

## Encountering God Through Communal Feasting: A Critical Examination of the Minahasan Christian Thanksgiving Tradition from the Perspective of the Theology of Eating

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### ABSTRACT

*The tradition of Thanksgiving is a religious cultural heritage of the Minahasa Christian community that continues to thrive with communal meals as a central practice. Commensality not only plays an important role in building social relations and community cohesion, but also as a theological locus of encounter with God. This study discusses communal meals in Thanksgiving from the perspective of Norman Wirzba's theology of eating. Using a qualitative approach, this study employs literature review, analysis of relevant theological texts, and interviews with pastors and the Minahasa Christian community to gain an in-depth understanding of the practice of communal meals in Thanksgiving. The results of the study show that eating in Thanksgiving has three profound dimensions: First, communal eating functions as an act of faith that becomes a means of nurturing, fellowship, and hospitality. Second, communal eating shapes a new way of understanding food, fellow human beings, and God in the practice of Thanksgiving as a gift that must be appreciated. Third, communal eating becomes a space for social criticism and transformation to combat consumerism, social prestige, and food waste.*

**Keywords:** *Eating Together, Thanksgiving, Theology of Eating, Contextual.*



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## INTRODUCTION

Eating practices constitute a fundamental human need because food sustains the body, provides energy, and maintains vital life functions (Sutono, 2021). At the same time, beyond fulfilling biological requirements, eating also functions as a space for social interaction and as a medium through which socio-cultural meanings are constructed. In many cultures, communal eating often referred to as commensality (eating together) serves as an important practice for strengthening social relationships and fostering group cohesion. Through this practice, communities affirm social togetherness, maintain relational order, and support collective health and well-being (Jönsson et al., 2021). Within the Christian communities of Minahasa, shared consumption plays a central role in social life. Eating and drinking together function as arenas for the formation of alliances and solidarity, while simultaneously creating possibilities for difference and competition among individuals, including between hosts and guests. Through such communal meals, communities build and reinforce social relationships while also opening opportunities for the negotiation and enhancement of social status (Weichart, 2008). Consequently, communal eating represents a complex social space that may also be interpreted theologically as a locus of encounter with God, where the relationships that are formed, the values that are negotiated, and the shared experiences of life enable the presence of God to be experienced within the very act of eating together.

Within a fundamental theological framework, eating is not merely understood as the act of consuming food; rather, it is closely related to the practice of hospitality, which involves opening space for others to experience life through participation in a shared life (Wirzba, 2018). In addition, communal eating functions as a model of social encounter grounded in mutual acceptance, where communication and relationships grow out of the willingness to receive one another (Dameria & Bratanata, 2021). Food thus serves as a medium that brings all participants together, while the practice of hospitality strengthens acceptance and deepens the relationships that emerge. This practice of communal eating finds a distinctive expression in the context of North Sulawesi, particularly within the Christian communities of Minahasa, through a tradition known as *Pengucapan Syukur* (Thanksgiving). Among the Minahasan people, this celebration is commonly referred to simply as *Pengucapan*.

Communal eating practices consistently accompany and constitute the core of the Thanksgiving celebration among Christian communities in Minahasa. This practice encompasses prayers before and after meals, verbal expressions of gratitude, and simple rituals that acknowledge food as the result of harvest and as a gift from God. Through these eating

practices, the Minahasan people express an awareness that sustenance, health, and togetherness do not depend solely on human effort, but ultimately derive from the generosity of God, for which gratitude is due (Pusung, 2020). The practice of eating within Thanksgiving does not cease at the symbolic level; rather, it constitutes a relational space between humans and God, as well as among members of the community. Through the sharing of food, the community affirms values of togetherness, solidarity, and social responsibility, all of which lead to a concrete expression of faith. In this sense, gratitude is not merely articulated verbally, but is embodied through acts of eating, sharing, and mutual acceptance.

In another respect, the practice of Thanksgiving in Minahasa today reveals issues that warrant critical attention. As a celebration centered on communal eating, Thanksgiving is often at risk of shifting into a space marked by excessive consumption, hedonism, and the reinforcement of social stratification (Subekti & Yuwanto, 2023; Weichart, 2008). Without intending to generalize, the author argues that the focus of the Thanksgiving practice frequently gravitates toward the abundance of dishes, the extravagance of presentation, and the economic capacity of the host, thereby placing the meanings of gratitude, togetherness, and simplicity at risk of being marginalized. This condition reflects a tension between the theological meaning of eating as an expression of faith and the social reality shaped by a consumerist logic. Such a situation underscores the importance of this study to examine the practice of eating within Thanksgiving from a theological perspective, so that this celebration may once again function as a form of faithful critique of consumerism and hedonism, while reaffirming the values of solidarity and humility within the life of Christian communities.

Studies on Thanksgiving in Minahasa have been widely represented in academic literature, particularly from social, cultural, and local identity perspectives. However, when related to theological questions concerning the practice of eating, existing studies remain limited. Weol et al., (2021) examine the transformation of Thanksgiving during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating how this tradition adapted to social restrictions and reduced practices of excessive consumption. Sondakh & Yoesoef, (2022) highlight how the Thanksgiving tradition integrates the preservation of traditional cuisine with Christian beliefs, reflecting the influence of ancestral traditions, local foods, and modern culinary practices. Meanwhile, Runturambi, (2022) discusses the culture of communal eating in the Thanksgiving celebration in Southeast Minahasa, emphasizing that food functions as a symbolic medium for building and maintaining social relationships. Dendeng & Wasida, (2022) explore the Thanksgiving tradition in Minahasa through a sociology of religion approach, particularly from the

perspective of lived religion. They conclude that gratitude constitutes a form of lived religion in the daily lives of Minahasan Christians in Manado, as nearly all aspects of life are interpreted through the framework of thanksgiving. Although previous studies provide valuable insights into the Thanksgiving tradition, none have examined this practice through the lens of the theology of eating. This paper therefore focuses on a critical analysis from the perspective of Norman Wirzba's theology of eating, in order to understand how the practice of Thanksgiving in Minahasa may be interpreted as a theological experience enacted through communal eating.

This paper argues that, from the perspective of Norman Wirzba's theology of eating, Thanksgiving within Minahasan Christian communities constitutes both a practice and a theological space that mediates relationships among humans, the body, others, and God. Within this theological framework, Thanksgiving is not merely understood as a biological or social activity, but as a means of "encountering God" through the experience of communal eating and everyday interactions within the community. At the same time, this study critically and reflectively examines the practice of Thanksgiving, both as a lived expression of faith and as a practice that may risk shifting toward consumerism or the reinforcement of social status. Accordingly, this research underscores how communal eating within Thanksgiving functions as a concrete theological space, while also highlighting the challenges of sustaining the presence of faith within everyday practices.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore the practice of Thanksgiving within Minahasan Christian communities, encompassing both its social and religious dimensions. This approach enables the researcher to understand the integrated values, symbols, and practices involved, while emphasizing the search for meaning and the lived experience of individuals and communities (Agito & Setiawan, 2018). The study also draws on relevant literature, including books, journal articles, and historical documents, to enrich the analysis by summarizing, synthesizing, and evaluating sources pertinent to the Minahasan Thanksgiving tradition (Sari et al., 2025). This review provides a foundation for assessing the social, historical, and spiritual context of Minahasan Christian communities, as well as for examining how local traditions are maintained or transformed within contemporary society. Field data were collected through interviews with three Christian religious leaders (pastors) and three members of the Minahasan Christian community. These interviews offer insights into how the Thanksgiving tradition is preserved, adapted, or replaced in everyday practice (Hartono, 2018).

The interviews were unstructured, allowing the researcher to remain flexible and not confined to a predetermined set of questions. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, by identifying patterns of meaning emerging from the interviews and observations. The findings were then interpreted in light of Norman Wirzba's theology of eating in order to understand how the Thanksgiving tradition in Minahasa reflects the community's experience of encountering God through the practice of communal eating. In the discussion section, the author presents four main focal points to substantiate the central argument of this study. First, the paper outlines the Minahasan context and the practice of Thanksgiving, including its processes of transformation up to the present. Second, it elaborates on the theology of eating as a Christian practice of faith that situates eating as a space of encounter with God, others, and creation. Third, it offers a critical examination of the Thanksgiving practice through the lens of Norman Wirzba's theology of eating. Fourth, it develops a theological reflection on the practice of Thanksgiving in Minahasa.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Thanksgiving in the Minahasan Context

Historically, the development of Minahasan society cannot be separated from the influence of foreign cultures, beginning in the sixteenth century with the arrival of the Spanish, who were later replaced by the Dutch following their victory in warfare in 1660. These interactions with external cultures had wide-ranging impacts on various aspects of life, including language, clothing, systems of governance, knowledge, education, healthcare services, technology, and transportation. The term "*Minahasa*" is derived from the word *Min* meaning "has been established" or "has occurred", and *Asa* or *Esa*, meaning "one," thus conveying the meaning of "a unity that has been realized" or "those who have become one" (Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1983). This unifying event is known as *Mahasa*. The first *Mahasa* was held at *Watu Pinawetengan* for the purpose of territorial division of settlements; the second was convened to confront the expansion of the Bolaang-Mongondow Kingdom; and the third was conducted to resolve conflicts between *Walak Kakaskasen* (including Lotta and Tateli) and the *Bantik*, all of whom are considered descendants of the *Toar-Lumimuut* lineage (Pusung, 2020). This series of *Mahasa* demonstrates that Minahasan society established unity through collective deliberation to organize living space, respond to external political threats, and mediate internal kinship-based conflicts.

The region was initially known as *Malesung* (literally "rice mortar") and was later referred to as *Se Mahasa* ("those who are united"); however, both designations eventually fell out of use. In contemporary usage, the area is identified as Minahasa, a term that conveys the meaning "that which is unified." The name Minahasa was first documented in Dutch records in 1789 and gradually gained acceptance as the official designation. During the 1970s, the region was popularly referred to as *Bumi Nyiur Melambai*, while in the 1990s it became known as *Tanah To'ar dan Limimu'ut* (Richard, 2007). Within Minahasan society, the practice of expressing gratitude for harvest yields constitutes a central element of their agrarian life (Regar, 2018). Favorable environmental conditions including fertile soil and conducive climate have enabled the community to sustain agricultural activities, both in wet-rice fields and dry-land farming. Consequently, communities in the northern tip of Sulawesi have continuously preserved and enacted ritual expressions of Thanksgiving for agricultural produce, locally referred to as *Fosso Rummages Um Banua*. The term *fosso* (also rendered as *foso* or *poso*) denotes a harvest festival, which over time has developed into what is now widely recognized as the tradition of Thanksgiving.

Through this tradition, the agrarian Minahasan community expresses its gratitude to *Opo Empung Wailan Wangko*, or the Almighty God. The practice of Thanksgiving in this region is believed to have originated in a period when local communities still venerated deities and ancestral spirits. Following the harvest, they conducted the ritual known as *kumankan weru*, which involved the communal consumption of newly harvested produce. The first yield was prepared and presented during this ceremony as an expression of Thanksgiving, accompanied by artistic performances such as singing and chants intended to invoke fertile soil, favorable weather, abundant harvests, and good health (Sondakh & Yoesoef, 2022). Offerings of agricultural produce were presented to deities and ancestors, reflecting the centrality of agriculture as the primary source of livelihood in traditional Minahasan society.

After Christianity was recognized and embraced by the majority of Minahasan society, the orientation of Thanksgiving underwent a significant transformation. The community gradually discontinued directing veneration toward ancestral figures and *Opo Empung Wailan Wangko*, redirecting instead their expressions of gratitude to God. Subsequently, Christian values and teachings reshaped both the meaning and the practice of the Thanksgiving celebration (Batubara, 2021). Furthermore, the transformation of the *foso Rummages* has occurred due to government intervention, particularly in its effort to assume a more dominant role in organizing the celebration through the regulation of its schedule (Subekti & Yuwanto,

2023). The government has taken an active role in the implementation of the Thanksgiving by collaborating with local communities, churches, and relevant stakeholders, especially in determining an appropriate time for its observance (Inaray & Tondok, 2025). The Minahasan community participates in this tradition with strong enthusiasm, engaging individuals across all age groups and fostering a shared atmosphere of collective joy. Social transformations have also shifted patterns of livelihood, as communities are no longer exclusively dependent on agriculture but engage in diverse forms of employment (Tongotongo et al., 2021). Consequently, all forms of income—whether monetary or agricultural products such as rice, cloves, and other crops are brought to the church to be blessed. Thanksgiving is therefore no longer limited to harvest yields but encompasses all sources of livelihood. The practice of communal dining remains a central feature of the celebration.

In the context of Minahasan society, traditional cuisine is prepared in abundant quantities, particularly during the Thanksgiving celebration. The dishes served commonly include chicken, pork, and various forms of wild game categorized as "extreme foods," such as snake, bat, wild boar, dog, and rat. In addition, fish-based dishes also constitute an integral part of this tradition, encompassing both marine fish from coastal areas and freshwater species such as tilapia, typically sourced from household ponds. These traditional preparations employ a range of distinctive Minahasan spices, including ginger (*goraka*), chili (*rica*), basil (*balakama*), and lemongrass (*goramakusu*) (Sondakh & Yoesoef, 2022). As these dishes are rarely consumed in everyday life the harvest celebration becomes a particularly special and prominent moment within the community. There are also narrative traditions that explain why certain types of cuisine are considered essential to the Thanksgiving ritual. For instance, *nasi jaha* and Minahasan *dodol* are two dishes that, according to oral tradition, constitute important elements of the ancestral ritual *Fosso Rummages Um Banua*. Both foods are prepared from high-quality rice, which serves as the primary ingredient in their production. According to Weol et al., (2021), within the contemporary context of Minahasan Thanksgiving, the meaning of these two dishes has evolved into a broader expression of gratitude, signifying that all people may partake in the blessings of *Kasuruan* (God) as the source of life. Beyond their status as essential ceremonial dishes, this harvest tradition also functions as a means of preserving Minahasan culinary heritage.

To date, the tradition of Thanksgiving in Minahasa continues to be practiced and has undergone significant development, becoming more complex than its ancestral forms. In addition to ritual offerings of rice and animals (agricultural produce) to God, the celebration

now encompasses communal dining (*fosso*), the presentation of a wide variety of traditional dishes, and artistic expressions such as singing and hymns. Accordingly, Thanksgiving not only preserves its spiritual values and reverential dimensions but also functions as a social occasion that strengthens communal bonds while sustaining Minahasan culinary and cultural heritage. During the celebration, households are open to all visitors, and each guest is received with an abundance of food. Community members may freely enter and leave homes without restriction, sharing meals together in a manner that fosters a strong sense of togetherness and inclusivity.

### **The Theology of Eating as a Practice of Christian Faith**

Eating is not merely an activity of biting, chewing, and swallowing; rather, it is an act that connects human beings to the world, to one another, and to God. One of the most prominent philosopher-theologians who has contributed to theological reflections on eating is Norman Wirzba. In his work *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*, he articulates a comprehensive vision of a theology of eating. Wirzba advances the following thesis: "...*In its ultimate, theological bearing, eating is not reducible to the consumption of calories. Instead, it is about extending hospitality and making room for others to find life by sharing in our own*" (Wirzba, 2018). This perspective suggests that food is to be understood as a sacred mystery and, at the same time, a sign of humility. Each act of eating constitutes participation in God's life-giving ways that involve sacrifice yet simultaneously affirm creation as a gracious gift imbued with delight. Through the act of eating, human beings are made aware of their existence as finite and dependent creatures, reliant upon the manifold gifts of God: from sunlight, fertile soil, and water, to animals, plants, and the labor of farmers, cooks, as well as strangers and friends (Dameria & Bratanata, 2021). Accordingly, eating becomes a profound reminder that human beings are part of a grace-filled world a creation that is blessed and worthy of care, attention, and celebration.

Food may be understood as an expression of divine love, rendered both nourishing and delightful. Eating, therefore, serves as a daily reminder that life is received as a gift. It is not merely a recollection of God's love but a process of immersion within it and an active participation in the life of God who gives Himself. To eat in a God-centered manner is to extend God's life-giving and life-honoring ways to others and to the wider world (Parker, 2013). This perspective affirms that God is never distant from creation; rather, God remains intimately present with humanity, even within the embodied processes of digestion and sustenance that are integral to eating. Furthermore, in Norman Wirzba's theological framework, the concept of

eating is interpreted in light of the Trinitarian account of creation, thereby transforming how eating itself is understood. Eating inspired by the Trinity entails sharing and sustaining life, receiving food as a gift, and recognizing it as an expression of divine love and joy. To receive food theologically, then, is to accept it as part of God's gracious self-giving. In this sense, eating becomes an invitation into communion and reconciliation with one another. To eat with God at the table is to eat with the purpose of healing and celebrating one's membership within creation. The ultimate purpose of eating is neither the worship of food nor of the self (Wirzba, 2013), nor is it to dedicate food production and consumption to modern idols such as control, efficiency, and convenience. Rather, the fundamental task of eating is to bear witness against the reduction of food into exclusive property or an instrument of power. Those who eat are called to recover an understanding of food as a gift one that must be received with gratitude and shared with generosity. Accordingly, eating transcends mere consumption; it is intrinsically bound to the deeper meaning and purpose of life itself.

Eating may also be understood as a theological act grounded firmly in biblical texts. When examined within both the Old and New Testaments, eating can be interpreted as a form of divine provision and participation through which God sustains His people. The creation narrative, for instance, portrays God as the Creator who brings forth all that exists from the heavens and the earth, the seas and the land, to human beings, animals, and vegetation (Gen. 1-2). Yet, God's work does not cease with creation alone. God also acts as Sustainer, guiding creation toward continued life by providing food (Gen. 1:29-30; 2:9; 9:3) (Goldingay, 2020), thereby enabling all creatures to live in accordance with the purposes intended by Him. In this sense, eating can be clearly understood as an expression of divine care and nurture from the very beginning of creation.

This perspective is further reflected in God's work for the people of Israel in the wilderness following their liberation from Egyptian bondage. In this context, bread from heaven (Manna) was provided by the LORD God so that they would not succumb to hunger and perish, but instead be sustained and strengthened to live and to fulfill the calling appointed to them (Exod. 16:1-36) (Winarjo, 2023). The New Testament literature likewise engages extensively with the theme of eating. In Greek, the act of eating is expressed through the terms *esthiō* and *phagō*, which denote "to eat" and, in broader usage, may encompass "to eat and drink" (Behm, 1979). These terms can refer to the satisfaction of basic needs such as feeding the hungry or healing the sick but also to the pursuit of enjoyment and the practice of communal fellowship at the table (table fellowship). This theological dimension of eating is most

profoundly embodied in the Lord's Supper, symbolized by bread and wine (Milala & Sitanggang, 2025). This theological idea is further manifested in church liturgy, wherein Christ is understood as the sustenance that unites God and humanity through the bread of the Eucharistic sacrament (as recognized in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions) or the Holy Communion (as more commonly termed in Protestant churches).

Bread and wine in the Holy Communion function as means of divine grace, through which believers enter into communion with God (the vertical dimension) while simultaneously fostering fellowship with one another as one body in Christ (the horizontal dimension) (Zizioulas, 2011). In this context, the food provided by God signifies not only communion with the divine but also embodies hospitality and openness toward others. Accordingly, partaking of bread and wine as an expression of participation in the body of Christ within the Holy Communion is not merely understood as a ritual act of faith; rather, it transforms everyday practices of eating into a medium of fellowship, in which individuals are invited to openness and mutual sharing (Wirzba, 2018). This practice underscores that the theology of the body of Christ encourages an inclusive pattern of eating, wherein the act of sharing food cultivates egalitarian social relationships and strengthens communal bonds in daily life.

Accordingly, the principal dimensions of a theological understanding of eating may be summarized as follows. First, as a means of nurturing, it emphasizes that God not only grants life but also sustains creation by providing the basic necessities for its continued existence. Second, as a means of communion, it underscores that God not only sustains but also weaves fellowship within Himself and among His creation. Third, as a means of hospitality, it demonstrates that God invites His creation to welcome one another and to build relationships. These three dimensions are deeply interwoven and integrated, forming a coherent theological framework for understanding eating.

### **Feasting and the Practice of Minahasan Thanksgiving: A Medium of Encounter with God, Others, and Creation**

The tradition of Thanksgiving within the Minahasan Christian community is inseparable from the practice of communal dining. Individuals of all ages participate directly in the preparation, presentation, and consumption of food. This practice generates a tangible sense of communal joy; for instance, during the harvest of rice, cloves, and other agricultural products, congregants bring food supplies to the church. At the same time, the Christian community not only offers harvest produce as a symbol of Thanksgiving but also transforms it into meals that

are shared collectively. Following the worship service, the celebration continues with a communal feast held at the church. The dining table thus becomes a central space for the expression of gratitude to God through the acts of giving and receiving food (Runturambi, 2022). In other Minahasan Christian communities, Thanksgiving is celebrated within the household through shared meals. Families open their dining spaces to relatives, friends, and guests from outside the region, thereby constructing social relationships through the preparation and serving of food. Communal eating, in this context, shapes patterns of hospitality and shared presence. Within this practice, food does not function merely as a complement to the celebration but constitutes the very core of Thanksgiving itself. Accordingly, this study examines the practice of communal dining in the Thanksgiving tradition of the Minahasan Christian community through three analytical focuses within the perspective of the theology of eating, as follows.

1. *Communal Dining in the Minahasan Thanksgiving as a Means of Nurturing*

The dimension of eating within the Minahasan Thanksgiving tradition cannot be regarded merely as a cultural activity; rather, it embodies profound theological significance. The Minahasan Christian community provides abundant food derived from harvests and other sources of livelihood, thereby making the Thanksgiving celebration a distinctive and prominent moment in communal life, further enriched by dishes that are rarely consumed in everyday contexts. This practice cultivates an awareness that sustenance emerges from the interrelationship between human labor, the fertility of creation, and divine providence. The presence of diverse foods on the table prepared with distinctive Minahasan spices and including customary dishes such as *nasi jaha* and *dodol* reflects the involvement of multiple dimensions of life (labor, agricultural yield, and the effort invested in food preparation), all of which function as means of nurturing. This clearly demonstrates that what is present on the table is inseparable from the work of God, who continually nurtures human life. God operates through natural processes such as sunlight, fertile soil, water, animals, and plants, as well as through the labor of farmers, cooks, and even strangers and friends (Dameria & Bratanata, 2021). At the same time, the Minahasan Christian community frames the Thanksgiving celebration as a space of concrete and intensive nurturing by providing food for others.

In another respect, it must be acknowledged and critically examined that the practice of communal dining within the Minahasan Thanksgiving celebration also tends to operate according to the logic of hedonism and consumerism. In many instances, patterns of eating shift from practices of nurturing toward excessive consumption. People tend to fill dining tables

with large quantities and costly varieties of food, thereby becoming confined to evaluating communal meals solely in terms of abundance and diversity of dishes presented. Such patterns of eating no longer function as a means of nurturing but instead begin to serve the logic of hedonism and consumerism. Practices of this kind diverge from the fundamental purpose of nurturing, which emphasizes sufficiency, sustainability, and responsibility toward others. Therefore, eating practices within the context of *Pengucapan Syukur* that are shaped by consumerist and hedonistic logics must be reoriented so that they may once again function as a means of nurturing life one that remains faithful to the relational bonds between creation and God.

## 2. *Communal Dining in the Minahasan Thanksgiving as a Means of Communion*

Communal dining in the Minahasan Thanksgiving functions as a space of encounter with God and with others, as well as an actualization of *koinonia* (communion) that affirms the identity of the people of God. The Minahasan Christian community presents communal meals as an open invitation to all family members, relatives, friends, and even guests from outside the region to sit at a common table, where encounter is realized through the very act of eating together. This act of welcome carries profound theological significance, as the community recognizes food as an expression of God's love and joy, while simultaneously fostering a form of fellowship that reflects equality and solidarity among those gathered in the name of Christ (Witherington III, 2007). This understanding corresponds to the example set by Jesus with His disciples, in which the table becomes a symbol of equality, hospitality, and love that binds believers into communion with both God and one another (Montoya, 2009). Accordingly, the practice of communal dining in Thanksgiving resists forms of eating that reduce food to an instrument of power or a marker of exclusivity. Rather, through the sharing of food at a common table, the Minahasan Christian community nurtures relationships and reaffirms the bonds of fellowship (Wirzba, 2018). The shared table thus becomes a space of encounter that transcends mere consumption, embodying acceptance, solidarity, and relational interconnectedness. The author contends that such moments reveal the presence of God not as confined to liturgical spaces, but as tangibly manifest in ordinary practices such as eating together. Through this practice, love and communion are genuinely experienced in common, rendering it a concrete expression of what may be understood as a theology of eating.

On the other hand, the practice of communal dining in the Minahasan Thanksgiving often shifts away from its function as a means of communion. Instead, it may transform into an arena of social prestige that affirms the existence of individuals and families in accordance with

communal expectations (Nelwan, 2020). The dining table no longer primarily functions as a space of egalitarian encounter, but rather as a medium for displaying economic capacity and social status. The author argues that cultural patterns such as *baku tindis*, *nimau kalah*, and similar practices encourage the excessive presentation of food. This pattern generates a form of latent social competition, whereby communal dining constructs social distance and reinforces hierarchy and exclusion, rather than strengthening fellowship. Relationships that ought to be formed through shared presence become instead constrained by social standards and symbolic pressures.

### 3. *Communal Dining in the Minahasan Thanksgiving as a Means of hospitality*

Through the lens of hospitality, the practice of communal dining in the Minahasan Thanksgiving tradition emerges as a central value that must not be overlooked. This is evident in the way each household opens its doors and prepares food to welcome relatives, friends, and even visitors from outside the region, thereby creating an atmosphere of inclusivity and affirming unconditional acceptance. Hospitality, however, does not conclude at the dining table; it extends beyond the visit itself. Hosts customarily provide guests with food to take home, such as *nasi jaha* and *dodol*, a practice locally known as *sawutan* or *babungkus* (Gosal & Gosal, 2008). Families often prepare food in abundant quantities and actively encourage guests to bring home portions of the meal (Nelwan, 2020). This practice underscores that food is not monopolized by the host but is shared as a tangible expression of acceptance and care. Hospitality is thus embodied in the deliberate act of sharing food, even after the encounter has formally ended. Through such practices, the Minahasan Christian community participates actively in the divine life entering into and experiencing the presence of God while simultaneously embodying the body of God that manifest and extends divine work in creating, honoring, and nurturing life for others across various spheres of existence. Hospitality, expressed through eating and the sharing of food, therefore becomes a central locus within the theology of food. In this light, *sawutan* or *babungkus* may be understood as a concrete expression of God's love, enacted and experienced collectively through the simple yet profound act of sharing food.

At the same time, alongside the hospitality of the Minahasan Christian community, the spirit of *Torang Samua Basudara* ("we are all brothers and sisters ") also shapes social relations within the practice of communal dining during the Thanksgiving celebration. This shared meal creates a space of intimacy and conviviality, often accompanied by additional activities such as conversation, singing, and storytelling around the dining table. However, these practices are

also frequently accompanied by other activities, including smoking and the excessive consumption of *Cap Tikus* (a traditional alcoholic beverage). The author argues that such patterns of excessive consumption have the potential to alter the atmosphere of hospitality. Relationships that are initially formed through openness and acceptance may gradually lose control, as excessive alcohol consumption can trigger interpersonal tensions and conflicts. This situation undermines the very meaning of hospitality that should be embodied in the practice of communal dining, indicating a deviation from its authentic essence. Consequently, communal dining no longer serves to sustain life and nurture relationships, but instead creates the conditions for violence and discord.

In another respect, it is important to note that the practice of communal dining in the Minahasan Thanksgiving tradition serves as a medium for encountering God from its earliest stage, namely, in the kitchen. The process of encountering God does not begin at the table but from the moment food is prepared. The kitchen functions as a space of reflection on the presence of God in personal, familial, and communal life. As individuals process food derived from nature, they engage directly with both the product of human labor and the gift of creation. This process fosters an awareness of how resources are managed, responsibility toward food, and relationships with others (Pinontoan, 2022). The practice of eating in Minahasan culture encompasses the preparation, distribution, and consumption of food, with these stages playing a central role in a way of life centered on eating and drinking together, thereby affirming the values of sharing, community, and equality (Weichart, 2008). Through this practice, Christian faith operates within everyday life, extending beyond the realm of ideas or doctrine into concrete reality (Situmorang et al., 2025), as embodied in the acts of cooking, serving, and sharing food. Therefore, the Minahasan Christian community employs this process of eating as a tangible invitation for guests to participate in communal life. Sitting and eating together fosters solidarity and creates a space of encounter in which the presence of God is experienced through human relationships.

### **Reconsidering Communal Dining in the Minahasan Thanksgiving Tradition: A Theological Reflection**

Communal dining in the Minahasan Christian Thanksgiving tradition occupies a central position within the theology of food. This practice does not merely function as a cultural expression of gratitude but also embodies a concrete relationship between God, humanity, and creation. However, shifts in practice driven by the logics of consumerism, hedonism, social

prestige, and patterns of excessive alcohol consumption have distorted the meaning of communal dining, which is rich in theological significance. As a result, eating no longer fully functions as a means of nurturing, fellowship, and hospitality; instead, it weakens the sustainability of life, neglects social responsibility, and diminishes communal solidarity. Therefore, the Minahasan Christian community (the Church) needs to reconfigure both its theological understanding and its practice of communal dining, as well as its perspective on food itself, so that these may once again sustain life and relationships in a manner faithful to the intentions of the Christian faith.

Reconfiguration must begin with the way the Church understands eating as a practice of faith. The Church needs to teach that communal dining constitutes an integral part of everyday worship by incorporating theological reflections on food into Thanksgiving sermons and congregational formation. Pastors and church leaders should emphasize that sufficiency is more important than abundance, so that communal dining may sustain bodily life, social relationships, and the continuity of creation. At the practical level, the Church and the Minahasan Christian community need to restructure patterns of food provision and distribution by encouraging households to prepare food proportionally and to share with those who are vulnerable. At the same time, the understanding of sharing should be expanded by promoting concrete actions of food distribution, not only to visiting guests but also to neighbors, informal workers, low-income families, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. This approach transforms the potential for food waste into a means of care and a broader expression of hospitality. Ultimately, food is no longer perceived as something empty, but as a reality imbued with profound and central meaning.

In another respect, a critical awareness of the culture of social prestige that fosters implicit competition within the celebration must be cultivated and reoriented in accordance with theological values. In this way, the practice of communal dining within the Minahasan Christian community may become a form of celebration that affirms equality, social responsibility, and solidarity in line with the spirit of the theology of food. Accordingly, the reconfiguration of communal dining practices should incorporate a critical and transformative theological stance toward food, so that the Christian community does not fall into patterns of wastefulness. The Church must affirm that food is a noble gift of God and is central to human life.

## CONCLUSION

Communal dining in the Thanksgiving tradition of the Minahasan Christian community functions as a theological medium that embodies both positive dimensions and the potential for significant challenges. This practice offers a concrete experience of faith, as believers encounter God not only within liturgical spaces but also in everyday activities through the act of eating together. Encounters at the dining table become spaces of care, fellowship, and acceptance that bind relationships among humanity, creation, and God. However, communal dining also undergoes distortion when the logics of consumerism, social prestige, food waste, and excessive consumption shift the meaning of eating from the sustenance of life toward the assertion of status and self-gratification. A theology of food therefore calls for a critical and constructive reconfiguration of communal dining practices within the Thanksgiving celebration, so that the Minahasan Christian community may once again understand eating as an act of faith that honors food, sustains life, and fosters egalitarian relationships. Ultimately, the theology of food enriches both understanding and the wisdom required to perceive and value food as a gift of God, arising from human labor and the fertility of creation. Thus, communal feasting in the Minahasan Christian Thanksgiving tradition is not merely a cultural practice, but a dialogical space of faith and action, as well as an encounter with God that is tangibly experienced in the midst of gratitude and togetherness.

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