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# The beauty of sorrow: A theological aesthetic based on the *Ma'badong* dance<sup>1, 2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*This article explores the Ma'badong dance in the death rituals of the Torajan culture in Indonesia, emphasizing Gerardus van der Leeuw's expansive definition of dance as a comprehensive expression of the human spirit. It argues that dance transcends a mere reflection of the soul, positing that sorrow in the Ma'badong dance is a manifestation of divine presence. This dance, still practiced today, embodies a theological aesthetic of "the beauty of sorrow," examined through several dimensions. Firstly, it expresses sadness and empathy towards death. Secondly, it universalizes the human body as an instrument of sorrow. Thirdly, it celebrates life amidst grief. Fourthly, it provides a language of lamentation, creating a space for encountering God. Lastly, the Ma'badong dance affirms that God is present in the dancers' sorrow. This article presents the Ma'badong dance as a profound theological aesthetic, where sorrowful movements become beautiful, facilitating remembrance of self, others, and God.*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Death becomes a universal fact in the human life experience. Death is not simply a biological event that marks the end of a person's lifespan on earth; it is also a symbol of separation between the living and the dead. Grimes (2000:218) observes that the death ritual was frequently one of the rites of passage that consumed a significant amount of time, money, and resources in comparison to other rites of passage. Grimes' research is based not only on personal experiences but also on the most profound implications of death rituals noted in a variety of cultural situations. In fact, the death ritual is performed by everyone who is facing death. According to Stolorow (2018:60), death is a traumatic occurrence that leaves a trail of concern about the life to be lived. Death causes existential anguish in recognizing the entity of the world that becomes meaningless. Stolorow's point of view is that death is part of suffering, the reality of trauma that a person experiences as a result of loss, and has an ongoing influence.

Death dialogue and response are influenced by how society views death. Holst-Warhaft (2002:11, 12) departs from social consciousness in the setting of Western nations, seeing the limited space for the expression of death and sorrow as a result of the formation of the meaning of death as something to be articulated communally as taboo. According to Holst-Warhaft, the expression or language used in describing the truth of suffering caused by death is exclusively personal; hence, the memorial or ceremony of death becomes particularly exclusive in Western culture. Holst-Warhaft's (2002:139) method exploits the setting of Greek culture to articulate the art of women's sorrow as a social activity to question the reality of lament considered to be excessive by the church. Holst-Warhaft's research implies that churches have limitations in accommodating or constructing relevant, open, and imaginative expressions of the trauma experiences that people face as a result of death. The art or expression of death, on the other hand, can be found in indigenous people's traditional practices, culture, or rituals. This article differs from a concern to determine how sorrow or death can be viewed as beauty through the lens of theological aesthetics, as expressed in the *Ma'badong* dance.

This article is based on the Torajans of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, who have various customs, practices, and rituals based on animist beliefs. The ritual of death is a customary practice that is still debated in the life of the church. The *Ma'badong* dance became a cultural practice in death rituals. *Ma'* means "to perform" and *pa'* means "to do", so *Ma'Badong* translates as to perform the *Badong* dance and singing (Patandean *et al.* 2018:136). *Badong*, the Torajan people's death lyrics, has been known as the song of lamentation since the first generation in Toraja. The *Ma'Badong* dance can take hours and last up to three days and three nights, all of which occurs in the courtyard

where the lament ceremony is held (Patandean *et al.* 2018). *Badong* is a form of death lamentation that focuses on appeasing and worshipping the deceased for his/her life in the world. The content of *badong* in death rituals is thus different because it involves the identity and life narrative of the deceased.

Everyone who participates in the *Ma'badong* dance only needs to prepare him-/herself to adjust to the tone and dance movements; there is no need for special equipment other than the sound and a body that is ready to move. Because *badong* is sung using only the tonality of the *pa'badong* (dancers), the *Ma'badong* dance is not accompanied by music or traditional instruments. The *Ma'badong* dance can be performed by men, women, small children, middle-aged people, or the elderly. It begins with the dancers standing in a large circle and moving their heads back and forth, holding each other's hands, and then linking their little fingers.

*Ma'badong* describes another reality, an expression of sorrow, in Torajans' funeral ceremony. Sadness is expressed through gestures such as dancing and singing rather than tears. In analysing the Andaman dance, Rappaport (1999:221, 222) shows that, in dancing, the body is formed on consciousness, and the individuals' feelings are coordinated with each other in the community; specifically, the tempo in dance synchronises the movements of the dancers' limbs and unites the dancers' voice more closely than in ordinary circumstances. Fortunately, there are different contexts for dance analysis. Rappaport's analysis resembles the *Ma'badong* dance, which presents dance as a communal practice. The slow movements and tempos that occur in the *Ma'badong* dance are not accidental; they have been formed in the consciousness of each *pa'badong* to adjust to the others. Because the *pa'badong* (dancers), previously consisting of each individual, merged into the community, the movement became harmonious and uniform. The *Ma'badong* dance depicts a symbol of solidarity among fellow dancers to interpret death together. The *Ma'badong* dance addresses not only individuals but also everyone in society. Men and women, young and old, and people of all religions can participate, making solidarity an inclusive symbol.

Gerardus van der Leeuw, a philosopher and theologian, examined dance as an art form. Traditional religious understandings of the sacred and profane, according to Van der Leeuw, are no longer merely abstract or only concerned with eternity, but can be interpreted through art. In theological aesthetic, beauty and holy become one. Although the concept of beauty was not specifically described, Van der Leeuw (1963a:6) viewed it as follows:

Whoever sees the beauty of a landscape experiences the beautiful. Whoever, above and beyond that, is capable of saying that it is beautiful and in what way it is beautiful; that is, he who can express his experience, is an artist. If he is not capable of this, then he experiences

the beauty of nature in the same way in which he perceives the beauty of a work of art. In both cases he is concerned not with beauty as such, but rather with his experience of beauty; that is, with art, whether it is potential (impressionistic), or actual (expressionistic).

The concept of beauty echoes Van der Leeuw's concept of holiness, which is part of the art itself. Religious experiences, whether objectively or subjectively manifested as possibilities or real ones, are associated with beauty. The author then employs the "beauty of sorrow" approach as a theological aesthetic proposition, examining sorrow in the art of dance. Beauty is not limited to the metaphor of kindness; beauty is also actualised in sorrow through dance because dance creates a sense of belonging to one another and builds a movement of togetherness. Sorrow then becomes part of the communal experience.

Van der Leeuw (1963a:12) defines dance as

an expression of all the emotions of the spirit, from the lowest to the highest. It supports and stimulates all of life's processes, from hunting and farming to war and fertility, from love to death.

Dance is then more than simply a practice that reflects the soul; it encompasses the process of human life, and more specifically, it allows for the stimulation of death as a life process. "Human beings can better understand themselves and find God through dance" (Van der Leeuw 1963a:73). "Dance is a God movement" (Van der Leeuw 1963a:74). The *Ma'badong* dance has a theological dimension, in that dance movements in sorrow are encounters with others in which God is present. Movements not only bring people together, but also become the beauty of the deceased's memory and remembered God.

The article is divided into sub-topics. First, the context of the *Ma'badong* dance in the Torajans (Indonesia) culture's death ritual. Secondly, Van der Leeuw's perspective of dance as a beautiful movement. Thirdly, the theological construction of the "beauty of sorrow" as a theological aesthetic perspective based on the *Ma'badong* dance that views sorrow as a beauty of movement because it produces a process of encounter and provides space to remember self, others, and God.

## 2. THE TORAJA CULTURE OF EASTERN INDONESIA

Culture is a characteristic or identity of a group of people. Culture is more than simply a symbol; it is also a way of life that is passed down from generation to generation. According to Tilich (1969:74), culture is the spirit's direction to conditioned forms of meaning and their fulfillment. Culture is an expression of

life manifested in its likeness or form. Culture cannot confirm meaning in the absence of form. As a result, Tillich (1969:74) views culture and religion as parts that can be separated but, in the depth of their meaning, are inseparable, but create a harmonization known as theonomy. Culture is part of religious beauty in Indonesia, where people are religious and attached to cultural identity.

The Torajans are an indigenous group that exemplifies the integration of religion and culture. They live in the province of South Sulawesi in Eastern Indonesia and have an inherent culture with death rituals that have survived to this day. Toraja is known for both its mystical culture and strong religious or ancestral beliefs. *Aluk To Dolo* is the name of Toraja's original religion, which gained official recognition as a branch of Hindu Dharma in 1969 and has since been renamed *Alukta*, which means "our religion" (Liku-Ada' 2014:3). *Aluk To Dolo* is not only the Torajans' ancestral religion, but it is also a symbol of belief from an ecological perspective. Torajans do not view themselves as the centre of nature, but as part of nature, not only in a functional relationship, but also in a fraternal relationship with living things and nature (Liku-Ada' 2014:3). Torajan beliefs express the unity of this ecological relationship through various ritual practices and customs.

Torajan culture has two rituals: *Aluk Rambu Tuka'* (ritual of salvation and life) and *Aluk Rambu Solo'* (ritual of death or burial). These two rites are considered paired and opposing rituals because they deal with life and death as part of the human life cycle. *Rambu Tuka'* is a ritual performed facing east when the sun rises, containing hope, joy, and gratitude to *Puang Matua* (God in Torajans' belief) for all his blessings (Manta 2012:104). *Rambu Solo'* is an offering made to the west of the house when the sun has leaned to the west (evening-night) regarding death or warning of spirits (Manta 2012:105). The death ritual is the most significant cultural expression in the Torajans' lives. This rite becomes very important in *Aluk To Dolo's* opinion because death is interpreted and perceived differently. Death is a step towards entering into, and returning to the creator's true life (Lembang 2011:42). Death is defined as a sign of the transition from this life to the next, but the transition is not meant to imply that there is no life or that it completely disappears; rather one's death is understood again at the beginning of life (Kobong 2008:36). During this transitional period, the *Rambu Solo'* ritual (death ritual) assists the deceased in returning to their origin. The role of the family that performs the ritual has an impact on life after death. Death is not regarded as the end of one's life or as something terrible. However, death acquires value for Torajans, due to their firm belief in life after death. These beliefs influence how the Torajans perform death rituals.

## 2.1 The *Ma'badong* dance in death rituals

The *Ma'badong* dance is a traditional Torajan dance performed during death rituals and is also known as a death dance. Badong or Torajan death lyrics have existed since the first generation in Toraja and always consist of lamentation. Ancestral dances and beliefs, *Aluk to Dolo*, depict the sound of wailing through body movements arranged in space and time, rather than verbal communication. The *Ma'badong* dance is performed with fairly simple movements, due to the simplicity of the practice. Rumairi (2021:221, 222) claims that the lamentation instinct is communicated through dance and singing. Many people perform in a circle that is always circling and repeated, each little finger is hand in hand, both arms are swung back and forth simultaneously, legs are moved back and forth alternately, and all limbs move. In terms of function, this dance represents the act of sharing sadness as part of a burden or responsibility that is carried together; this togetherness is what distinguishes *To Ma'badong* (the dancers) (Rumairi 2021:221, 222). The *Ma'badong* dance is inseparable from rituals such as *Rambu Solo'*, a death ritual in Torajan society. It is mainly a death rite centred on lamentation. The *Ma'badong* dance is performed in groups by forming a circle, holding hands, and moving around counter clockwise. Everyone sings *Kadong Badong* (lamentation verse) while moving to the beat and rhythm of the *Indo' badong* (singing leader). The *Ma'badong* dance is performed day and night. In practice, it is performed in the middle of a large field or courtyard from a Tongkonan (the main place for death rituals in Torajan).

In his book, *The craft of ritual studies*, Grimes (2013:235) emphasizes the importance of analyzing the elements of a ritual. Grimes draws attention to ritual elements for two reasons, namely “resisting oversimplification” and “observing ritual transformations”. These elements refer to the fundamental components of a ritual, which means that ritual practice cannot be simplified because it is made up of action components that develop within the social context of human life. The second reason given by Grimes (2013:235) shows that a ritual is dynamic because it can transform in terms of the ritual perpetrators' or others' perspectives, giving rise to new meaning possibilities in ritual practice. The analysis of ritual elements can reveal the ritual's complexity. According to Grimes, rituals reveal meaning and give voice to the reality of human life. The *Ma'badong* dance is thus a dance of death because it confirms the meaning and act of lamenting death. Grimes (2013:235) defines ritual elements as actions, actors, places, times, objects, languages, and groups. Moves or actions refer to human practice in performing a ritual. A ritual becomes visible because it consists of a series of actions such as how human beings respond

to something and how they interact with one another individually or in groups (Grimes 2013:243). Grimes uses pragmatic reasoning in introducing ritual elements that depart from human activity.

Based on Grimes' theory, the ritual actions of the *Ma'badong* dance are dancing and singing. First, each *pa'badong* (*badong* dancer) stands, gathers, and forms a large circle together. On the one hand, the circle formation serves to facilitate every *badong* leader (*Indo' badong*) in chanting. On the other hand, the circle functions so that the sound of each *pa'badong* can blend and become round, thus the *badong* singing is louder. The first action is carried out not only by individuals but also by groups, resulting in a circle formation, which is the basic action of the beginning of the *Ma'badong* dance. The second action is for the dancers' hands to be joined by linking their little fingers (Annisa 2021:56). Each person's role in this action is to move his/her hand, specifically the little finger, to be able to join the dancer's finger on the right or left; it can also be done by holding each other's hands or shoulders. The act of hooking the little finger allows dancers to move freely while still paying attention to the rhythm of the other dancers' movements, in order to achieve unity. The third action of the *Ma'badong* dance is dancing:

The dancers go forward, then rewind and expand the circle, rotate and change positions, but do not switch places with other dancers on their right or left side; there are also times when dancers stop in place but hands keep moving (Patandean *et al.* 2018:136).

This movement depicts a simple dance action; a dance with body movements reminiscent of the *Ma'badong* action. The fourth action is *badong* verse singing. The *pa'badong* (dancers) recite verses (*kadong badong*) from the deceased's life, from birth to death (Patandean *et al.* 2018:136). The dancers sing poems that tell the life story of the deceased. This performance also includes a *badong* song performed by each dancer. In the *Ma'badong* dance, the act of singing becomes the final act. The four *Ma'badong* actions indicate ritual practices that are more than simply customs; they are acts of lamenting death through circular movements and formations that show the collective power of a dimension of lamentation in death rituals.

### 3. DANCE AS THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS

Dance is a form of art that involves body movements. Dance is classified as a nonverbal art form that depicts the reality of human life. Initially, human beings did not interpret dance, but as time passed, the developing world shaped dance as an expression of life, reflecting human desires and overflowing the movements of the soul into physical action (Vuillier & Grego 1898:ix,

x). The history of dance shows that dance emerges from the soul, desire, or depth of human existence (transcendental), rather than from outside the human self. Because it implies the existence of the self with various human life experiences, including religious experiences, dance becomes a complex body movement.

Dance can be found in the history of Christianity, mostly in the Old Testament. Procession dance, circular dance, and joy dance are the three most common types of dance (Daniels 1981:9). Dance and religion become inseparable, with dance becoming part of custom and worship (Daniels 1981:10). Dance is described in the Old Testament as a religious movement that unites people with God in worship, influenced by Jewish culture. Daniels (1981:11) emphasizes that dance communicates symbols, stirs the soul, and creates communion with God. As a communication arts and sciences teacher, Daniel links dance with Christianity not as a rejection or as two separate things, but rather Christianity is full of dance practices as an art that is considered more capable of conveying meaning and reflecting faith in God. The dance evolved into a religious expression. Van der Leeuw (1963b:23) defines religion as the "Other", referring to something that transcends, and very impressively, even experiences that connect and unite with the "other"; this is known as the existence of power. Religion then implies that man encounters God in a variety of forms and expressions. If, as Van der Leeuw puts it, the object of religion is dance, then dance can be viewed as a manifestation of God's presence as the "Other", who reveals himself not only through songs or sermons but also through small movements expressed from within the human mind. LaMothe (2004:182-183) agrees with Van der Leeuw, who studied the relationship of dance with religion and concluded that dance is a universal art form in which dancers articulate their individuality and express their humanity. According to LaMothe, dance involves the experience of individual freedom to express and describe oneself, because dance only requires a human body. If dance is recognized as a universal art form, it will serve as a vehicle for the development of patterns of individual power and consciousness in the reality of life.

According to Hanna (1987:106), dance as a religious expression can be divided into four broad categories that are neither exhaustive nor exclusive: veneration, performing supernatural virtues, making changes, and manifesting the supernatural. Hanna defines a type of dance as having the ability to transform both cultural processes and human life experiences. Dance does not refer to body movements that exist independently of a belief system, but rather to the human embodiment of a belief. Because dance is shaped through a belief system to produce meaning, it transforms and simultaneously joins human beings in their experience of transcendence with something beyond



themselves. As a form of religious expression, dance demonstrates the power of imagination and beauty. Viladesau (1999:7) proposes three aesthetic methodological dimensions: the study of sensation and imagination, beauty and/or taste, and the study of art. Theological aesthetics is a contemporary and contextual approach to exploring something outside of the categories of *logos* and *theos* to become a source of theology. Viladesau defines theological aesthetics as a nonverbal art approach that allows for imagination and even a sense of God's presence within. In a roundabout way, Viladesau's viewpoint transforms the study of dance into a work of theological aesthetics.

### 3.1 Dance as the movement of God

Van der Leeuw uses theological aesthetics to view art as a relevant resource for living the sacred and the profane, even in talking about God. According to Eliade (1963:vii), Van der Leeuw speaks of beautiful movements, believing that dance is an original art, that all art can be found in it, in an undivided unity. According to this interpretation, Eliade describes Van der Leeuw's perspective on using dance as a central approach to theology in comparison to other arts because the power of dance lies in the dimension of movement. This purity and beauty can be found in dance movements that combine religion and art. In his reading of Van der Leeuw's writings, Eliade (1963:vii) explains more clearly that

the starting point of art is a complete humanity, where body and soul are inseparable, that religion and art are parallel lines which connect in God.

It is clear that Van der Leeuw did not speak of the theological-Christian dimension of dance by separating the dimensions of soul and body, but rather as a unity. Human movement is manifested by unity. According to Van der Leeuw (1963a:14), dance is a self-movement that has a purpose and is certain. This demonstrates that the movement in dance has meaning and a goal to achieve; no movement is meaningless because dance always takes the form of human life. In dancing, the experience of human life is also the experience of divinity. According to Van der Leeuw (1963a:29-31),

the dance becomes contemplative and reflects the highest form of movement, the movement of God. The most eloquent example of such a dance of mystic contemplation is the image of the dancing Christ, which was current in Gnostic circles during the early centuries of our era. The movement of God's love in Christ is apprehended as a dance which Christ performs with his twelve disciples ... But life on earth, too, resembles a dance when it is filled with the joy of the divine incarnation ... But the dance is also a superb mode of expression for the more self-possessed delights that life with God brings.

A particular kind of dance is its communal form of worship, as demonstrated by Van der Leeuw through medieval mysticism and Christian life, which refers to events in *The Acts of John-Gnostic Christianity* involving Jesus Christ and his disciples. God dances in Christ, who not only unites divinity and humanity, but also connects Christ to an intimate relationship with the disciples. Dance transforms into a mystical unity that depicts God in his living incarnation and, in collaboration with the rest of creation, celebrates and expresses life. Furthermore, dance as a God-movement describes God's active actions in all creation. The dancing God embodies the movement of beauty and holiness, the pinnacle of which embraces life in his love and grace. For Van der Leeuw (1963a:74),

God's dancing movements are explicitly described in the Bible, God moves in all things, His spirit broods over the waters of chaos, his pillar of fire leads through the desert, his prophets bring disquiet to a people that loves quiet, his Son comes down to earth, his spirit drives.

God's dance is a dynamic movement that existed from the beginning and continues to overflow in the incarnation of God through Jesus Christ. Theologically, dance shapes movement as a symbol of God's love that does not stand still, but moves in creation and the real work of salvation for human beings, comparable to dancers. Dance shows that the God who moves is a compassionate God who exists and is present in the entire universe, including all of its experiences and even sufferings. According to Van der Leeuw (1963a:74),

it is the curse of theology always to forget that God is love, that is, movement. The dance reminds it... In the dance shines the recognition of God, himself moving and thereby moving the world.

In dance, God's love is a movement that animates, not simply moves for Godself, but God's movement empowers the world and life in it so that the world is God's mercy at the same time. Dance-based theology can then be a way and light to understand death's sorrow or suffering.

#### 4. *THE BEAUTY OF SORROW: A THEOLOGICAL AESTHETIC BASED ON THE MA'BADONG DANCE*

Beauty is not merely imagined in a good, or fine situation. Beauty can be viewed as something deeper and beyond the definition of a situation where there is no damage, even a safe state. According to Van der Leeuw (1963a:266), holiness and beauty are two parallel things. Beauty is holiness,

beauty is something more, an expression of beauty as well as an expression of holiness. Beauty is defined as an expression of something greater, but it is not absolute. Based on Van der Leeuw, beauty can be found in things, and sacredness is also part of that beauty. Similar to Van der Leeuw's argument, Viladesau (2000:42) argues that

to experience beauty is to feel a profound 'yes' to existence – even in limitations and moments of tragedy; affirmation is possible only if its existence is grounded.

Despite Viladesau departing from an analysis of music, his point of view shows that the meaning of beauty is experience, an existence that is both transcendental and experimental. Van der Leeuw and Viladesau do not distinguish the existential experience of beauty from the human reality.

The beauty of sorrow performed in death rituals is then displayed in the *Ma'badong* dance. In this context, sorrow or sadness caused by the reality of death is an existential expression of human beings. Because of the reality of death, beauty is interpreted. Ishizu and Zeki (2017:4186) use a neural mechanism approach to examine that sad beauty is related to negative empathy, while joyous beauty shows positive empathy. These two aesthetic emotions are opposites but they have something in common, namely beauty. From a scientific perspective, it demonstrates that the human brain's response to sadness becomes negative. However, despite producing negative empathy, sadness can affect or stimulate another part of the emotion, joy, which is also driven by empathy. The beauty of sorrow then becomes the aesthetic of human emotions in response to an experience. Through the *Ma'badong* dance, the beauty of sorrow does not occur before dancing. Instead, it starts and grows stronger when dancing and singing together. Sadness or sorrow expressed through the *Ma'badong* dance is then more than simply a feeling; it exists in the depths of beauty itself. As part of the moment or human existence, sadness reveals beauty and holiness.

The beauty of sorrow is expressed through the *Ma'badong* dance. It is built on the universal dimension of dance, the body. Van der Leeuw recognises dance as a universal art form that does not require any material or other forms such as paintings, instruments, stone, or wood, but rather one's own body. The body becomes the power of dance, bringing together human beings to directly experience sorrow and loss, so that beauty becomes an inclusive experience because it is easily accessible to all. Like Van der Leeuw, Kissell uses the lens of body pneumatology to introduce *Dancing theology*.

Dance as theology and theology as dance is the shared work of 'facilitating revelatory wonder making' and, whether participating in dance or witnessing dance, we are engaging in an embodied experience and embodied testimony or witnessing (Kissell 2020:20).

Dance becomes a theological medium by combining the embodiment of experience with that of testimony. Embodied experience refers to the physical manifestation of an experience, whereas embodied testimony or witnessing refers to the physical manifestation of an experience, making dance a medium for witnessing the reality of the human body experience. The universal dimensions of the *Ma'badong* dance form everyone who dances (*pa'badong*) into a connected humanity; sorrow is not only experienced by the family, but it also becomes a shared reality created through the movement of the body. Through the *Ma'badong* dance, the body becomes an active site in perceiving the beauty of sorrow. Body movement in the *Ma'badong* dance occurs when dancers form a circle, hold each other's hands or fingers, and move their bodies to the right side, forward, and backward. In dancing, the beauty of sorrow becomes an active act of the body.

The *Ma'badong* dance in death rituals is formed based on the lamentation of the deceased. Fortunately, lamentation is also part of realising that life and death are the transition of life or the return of man to his creator in its most profound sense. Dance expresses the sadness of death and displays a celebration of real life and beauty. Van der Leeuw (1963b:193) argues that from birth and marriage to death is the point of contact between power and life, and therefore it should not simply be experienced and remembered, but also truly celebrated. Beauty is formed in interpreting death not as the end of life but as a celebration of a human being's return to the owner of life. Sadness or sorrow in death is interpreted constructively as a celebration of life, rather than as an event with negative implications. According to Rumairi (2021:224), the *Ma'badong* dance is "a celebration of life manifested in the cry of being institutionalized, moved, and sung together". Dance becomes a celebration of life, reinforcing the dimension of beauty that arises from sorrow. The celebration shows the unity of power and life in the face of sadness and sorrow.

A celebration of life in the *Ma'badong* dance represents a path or approach to God. Each approach to God or gods can, indeed, be a dance (Van der Leeuw 1963a:23). Dance adds a dimension of witness space to the reality of human life experience, including the reality of God's presence that can be expressed individually or in groups. In the *Ma'badong* dance, the dancers communally participate in the sorrow of death and approach God with language and body movements in lament. Dance is a way to God that recognises that man comes from God and will return to God. By dancing, dancers encounter God. This then forms sadness or sorrow as beauty. Dance transforms into a space of human encounter with God that is formed not through pleasant circumstances or situations, but rather through the experience of sadness and sorrow. Peterson (2005:12) interprets Michael Card's writings emphasising lamentation as a language that accepts suffering and suffering freely, expressed as that which

God uses for the salvation of mankind amid the loss of Christian language and lamentation. Card's approach is musical, but his perspective on sacred suffering shows that lamentation conveys an experience of God's presence in suffering. The *Ma'badong* dance then becomes language, an expression of the dancers' freedom to express sorrow and sadness to God because Godself is suffering.

Ultimately, the theological construction of the beauty of suffering through the *Ma'badong* dance is located in the dimension of movement. The movement of forming a circle and dancing together is a power of the beauty of sorrow. Movement as an act shapes life in a more intimate relationship with God and others.

The dance is the discovery of movement external to man, but which first gives him his true, actual movement. In the dance shines the recognition of God, himself moving and thereby moving the world. The beauty of sorrow in *Ma'badong dance* presents God as a person who moves in suffering. Every movement in the dance becomes God's movement because God actually moves people in the world. God is not a passive person or is far from the reality of suffering experienced by humans, but through movement, God dances with humans in suffering. God moves more evidently in God's work in Christ (Van der Leeuw 1963b:74).

We believe that we have found this unity of essence in the fact that both are answers of man to the call of God. In this instance, the "image of God", that is to say Christ, forms the central idea (Van der Leeuw 1963a:8). The God who moves in Christ is the God who embodies dance as a form of salvation beauty that embraces all aspects of human suffering. God not only embraced but also suffered as God moved and danced with the other elements of creation. The movements in the *Ma'badong* dance that unite each dancer in the beauty of sorrow show God moving along with the dancers.

In Jesus we experience a God who is moved by our tears, who is even moved to tears. Until we learn to let our tears of lament flow freely in His presence, we will never discover this deep dimension of Him. Only the Christ who became so familiar with our suffering can break apart that dispassionate dividing wall between ourselves, others, and God (Card 2005:30).

Van der Leeuw and Card both show that God incarnate is a movement of God who suffers alongside human beings. God is moved and present in human suffering through Christ. The *Ma'badong* dance serves as a theological foundation for perceiving sadness and sorrow as beauty because God moves and dances alongside creation, God who is not far away but also experiences sorrow, and God who is active in God's love and mercy embraces every reality of human suffering.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The beauty of sorrow is the experience of God being present and moving in sorrow. The *Ma'badong* dance, practised by the Torajans to this day, shapes the beauty of sorrow as a theological aesthetic. There are several dimensions of the beauty of sorrow as theological aesthetics in the *Ma'badong* dance which was examined from Van der Leeuw's perspective. First, the beauty of sorrow in the *Ma'badong* dance is shaped through the expression of sorrow towards the reality of death driven by empathy to both feel sorrow. Sadness as part of human existence manifests beauty and holiness in it. Secondly, the universal dimension of the *Ma'badong* dance presents the body as the beauty of sorrow. As a universal art, this dance brings people together to experience sadness so that sorrow becomes an inclusive experience because everyone can be involved in this dance. The beauty of sorrow becomes an act of participation as well as an activity of the human experience through the body. Thirdly, the beauty of sorrow in the *Ma'badong* dance lies in the meaning of celebration of life. The reality of death is not the end of life but a celebration of a human being's return to the owner of life. Dance becomes a celebration of life that reinforces the dimension of the beauty of sorrow. Fourthly, the *Ma'badong* dance displays the language of lamentation freely through dance, which then forms a space for human beings' encounter with God in sorrow. Finally, the *Ma'badong* dance shows that God is present and moving in the sorrow experienced by the dancers. Dance is a movement of God in Christ who moves and dances the world with all the realities in it, including the reality of sadness and sorrow experienced by human beings. Therefore, the beauty of sorrow in the *Ma'badong* dance is a theological aesthetic foundation that emphasises that God is present in suffering and sorrow, God who moves actively together with the other elements of creation.

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