JAVANESE CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS
IN VILLAGES DIVERSITY CONTEXT IN JAVA

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Abstract

Until now, there are very limited discussion in the context of local perspectives on how religion has played a major role in the Javanese villages. However, there are some other perspectives that can be viewed form their oral tradition. This is very significant in order to compare with other European sources. Understanding of Christian dogma which came from western, was affected by local culture. People in more identical rural area which has stronger Javanese culture, perceive the Christian dogma as acculturation of Javanese Christian. Tolerance of javanese philosophy towards other religions (e.g. Moslem, Hindu) proves that it can receive dogma of Christian in harmonic combination form with Javanese culture. In this case, zending as broadcast institution of Christian Protestant was very important in transferring new dogma through local culture application. Furthermore local congregation were included in world organization called church.

Therefore, some pertinent questions that need to be addressed in the paper. Firstly, how the local people understand the available sources that already written by the European particulary by the mission activist ? secondly : what kinds of impacts that can be learnt from those sources? And thirdly, how can we understand the meaning of the local perspective in order to have a better understand of the Christian in the Javanese villages.

Keywords : tradition, Christianity, diversity, Javanese villages, Javanese culture, church

Introduction

There is an assumption that the Christianity is identical with the Western World. Historical reality illustrates that governance in running this religion institutional organization cannot be separated from the vision of Western culture. The church as a form of organization or community institution that adheres to Christianity (Protestantism) is also constructed in accordance with the concept of Western thought, the place where Christianity was developing. Regarding this, one of the duties or functions of the church was to introduce and disseminate Christian teachings to other parts of the world that had not embraced other religions, through what was called evangelism or Christianization. According to Christianity the task of spreading or preaching Christian teachings is a command of God that must be obeyed by the church.

The colonization of Europeans / Dutch in the Dutch East Indies in the 19th century became an important way for evangelism in Java. Zending is an evangelistic institution to Java, which was formed and coordinated by the Gereformeerdd church in the Netherlands, namely the Netherlands Zending Gereformeerdd / NZG (Muller Kruger, 1966: 66-67). The dynamics of evangelism in Java that had been carried out in Java around 1815 were influenced by the political and economic interests of the colonial government. The large expenditure to finance the Diponegoro War in Central Java in 1825-1830 led to the desire of the colonial government to refill the deficit state treasury through the policy of implementing the cultuurstelsel in Java. For this reason, calm and safe conditions are needed. Evangelism activities were feared to shake the “Islamic world” in Java, which in turn would disrupt order and security. Therefore until 1850, evangelism in Java coordinated by NZG from the Netherlands was very limited. However, that does not mean that the Christian tradition in Java has stopped completely.

Adherents of Christianity at that time were mostly in cities, such as Semarang, Surabaya and Batavia (Jakarta), and the majority of them were not local Javanese. Some of them were colonial government employees, and Dutch priests served their rochaniah interests in the church. These pastors are organizationally included as evangelical members of the NZG church in the Netherlands. Because
formally zending organizations had not been permitted to do their work in Java, they worked individually to evangelize rural areas. People like Emde, Coolen who worked in East Java, Mrs. Phillips and Bruckner in Central Java and Mr. Anthing in West Java and Batavia was a zendeling (zending envoy who worked as an evangelist) who worked informally. The new Zending was allowed to return to work in Java after the 1950s.

In the villages in Java at that time Islam was really strong, but in more remote areas Islam was syncretistic with the domination of Javanese tradition called kejawen (Clifford Geertz, 1960: 11-15). In the Kejawen region, the goal of evangelism was carried out. The problem laid on how the elements of the Kejawen tradition, which had mysticism, were able to adapt the teachings of Christianity rich in Western (Dutch) culture. In addition to the oral tradition of religious education, it was also done with an understanding of the Gospel written by Dutch people. The question here is how the Kejawen community interpreted Christian teachings written in the gospel, so that they were convinced that religious teachings influenced by different cultures were in line with their hopes and desires. On the other hand, the conceptual way of thinking of rural communities in Java in looking at the micro and macro cosmos became important to understand with a local perspective. All of that needed to be done in order to know what they wanted from the Christianity in giving more meaning to their lives without forgetting their cultural ties. In this social context, the dynamics of Christianity in Java showed the dichotomy of Javanese and Western-style Christianity.

In urban areas in Java, the Western-style Christianity tradition was more dominant than in rural areas. The vision that defined religious teachings through local traditions collided with the vision that defined textual religious teachings from the gospel. The dynamics of the history of evangelism in villages in Java showed more vivid colors towards the end of the 19th century. Textual understanding of the Gospel / Bible, wrapped in Javanese tradition was a new color of Javanese Christian life in rural areas. The implementation of the consensus model from the way of managing conflict according to Claessen (Claessen, 1974: 24) will make it easier to see the problems of the tradition of Christianity in villages in Java.

The Role of Zending / Dutch in Villages in Java

The role of Zending in the life of Javanese Christianity was very huge. The process of Christianization which experienced many obstacles could eventually form a Javanese Christian community or congregation, which implemented textual teachings of the Gospel, without leaving at all some Javanese identities behind. This was a form of compromise in the way of evangelism which was then zending performed to avoid chaos which might actually hinder evangelism efforts. This was in accordance with the provisions of the zending on evangelistic methods which basically suggested that the zendeling performed their duties in a flexible, ethical and clever manner in any conditions and situations. Evangelism duties included the fields of education, medical, book publishing, and translation of the Gospel called colportage (D. Pol. VDM, 1922: 239).

Compromising zending policy between the two styles of Javanese and European Christianity, began in the village of Ngoro, East Java when Emde, a German pastor, tried to evangelize eople from Ngoro who worked in Surabaya in a European style. In general, the new Javanese Christians were domestic servants who worked for Dutch families. Because Christianity was considered to be European origin, the new Christians were also required to follow European / Dutch customs. They were required to cut their hair, change their sarong with trousers, release their kris, they could no longer watch puppets, listen to the gamelan and hold salvation because it was considered infidel. This extreme policy was challenged by Pastor Coolen. Coolen was born to a Dutch father and his mother was a daughter of Javanese nobility. From his mother he inherited Javanese cultural traditions so he understood Javanese puppets, music and dance. The pastor also worked to evangelize people in the Ngoro village area by using the Kejawen custom. For example in the Sunday service the reading of the holy verses of the Gospel was interspersed with Javanese songs accompanied by gamelan.

Besides that, Christian prayers were said through zikir (memorizing) and rapal (reading or chanting). Some of the examples above show that there were differences in the style of evangelism between Emde
and Coolen. Emde combined Christianity with Western culture. On the contrary Javanese cultural customs were Coolen’s character to teach Christianity to people in the village of Ngoro, East Java. In this way Coolen was able to Christianize other people from the village of Wiung. In turn this difference resulted in divisions among Christians in Ngoro. Western-style Christian citizens were expelled from this region, and opened up land in other regions namely Mojowarno. At the same time the pastor of the zending priest Jellesma helped coordinating the congregation in Mojowarno led by a Javanese Christian, Paulus Tosari. This zending messenger took the middle path between Western and Javanese styles. For example, Javanese Christians did not have to cut their hair short, they were even allowed to wear headbands. Until now the church (church members) in Mojowarno run the Christian tradition based on the Gospel textually, without having to leave the Javanese culture behind.

While working in Java, zendeling (emissary zending) Jellesma in addition to successfully Christianizing more than 2000 people, also opened a People’s School and educated a number of young men to become school teachers and also as church teachers. Together with Paul Tosari he established the “poor barn” which was the rice collected by the congregation to donate to the needy people. Jellesma also published Gospel books and a collection of gospel songs in Javanese. These are some of the zending strategies in evangelization in Java, which seemed to target more people who were already able to read and write (J. Verkuyl, 1973: 12). The next period after 1864, under the leadership of J.Kruyt, the influence of zending in developing the Javanese Christian tradition grew stronger. They considered themselves to be teachers who guide the Javanese Christian Community towards the independent and universal Christianity. This was only achieved in the 20th century.

The Christian tradition in Central Java was not much different from East Java. Christianity in this place splitted into Western-style Christianity taught by the Dutch in Semarang, and the Javanese style introduced by Christian Javanese from Ngoro and Mojowarno. In the midst of these conditions the delegation of the zending institution came and took over the leadership of the Javanese Christian congregation. Only in Central Java they did experience more conflict than in East Java. The unification of the two forms came into being in the 20th century. The pattern of Christianity which was syncretized with Javanese aspects in this region was introduced by a Javanese evangelist who often meditated in Mt.Kelud, Kyai Ibrahim Tunggul Wulung and later by Kyai Sadrah Surapranata in Rembang and Purwareja regions (South Central Java). The kyai title showed the title of respect for someone who was regarded as a religiously knowledgeable person. For them the Gospel is “ngelmu” which could be explored through rapal (reading or chanting) and dhikir (memorizing), and did not need to be interpreted literally, and had a mystical secret meaning that was realized in the mind of the believer (H. Kraemer, 1938: 165) Despite being a Christian, the Javanese must remain Javanese, and not imitated Dutch customs. Even Sadrah identified the Jews (Jesus as the son of his people) with Java, and the language of the Jews was Javanese. The Gospels were also written in Javanese and had been revealed to Sadrah (I.Iswanto, 1974: 70-71).

This implied the recognition that language as part of Javanese culture was higher than Western / Dutch culture because Jesus whom he called Ratu Adil was born from a Javanese cultural environment. Thus the Javanese customs such as the earth alms which carried out the rituals were complemented by offerings which must not be abolished. However the meaning of the offerings was no longer related to the old beliefs, but was interpreted by the Christian nature. Initially opposition from Bieger’s zendeling involved government intervention to arrest Sadrah. But in 1882, under his successor zendeling Wilhelm, zending again showed a compromise attitude. Wilhelm, who was quite good in Javanese language, tried to guide and cooperate with Sadrah to bring the Javanese Christian congregation to textual understanding of the Gospel (Coolsma S, 1901: 172).

Meanwhile the dynamics of the Christian tradition associated with zending works in West Java / Batavia took place with fewer challenges, although in the West Java / Sundanese region the Christian tradition was interpreted as “knowledge”, such as “ngelmu” in East Java and Central Java. This happened because from the beginning Mr.Anthing, a zendeling who also served as a government official in Batavia, carried out a careful and prudent approach. The West Java / Sunda region was given the freedom to implement the style of its Christian tradition, while he temporarily focused more on evangelism in
Batavia in 1861, and succeeded in forming congregations among others in the Kampung Sawah area. Later many Christian leaders in the Pasundan Church came from a church in Batavia.

The description of the Christian tradition in the Javanese village in the 19th century was pioneered by several people who carried out individual evangelism. The new zending institute began to work in 1860. In the countryside / inland, in that year there were already many Christians due to the individual evangelism. The Christian congregation generally had a clear Javanese / local Christian tradition. Along with the operational permit from the government, zending became definitely as their guardian, trying to reduce the kejawen element in it.

**Christianity In The Multicultural Community Context**

Understanding the concept of multicultural according to the vision of Christianity is the existence of love, kindness, equality and salvation that will be given to all humans without any exception. In the Gospels, written in Galatians 3:28 that all men coming from various tribes, nations and social classes are united in Christ. The essence of the concept is very identical with the current view of multiculturalism in which the point is to grow enthusiasm to avoid prejudice, discrimination and marginalization among members from different communities of ethnicity, race and religion. In other words, the principle of multiculturalism can be understood as a form of recognition of cultural diversity, encouraging a concern so that marginalized groups are integrated into society, and the community accommodates the differences in their respective cultures, therefore peculiarities in their identity are recognized (Haryatmoko, 2010: 70). So the keywords are compromise and tolerance in diversity.

The principle of Christianity which is identical with the concept of multicultural today, shows there is a hope that the actualization of Christianity in social life gives contribution in creating peace of the nation and the world. For that reason, it is important to understand how the relationship between the gospel as a Christian guide to the church and multiculturalism. In the Gospels it is told that through the Roman occupation, the nation Israel / Jews must live together and associate with other nations, such as: Persia, Greek and Roman. Even the teachings of Christianity which always emphasize the healing and help given by Jesus to the Roman soldiers, and a Palestinian woman, shows that the concept of multiculturalism already existed since the tradition of Christianity was born (http://adeherianto84.blogspot.com/2016/06/gereja-dan-multiculturalism.html). The contribution of Christian civilization in the formation of Modern Western thoughts in the discourse of globalization now constructed the concept of multiculturalism,

**Multiculturalism in Church Life**

The compromising policy of zending in Javenese villages in the late 19th century showed there was an awareness that recognizing and accepting Javanese customs and culture which was equal to Western culture, which was a form of implementation of the teachings of Christianity mentioned in the gospel. The Javanese themselves at that time actually had the habit of mutual cooperation (gotong royong) which was a reflection of multicultural ideas, so they refused Western imitation of Christianity because it was considered to demean their Javanese tradition. Christian Community led by Sadrah in South Central Java continued to carry out the slametan ceremony, a ceremony where people pray together for the spirits of the deceased, carried out consecutively on day 3, 7, 40, 100 and 1000 (L. Adriaanse, 1889: 377-378). This tradition is still up to now continued to be carried out in Java both in the village and in the city. Some Christians still carry out this tradition, at least hold the ceremony on day 3 or until day 40.

The Javanese tradition of nyekar (visiting family graves) now, is not yet abandoned by Christians. The ‘spreading flowers’ ceremony on the members’ tombs family, while praying for common salvation, reflects the form of Javanese tradition who still respect their ancestors, even though they have embraced Christianity. Accompaniment of music gamelan in the liturgy (church ceremony), songs sung in Javanese language as well as Javanese traditional clothing worn by the congregation at each service on Sunday in the church are still done in some Javanese Christian churches (for example in Mojowarno East Java). Today there are several Christian schools and hospitals in Java accepting students or non-Christian
patients, for example Bethesda Hospital in Jogjakarta. Some of the picture above describing the teaching process in the church emphasizing the nature of love, kindness, equality and safety that will be given to all humans without exception. Essentially it shows the form of implementation from the aspect of multiculturalism. One of the phrase from the Gospel of Galatians 3:28 is that all people who come from various tribes, nations and social classes are united in Christ. This shows the role of the church as a deep Christian institution teaching the congregation / people to continue to integrate with other community members who have different social backgrounds. In the history of Christianity, the most important thing is how to get closer to God and carry out the mandate accordingly with the law of love and equality in the gospel (http://adherianto84.blogspot.com/2016/06/gereja-dan-multikulturalisme.html).

The church as a Christian community emphasizes to its congregation to not discriminate anyone just because of the background of the tribe, nation, culture, social class, different view of life. There are several main points underlying the church in implementing its teachings in the world social life, namely avoiding primordialism, ethnocentrism and discriminatory attitudes which are contrary to the teachings of the church and the gospel. The most important point is togetherness, solidarity and peaceful coexistence in difference. Generally the church in Indonesia / Java is a church built in the middle of a congregation consisting of various ethnic groups, cultures, customs, and geography.

The church is open to diversity. Among Christians, multiculturalism is not a problem that must be contested. Even inside inter-religious relations, multicultural principles seem to be well understood by Christians. On Christmas Day (commemorating the Battle of Jesus Christ) in December Christian community also invites other people, as a form of appreciation for them. Conversely Christians will come to meet the invitation of Muslims who celebrate their big day, like Eid feast. In Mojowarno village, East Java, Christianity is interpreted as Javanese cultural customs, also by creating harmony and balance in diverse society life.

The realization of the principle of multiculturalism in the dynamics of church life can be seen from the fact that the church in Indonesia / Java has various members ethnicity, culture, language and area. The church also adopted several elements of local culture including in the liturgy of worship. Local songs, music and habits can be adopted in order to enrich the understanding of the Christian faith. Various church services are intended for the general public regardless of region, culture, customs, social class and religion. Examples are services in Hospitals, Advocacy Teams, Schools and Universities Christians on Java. Church studies or cultural studies are conducted to dig back elements of local culture that are feared to decline. Implemented among others by publish Bible translations, and spiritual songs into Javanese.

**Church Role In The Global Java World**

As a global process, globalization is a process narrowing the distance of social relations in the world, so that an incident in a place will quickly affect the other places. This process will force all people in developing sophisticated communication technology. Some of the characteristic of globalization is that all institutions are in one good world system of government, economic, trade and social politics. Besides that, the process of democratization goes on aspects of human life because in the system of globalization there is a freedom. Technology of information and knowledge are a necessity, so education must encourage human beings in creating and thinking.

In a globalized Javanese world, human resources needed are those who have international insight, international communication, free, unbound, holistic thinking, systemic and interdisciplinary, and are able to work in an organization. The Javanese church must not be exclusively thinking, which assesses and conducts a policy based more on its vision or perspective (Java) itself, without regards to the conditions and interests of others. Mindset of the Dutch colonials who thought that Dutch Christianity was the best and true, it is no longer relevant nowadays which demands thought oriented to appreciation, respect, recognition and cooperation with them which is different from us (https://dongants.wordpress.cm/2006/07/06/peran-gereja-menyongsong-globalisasi/ ).

Through the church as a church organization, all social and humanitarian activities religious churches in Java contact each other, interact even integrated in one destination with churches or other
institutions in the region of Indonesia and even abroad. Church have broad access to collaborating with outside institutions country, so this makes it easier to exchange experiences and knowledge to strengthen themselves to face the swift influence of globalization. Church dynamism is reflected by the attitude and behavior of the congregation in facing challenges, world problems and spirituality. Dynamic faces the challenges of globalization, and does not consider globalization as a scary thing, but more as a challenge to church dynamism,so that the church remains focused on services that contribute to others human or to God. So the church is an integrated thing carries out its activities based on work programs that are in tune with dynamism.

Conclusion

The Gospel is the source of Christian teachings carried out by Westerners / Dutchmen to rural communities in Java. It was initially interpreted as a form of traditional camouflage Javanese culture in Christianity. The gospel that is believed to be the word of God is becoming teaching materials. It turns out that the village community in Java cannot understand at that time (19th century), there were still many who could not read and write. On the other hand, Dutch people who considered Christianity to be identical with their culture, judge it is a form of deviation from Christian teachings. This difference in perception resulted in stagnant Christianization among rural Javanese people. In turn it raised awareness of zending to take a stand to compromise of Javanese Christians. Some elements of Javanese tradition, such as tembang (Javanese songs), the accompaniment of Javanese music / gamelan was united in Christian ceremonies / worship in church. The most important thing is that Javanese Christians were able to interpret the nature of teaching Christianity, among others, the teachings of love among all humanity, and the confession of Jesus as their savior.

The policy towards the Javanese Christian acculturation was expected to increase a better understanding of Javanese cultural traditions. This effort is materialized in the form of translating the Gospel into Javanese, and mastering the Javanese language more deeply by the Dutch zendeling. Zendeling who mastered Javanese were able to communicate and interact with rural communities in Java. Eventually evangelism / Christianization efforts succeeded. Besides that relations and coaching to the Javanese Christian community could take place well.

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