

Finding and Bridging Christian Values: A Conversation Between Christian Missiology and Cultural Identity

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Abstract: the Adventist church does not share any formulation for the missiological concept. Its absence leads to Westernization theology where from the systematic theological perspective, Western theology has no interest in accommodating local issues. Consequently, its mission concept presents as a Western formulation with no relevance and significance to the Asian context, specifically Indonesia. This article attempts to construct an Indonesian missiological concept that could contribute to evangelism exercises in Central Java. By using a qualitative approach, references such as books, articles, and other related sources will receive primary attention. In sum, the church mission must find Christian values in the culture and cultural expression should be operated as a medium for evangelism.

Keywords: Christian values; Christian missiology; cultural identity



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INTRODUCTION

Adventist church mission is suffering in Indonesia. Its missiological concept has no solid construction that is collaborative and interactive to the Indonesian context. In evidence, Marudut Matanari argues that Adventist members have no solid idea concerning the church mission.¹ The church is interested in developing a practical approach rather than formulating a holistic idea that would ground missiological ideas. Douglas Sepang reflects layman participation in evangelism² but does not modify a comprehensive perspective concerning the core of mission activities. In consequence, mission praxis works separately and independently without a leading concept that is applicable to Indonesia. For instance, Litner Otan Sinaga explores how literature evangelism works in North Sumatra.³ Bistok Hasibuan and Stimson Hutagalung reflect on employing supper as a hospitable expression

¹ Marudut Matanari, "Pandangan Anggota Jemaat Terhadap Penginjilan Melalui Kelompok Kecil Di Gereja Masehi Advent Hari Ke-Tujuh Distrik Dairi Selatan," *Jurnal Teologi Forum STFT* 8, no. 1 (2020): 29–42.

² Douglas Sepang, "PERANAN KAUM AWAM DALAM PENGINJILAN DIGEREJA MASEHI ADVENT HARI KETUJUH WILAYAH KECAMATAN KAUDITAN KABUPATEN MINAHASA UTARA," *JFF (Jurnal Fakultas Filsafat)* 1, no. 2 (2012): 1018–1019.

³ Litner Otan Sinaga, "Tingkat Keterlibatan Anggota Gereja Masehi Advent Hari Ke Tujuh Daerah Sumatra Kawasan Utara Terhadap Pekerjaan Penginjilan Melalui Literatur," *Jurnal Teologi Forum STFT* 8, no. 1 (2020): 60–69.

that would invite people's interest.⁴ Previous academic works display how the Adventist mission penetrates the praxis approach but does not accommodate its foundation.

However, the absence of missiological conception in the Indonesian Adventist movement leads to missiological Westernization. From a systematic theological perspective, Western theology has no interest in accommodating local issues. Consequently, its mission concept presents as a Western formulation with no relevance and significance to the Asian context, specifically Indonesia. Donny Chrissutianto examines homosexual orientation in marriage,⁵ but the significance for Indonesian due to LGBT is not a provoking issue as in Europe. Blasius Abin explores the significance of *tabith* in the heavenly and earthly sanctuary.⁶ Unfortunately, it has no direct correlation to missiological activities in Indonesia. Enos Hitler and Alwyn C. Hendriks delve into the impact of holy communion on church growth; however, it does not reach out to the non-Adventist society,⁷ and lastly, Stimson Hutagalung explores church growth and its praxis issues such reading the Bible, pray and worship.⁸ However, these works play surround the doctrinal issues and internal intention. They do not accommodate and reach concepts that are fruitful for a church mission. Therefore, Timoteo D. Gener argues that Christian theology has no concern for the Asian context as it was modified in a Western context. It discusses Trinity, pneumatology, soteriology but has no significance to poverty, demon possession, and injustice.⁹ Therefore, contextualization in Indonesian missiology is prominent. Previously, Adventist scholars have been shared works in contextualization missions. Charstar Arstilo Rumbay attempts to contextualize Christology public theology issue, Pancasila and works to share peace between Christian doctrine and innovative digital society in Indonesia.¹⁰ Budi Harwanto shares how to contextualize Javaness Tirakat tradition to Adventist spiritual formulation.¹¹ However, these essays do not work comprehensively and have no solid contextual mission draft. Indeed, missiology is an inseparable entity with contextualization. In response to the fluctuation, this research attempts to formulate a contextualization concept that could contribute comprehensively to the Adventist church mission in Indonesia.

Moreover, Indonesia shares a heterogenic community where each region has its challenges and obstacles. Therefore, narrowing its context is prominent to gain specific discussion. Central Java is a promising research object due it contains solid culture. Ancestral spirits tradition is one of the most provoking practices. It receives massive

⁴ Stimson Hasibuan, Bistok and Hutagalung, "ANALISIS TUJUAN JAMUAN MAKAN BERSAMA SEBAGAI SUATU METODE PENGINJILAN BERDASARKAN KISAH PARA RASUL 2: 46 DI JEMAAT PAKUSARAKAN CIMAH BANDUNG," *Jurnal Koinonia* 8, no. 1 (2016): 95–120.

⁵ Donny Chrissutianto, "Homosexual Orientation in Marriage: A Reason for Divorce?," *Klabat Theological Review* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1–12.

⁶ Blasius Abin, "The Significance of Tabnith in the Context of Correspondence of Heavenly and Earthly Sanctuary in Exodus 25:9, 40," *Klabat Theological Review* 1, no. 1 (2020): 24.

⁷ Enos Hitler, "Pertumbuhan Kerohanian Jemaat Gmahk Bunsadan Kota Marudu Sabah, Malaysia" 2013 (2013): 27–44.

⁸ Stimson Hutagalung and Rolyana Ferinia, "Menjelajahi Spiritualitas Milenial: Apakah Membaca Alkitab, Berdoa, Dan Menghormati Acara Di Gereja Menurun?," *Jurnal Teruna Bhakti* 2, no. 2 (2020): 97.

⁹ Timoteo D Gener, "Doing Contextual Systematic Theology in Asia: Challenges and Prospects," *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology* 22, no. September (2018): 49–68.

¹⁰ Charstar Arstilo Rumbay, "Christology in Digital Era: A Socio-Systematic Theology Contribution to the Sustainable Smart Society," *PASCA: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 16, no. 1 (2020): 15–23.

¹¹ Budi Harwanto, "Contextualized Tirakat Form to Christian Spiritual Formation among Javanese," *Klabat Theological Review* 1, no. 1 (2020): 49.

attention and being an object of church contextualization. Suh Sung Min explored these practices and their relevance to churches in Minahasa, Batak, and Sumba. He is interested in examining how church missions respond to such cultural legacy. Nevertheless, Min and other Christian scholars, especially Adventist researchers, have no attention to this tradition. Central Java contains a variety of ancestral spirit traditions. For instance, *perang obor* in Jepara is the manifestation of ancestral tradition in which the people respect and honor their ancestors.¹² The people manage temple ornament and architecture as a representation of honor to ancestral spirits.¹³ In extension, *wayang* performances ancestral spirits ritual for Javanese.¹⁴ Indah Putri argues that most Central Java cultural expression relates to gratitude for ancestral spirits that have helped balance agriculture and other social activities.¹⁵ With this in mind, ancestral spirits practice is significant in Central Java; further, it is an opportunity for the Adventist church to occupy this tradition as an object and mediator of contextualization.

Other religions have shared several works to the tension, but the involvement of Adventist mission and the ancestral spirits traditions are absent. Catholic church mission worked to acculturate church architecture design that applies to Javanese culture.¹⁶ Dony Azis presents several works of Islam that accommodate local traditions.¹⁷ Unfortunately, Adventist scholars have no attention and interest to such works; further, ancestral spirits practices are less of exploration.

A proper contextual formulation for Adventist mission in Central Java Indonesia concerning ancestral spirits practice is the primary problem in this essay. Therefore, the research question that leads this essay is, what is the beneficial contextualization that could contribute comprehensively to the Adventist church mission in Central Java Indonesia concerning ancestral spirit practice? This research intends to donate constructive ideas for the Adventist church mission in Indonesia, explicitly speaking, Central Java. However, the result of this study could be an alternative perspective for Adventist doctrine development on missiology. The maximum expectation is that the contextual concept constructed in this paper concerning ancestral spirit tradition would be applied in mission activities. The minimum contribution is; this exploration will provoke other scholars to improve further studies.

METHOD

This study is a qualitative work that attempts to explore literature such as articles, books, and other related sources. A sensitive hermeneutical approach will lead this study.

¹² Efa Ida Amaliyah, "Nilai-Nilai Kearifan Lokal Dalam Tradisi Perang Obor Di Tegalsambi-Jepara Sebagai Karakteristik Islam Nusantara Local Wisdom in Perang Obor Tradition at Tegalsambi- Jepara as Characteristic of Islam Nusantara," *Lektur Keagamaan* 16 (2018): 395–416.

¹³ Alfin Nurwahyu Shokheh Muhammad and Yohannes Hanan Pamungkas, "KAJIAN ARSITEKTUR DAN FUNGSI CANDI KENDALISADA DI SITUS GUNUNG PENANGGUNGAN AVATARA , e-Journal Pendidikan Sejarah," *AVATARA, e-Journal Pendidikan Sejarah* 4, no. 3 (2016): 1035–1045.

¹⁴ Bayu Anggoro, "'Wayang Dan Seni Pertunjukan' Kajian Sejarah Perkembangan Seni Wayang Di Tanah Jawa Sebagai Seni Pertunjukan Dan Dakwah," *JUSPI (Jurnal Sejarah Peradaban Islam)* 2, no. 2 (2018): 122.

¹⁵ Indah Riadi Putri et al., "Tradisi Masyarakat Selo Dan Pariwisata Di Taman Nasional Gunung Merbabu, Boyolali Jawa Tengah," *SASDAYA: Gadjah Mada Journal of Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2017): 199.

¹⁶ Yunita Setyoningrum, "Tinjauan Inkulturasi Agama Katolik Dengan Budaya Jawa Pada Bangunan Gereja Katolik Di Masa Kolonial Belanda. Studi Kasus: Gereja Hati Kudus Yesus, Pugeran, Yogyakarta," *Jurnal Ambiance* 1, no. 2 (2008).

¹⁷ Donny Khoirul Aziz, "Akulturasi Islam Dan Budaya Jawa," *Fikrah* I, no. 2 (2015): 253–286.

However, this essay is a systematic-cross-cultural approach that explores the missiological concept of Christian scholars that is applicable and potentially could donate knowledge to the tension. Adventist church mission will receive the first approach as a solid ground to work further. Its dogmatic missiology will be re-constructed to gain a clear and comprehensive idea of how the Adventist church defines its concept. In the next stage, Central Java's existence, especially ancestral spirits practices, will receive intense exploration to see how Javanese express honor the ancestors and practice such rituals. Eventually, this research tries to formulate, construct, and modify the mission by contextualizing the cultural legacy.

DISCUSSION

Biblical Foundation

The significance of missiology, proclaiming the Gospel, is not less critical than in the early church. The Gospel does not only articulate the heavenly message, but the Word incarnate, which was with God in the beginning and is always one with him. Therefore, the Bible prepares several signs as motivation to participate in evangelism. In doing so, Jesus gave a great commandment to disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV) "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen." Stephen Tong argues that the great commandment is not simply significant, but historically, it is the most excellent order.¹⁸ Further, the role of the commander in this text share impression that it is a divine command.¹⁹ The Bible expresses the text in the four books of the Gospel and Acts. Yakob Tomatala says that the five books were written by four authors with clear perspective distinction but displayed mutual support.²⁰ Mark 16:15-18 stresses the proclamation and preaching, while Luke 24:46-49 focuses on witnessing.²¹ According to George Peters, Mark emphasizes the method and geographic approach, Luke portrays the universalism of Christ-center, and John articulates its character. In his discussion, Peters extends several values of the text. First, it is a divine natural expression of God as it is revealed in the scripture. Second, it donates God's mission intention, a manifestation of the life, theology, and soteriology of Christ. Third, it applies the Holy Spirit works and the essence of the church mission. Fourth, formulating organism unity as an inseparable entity.²²

In sum, Matthew 28:19-20 presents a biblical foundation for a church mission; even more, it portrays a powerful message that Christians have mission responsibility. The text prepares method, character, urgency, and theology. Therefore, the text shares both a commandment and a clue on how to implement it.

¹⁸ Stephen Tong, *Teologi Penginjilan* (Surabaya: Momentum, 2004).

¹⁹ Jim Petersen dan Mike Sham, "Menjadi Garam Dan Terang Bagi Kalangan Terdekat," *Bandung: Pionir Jaya* 9 (2007).

²⁰ Yakob Tomatala, *Penginjilan Masa Kini 1* (Malang: gandum mas, 2004).

²¹ David J Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication* (Malang: SAAT, 2005).

²² George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Malang: Gandum Mas, 2006).

Ancestral Spirits and Its Practice

In Javanese tradition, respecting ancestral spirit is defined as sadranan, come closer to God. The meaning and essence of life significantly influence the transformation of this practice.²³ April Sani confirms that sadranan has significance toward the indigenous people's social interaction; it spans economic, cultural, and anthropological dimensions. It portrays how the people with ancient worldviews bond to the tradition that the existing cosmos has a connection to the magic world with its spirits. More provoking is, the ancestral spirits have the authority to engage in civilization.²⁴ With this in mind, the Javanese agree that the cosmological system is not a single dimension but integrated into another world. Respecting and honoring the ancestors is an integral part of human life as they can intervene in their descendants. Such tradition is a unique identity that shares local features. It is attached to the practices and rituals and seems to have no impendence on civilization.

Sadranan practices invite massive participation to the youth, teenagers, and adults. It reflects values; kinship, communal work, friendship, and siblingship. In its ritual, it employs symbols that present as the agent to communicate the message. Essentially, sadranan contains steps and methods on how to extend the advice to descendants. Ancestor spirits equip this ritual to be connected with their existing siblings. Hanun Wuryansari identifies that sadranan has been transformed into Islamic practices. The essence of this ritual, in its original, addressed ancestral spirits in a communication sense, where the descendants could interact with their ancestors. Currently, it is considered as a ritual that is expected Allah blesses the ancestors.²⁵ Further, the offerings are raw meat but conversing to a proper meal. In central Java, its practice is distinction, but generally, the people clean the grave, the village, and the meeting hall. Participation in the sadranan ritual reflects how the existing people respect and honor their ancestors, followed by submitting to parents. Besides, sadranan is a confirmation of cultural identity. Maintaining this legacy expresses that society still preserves the tradition.

Moreover, sadranan plays the role of social communication, implying that social communication is carried out for self-fulfillment to feel comforted when cultivating good relations with others. The Sadranan ceremony is also used as a medium for social interaction. Its delivery of information involves all levels of society. Sadranan ceremony is a form of social communication that has a meaning in the form of harmony created in the dynamics of the lives of citizens. Social harmony looks solid in the ordinary life behavior of citizens. Sadranan ceremony also has a crucial role in creating social harmony in people's lives. Cleaning the grave is one of the symbols of social harmony where there is a harmonious relationship, cooperation, and a firm siblingship. This social harmony creates a form of harmony that leads to mutual prosperity in community life. For the Javanese, social harmony is an expensive series of welfare living together where Sadranan has transformed its indigenous meaning. In ancient times, various offerings were intended for the spirits of the ancestors or ancestors. The offerings in the form of raw food, raw meat,

²³ Putri et al., "Tradisi Masyarakat Selo Dan Pariwisata Di Taman Nasional Gunung Merbabu, Boyolali Jawa Tengah."

²⁴ April Sani, "Tadisi Sadranan Masyarakat Desa Pagerejo Kecamatan Kertek Kabupaten Wonosobo Propinsi Jawa Tengah" (2005).

²⁵ Hanun Wuryansari, Puji Lestari, and Isbandi Sutrisno, "Sadranan Sebagai Bentuk Komunikasi Sosial," *Jurnal ASPIKOM* 2, no. 3 (2014): 198.

incense, and blood are intended for the ancestral spirits so that the community gets safety, prosperity, and the blessing of life. While the Sadranan practice currently maintains its substance but has been filled with Islamic values. Sadranan is no longer offered to the spirits of the ancestors but is a means or medium for alms and praying for the ancestral spirits to be at peace. The offerings originally in raw food, raw meat, and blood have now been replaced with proper food and drink. The sadranan ritual tradition has experienced a shift in values and meanings, namely a pilgrimage to the grave, praying for the departed souls to gain peace with God.

In consequence, the existence of ancestral spirit and active community is connected and interacted regularly. Javanese ancestors considered objects surround them to have spirit and alive. In animism and dynamism beliefs, the ancestor spirits are more substantial than alive people. The ancestor spirits stay within mountains, valleys, trees, and other objects. Therefore, alive society expects that their ancestors would supply blessings and helps by inviting them into sacramental practices. Javanese employs mediators such as dukun (magician), songs, dances, offerings, and fragrances.²⁶ With this in mind, the whole sacramental practices apply to honor and respect ancestral spirits. Javanese life dimension displays how they share gratitude to their ancestors.

Finding or Offering Christ?

Christ is present in the culture. The ultimate intention of doing contextualization is to find Christ in the culture. Robert W Jenson proposes Christ as the culture. He proposes that if the church is the body of Christ, the culture should be part of Christ and the Gospel.²⁷ In contrast, David Eko Setiawan does not regard Christ, or the Gospel exists among a culture. He proposes missionaries to bridge the gap between God and local tradition.²⁸ He defines contextualization as a model of bridging the distinction between Christianity and cultural tradition. In detail, H. Harming and K. Katarina propose four steps of doing contextualization; understanding the local culture, employing media, encouraging potencies, and innovating.²⁹ Extremely, Deni Triastanti insists that Christian teaching contextualization means defending and protecting the purity of truth.³⁰ She draws a clear standing point by limiting the mission's activities based on biblical principles. In sum, contextualization in church mission shares two natures; first, church mission should search Christ among the culture because the Christian truth exists among the society. Second, Christian teaching needs to transform and convert its values and dogma to accommodate the culture without destroying its core doctrine.

Finding Christ means that ancestral spirits practices in central Java, such as sadranan, are an object to probe Christian values. In doing so, the church mission will deal with the religious expression of *sadranan*; social bonding, social communication, and social respect.

²⁶ Anggoro, "Wayang Dan Seni Pertunjukan" (n.d.): 125–126.

²⁷ Robert W Jenson, "Christ as Culture 1: Christ as Polity," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5, no. 3 (2003): 323–329.

²⁸ David Eko Setiawan, "Menjembatani Injil Dan Budaya Dalam Misi Melalui Metode Kontektualisasi," *Fidei: Jurnal Teologi Sistematika dan Praktika* 3, no. 2 (2020): 160–180.

²⁹ H. Harming K. Katarina, "Strategi Pelayanan Lintas Budaya Berdasarkan Markus 4:1-34," *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat* 3, no. 1 (2019): 113–121.

³⁰ H Triastanti, Deni and Ndiy, Ferderika Pertiwi and Harming, "Strategi Misi Lintas Budaya Berdasarkan Kisah Para Rasul 1: 8," *Jurnal Teologi Kontekstual Indonesia* 1, no. 1 (2020): 15–25.

Honoring ancestral spirits is not a vertical relationship; it is not simply a supernatural activity; instead, it deals with horizontal connections where the people are integrated into a ceremony. On the flip side, offering Christ means that the church mission introduces Christianity as an alternative religious value to society. However, presenting Christ can destroy the culture because they come from distinct traditions that could contrast. It shares enmity when meeting in the core value for discussion. Approaching this tends to force Christian teaching as superior and treats cultural values, and ancestral spirits rituals as *alifuru*, an ancient practice that has no significance to the modern world. The advantages are; dogmatic purity is maintained and far from syncretism, offering a new worldview that could help and contribute to society's development.

The expression of Javanese culture concerning ancestral Spirit shares opportunities and challenges. The opportunity is, they believe that supernatural power is superior to alive human beings. The Spirit of God should be defined as the Spirit who owns the competencies and authority to donate blessings and wealth to the people who praise Him. The personality and figuration of the Spirit must be modified in the Javanese context as an alternative way of bridging the gap between Christianity and Central Java culture. Moreover, the works of God, nature, display the glory of God. Trees, valleys, rivers, mountains, and rocks prove that God is alive among nature. Church missions need to re-direct the focus to God instead of nature. The environment and nature are the media leading people to God. On the flip side, the challenges are finding a Christian dimension within the culture and avoiding syncretism. The church mission can accommodate Central Java culture concerning ancestral spirits by performing hospitality toward the tradition. Bridging the gap and finding Christian values within society is realistic in this context.

The great commandment by Jesus should be considered a cosmic order that bears urgency. The church has responsible for extending the good news globally, especially speaking, Central Java. The life of the Javanese with its ancestral spirits tradition must be a discussion by the church. The implementation of Matthew 28:19-20 leads the evangelism into two contextualization models; finding and bridging Christian values in the Central Java context.

CONCLUSION

Contextualization in Central Java should accommodate two mission models. First, the church mission must find Christian values in the culture. Second, the cultural expression should be operated as a medium for evangelism. By doing these contextualization models, the church can reach Central Javanese with their ancestral spirits influences. However, this study opens further research to discover and unfold challenges and obstacles in evangelism in the Javanese context.

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