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Release from Batara Kala's Grip: A Biblical Approach to *Ruwatan* from the Perspective of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

Pancha W. Yahya

Ruwatan is a ritual that has been practiced by the Javanese people (the largest ethnic group in Indonesia) for centuries.¹ The word *ruwatan* comes from *ruwat*, which means 'to free' or 'to liberate'. *Ruwatan* is 'a ritual to liberate certain people because it is believed that they will experience bad luck.'² These people are considered unclean and firmly under the grip of Batara Kala, an evil god of gigantic proportions in Javanese mythology. The ritual is practised by every stratum of the Javanese society—wealthy and poor, educated and illiterate.³

Ruwatan is derived from a Hindu tradition and is related to the purification or liberation of gods who had been cursed for making mistakes and changed into other beings (either humans or animals).

Because of the widespread practice of *ruwatan*, a biblical perspective on this ritual would be beneficial to Indonesian Christians, especially those from a Javanese cultural background. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians provides such a perspective, as it directly addresses the evil powers and their ability to bind people.⁴ Ephesus was known as the centre of magic in the Graeco-Roman world.⁵

I will begin by describing the practice and implicit worldview of *ruwatan*. I will then consider this practice from the perspective of Ephesians.

1 The Javanese live in the provinces of Central Java and East Java and also the Yogyakarta special region, all on the island of Java, Indonesia. According to the 2010 census, there are 95.2 million Javanese, which is 40 per cent of the total of Indonesia's population. See Hendri Akhsin Naim, *Sensus Penduduk 2010* (2010 Population Census) (Jakarta: Badan Pusat Statistik, 2010).

2 A. Hari Kustono, 'Ruwatan: Tinjauan Alkitabiah' (*Ruwatan: A Biblical Review*), *Studia Philosophica et Theologica* 6, no. 1 (March 2006): 71.

3 Sri Mulyono, *Simbolisme dan Mistikisme dalam Wayang: Sebuah Tinjauan Filosofis*

(Symbolism and Mysticism of Wayang: A Philosophical Review) (Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1979), 33.

4 See Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 115.

5 Bruce M. Metzger has pointed out, 'Of all

I. *Ruwatan* and Its Foundational Worldview

Ruwatan consists of three primary elements: a shadow puppet play⁶ entitled *Murwakala* (from the words for 'ancient time'), which recounts the story of the origins of the god Batara Kala; the *sukerta* people who are believed to be unclean; and the need to be freed from bondage via the ceremony of *ruwatan*, which is accompanied by ritual offerings.

1. The Origin of Batara Kala⁷

The myth of the origin of Batara Kala begins with the epic story of Batara Guru, the supreme god in Javanese mythology. One afternoon, Batara Guru wanted to have sexual intercourse with his wife, the beautiful goddess Batari Uma, while they were riding an ox named Andini on their

way to heaven. Batari Uma rejected his advances because she thought that it was not a proper time or place to make love. Nonetheless, Batara Guru could not control his sexual desire for his wife. In his lust, Batara Guru ejaculated, and some of his sperm went down into the ocean and created the gigantic Batara Kala, who subsequently created chaos by eating all the fish in the ocean. In response, another god, Batara Gangga, asked Batara Kala not to eat those fish, since Batara Kala himself had been derived from the ocean.

Batara Kala then asked Batara Guru for permission to eat all the creatures living on the land. Batara Guru permitted him to eat certain people who were deemed *sukerta* (unclean). But because Batara Narada (yet another god) feared that Batara Kala would devour far too many people, Batara Guru sent Batara Narada together with two colleagues, Batara Wisnu and Batara Brahma, to free the *sukerta* from his grip.

There are different opinions in Javanese tradition as to who qualifies as *sukerta*. Various listings identify twenty, sixty, 136, or 147 kinds of people who are considered unclean, but basically there are two general

ancient Graeco-Roman cities, Ephesus, the third largest city in the Empire, was by far the most hospitable to magicians, sorcerers, and charlatans of all sorts' ('St. Paul and the Magicians', *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 38 (June 1994): 27. Some commentators have argued that Ephesians was a circular letter sent to multiple churches in southern Asia Minor, but if so, the church at Ephesus was still probably the first recipient since the city was the communication and transportation hub of Asia Minor. See Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 13.

6 In the Javanese tradition, this shadow puppet play is called *wayang kulit* (puppet skin) because the puppet is made from goat skin and supported by carefully shaped buffalo horn handles and control rods. At least four additional forms of *wayang* can be found in Javanese culture: *wayang orang* (human *wayang*; actually this is not a puppet play but a dance theatrical performance), *wayang golek* (made of wooden dolls/pup-

pets), *wayang karucil* (made of wood but in thin pieces and used as shadow puppets), and *wayang beber* (scroll-painted presentations of the stories being told). Among these kinds of *wayang*, *wayang kulit* is the most popular form. The tradition of *wayang* originated among the Javanese people in the tenth century AD and the stories are taken from well-known Hindu epics, namely *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

7 The story of the origin of Batara Kala is summarized from Mulyono, *Simbolisme dan Mistikisme*, 43–46.

categories. The first contains certain family conditions such as being an only child, a twin, a child born at dawn or dusk, or an albino child. The second category consists of people who have done inappropriate things from the perspective of the Javanese worldview: sleeping on a mattress without a sheet, standing in the middle of a doorway, sweeping the floor without throwing away all the waste, sleeping at dawn, midday or dusk, dropping the rice cooker when boiling rice, breaking a *gandik* (a cooking tool made from stone and used in preparing *jamu*, or traditional Javanese herbal medicine), and cooking rice in a location other than one's home.

2. The Practice of *Ruwatan*

The ritual of *ruwatan* can be divided into seven sequential events. First, the *sukerta* people show respect to their parents by kneeling and pressing their faces to their parents' knees (*sungkem*) to ask their blessing so that the ritual may be successful. Second, a procession occurs as the *sukerta* along with their parents and other family members bring their offerings. The purpose of giving offerings is to worship the Creator, ancestor spirits and local spirits (in their houses, villages and country) and to ask for their protection, peace and salvation.⁸ There are seven main types of ritual offerings: (1) agricultural products such as rice, corn, coconuts, watermelons, and cassavas; (2) agricultural devices such as a farmer's cap and crowbars; (3) utensils such as pots,

pans and spoons; (4) animals such as cows, buffalos, geese, ducks and chickens; (5) fabric; (6) sheets, pillows and bolsters; and (7) food.

After the procession, the *dalang* (a person who performs as the narrator, puppeteer and leader of the ritual)⁹ receives the *sukerta* and begins the first act of Murwakala, the shadow puppet play. Once the puppet play has ended, the *dalang* reads magical spells to liberate the *sukerta* from Batara Kala's grip. Afterwards, the *dalang* cuts some strands of each *sukerta*'s hair. Then the second act of Murwakala is performed. To conclude the ritual of *ruwatan*, the *dalang* ceremonially washes the *sukerta* with water taken from seven springs and with flowers.

3. The Worldview Underlying *Ruwatan*

For the Javanese people, *wayang* represents the depth of their worldview. According to Eka Darmaputera, '*Wayang* can be stated to be the one thing that conveys to the Javanese people an understanding about "the reality behind all realities", about themselves, both as an individuals and as a society, and their ensuing place in the universe.'¹⁰ *Wayang* communicates many Javanese myths including Murwakala, the story of Batara Kala's desire to devour the *sukerta*. As

⁹ On the *dalang*, see George Otis Jr., *The Twilight Labyrinth: Why Does Spiritual Darkness Linger Where It Does?* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1997), 169–70.

¹⁰ Eka Darmaputera, *Pancasila: Identitas dan Modernitas Tinjauan Etis dan Budaya* (Pancasila: Identity and Modernity, An Ethical and Cultural Review) (Jakarta: Gunung Mulia, 1991), 66.

⁸ H. Karkono Kamajaya et al., eds., *Ruwatan Murwakala: Sebuah Pedoman (Ruwatan Murwakala: Guidance)* (Yogyakarta: Duta Wacana University Press, 1992), 5, 48.

Paul Ricoeur asserts, myths 'are not fables but a particular way in which man places himself in relation to the fundamental reality'.¹¹ The myth of Batara Kala and the ritual of *ruwatan* reveal important features of the Javanese worldview.¹²

a) Harmony as the Primary Purpose of the Javanese People

One prominent characteristic of the Javanese worldview is harmony as it relates to their purpose of life. We can see this underlying reality found within the myth of Batara Kala, which began with harmony that quickly turned to chaos when Batara Guru became lustful. This lust resulted in the birth of Batara Kala, who caused chaos both within the ocean and upon the land because of his desire to devour both the fish and the *sukerta*. Furthermore, the *sukerta*, either because of the manner in which they were born or due to their inappropriate conduct, are also considered contrary to established harmony. In response to this chaotic situation, Batara Guru took the initiative to send Batara Wisnu, Batara Narada and Batara Brahma to the earth to conduct *ruwatan* and restore harmony. As Russell L. Staples notes out:

[In a monistic worldview] reality is

regarded as being a vast network of interrelated spiritual forces in which every being and everything is related to every other spiritual force. The good life is the life that is lived in harmony with the moral order of reality. To offend against that order is to bring calamity not only upon oneself, but also upon the whole community. The evil forces of reality must be restrained and rendered impotent, and the beneficent forces must be supported and kept well disposed toward the community. The means by which this may be accomplished is religious ritual.¹³

The Javanese people believe that the ultimate aim of human beings is to create and maintain harmony with God, their neighbours, the spirits and the universe. They also believe that they are an emanation of God and should eventually be united with him. For them, meditation, solitude and learning from a spiritual teacher who is endowed with supernatural power are among the ways to become united again with God.¹⁴

Furthermore, to establish harmony with the spirits, the Javanese people usually practise several traditional forms such as *slametan* (a ceremonial meal to which they invite their neighbours),¹⁵ the giving of of-

11 Quoted in Kabiro wa Gatumu, *The Pauline Concept of Supernatural Powers: A Reading from the African Worldview* (Milton Keynes, UK and Colorado Springs, CO: Pater-noster, 2008), 175.

12 With regard to the relationship between myths and rituals, Gatumu (*The Pauline Concept*, 176) observes, 'It seems then that people and all religions operate in a mythical framework, tell sacred stories and express aspects or meanings of the myth in rituals.'

13 Russell L. Staples, 'Western Medicine and the Primal World-View', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 2 (April 1982): 71.

14 Frans Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa: Sebuah Analisa Falsafi tentang Kebijaksanaan Hidup Jawa* (Javanese Ethics: A Philosophical Analysis of Javanese Life Wisdom) (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1985), 114–16.

15 The Javanese people usually conduct *slametan* during the following events: the

ferings (e.g. at roadway intersections and at cemeteries), the practice of rituals (e.g. before planting rice and after harvesting it), and performing the shadow puppet play.¹⁶ To maintain harmony with their neighbours, they try to avoid conflict by controlling their emotions and not expressing disagreements even though they may not agree with others' opinions. In addition, they show great respect for the elderly.¹⁷

With regard to the universe, the Javanese people try to obey traditional astrology by conduct certain cultural practices such as determining the appropriate time to get married, move into a new house, or perform *slametan*. For them, maintaining harmony with God, neighbours, spirits and the universe is a way to solve and overcome chaos.

b) Evil in the Javanese Worldview

The myth of Batara Kala teaches about the origin of evil within the Javanese cosmogony.¹⁸ In this myth, a gigantic god, Batara Kala, serves as the representation of evil. Ogres appear in

other stories performed in *wayang* as well. For the Javanese people, however, evil is not the antithesis of good since it is viewed as 'being in bondage to a curse or punishment after making a mistake'.¹⁹ They understand a mistake as the result of ignorance or immaturity; it has nothing to do with breaking God's law or opposing God.²⁰ Rather, evil is 'the flaw of the good' or 'less good'.²¹ Thus, evil and good are not contradictory but complementary.

Moreover, the Javanese understand evil as an attitude that is inappropriate for someone's status and that results in damaging harmony and the peaceful order.²² Therefore, both gods and human beings should behave appropriately according to their own status so as to maintain harmony and a peaceful order. When harmony and peaceful order are threatened or evaporate, evil comes. In the story of Batara Kala, Batara Guru, the supreme god, was supposed to control his lust. When he could not control his sexual desire for Batari Uma, evil ran rampant and chaos resulted.

II. Evil Powers and Their Influences according to Ephesians

In the epistle to the Ephesians, the evil powers are understood as per-

seventh month of pregnancy, after delivering a baby, when a child becomes a teenager, getting a promotion at work, moving into a new house, after harvest time, and after one member of the family dies (on the third, hundredth and thousandth day). The ritual is aimed at gaining harmony with both the spirits and neighbours.

16 Philip Van Akkeren, *Sri and Christ: A Study of the Indigenous Church in East Java* (London: Lutterworth, 1970), 26; cf. Mulyono, *Simbolisme dan Mistikisme*, 183.

17 Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*, 38–69.

18 Armada Riyanto, 'Lolos dari Terkaman Betara Kala' (Release from Betara Kala's Grip), *Studia Philosophica et Theologica* 6/1 (March 2006): 2.

19 Riyanto, 'Lolos dari Terkaman', 15. In Javanese mythology, the evil gigantic gods normally are gods that have been cursed due to making mistakes. Eventually, they are changed back into regular gods after they are liberated.

20 Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*, 210.

21 Riyanto, 'Lolos dari Terkaman', 25.

22 Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*, 162, 165.

taining to three distinct dimensions: individual, structural-systemic and spiritual. Their personal, systemic and demonic nature is evident in Ephesians 2:1–3.²³ The personal dimension occurs in verse 2c: 'the spirit that is now at work in *the sons of disobedience*'. The demonic force appears in verse 2b, 'following the prince of *the power of the air*', and the systemic element also appears there: 'following *the course of this world*'.

These elements of evil are inseparable. Mariano Avila states, "These are highly powerful forces that enslave human beings and make their life miserable and full of suffering. And these forces or powers act upon humans in a concerted way. Any diagnosis that attempts to remedy or solve the human condition without taking seriously the biblical cosmovision (world and life view) will be reductionist and a failure."²⁴

In *ruwatan*, this threefold form of the evil powers is both evident and actively involved. First, here the demonic power has spread terror among the Javanese people, causing them to believe that some of them live perpetually within a framework of bad luck. This situation confirms Arnold's observation that the 'fear of the demonic realm was a very important factor in the use of magic.'²⁵ Indeed, most cultures have a myth pertaining to chaos, and 'A final worldview theme that runs through nearly all folk religious belief systems is near constant

fear and need for security.'²⁶ For example, in the Babylonian Enuma Elish, chaos is personified as Tiamat, a chaos monster, a primordial goddess of the ocean, whereas in Mesoamerican culture, chaos is represented by a monster that has many mouths.²⁷

From a Christian perspective, the purpose of spreading terror is that when people become fearful, the devil, whom Otis defines as a creative genius and a fearful terminator,²⁸ comes with a solution. The intended result is that people will worship the devil in exchange for protection. This strategy confirms Paul's instruction in Ephesians 6:11: 'Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes (*methodeia*) of the devil.' In Paul's day, *methodeia* concerned treating a matter methodically or according to a plan, such as in the orderly collection of taxes.²⁹ In the context of war, the word referred to a careful strategy in order to win a battle.³⁰ In this case, the devil manipulates the Java-

²³ Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 124–25, 152.

²⁴ Mariano Avila, 'Ephesians: Class Hand-outs' (Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Fall 2013), 56.

²⁵ Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 18.

²⁶ Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 58.

²⁷ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 81.

²⁸ Otis, *The Twilight Labyrinth*, 80.

²⁹ W. Michaelis, 'methodeia', in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 102–3.

³⁰ Mariano Avila, 'Meaning of 'Metanoia: Continuous Renewal of Our Life (Ephesians 4:17–5:2)' (Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, 27 March 2013). Michaelis, 'Methodeia', 103 demonstrates that the word can mean 'machinations' ('a complicated and secret plan to get power or control', or 'an attack against which one must be armed').

nese people's fear of bad luck to make them follow his own manipulative will. As Jesus noted, the devil is the father of lies (Jn 8:44), and Paul similarly stated that Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).

With regard to the systemic element, Walter Wink argues that this dimension includes an evil power that is 'invested in institutions, laws, traditions and rituals as well, for it is the cumulative, totalizing effect of all these taken together that creates the sense of bondage to a "dominion of darkness"'.³¹ If so, we may say that the evil power has influenced the ritual of *ruwatan* so that the Javanese people are subjected to the powers of darkness. This evil influence is worsened by the individual dimension of the evil powers. Arnold defines personal evil power as 'the inner drive of people to act in ways deviant to the standard of God's righteousness'.³² In Ephesians 2:1, Paul explains that before their conversion, Christians were 'dead through their trespasses and sins'. Wink states that they were dead because they were born in a world-system that is in conspiracy against God, such that we breathe its deadly vapours; 'We become its carriers, passing it into our institutions, structures, and systems'.³³ This notion is evident in the practice of *ruwatan*, since the rituals have become a key part of the Javanese culture, a structural reality that controls the Java-

nese people's everyday life.

III. The War Is Real

Unlike the Javanese worldview, which holds that good and evil are complementary, Paul places great emphasis on the sharp opposition between good and evil, using the imagery of light and darkness in Ephesians 5:3–20.³⁴ In this passage, Paul regards vices as darkness and virtues as light. Furthermore, Christians are urged to 'live as children of light' (5:8) and 'expose darkness' (5:11) because they are imitators of God (5:1), the Light (cf. 1 John 1:5). As Marcus Barth points out, 'Light and darkness determine conflicting ways of life; therefore they are names for describing good or evil conduct. They call for a radical decision and do not permit neutrality'.³⁵ Evil is not merely ignorance and the absence of good, as the Javanese worldview posits;³⁶ it is op-

³⁴ In Ephesians 6:12, Paul points out that darkness is the realm in which the evil powers reside. In using this light-darkness language, Paul is probably alluding to Isaiah: 'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined' (Is 9:2); 'Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you' (Is 60:1–2). See Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 328. Arnold lists images of warfare and struggle throughout the New Testament in *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 22–23.

³⁵ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4–6* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 600.

³⁶ Although Paul uses the word 'ignorance'

³¹ Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 85; cf. Clinton E. Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 34.

³² Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 125.

³³ Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 83.

posite to God and a manifested rebellion against God's authority. In Ephesians 2:2–3, Paul calls unbelievers the 'sons of disobedience' and 'children of wrath'. In addition, in Ephesians, sin is regarded as a destructive entity threatening the harmony between people and their neighbours (cf. 4:25–32). In other words, sin destroys the harmony that exists between us and God as well as among people.

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul continues, 'For our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.' Interestingly, in this verse Paul does not use the typical vocabulary of war or battle, such as *machē* ('struggle, fight'; 2 Cor 7:5), *strateia* ('warfare, battle'; 2 Cor 10:4) or *polemos* ('war, battle'; Lk 14:31).³⁷ Instead, he chooses *palē*, a *hapax legomenon* in the NT and the LXX, which refers to 'a wrestling match'.³⁸ In Paul's time, soldiers were trained as wrestlers to equip them for hand-to-hand combat. Accordingly, his use of *palē* is probably intended to signify that our spiritual warfare will be intense, difficult and tiring, as one would expect from close

combat with an opponent.³⁹ This observation strengthens the notion that the war between good and evil is real.

IV. Ultimate Victory in Christ

In the Javanese culture, the way to find release from the grip of Batara Kala is to perform *ruwatan*, which includes giving offerings to the spirits and speaking magical spells. Likewise, the Ephesian people of the first century conducted similar rituals to invoke protection by deities.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Paul insists that Christians can defeat the evil powers only by depending upon the Lord's power. In Ephesians 6:10, he urges his readers to 'be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might'.⁴¹ This instruction is in accord with Paul's prayer for his recipients in 3:16, 'that he may grant you to be *strengthened* with might through his Spirit in the inner

(*agnoia*) as a reference to unbelievers' life in Ephesians 4:18, this ignorance cannot be viewed as the equivalent of that in the Javanese worldview because it is due to 'hardness of heart'.

³⁷ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 465; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 446.

³⁸ Frederick W. Danker, William Arndt and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 752.

³⁹ Barth, *Ephesians 4–6*, 763; Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 593. Other possible reasons are that (1) Paul wants to attract his readers' attention by referring to a popular sport in his day (O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 465), or (2) Paul chooses *palē* because in Ephesus some wrestlers put *Ephesia grammata* on their ankles as written amulets to help them win the competition. In the latter case, Paul would be telling the believing Ephesians not to use magical amulets, as they did before they became Christians, but to depend on the Lord's mighty power (Arnold, *Ephesians*, 446).

⁴⁰ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 447–48.

⁴¹ In this verse, the word *kurios* ('Lord') should be read as referring to Christ rather than to God, since of the twenty-four occurrences of *kurios* in Ephesians that refer to the divine title, nine obviously refer to Christ (1:2, 3, 15, 17; 3:11; 4:5; 5:20; 6:23, 24).

man' (cf. Phil 4:13; 2 Cor 12:9).⁴² This command is an inalienable aspect of the ethical dimension of the Christian life, and it is in sharp contrast to ritualistic practices. In this passage concerning spiritual warfare (Eph 6:10–20), Paul exhorts his readers to *put on* (verse 11) and *take up* (verse 13) the whole armour of God so that they can stand firm in the battle. The use of 'put on' here corresponds to the same expression in 4:24 by which Paul exhorts believers to put on their new humanity in Christ. In fact, all the distinct pieces of the armour of God that Paul describes in verses 14–17 are associated with the virtues that Christians should display as new creations in Christ. Some of them identify God's characteristics—truth and righteousness—that believers should imitate as the children of light (cf. 5:1).⁴³

The reason for needing to depend on the Lord and his power is that the battle is not against human beings but against the threefold elements of the evil powers as explained above (6:12). Furthermore, in 6:10, Paul employs two words with similar meanings: 'be strong in the Lord and in the strength (*kratei*) of his might (*ischuos*)'. The use of a pair of words that both mean 'power, might or strength' emphasizes Christ's extraordinary power to strengthen believers.⁴⁴ In addition,

the guarantee of victory is available to believers because God has raised and seated Christ at his right hand⁴⁵ and has given him power over all things, including the rulers and powers against whom the believers are struggling (1:20–23).

The Javanese worldview solves the problem of chaos by performing *ruwatan*. In contrast, as clearly expressed in Ephesians, the Bible teaches that chaos is under God's control. The victory of God over chaos can be seen in five instances. The first instance is the story of creation, in which Yahweh creates the universe from *tōhū wābōhū* (Gen 1:2; Jer 4:23), which to the ancient Israelites meant chaotic and destructive power.⁴⁶ How-

tions on Ephesians 6:10–20', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (April 1984): 287; Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 338. Paul probably alludes to the similar phrase that occurs in Isaiah 40:26 LXX: *en krateri ischuos*. In this passage, Yahweh contrasts himself with the idols (40:18–20) and shows that he is incomparable with them. Therefore, Israel should wait for the everlasting and powerful Yahweh who will 'renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint' (Is 40:31).

⁴⁵ Paul probably echoes Psalm 110:1: 'The LORD says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool"' (Arnold, *Ephesians*, 111).

⁴⁶ John D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), xx. In the Old Testament, chaos is depicted as the raging sea (Ps 89:9–10) and *tāhōm* (the deeps) (Gen 1:2; Ex 15:5, 8; Ps 33:7; 71:20) in which the monstrous creature lived. That creature is called Leviathan or a dragon (Ps 74:13–14; Is 27:1) or Rahab (Job 26:12; Is 51:9). See Bernhard W. Anderson, 'Water', in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of The Bible: An Illustrated Encyclope-*

⁴² O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 461.

⁴³ Interestingly, all pieces of the armour of God that Paul mentions in 6:14–17 have also appeared in the previous chapters: truth in 1:13; 4:21, 24, 25; 5:9; righteousness in 4:24; 5:9; the gospel in 1:13; 3:6; faith in 1:15; 2:8; 3:12, 17; 4:5, 13; salvation in 1:13; the Spirit in 1:13; 3:5; 4:4; and the word of God in 5:26.

⁴⁴ See Danker, Arndt and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 565, 484; Robert A. Wild, 'The Warrior and the Prisoner: Some Reflec-

ever, Yahweh defeated the power of chaos when he created the universe, as stated in Psalm 74:12–15: 'Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. You split open springs and brooks; you dried up ever-flowing streams' (ESV).⁴⁷

Second, Yahweh crushed chaos in the exodus story. Isaiah 51:9–10 alludes to the crossing of the red sea: 'Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?' (ESV) (cf. Ex 15:8; Ps 114:3–6).

Third, Yahweh defeated the chaos caused by the raging nations (Is 17:12–14). Fourth, Jesus overcame the power of chaos in the following events: (1) his temptation by the devil; (2) exorcism; (3) the miracle of calming the storm; (4) his death and resurrection. Fifth, in the end times, the dragon will be defeated completely (Rev 12:7–9) as prophesied by Isaiah: 'In that day the LORD with his

hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea' (27:1, ESV).

These biblical instances confirm that evil and good are in an uneven opposition, as the evil powers are under God's control. This view departs markedly from the Javanese worldview, in which Batara Guru and other gods, as the representation of the good power, seem not to have had full control over Batara Kala, since they permitted him to eat certain people in order to prevent him from eating the oceanic creatures.

V. True Harmony in Christ

As discussed above, the Javanese worldview places great emphasis on pursuing harmony with God, the spirits, their neighbours and the universe. In contrast, Paul insists that true harmony can be achieved only in Christ because God 'has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth' (1:9–10). Concerning these verses, Frank Thielman points out, 'Through the resurrection and the ascension of Christ, God has conquered all powers inimical to his purposes and placed them, vanquished, at Christ's feet (1:20–22a).'⁴⁸ In other words, Christ has turned chaos, the opponent of peace and order, into shalom.

By the power of his death, resur-

dia, ed. George A. Buttrick, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1962), 806–10; John N. Day, 'God and Leviathan in Isaiah 27:1', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155, no. 620 (1 October 1998): 423–36; John N. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge; MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁴⁷ Cf. Job 26:12; Psalm 29; 89:10–16.

⁴⁸ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 67.

rection and ascension, Christ has reconciled the believers, who were under God's wrath, to God (1:5; cf. 2:17–18) and with himself. Arnold has pointed out that in Ephesians 2:5–6, the notion of the union of the believers with Christ can be clearly found in the threefold use of the word 'with' in the following events: new life ('God ... made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgression'), resurrection ('God raised us up with Christ') and exaltation ('God ... seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus').⁴⁹

In addition to uniting believers with God and Christ, Christ has reconciled the Gentiles and the Jews into his body, of which he is the head (2:11–22). Without the work and the power of Christ, this reconciliation would have been impossible, since the Jews saw the Gentiles as both sinners and unclean. Nonetheless, Christ has made the Gentiles who were 'foreigners and aliens' into citizens and members of God's household, 'a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit' (verses 19, 22).

VI. Towards a Community of Shalom: An Insight from *Ruwatan*

Ruwatan is based on the Javanese worldview that seeks to help humans attain harmony with each other, the creator, and the universe. As previously discussed, the Javanese view an evil deed not as a transgression against God's law but as improper conduct that disturbs the harmony of life. In the story of Murwakala, Batara

Kala is the embodiment of evil, but he himself is the product of Batara Guru's lustful desire, which is regarded as the antithesis of the family harmony that the Javanese should demonstrate. Riyanto says, 'This point of the myth of Batara Kala more or less conveys the message of the importance of the harmonious life in a family.'⁵⁰

In daily life, the Javanese always seek to avoid conflict and maintain *rukun*, which means 'to feel oneself in the state of harmony, calm and peaceful, without quarrel or dispute', and 'united in purpose for mutual help'.⁵¹ Every Javanese person is expected to pursue peaceful interaction with each other and avoid any hostile messages or attitudes so as to maintain harmony. The Javanese 'avoid, at all costs, signs of disorder, dissonance, dissidence, loud disputes, and any disturbance of peace or of social equilibrium'.⁵² Interestingly, they are generally willing to put aside their personal interests, if necessary, to avoid conflicts.⁵³

In addition, a person who obtains great financial gain is expected to share it with the community, as is reflected in the Javanese proverb, 'When there is a scarcity, it is shared; when there is abundance, it also shared.'⁵⁴ Similarly, in decision making, instead of voting, the Javanese practise *musyawarah*, or an effort to accommodate everyone's concerns:

Ideally, *musyawarah* is a procedure in which all voices and opinions are heard. All these are considered

⁵⁰ Riyanto, 'Lolos dari Terkaman', 15.

⁵¹ Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*, 39.

⁵² Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*, 47.

⁵³ Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*, 39.

⁵⁴ Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*, 50.

⁴⁹ Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 40.

to be equally true and to contribute to the solution sought. *Musyawarah* tries to establish the *kebulatan kehendak*, or *kebulatan pikiran*, that can roughly be translated as the totality or completeness of the wishes and opinions of the participants. This completeness is a guarantee for truth and right decision-making, because the truth is contained in the harmonious unity of the deliberating group.⁵⁵

The Javanese philosophy of harmony offers a valuable perspective on the more individualistic way of life exhibited by Westerners, which may in some cases hinder Christian believers in their efforts to practise the way of life prescribed in the Bible.⁵⁶ Because both Westerners and non-Westerners are inescapably situated in their own cultures, both groups can come to understand the Bible more thoroughly through listening to each other. Behind the ritual of *ruwatan*, we see a philosophy of harmony that echoes the notion of shalom, which Craig L. Nesson has found to be more overtly evoked in African and Asian cultures than in the West.⁵⁷

Scripture tells us that when God created the world, he intended to establish shalom among his creatures. As Walter Brueggemann points out, shalom is 'the dream of God that

resists all our tendencies to division, hostility, fear, drivenness, and misery'.⁵⁸ However, sin has destroyed the peaceful harmony that existed between human beings and between humans and God. God sent his Son to die on the cross and rise from the dead so that he might reconcile the world to himself and bring shalom among humans.

In Ephesians, Paul states that the believers who have been saved through the death and resurrection of Christ are called to practise good works that God has prepared beforehand (Eph 2:10). Ephesians 2 goes on to explain that one part of these good works involved enabling the people of God—both Jews and Gentiles in Paul's original context—to live in love and harmony, since Christ, through his death and resurrection, has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility (Eph 2:14). Paul enjoins the Ephesian Christians (and us as well), as part of putting off our old life and putting on the new humanity (4:22–24), to remove all our bitterness, anger and hostility and to forgive, edify and support one another in the body of Christ (4:29–32).

God wants his people to act as agents of shalom in this chaotic world. For the church to function properly as an instrument of shalom, it must first demonstrate shalom internally by removing division, hostility, fear and enmity within the body of Christ. In doing so, every believer should be willing to put aside his or her selfish ambitions and self-interest, just as Christ emptied himself, so that we may become one in Christ (Phil 2:1–11).

55 Niels Mulder, *Mysticism and Everyday Life in Contemporary Java* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1978), 40.

56 See E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders To Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 95–112.

57 Craig L. Nesson, *Shalom Church: The Body of Christ as Ministering Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), 10.

58 Walter Brueggemann, *Peace* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2001), 14.