tolu, emphasizes that the being of humanity is relational. Hula hula, Dongan Tubu, and Boru affirm that human beings are related and interpenetrate with one another. Dalihan Na Tolu is the manifestation of the trinitarian relationships in order to maintain harmony. In short, we can use the Dalihan Na Tolu concept to explain God's presence and action in human life.

The concept of Dalihan Na Tolu tends to understand "What does God do?", and "Who is God for us? From the lens of Dalihan Na Tolu, God the Father is Hula hula, who bestows blessing. The Holy Spirit accompanies, guides, and gives advice. It is Dongan Tubu. The Son is one who, in his obedience, serves, unites, reconciles human beings and God, and performs God's redemptive works. It is Boru. This cultural trinitarian image describes the Triune God dwells within humanity and simultaneously reveals God-self in human realities. As a result, this cultural image depicts the continuity of the Trinitarian relationships in human life.

This cultural trinitarian image helps Toba Bataks reflect the union of God with the creatures and the cosmos. In the Bible, we can find the characteristics of God in bodily form (e.g., walking, breathing, shaping), who personally interacts with humans as if God is another human being. Bodily existence is considered an essential element of the relationality of human beings. This cultural trinitarian image emphasizes the "re-remembering" of human beings in Trinitarian relationships. Additionally, it reminds one that the creation of human beings resulted from divine-inner Trinitarian communication. The concept of Dalihan Na Tolu can lead Toba Bataks to contemplate that human beings are not only created "in" the image of the Triune God (this is who they are) but are also created "to be" the image of the Triune God (this is how they manage the world with others). In conclusion, this cultural trinitarian image expands a trinitarian friendship between the Triune God and human beings in the Dalihan Na Tolu framework.

Second, perichoresis underscores the hypostatic union of Christ's two natures. Jesus Christ is truly God; however, during his life in Palestine, the people recognized and experienced God in the context of humanity. Using Lee's idea of "Jesus-Christ," which explains Christ as the symbol of divine reality and Jesus as the symbol of humanity, the idea of "Jesus-Christ" can be linked to Dalihan Na Tolu. The concept of Dalihan Nat Tolu provides room for us to elaborate on the idea of "Jesus-Christ," primarily to discuss his humanity. Using the "both/and" thinking, in the concept of Dalihan Na Tolu, we can interpret that Jesus is "both" Hula hula, Dongan Tubu, "and" Boru. In this lens, Jesus could be a Hula hula who bestows blessings, a Dongan Tubu who accompanies, and a Boru who serves the people. As a result, this approach provides contextual Christology and is more relevant to Toba Batak society. On the other hand, it creates a room to bring Jesus-Christ as Hula hula, Dongan Tubu, and Boru into practical dialogue with Muslims and Parmalim.

In this cultural image, Jesus Christ not only assumes Toba Batak's humanity but also generates space for encounters, dialog, and relationships with Batak Christians, Muslims, and Parmalim in the presence of Hula hula, Dongan Tubu, and Boru. This cultural image also emphasizes trinitarian friendship. In the context of Dalihan Na Tolu, Jesus-Christ is a brother to Muslims, Christians, and Parmalim. Jesus-Christ is Dongan Tubu, who always accompanies and supports Muslims, Christians, and Parmalim. Jesus-Christ is a sister and servant to Muslims, Christians, and Parmalim. Jesus-Christ is Boru who provides the needs, shares hospitality, and cares for the Muslims, Christians, and Parmalim. As Boru, Jesus-Christ also unites all the different people into harmony. Jesus-Christ is also a Hula hula who bestows a blessing, protects, and shares generosity with Muslims, Christians, and Parmalim. This trinitarian friendship emphasizes that Jesus-Christ is "both" Hula hula, Dongan Tubu, and Boru to "both" Muslims, Christians, "and" Parmalim. At the same time, Jesus-Christ is "in" the daily relationship of Muslims, Christians, and Parmalim through the actions of Hula hula, Dongan Tubu, and Boru. Conversely, this mutuality also allows Christians, Muslims, and Parmalim to participate and engage in trinitarian friendship.

Third, this cultural trinitarian friendship also underlines the principle of: “in-both” and “in-beyond.” It encompasses the practical action of engaging in dialogue with Muslims and Parmalim. We can see that Jesus is “Jesus-Christ” in-both and in-beyond Christianity, Islam, and Malim. It means the perichoretic nature of Jesus Christ emphasizes a universal love and a dynamic move to embrace others. Jesus-Christ takes our humanity into his divine nature and opens himself as the open space for Christians, Muslims, and Parmalim to reflect the relational God who created a relational world or a web of life. Because the term “ousia” (essence) has the ontological resonance with the verb “eimi” (to be), and the noun “chorein” means “to contain,” “to go forward,” and “to make room,” so the concept of the cultural trinitarian friendship emphasizes that in order to be, one requires to move around from like to like, and simultaneously create a room for others. In short, Muslims and Parmalim have always been integral parts of Christians.

The concept of cultural trinitarian friendship envisions the Triune God, who embraces the multiple religious traditions and promotes a “trilogue” for the Christians, Muslims, and Parmalim. Unlike dialogue, where “one religion relates to another religion because they are strangers to each other,” Lee promotes what he calls a “trilogue.” In “trilogue,” the religions relate to each other because they are part of each other. Since each person is part of the trinitarian family of God, the trilogue expresses that one is part of the other’s religious traditions. The trilogue is a spontaneous act of communication that recognizes the presence of one in many.⁴⁷ In short, through the trilogue of cultural trinitarian friendship, Christians, Muslims, and Parmalim do not exclude each other but rather complement one another and always become.

In the praxis of cultural trinitarian friendship, each Toba Batak accepts and recognizes Christians, Muslims, or Parmalim as family and part of their identity. The cultural trinitarian friendship concept provides a space for expression and participation without denying each faith. It is spontaneous participation. The cultural trinitarian friendship describes multiple religious belongings and hospitality in this

⁴⁷ Lee, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective*, 217–18.

scenario. The presence of Muslims and Parmalim in daily interaction constantly challenges Christians to practice trilogue in action and interfaith in action. Each Christian, Muslim, and Parmalim is part of Familia Dei and Trinitarian friendship. As a result, whenever the Christian, Muslim, and Parmalim practice the action of bestowing blessing, accompanying, and serving, they also reflect the actions of the Triune God.

CONCLUSION

The sense of community and humanity are highly cherished values of the Dalihan Na Tolu. It emphasizes that a Toba Batak becomes a fully human being or a person in a relationship with others. Dalihan Na Tolu confirms that the community is not opposed to the individual. The emphasis is on what is good for the community. Therefore, what is good for the community implies mutual interrelationship, interconnection, and interdependency.

Both the concept of the perichoresis of the Trinity and Dalihan Na Tolu underline an attempt to create space for others, go forward, and interpenetrate one another. Moreover, it promotes a dynamic and paradoxical unity. The dialogue between the concept of the perichoresis of the Trinity and the concept of Dalihan Na Tolu produces an imaginative theological comprehension of the cultural trinitarian friendship in the Toba Batak context. This cultural trinitarian friendship concept explains that diversity and differences do not lead to destruction, exclusion, or alienation; however, it contextualizes God, Jesus-Christ, and the trilogue between Christians, Muslims, and Parmalim. As a result, it emphasizes that each one is interrelated, interconnected, interdependent, mutually indwelling, and interpenetrating.

The cultural trinitarian friendship contextualizes the Triune God, who is present as Hula hula, Dongan Tubu, and Boru and One, and who enters the realm of religious plurality. The concept of cultural trinitarian friendship promotes a trilogue that transforms hierarchical dominance into a mutual community of love and justice. Cultural trinitarian friendship unites Christians, Muslims, and Parmalim

to participate in God's creative works promoting peace and harmony. Moreover, amid socio-religious conflicts, to be Toba Batak means to be open to multiple existences and religious plurality. The cultural trinitarian friendship concept is a way of connecting people and an art of harmonizing different people. Therefore, any attempts or structures that separate a person from his or her community or others in the Toba Batak context should be considered evil and an act of dehumanization.

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