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APA YANG KAU INGINKAN DARI SAYA, IBU?

Teologi Komparatif tentang Keibuan antara Perempuan dalam Cerita Rakyat Indonesia dan Maria dalam Injil

Abstrak

Artikel ini berfokus pada pengembangan teologi komparatif dengan membandingkan perjuangan perempuan dalam cerita rakyat Indonesia dan Maria dalam Injil. Cerita rakyat yang diteliti di sini adalah Malin Kundang dan cerita-cerita serupa yang menggambarkan hubungan antara seorang ibu dan anaknya. Dengan menggunakan metode komparatif, perjuangan para perempuan dalam dongeng-dongeng tersebut serta citra Allah terlebih dahulu diuraikan. Dalam konteks ini, peran Maria dalam peristiwa Yesus mengungkapkan keunikannya, terutama dalam solidaritasnya dengan perempuan Indonesia dan hubungannya dengan Yesus sebagai Bunda Gereja yang teladan. Akibatnya, kisah Injil, jika dilihat secara komparatif, tampak sebagai cahaya bagi kisah-kisah perempuan dalam perjuangan mereka.

Kata-kata kunci: Maria, cerita rakyat, perempuan Indonesia, teologi komparatif.

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME, MOTHER?

A Comparative Theology of Motherhood between Women in Indonesian Folklores and Mary in the Gospel

Abstract

This article focuses on developing comparative theology by comparing the struggles of women in Indonesian folklore and Mary in the Gospel. The folktales studied here are Malin Kundang and similar tales showing the relationship between a mother and her child. Using the comparative method, the struggles of women in these folktales and the image of God are first shown. In this light, Mary's role in the Jesus event reveals her

specificity, especially in her solidarity with Indonesian women and her relationship with Jesus as the exemplary Mother of the Church. As a result, the Gospel story, viewed comparatively, appears to be a light for the stories of women in their struggles.

Keywords: Mary, folklore, Indonesian women, comparative theology.

INTRODUCTION

One interesting approach in comparative theology is scrutinizing the gospel message by comparing it with local wisdom. This local wisdom can be found in many forms. One of them is in folklore. While folklore often embodies a more imaginative spirit than the historically grounded Gospels, both forms of storytelling share significant common ground. They both address human struggles and provide profound spiritual insights. Folklore frequently utilizes humour to portray life's challenges, yet it imparts significant moral lessons when analyzed thoughtfully. Folklore subtly conveys specific cultural messages and often illustrates certain patterns of human behaviour (Abrahams 2019, 79). Meanwhile, the Gospels portray human existence as one where God actively intervenes, steering individuals toward their divine purpose. By examining these two storytelling traditions through the lenses of social anthropology and cultural analysis, we can deepen our understanding of the word of God as it is presented to Christians.

This article examines the fate of Indonesian women as depicted in folktales and compares it with Mary's experiences as a significant figure in the Gospels. Indonesia boasts a rich tradition of folklore featuring women as the central characters. Furthermore, similar narratives can be found across various

regions, allowing us to discern a consistent picture of the socio-cultural realities faced by Indonesian women. From this perspective, we can align these stories with the life of Mary in the Gospels, revealing parallels that suggest Mary is truly a sister in our journey to follow Jesus, the Son of God.

One compelling story relevant to this research is the tale of Malin Kundang (Mahayana 2018). This Minang/Padang folklore is well-known among Indonesians and serves as a representative narrative, sharing similarities with many other regional tales. A notable counterpart is *Batu Menangis* (which means the Crying Stone), which also enjoys popularity in West Sumatra (Mahayana 2018). Both stories revolve around a poor mother living with her child, and ultimately, both tales conclude with a divine curse on children who disregard their mothers.

Folklore itself encompasses various versions and interpretations. As noted by Umar Junus, folklore is not a monolithic entity; it is subject to change depending on the narrator's emphasis (Junus 2001). Certain story elements may be standardized, while others can be added or modified. A key characteristic of folklore is its connection to tangible entities. For instance, the stone linked to the tale of Malin Kundang or the stone resembling a horse in the story of Nakoda Bincit illustrates this point. The existence of these stones either

gives rise to folklore or reinforces preexisting narratives (Junus 2001). This dynamic allows for ongoing updates to stories, ensuring that folklore imparts relevant lessons for each new generation.

Numerous studies highlight the significance of fairy tales in character development. For instance, Ramadhan S. and colleagues explored the potential of traditional East Javanese fairy tales in shaping the character of Generation Z (Ramadhan et al. 2022). Similarly, Purwantoro emphasized the importance of the fable of Sang Kancil in childhood character education. This theme is also reflected in Insum Malawat's research on the fables of Burung Kasuari and Cendrawasih (Malawat 2022), in Sumarno Elizar et al.'s study of Bawang Merah and Bawang Putih (Elizar, Sumarno, and Fatimah 2024), and Evi Rahmawati concerning fairy tales from Sundanese (Rahmawati 2022). Many researchers agree that fairy tales are also crucial in religious education. However, there is a lack of research comparing Indonesian folktales, such as Malin Kundang, with life stories from the Gospels. I believe this comparative study of mother-son relationships in Malin Kundang-style stories will offer a new perspective on the relationship between Mary and Jesus in the Gospels.

This study used the descriptive comparative research method, commonly utilized in literary criticism and comparative theology. Using the descriptive approach, we analyze a literary text by examining its social and cultural context and exploring its characters or author, settings, and essential themes in the stories. The findings from our descriptive analysis are then compared with

insights gleaned from other texts, allowing us to outline the similarities and differences between the texts (Dobie 2012, 24). This synthesis of comparative results aims to yield valuable contributions that enhance our understanding of the meanings inherent in each text. In the realm of comparative theology, this method encourages participants to approach the study of different religions without presuming the absolute truth of their own beliefs. Instead, it fosters an openness to appreciating the truths found in other religious traditions, which, in turn, can illuminate and deepen one's faith. This concept is referred to as participatory engagement in comparative theology. It entails engaging with other religions and cultures not from a position of power but from a place of vulnerability (Soars 2019, 1). In doing so, we open ourselves to the valuable insights these diverse traditions and cultures can provide.

This study delves into the central characters of the tale of Malin Kundang and similar narratives, exploring their stories and the social contexts that shape them. It highlights the importance of religiosity, particularly the influence of the divine or God within these narratives. The fairy tale of Malin Kundang is examined for its religious elements. This analysis lays a foundation for comparing Malin Kundang with the figure of Mary, leading to a substantiated synthesis.

THE STORIES AND THE MESSAGE

The story of Malin Kundang revolves around an only child raised by a single parent in a village. The impoverished mother struggled to provide for her child by foraging for food in the forest,

often enduring hunger and thirst. One day, a magnificent ship arrived in the village. The ship's captain had become wealthy through his relentless efforts. Malin Kundang, who became a strong and sturdy young man, was drawn to the captain and wished to join him on his journey. Although it was difficult for his mother to let him go, she ultimately decided to support his dreams and released him.

Malin Kundang departed from his mother, and through tenacity and luck, he became a successful, wealthy merchant. He even married a beautiful princess who added to his fame. Long story short, once the merchant Malin Kundang came to his hometown on a huge ship, accompanied by his beautiful wife and bodyguards. His mum heard the news and wanted to meet him. However, ashamed of his poor, shabby mother, he rejected her. He kicked his mother and denied her as his mother. "The bodyguards kicked him out! I have no mother like that! My mother is dead!" His mother became very sad, and in her grief, she begged Allah to judge her son. Just as she finished praying, a storm came and destroyed everything. Malin Kundang's ship fell apart, splitting into pieces. Malin Kundang cried out in fear and regret. As soon as the storm subsided, he became more and more frozen. Gradually, his body blackened and then turned into a boulder. People believe now that the rock standing upright on the beach is the body of the cursed Malin Kundang (Mahayana 2018).

The story of Batu Crying came from Maninjau, West Sumatra, and has similarities with the Legend of Batu Crying in West Kalimantan (Harahap 2015). The description follows: Near Lake Maninjau, a village burned down. All residents fled except for a widow

with her daughter. However, the girl was incredibly lazy and only liked to look in the mirror to beautify herself. Indeed, their looks were very different. Mother looks poor and old, while the girl is beautiful and charming. On the way, they came to a wealthy house. The mother told the child to ask for rice, and after grumbling for a long time, she finally went forward to beg at the house. Because of her beauty, she was accepted into the house, but she was ashamed to admit her mother and did not invite her in. She even referred to her as a maid. Finally, she was given a sack of rice and immediately told her mum to carry it while she only wandered around.

"Come on. It is getting late. We will spend the night on the road!" the girl told her mother. While shedding tears, the mother tried to carry the heavy sack of rice. She fell several times, but the fatigue and hunger she felt were nothing compared to the hurt of being abused by her daughter. At that moment, suddenly, there was a thunderous sound of thunder. *Torrelap.... jeger!* Followed by her daughter's scream: "Ouch! Mother, please...." The mother was also shocked, but before she could reach out her hand, she saw that her daughter's body had turned into stone. From inside the rock came the sound of a girl crying. Regret, however, does not change anything. God has cursed her. It is said that water flows from this stone every fasting month, reminding people of the girl's tears.

From a social perspective, this story points to the class differences between the rich and poor. In the past and nowadays, people are judged by how much money they have. No poor man marries a rich man. On the contrary, the rich, or the nobility, were forbidden to come

into contact with people from the commoners. Moreover, it often happens that those who are poor will try to become rich through various endeavours. However, when he becomes rich, he will do the same—a poor man who climbs into (his master's) bed.

COMPARISON: VARIOUS INDONESIAN FOLKLORES WITH WOMEN AS MAIN ACTORS

Before examining the story of Malin Kundang, let us first look at various other folk tales to provide background and resemblance. Elisabeth Harahap discovered at least five stories about disobedient children: Batu Crying, Malin Kundang, Si Lancang, Si Kintan, and Batu Bangkai (Harahap 2015). In addition, the legend of Lake Toba and Dempo Awang can also be mentioned.

Si Lancang is the Riau version of Malin Kundang. The main character, Lancang, came from a village on the Kampar River. He migrated to Andalas (Sumatra) and succeeded. Nevertheless, when he returned, he rejected his old and poor mother. Elisabeth Harahap described, "With a sorrowful heart, Mother returned to her hut. Mother twirled the mortar and fanned it with *nyiru* while saying, 'My God, I have given birth to Lancang and raised him with my breastmilk. After amassing his fortune, he turned his back on me, refusing to acknowledge me as his mother. O my Lord, show him Your power!'" Out of nowhere, the vibrant sunshine vanished, giving way to an ominous darkness as heavy rain began to pour down, transforming the day in an instant. Lancang's ship was smashed to pieces. The silk

cloth that the Lancang brought as merchandise flew and fell many times, becoming Negeri Lipat Kain in Kampar Kiri. A gong was thrown far away and fell near Lancang's mother's hut in Air Tiris Kampar, which became the Ogong River in Kampar Kanan. A pottery shattered and floated into Pasubilah, adjacent to the Lancang Lake. It was in the lake that the Lancang's flagpole remained upright. If one time the flagpole came to the surface, it would be a sign to the Kampar people that there would be flooding in the Kampar River. The flood manifested Lancang's tears, expressing his regret for disobeying his mother" (Harahap, 2015).

Si Kintan is related to the legend of the island of Sikintan. The story is similar to Malin Kundang.

The story of Batu Bangkai (the carrion stone) originates from South Kalimantan. It follows a boy named Andung Kuswara, who is skilled in treating diseases. His exceptional healing skills made him famous, especially in the Basiang kingdom, where he successfully treated the king's daughter and later married her. Once, the princess wanted to eat musk fruit. Andung searched for it in the village of Loksado, where he met his mother. Unfortunately, Andung did not recognize her as his mother. "Andung's mother felt sad, and as she prayed for strength, thunder and lightning struck the earth. Andung realized his mistake, but it was too late before he ultimately turned to stone, resembling a human form. Due to its resemblance, residents named the mountain Mount Batu Bangkai. Mount Batu Bangkai is located in the Loksadu District, upstream of the southern river in South Kalimantan" (Harahap 2015).

The legend of Lake Toba and Samosir Island tells of a young man named Toba, who was once a fisherman. Miraculously, the fish he was about to eat turned into a beautiful princess he later married. Conditions provided: Ensure that he never reveals her secret. Once, their son Samosir misbehaved and ate food meant for his father. His father was furious and shouted at the boy, cursing, “You little fish!” The wife felt sad and asked her son to climb the highest hill. Soon, the entire village was flooded, and a lake formed. That is Lake Toba. The island in the middle is called Samosir Island. The poor woman whose love was betrayed by her husband re-entered the sea in her original form (JA 2021).

The tale of Dempu Awang from Bangka Belitung is a variation of the story of Malin Kundang. Dempu Awang has a birthmark on his forehead. His mother wanted to see it to confirm that he was her son. Nevertheless, Dempu Awang’s heart was tough. Even when his beautiful wife prostrated herself to persuade him, Dempu Awang’s heart remained stubborn. He rejected his mother. At the end of the story, Dempu Awang transforms into a boulder resembling a human and a ship. A white ape visited him regularly, believed by residents to be the reincarnation of his wife (“Dongeng Cerita Rakyat Dari Bangka Belitung” 2017).

THEME AND RELEVANCE

1. The Suffering and Abandoned Mother

Indonesian folk tales often share common themes and characteristics. They feature contrasting characters, such as the poor and

the rich, the beautiful and the shabby, themes of promise and loyalty, and, ultimately, the concept of divine judgment. The moral messages in these stories are easily understood due to their straightforward portrayals.

This story begins in a context of poverty, where the mothers in fairy tales often symbolize this struggle. Despite their economic challenges, these mothers have children, representing hope even in dire circumstances. A child embodies the possibility of a brighter future, ensuring the continuation of the mother’s legacy. The absence of a father figure highlights the matrilineal system within Indonesian culture, emphasizing mothers’ crucial role in their families. On the other hand, this highlights the issue of poverty, particularly illustrated by the struggles of a mother who must care for her child alone. Malin Kundang’s mother represents the suffering of single mothers across generations who face various hardships. These mothers often have to work extra hard to provide for their children. Additionally, societal gender bias can lead to significant discrimination against women, especially those who are single and living alone.

In this situation, children dream of leaving their mothers. Both Malin Kundang’s mother and Dempu Awang felt sadness at this moment. Their sons became acquainted with a wealthy captain who inspired them to set sail. In the story “Crying Stone,” the mother feels sorrow when her words go unheeded. Her daughter dreams of becoming beautiful. All dreams come with risks. Ultimately, children cannot stay with their mothers forever. They desire to step beyond their mothers’ protection, who, despite loving them deeply, can no longer fulfil their dreams. This marks the first farewell—a poignant moment. However, it is

delivered by the mother with sincerity, hoping that her children will succeed and lead better lives.

Every mother seems to face similar challenges, whether in the past or today. Many mothers have endured feelings of abandonment. Children have always had their own dreams and aspirations. This can manifest in various ways: for instance, a mother who feels abandoned when her child becomes addicted to gadgets or is viewed as old-fashioned because she talks too much and gives advice. To be accepted by their children, some mothers feel pressured to adopt more fashionable styles, as their children do not want to be embarrassed by their appearance or lifestyle. Today's mothers may struggle even more as the world their children navigate changes rapidly while they were raised in a very different educational and social environment.

In *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis addresses the issue of young people being encouraged to abandon their history. He highlights an ideology suggesting that to achieve success, one must leave everything behind and forget the past. In Pope Francis's opinion, such an ideology poses a significant danger (Fransiskus 2019).

How does child development impact a mother? Several experiences can affect a mother's mental health, including: 1. Feelings of guilt for not being able to meet the child's needs or for not feeling like a good mother; 2. The overwhelming burden of juggling responsibilities as both a housewife and a worker, often under significant pressure; 3. The constant expectation to be the primary caretaker and observer of the child's development; 4. A lack of rest and sleep; 5. The inability to focus on her well-being and self-care. These factors

can significantly influence a mother's mental health and well-being (Therapists et al. 2022).

2. Hope and Unwavering Loyalty

What happens when a child expresses a desire to leave his mother? In Indonesian folklore, this often leads to a challenging situation. The mother hoped Malin Kundang would stay with her and care for her as she aged. However, he insisted on seeking a new life. Eventually, she reminded him not to forget his mother. A similar sentiment is seen in the story of the Crying Stone, where a girl is urged to remember her mother when she enters the palace. Unfortunately, in both tales, the mothers' hopes are in vain; the promises made by their children do not come true.

Children often feel ashamed to acknowledge their mothers and think that the glory they achieved cannot be reconciled with the reality of being nurtured by a poor mother. The sight of their mother's worn and shabby appearance can evoke feelings of bitterness and disgust. As a result of their restlessness, tragic things often happen: the mother is often hidden, expelled, or even cruelly eliminated.

A mother naturally hopes that her child will lead a successful life. Any mother who loves her child wishes them to find their own path. An Indonesian children's song expresses this beautifully: "A mother's love for her child is infinite, lasting forever. It is a love that gives without expecting anything in return, much like the sun shines upon the world." Another saying reflects this sentiment: "A mother's love knows no bounds." On the other hand, while a mother's love is sincere, she does hope for some acknowledgement in return. When a mother wishes her child to remember

her, it signifies a desire for the child never to forget their roots. This longing represents the importance of self-identity, which should always be cherished.

Cursing at and neglecting one's parents is a deeply concerning behaviour and stands in stark contrast to Asian customs. Many people in Asia would feel intense sadness at the thought of a disobedient child treating their mother in such a way. Respect for family is a fundamental value in Asian culture, as emphasized in the *Ecclesia in Asia* document (Yohanes Paulus II 2010). Various Asian wisdom traditions emphasize the importance of honouring parents. For instance, Indonesians have the saying, "Heaven is under the feet of mothers," highlighting the deep respect for motherhood. Another saying, "*mikul dhuwur mendem jero*," means to uphold the dignity of parents while concealing their shame. Similarly, in Chinese culture, honouring parents is placed on a level nearly equal to reverence for deities. The Decalogue also reflects this belief by making the commandment to respect parents the first one after the commandment to honour God. This underscores the idea that parents are essential partners of God in the creation of life and embody a direct manifestation of divine will. Disrespecting or going against one's parents is considered a significant sin.

3. Divine Judgment

The tale of Malin Kundang exists in various versions, yet all share the same ending: Nature or divine power punishes the disobedient child. In Buddhist belief, this is understood as karma. Folklore that reflects the Asian perspective of a deity often portrays the mother as a symbol of fertility or life itself. Life, after all, flows from

the mother. She embodies the motherland, nurturing and raising her children. The saying "Heaven is at the feet of the mother" underscores the reverence for her role, as it is through a mother's efforts that children—and indeed all life—are born and nurtured. Unsurprisingly, mothers are considered to possess the power to open the gates of heaven and influence the judgments of the heavenly court.

In Indonesian culture, mothers and women are often highly regarded, symbolizing dignity and respect. In many villages across Eastern Indonesia, conflicts can arise if a neighbouring community mistreats a woman. Furthermore, substantial gold dowries are frequently demanded as a reflection of the honour attributed to women. Although mothers in many patrilineal societies may not have a direct role in village decision-making, they skillfully express their opinions during meetings, ensuring their voices are heard, especially during conflicts. In many cases, a woman's perspective can significantly influence the decision whether to convict or pardon someone found guilty.

A mother does not exercise divine judgment simply because of her power or position. She has that right because of her tenderness and capacity to endure immense suffering. God listens to the brokenhearted, and mothers embody that kind of resilience.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, several characteristics of mothers revealed in Indonesian folklore can be summarized as follows.

First, for the Indonesian people, the mother is always central to life and therefore holds significant spiritual meaning. In folklore,

a mother is not only the one who gives birth to a child and sustains life, but also the true shaper of that life. Therefore, a person's attitude toward their mother determines their future, both on earth and in heaven hereafter.

Second, a true mother is portrayed as one who willingly endures suffering. In the legend of Malin Kundang and similar tales, the mother is depicted as a poor single parent. Their only strength is their child, who, on one hand, offers hope, but on the other hand, often causes them to suffer. A mother is a true symbol of struggle.

Third, mothers are often the targets of injustice and neglect. Folktales also vividly depict a social reality in which mothers are frequently ignored or humiliated by society, even by their own children. The mother in these stories symbolizes the vulnerability of women in society. She represents the common people, who have no one to turn to but God Himself, the Most Just.

Fourth, a mother's strength lies in her hope. It is that hope that keeps her steadfast as she raises her children. That hope accompanies her when she sends her children off and when she welcomes them back. The essence of that hope is not merely for her children to be economically prosperous, but also—and most importantly—morally sound: for them to become good people—people who remain true to themselves, are grateful, stay humble, and are not lulled by worldly wealth. This is the key reason why the son/daughter's acknowledgement or abandonment of the mother is the most touching moral scene in these folktales. Recognition will be the highest moral aspiration for everyone.

UNDERSTANDING MARY IN THE GOSPELS THROUGH THE LENS OF INDONESIAN WOMEN

1. The Experience of the 'Abandoned' Mother

Like many Asian mothers, Mary depended on her husband, Joseph, for support and companionship, particularly during the difficult period surrounding Jesus' birth, a time characterized by extreme poverty and uncertainty. As an Israelite woman, she submitted to her husband as the family leader (Wijaya 2018). She faced various religious and governmental regulations that sometimes forced them to part with their possessions. At one point, after losing Joseph, Mary found herself a widow, tasked with raising Jesus on her own.

How does Mary's life story compare to those found in fairy tales? I identified several critical moments in the Gospels that resonate with this theme, precisely two significant encounters between Mary and her son: the first occurring in Jerusalem during a pilgrimage with his parents (Luke 2:41-52) and the second at the crucifixion.

In the first story, we learn that Mary and Joseph were devout and diligently followed the law, including the obligation to be present at the Temple in Jerusalem for three festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Ratzinger 2012, 176). Luke recounts the story of their journey to fulfil this obligation with Jesus, who was 12 years old at the time. According to the Mosaic Law, a child at that age becomes fully responsible for participating in its observance. At 12, a boy is considered a Bar Mitzvah, which means "son of the law"

(Harun OFM 2019, 408). In that incident, Jesus went missing. Mary and Joseph only realized this after they had travelled a day's journey away from Jerusalem. They assumed that Jesus was with their relatives, which Ratzinger describes as a sign of trust and freedom in Nazareth's family education. However, they soon discovered that Jesus had not returned with them that evening. This moment holds interesting theological significance. The fact that Jesus did not return is not merely a question of freedom; it marks the beginning of his mission. It initiates a journey filled with fear and anxiety. The evangelists reported finding the boy after three days, during which he was among the teachers, listening and asking questions (Luke 2:46).

Ratzinger highlights the connection between the three days of anxiety and the experience of losing disciples following Jesus' death. The phrase "after three days" should be understood in the context of Jewish tradition, which interprets the timeline as a day's journey to the North, a day's return to Jerusalem, and on the third day, they found Him in Jerusalem. Following René Laurentin's insights, Ratzinger emphasizes that these three days of suffering, experienced after the crucifixion during Jesus' absence, represent days of darkness. This is reflected in Mary's words: "Son, why did you do this to us?" (Luke 2:48), which echoes her sense of loss and sorrow. Thus, a significant connection exists between Jesus' first Easter and His last Easter after the crucifixion (Ratzinger 2012).

There is a translation issue concerning the phrase about Mary's heart. In Indonesian, the Latin word "*dolentes*" is translated as "anxious," which Martin Harun believes is too weak. A more fitting translation would be

"grieve," as found in the King James Version, or even better, the German phrase "*mit Schmerzen*," meaning "with pain from being injured." Mary endured significant suffering due to the loss of Jesus. According to Martin Harun, she represented the Church in the absence of Jesus and experienced profound pain (Harun OFM 2019). The wounds and sufferings remind us of Simeon's words about the sword of pain that will pierce Mary's heart (Luke 2:35). This relates to the mystery of Jesus' mission, which Mary did not fully understand, as well as the mystery of her suffering. Mary has walked this path ahead of us.

Jesus' following words and Mary's reaction are intriguing to observe. He said, "Why are you looking for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my father's house?" (Luke 2:49). Here, there are two interpretations of "Father." The first refers to Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, while the second refers to His Heavenly Father, from whom He came. In response to Mary's question, Jesus clarified that He was with His true Father—not Joseph, but God Himself. He emphasized His belonging to God and the necessity of being with Him.

Many interpreters link this to the use of the word "must" in verse 49 ("Didn't you know that I *must* be in my father's house?"). Here, the Greek word *δεῖ* is used, as it is in Mark 9:31, when Jesus speaks of the need for the Son of Man to obey the Father's plan in the work of salvation. "The Son of Man must suffer greatly, be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and rise again after three days" (Mark 9:31; compare 10:33; Luke 9:44, etc.). It is clear, then, that in the account of Jesus' encounter with Mary, the word *δεῖ* effectively conveys Jesus'

obedience and submission to God's will (Harun OFM 2019; Ratzinger 2012). Thus, what was to happen in Jesus' life had actually begun to unfold from the very beginning of the Gospel, particularly in the Temple of God when Jesus was 12 years old. He felt the need to be with His Father. He stated, "I must be in my Father's things." This expression refers to the physical location of God's temple and the importance of obeying the Father in all aspects of life. Martin Harun places it in the context of Jesus' awareness of His identity, as does Luke's context, namely that Jesus is the Son of God (1:35). However, this knowledge is not evident in the parents. They had offered him to the temple (2:22), but they did so only to fulfil the law regarding the firstborn. The mystery remained well beyond their understanding (Harun OFM 2019).

This is very interesting for our study. Mary is portrayed as a mother who does not fully understand her child. No matter how much a mother tries to comprehend, the child possesses its mystery and identity.

2. Mary Meets Her Son in Glory, Not Rejected but Glorified

What do Jesus' and Malin Kundang's mothers have in common at the end of their respective stories? Both mothers meet their sons. However, the circumstances are quite different. Malin Kundang's mother encounters her son as a wealthy merchant, the owner of a merchant ship, accompanied by his beautiful wife. In stark contrast, Jesus' mother meets her Son in a state of great agony. The disparity between Malin Kundang's wealth and his mother's old, shabby, and poor condition highlights a significant gap in dignity. This contrast is further emphasized

by the emotional barrier that prevents Malin Kundang from acknowledging his mother. To him, she appears as a "disgusting monster," which leads him to avoid her and refuse any connection. Jesus, on the other hand, was hung on the cross, enduring contempt alongside criminals. He faced public humiliation and was stripped of his clothing; people recoiled at the sight of him because his appearance was no longer human (see Isa 53:2-3). His condition was anything but glorious. He became a very lowly figure (Phil 2:11). A cross represents a place no one wishes to be. The Jews viewed the cross as a cursed place, while the Greeks regarded it as foolishness.

Mary was a mother enduring a torn heart in that situation. She felt both sad and pitiful. Did she expect recognition from her son, much like Malin Kundang's mother? It seems the Gospel does not mention this. Mary stood at the foot of the cross with admirable faithfulness even though many people had abandoned her son. It was Mary who made it clear that she remained the mother of her son. She was a faithful mother.

3. Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, the characteristics of Mary's suffering as the mother of Jesus can be identified as follows:

- a. Suffering from loneliness and uncertainty: As a mother in the Near East at that time, Mary was heavily dependent on her husband, Joseph. They were familiar with poverty and uncertainty as depicted in the story of Jesus' birth, but her uniqueness became apparent when she became a widow and had to raise Jesus on her own after

losing Joseph, all while remaining subject to various strict religious and governmental regulations.

- b. Suffering as the 'abandoned mother'. Mary experienced profound emotional suffering when Jesus 'went missing' for three days in Jerusalem at the age of 12. This experience was not ordinary worry, but a journey filled with fear and anxiety that marked the beginning of Jesus' mission. These three days of anxiety are seen as a prophecy or foreshadowing of the 'day of darkness' and the suffering she would again experience after Jesus' crucifixion.
- c. The depth of heart-wrenching sorrow: The uniqueness of Mary's suffering is described by the Latin word '*dolentes*', which is better translated as 'grieving' or 'in pain being wounded' (*mit Schmerzen*) rather than simply 'anxious'. This suffering represents Simeon's prophecy of the sword that would pierce her soul, making her a representation of many mothers experiencing profound grief at the loss of their sons/daughters.
- d. Suffering due to a lack of understanding of the mystery: One unique aspect of Mary's suffering is that she was a mother who did not fully understand her son's identity and mission. Although she was faithful, the mystery of why Jesus 'had to' (*dei*) suffer and be obedient to the Father's plan in heaven was beyond her comprehension at the time.
- e. Faithfulness in extreme humiliation: Unlike the stories of other mothers, Mary was reunited with her son not in

a moment of triumph, but in the midst of his intense suffering on the cross. She witnessed her son being publicly humiliated, stripped naked, and deemed accursed. What sets her apart from the women in folklore is that Maria does not demand recognition or reward from her son; she remains there with a "broken heart" in the very place everyone wants to avoid.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

At this point, we can identify the similarities and differences between Mary and the mother figure in the legend of Malin Kundang and in similar folktales. In terms of similarities, we find that both the mother figures in folklore and Mary in the Gospels reflect the experiences of many mothers regarding their children and society. Many mothers struggle to understand their children's choices and navigate their relationships, which are common challenges today. Experiences of abandonment and rejection are also widespread for various reasons. With the rapid advancement of technology and its consequences, these difficulties seem to be increasing. The sense of 'loss' that a mother can feel is profound and deeply impactful. In this case, Mary is one of the Asian mothers who, in a certain sense, have also lost their children.

Another similarity lies in the hope shared by both Maria and the other mothers. It is that hope that gives a mother strength in the midst of deep suffering. That hope guides them to look toward the future while hoping for the best for their children. Mary, of course, hoped

for the best for Jesus, her Son, even though she did not know exactly how that hope would be fulfilled.

The differences between Mary and the female characters in folklore are as follows:

- a. Malin Kundang's mother was rejected by her son, whereas Mary—despite facing quasi-rejection during Jesus' missing in the temple—was ultimately publicly acknowledged by Him on the cross.
- b. On a deeper level, Malin Kundang's mother was indirectly rejected not only by her son, but also by the children of the world who worshipped worldly splendour. It was precisely that worldly attitude that made Malin Kundang too ashamed to acknowledge his mother. In the case of Jesus, the opposite was true. The children of this world rejected Jesus radically and cruelly. Because of her solidarity with her Son, Mary experienced the rejection by the children of this world as her own suffering as well.
- c. Ultimately, the difference lies in their respective "pleas" in response to rejection. Unlike Malin Kundang's mother, who pleaded with God for justice, Mary united herself with her son on the cross, in His obedience to the Father's will to fulfil His mission.

GLORY ON THE CROSS

Now, there remains one important question in the method of comparative theology. Why do such differences exist? What is the theological

significance of these differences? We find the answer in Mary herself—in how she viewed the events of the crucifixion, which involved both her son and herself.

Mary understood the significance of the cross more deeply than others. Through a continuous learning process, she came to understand the events surrounding the cross as the true glory of her Son. This was the moment the Gospel referred to on several occasions when it talked about 'the hour not already come' (John 2:4; 7:4; 7:30; 8:20). Mary first heard the phrase "the hour of Jesus" at the wedding in Cana, when she asked Jesus to solve the problem with the wine. In response to that request, Jesus did not answer immediately, but asked his mother, "Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour has not yet come." (John 2:4). At that moment, Mary felt rejected by Jesus, but she got through it by continuing to trust him completely. Finally, that hour happened on the cross, where she accompanied her son as he revealed his true glory. While many listeners misinterpreted glory as the coming of an earthly kingdom, Mary recognized it as the moment when her Son would be revealed in His true identity. The time will come when the Son of Man is exalted and draws all people to Him. That is when everyone faces God's judgment, but at the same time, it is nothing less than the ultimate revelation of God's love in the face of human rejection. Beneath the cross, Mary once again contemplated this mighty act of God and encountered a profound secret. She saw the events surrounding the cross as a reflection of her Son's true glory. This was the moment Jesus referenced multiple times: when He would be glorified through the cross.

What Paul reveals allows us to also meditate on Mary. First, the cross is not a curse to her son, as many believe. This is important to express because, as a devout woman, Mary understood Jewish customs. The cross is described as "...to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles a folly..." (1 Cor. 1:23-24). Mary stands as the mother of the crucified one. Before her were Roman soldiers and religious leaders spouting curses and judgments. As a Jewish mother, Mary had to endure the heavy weight of the scriptures regarding the cross, which may have caused her inner turmoil. Her heart was pierced not only because her son was cruelly punished but also because of the blasphemous words directed at him. In this moment, Mary is truly united with her son's feelings on the cross. She shares in his suffering against a sinful world. What is happening here is something profoundly significant.

Secondly, the cross represents the moment of redemption when God's wisdom is revealed. As St. Paul stated, "But to those who are called, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:23-24). Mary, who grew up closely connected to her son's heart, witnessed everything that transpired. Jesus stretched His arms across the cross, nailed to it, His muscles taut, His body torn, blood flowing, and His face pale. Mary observed a striking consistency in her son's demeanour throughout this agony. Jesus did not curse those who hated Him but forgave them. He surrendered to His Father as if this were His Father's business. Jesus walked the final path of His mission with firmness and obedience. On this journey of serenity, forgiveness, and mercy, this Son of Mary fulfilled His purpose. Under her son's cross, Mary joined her son on the path of

redemption. It was indeed an intense moment of contemplation for Mary. The cross is the moment of Christ's victory over Satan, who has taken man captive. At the cross, our debts were forgiven (Col. 2:4), our sins were atoned for, and we were set free.

For some, the Cross might represent suffering, but for Mary, it signifies the moment when the Son of Man is glorified. The hidden God, *Deus absconditus*, is revealed as a loving God who embraces all people, even those who have crucified Him. This moment represents the meeting of heaven and earth.

Similarly, both Malin Kundang and Jesus returned to their mothers in glory; however, the meaning of their glory differs. We can see the uniqueness of Mary's story in two points:

1. Recognition: This is Your Mother, This is Your Son

There, we see a different relationship between Malin Kundang and Jesus regarding their mother. On the Cross, Mary drew near to Him, standing under the cross without saying a word. Her heart was broken from the very beginning of the Way of the Cross, as we see in the tradition of the Way of the Cross when Jesus met his mother on the road. Now, atop Golgotha, Mary remained steadfast, even though her heart was pierced by a sword. Tradition also concludes this scene with a famous 13th-century hymn: *Stabat Mater* (The Mother Stood). The hymn is so famous that many composers, such as Pergolesi, Rossini, Dvořák, and Verdi, have created beautiful symphonies based on it.

The sorrowful Mother stood beside the cross, weeping, while the Son hung there.

*Whose grieving, sorrowful, aching soul
was pierced through by a sword.*

*O, how sad and afflicted was that blessed
Mother of the Only-Begotten!*

At that moment of his agony, but actually in the moment of his hidden glory, Jesus turned to His mother. This mother, who has listened to the Word and diligently puts it into practice, gets the last glimpse of Jesus. And after addressing Mary as His mother, he then entrusted her to his beloved disciple. “Mother, this is your son.” Moreover, to his beloved disciple, “This is your mother.”

This incident is contrary to Malin Kundang’s meeting with his mother. Jesus recognized Mary not only as his mother but also as his disciple’s mother. Jesus thought not only of Mary’s life but also entrusted her with a more significant task: that she should nurture and educate His disciples. Jesus, who had experienced Mary’s motherhood, now gave His mother as a very precious gift to His followers from a high place when all eyes were on him and his mother. “This is your mother.” So, Jesus acknowledged his mother not only privately but also publicly.

2. Mother Mary: Bearer of Grace—Not Punishment but a Prayer for the Holy Spirit

Malin Kundang ended tragically; his behaviour caused him to turn to stone. Some versions claim that disaster came suddenly from above, while others point out that the calamity occurred in response to a mother’s anguished prayer for her rebellious child. But from there, we can see God acts as the avenger of this wrongdoing. The punishment is meted out because the son

fails to appreciate the love of his mother, who has gone to great lengths for him.

In the case of the cross, the opposite holds. Mary faced the profound pain of rejection, not because her son rejected her, but because the children of the world rejected her only son. As a mother, she was deeply attuned to her son’s emotions and thus felt that the world’s rejection of him was also a rejection of herself. Furthermore, as Mary came to understand her son’s identity as the Son of God, her heartache was compounded by humanity’s rejection of God Himself. Throughout these experiences, she grew as a mother figure, learning and waiting patiently for God’s plan to unfold. What she had expressed to the angel at the beginning of her journey into motherhood resonates deeply in the light of her profound trials: “Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). It reflected her willingness to embrace God’s plan and her eagerness to journey along whatever path He set before her.

Like Malin Kundang’s mother, we can reflect on Mary’s prayer under the cross. Mary’s prayer, however, is never one of despair or a plea for harm in return. It is life’s prayer precisely because she follows her son, who first loved humanity and continues loving fully until the end. The divine love culminates in the cross, which can be described as the “hour of hell,” meaning the moment humanity refuses divine love (von Balthasar 2014, 12). Through the cross, God had already removed the curse of death. From now on, the hell belongs to Christ (von Balthasar 2014, 87). Mary was dedicated to this path, striving for God’s will to be fulfilled so that people might receive God’s love and grace.

After Jesus' funeral, Mary remained with the disciples, staying among the Apostles as they waited and prayed before Pentecost (Acts 1:14). This event reminds us not only of Jesus' command to wait (Acts 1:4-8) but furthermore of Jesus' teaching that his disciples should not grow weary of praying (Luke 11:9). Along with the Lord's Prayer, He urged them to pray tirelessly. "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you." This exhortation concludes with the promise of a special gift from the Father: The Holy Spirit. "He will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him" (Luke 11:13). Our good Father offers more than just food or bread; "He will give you the Holy Spirit." Asking for the Holy Spirit is the final request in prayer because what we seek is not merely an earthly or temporary gift but God Himself. As Solomon asked for wisdom over wealth and fame (1Ki 3), so does prayer seek the Holy Spirit as the culmination of his longing. This is the gift that Jesus promised to send after His ascension to heaven: God's own Spirit, the helper who will lead them to the truth. The Holy Spirit completes the disciples' understanding of Jesus' revelation of truth. He will guide them during challenging moments, especially when they are under pressure and unsure of what to say to their opponents. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit will teach us to pray, even with unspoken words.

Mary's presence on the cross is significant and symbolic. Flanagan notes that John intentionally parallels it with the story of Eve in Genesis, transforming it into an event of grace (Flanagan OSM 2002, 197–98). Mary's presence symbolizes the feminism of the mother Church, which looks after Jesus' disciples. Mary's presence also emphasizes

the triumph of women who are given a role in the work of salvation. "The negative image of Eve has been replaced by the life-giving Eve" (Flanagan OSM 2002, 198). As Paul VI said, Mary deserved to be called Mother of the Church because of her closeness and bond to the Mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption (Paul VI 1968, para. 15).

CONCLUSION

Folk tales are a way for a community to teach moral lessons to its members in a lighthearted yet meaningful way. Many folk tales convey these moral messages by first depicting the realities of society and the problems within it. Therefore, folk tales are rich in concrete moral values that guide society toward a better life. Comparing Gospel stories with folk tales can provide unique insights into understanding the Gospel texts, as found in this study. As stories of revelation, the Gospels not only present symbolic narratives but also highlight real human stories in the light of God's work of salvation. It was precisely because of this uniqueness that the Gospels were able to convey messages of life in a more complete and meaningful way. Research has found that the story of Mary in the Gospels can offer deeper wisdom that can help mothers when they are suffering, particularly in their relationships with their children. Comparing the Gospel with folk tales can affirm that revelation intersects with wisdom rooted in human reality, yet at the same time perfects it.

Mary is a sincere sister within our community and a guiding presence during the trials of human existence. She never succumbed to despair or self-blame; instead, she kept her

heart open to her son's journey. She embodies a true believer who engages in deep reflection and continues to grow, even in her role as a mother. Through her experiences of suffering, she learns the importance of listening, having faith, and showing obedience. Mary stood at the foot of the cross with a spirit of unwavering obedience.

At the moment of the crucifixion, the echo of Jesus' question to Mary at the Cana wedding resounded again: "What do you want from me, Mother?" At Cana, she saw the host's distress, so she asked for wine for the celebration. Jesus led her into the mystery of His hour that had not yet come. So, more than just her desire for wine, Mary longed for that "moment with Jesus" to come soon, and she desperately wanted to be there when it happened. That moment did indeed come at the cross, and Mary, united with her Son, experienced the most heart-wrenching event of all. It was a moment full of glory, even though it seemed veiled. At that moment, God's love was revealed through her Son, and an abundance of spiritual wine was poured out for Mary and for all believers.

From Mary's experience as a mother, the faithful can learn about suffering and hope. Mary can be a role model and a faithful companion in every struggle of faith faced by Indonesian mothers. She united her suffering with that of her son, and with the eyes of faith she always aligned her prayers and hopes with God's plan of salvation for the world. Mary's attitude of faith can serve as a guide toward true self-surrender and help everyone find answers to their prayers amid suffering. Her encounter with Jesus, which reached its climax on the cross, has revealed Mary as the mother of hope. This is also clearly evident in Mary's life in the

days leading up to Pentecost, when she prayed together with the Apostles, imploring the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit who enlightens the faithful, like Mary, to discover and accept the answer to the mystery of human life, which is fulfilled in her Son.

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