

THE JAVANESE MUSLIM CHURCH EXPERIENCE:
AN EXAMPLE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

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"The ethnic groups of the East Indies can be fully brought to Christ only by laborers from their own ethnic groups" F.L.Anthing

A.J. Blik, *De "Anthingsche" Christen-Inlandsche Gemeenten in Batavia's Ommelanden*, (Bandung:1938)

INTRODUCTION

In these recent years a new description and definition of “insider” contextualization has become popular in a number of mission agencies. This new “insider” thought seems to differ considerably from the historic view long held by scholars and which is illustrated by the great turning of Muslims to Christ among the Javanese of Indonesia. The Javanese are the largest ethnic group (85 million) in Indonesia and have dominated the archipelago for hundreds of years due to the fact that Java is the largest food source, producing the major proportion of rice in the islands. Most of the ethnic groups that received the Islamic faith in the 16th century have continued to show little response to the gospel. The Javanese Muslims are the exception and they illustrate contextualization in the most comprehensive sense. The turning among the Javanese is the largest movement of Muslims to Christianity from any ethnic group in the world.

Unfortunately, two kinds of description have dominated the field of contextualization. One is erudite theory represented by the exposition of scholars such as Hesselgrave & Rommen¹ and the other is a simplistic presentation exemplified by the C1-C6 Spectrum.² The former is difficult for many cross-cultural church planters to understand and the latter gives a misleading

¹ David J. Hesselgrave & Edward Rommen. *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989).

² John Travis, “The C1 to C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of “Christ-centered Communities” (“C”) Found in the Muslim Context,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 23, 4 (1998): 407-408.

perception of the issues involved. In “*Contextualization That Is Comprehensive*,” Scott Moreau³ outlines a structure that not only highlights the complexity of contextualization but also gives us characteristics that help make it practical for implementation.

Gathered into one statement, these categories are: 1) “*Concerned with the whole of the Christian faith*, 2) *both propositional and existential*, 3) *grounded in Scripture*, 4) *interdisciplinary in its approach to culture*, 5) *dynamic*, 6) *aware of the impact of human sinfulness on the process*, 7) *a two way process in which all sides contribute*.”⁴ [numbering added for this paper].

The Javanese church experience is a clear example of Moreau’s theory and relates to ministry among many Unreached People Groups (UPG) because it took place among a people who were oriented to both a world religion and a local belief system. The early history of this church reveals specific steps that any cross-cultural church planter must consider in engaging a UPG. There were no missionaries involved in this work for the first 20 years but there was European influence. Later, some of the missionaries clashed with Javanese leaders over theological and cultural understandings of Christianity. It is difficult to neatly fit the elements of the Javanese church experience into Moreau’s framework because some features flow among his categories and the time frame covers decades. Nevertheless, his framework is applicable and guides us in exploring and understanding true contextualization. The later Javanese church contextual history could also be applied to this model.

³ Scott Moreau, “Contextualization That Is Comprehensive,” *Missiology: An International Review*. Vol. XXXIV, Number 3, (July 2006): 325-335.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 325-327.

1) “CONCERNED WITH THE WHOLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH”

Coolen

Many of the early Javanese Christian leaders were oriented to a comprehensive Christian faith with a contextualization of that faith to the Javanese culture. These people included both men and women who were Javanese, Eurasians, and Dutch. Opposition came from their Javanese Muslim neighbors, from Dutch colonial government officials, and from some Dutch missionaries. Their history is so complex that it is impossible to recount it in these pages. However, one aspect stands out above all others and that is their great leaders who forged the foundation on which a contextualized church could emerge. In their struggles, these leaders were concerned with the whole of the Christian faith.

The earliest of these was Coenraad Coolen, the son of a Russian father and a Javanese mother. All his life he imbibed the traditions and emotions of his Javanese mother. About 1817, he came to faith as an adult, but he never left his Javanese roots. When Coolen retired from government service, his wife refused to move with him to an isolated area of East Java. Later, he remarried illegally and raised a family in that new location. His Christian beliefs were syncretistic. He believed that one of his sons was a reincarnation of an early settler and guardian spirit of that region and he followed his son's suggestion to open a new clearing in the jungle near the village of Ngoro in East Java. Coolen developed a prosperous village and invited Christians and Muslims alike to live there. He established a new set of community morals for Javanese and led in Christian teaching. The citizens there were known for their honesty. The village became a prosperous area and this increased Coolen's prestige among the Javanese.

After Coolen had a vision of the prophet Noah telling him to preach to the people, he never flagged in spreading the gospel as he conceptualized it. He realized that the Javanese “could not comprehend the Gospel in its New Testament or European Form...,”⁵ so he began to teach them in Javanese stories, myths, and other forms. According to van Akkeren, Coolen began the process of clarifying the difference between Christianity and the other religions which had come to Java. Christianity was presented as a “new foundation for the life of the *desa*.” [village]⁶ From the beginning, the gospel stood in stark contrast to the worldview of other religions. He taught about the trinity, using many concepts from daily life such as the flame of a candle. The one area in which he differed from orthodox belief was in baptism. He did not baptize and because of this many of his most promising apprentices eventually left him to join another church.

Some aspects of Coolen’s church theology can be seen in his mixture of European customs intermingled with those of the Javanese. He seated the congregation according to the cosmology of the Javanese, with men on the right and women on the left. None of the Javanese believers wore European clothes or cut their hair like their Christian counterparts in the city of Surabaya. Coolen, himself, wore Javanese clothing except when he led the Sunday services, at which time his dress was typically Dutch and he sat at a table. The people sat on benches or stood. Later, when a missionary had charge of the congregation, he removed the benches. Even

⁵ Philip Van Akkeren, *Sri and Christ: A Study of the Indigenous Church in East Java*. (New York: Friendship Press/ Lutterworth Press, 1970), 77.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

so, in 1900 the members replaced the benches.⁷ This vignette of life in Ngoro illustrates how believers were grappling with Christian faith and practice for more than half a century.

Coolen demonstrated the world-wide fellowship of believers with Christians in other parts of Java. Some Javanese near Surabaya had become Christians and they followed the Dutch style. Even though Coolen did not agree with that approach, he did not isolate himself spiritually from other Christians. He had contact with many of the Indonesian evangelists working in different parts of Java.⁸ There are records of visits to Coolen by both Indonesian evangelists and European missionaries who later became leaders in the Javanese church. He was known and liked by the earliest Dutch missionaries even though they disagreed with some of his theology. The villagers of Ngoro also exchanged visits with their relatives in many parts of East Java and spread the news of the development of their church.

Sadrach

Our second example of a Javanese leader who was concerned with the whole of the Christian faith is Kiai Sadrach, who ministered in Central Java in the second half of the 19th century and into the 20th century. He developed a church similar to Coolen's but more closely related to and influenced by Islamic practices and Dutch church leaders. Converted from a Muslim background, Sadrach had studied at a *madrrasah* (Muslim training school) and was considered a teacher of Islam. Before he began his Christian work, he had visited Coolen and many other Christian leaders among the Javanese, the Eurasians, and the Dutch expatriates,

⁷ Ibid., 64.

⁸ Sutarman S. *Partonadi, Sadrach's Community And Its Contextual Roots: A Nineteenth Century Javanese Expression of Christianity*. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 46.

observing the ways they evangelized and nurtured believers. The Dutch mission agencies came into Java around the middle of the 19th century so Sadrach interacted with missionaries as well.

Sadrach extended the contextualization process started by Coolen, although at first his community was not as clearly distinguished from others as Coolen's was. In the beginning it "could be compared to the New Testament Christian community which initially was regarded as merely a new Jewish sect."⁹ One of the Dutch Residents considered it a Christian sect influenced by Islam while the Muslims thought it was a new sect of Islam with a Christian color. Sadrach arranged a complete creed in the form of the Islamic *shahādah* [Statement of Faith].¹⁰ As we describe later, Sadrach incorporated many aspects of Islam as well as those of Javanese *adat* (customary law).

Sadrach began his work by helping two Eurasian ladies who were active in evangelism among the Javanese. His approach to the Javanese was very successful and he gathered many converts. Although Sadrach was committed to a Javanese church, he emphasized the major tenets of Christianity. He was able to read the Malay and Javanese Bibles and he taught from them concerning the trinity, salvation by grace through faith in the Son of God and all the biblical tenets. He could not baptize or administer the communion because he had not been ordained in any church. Therefore, he invited Dutch pastors and missionaries to perform these ceremonies.

Even when Sadrach was under attack by the Dutch missionaries who wanted to take over his congregations, he continued to be willing to work with some missionaries. He was

⁹ Ibid., 111.

¹⁰ Ibid., 135.

ecumenical in every way, but he did not allow the Dutch missionaries to take over leadership of his congregations. This caused them to push him away.

Application

Effective cross-cultural church planting will be concerned with promoting the theology of a worldwide communion of saints. Although ministry may occur in an isolated place, biblical theology shows that believers are integrated into a fellowship that extends far beyond their cultural boundaries. They must not be allowed to isolate themselves physically from Christians of other traditions because this impoverishes them spiritually in their attempts to contextualize the gospel to their culture.

They must be allowed to interact with various worldviews. As the Javanese wrestled with biblical worldview as it related to those of Islam, their own *adat* (customary law), and the European influences, they were able to make informed decisions concerning the expression of their own faith in everyday life. In today's world, some cross-cultural church planters isolate their converts so that they can create a "pure" contextual situation. But separation from the larger Christian community is not biblical contextualization.

2) "BOTH PROPOSITIONAL AND EXISTENTIAL"

Propositional

If we look at the cultural reasons why the Javanese had both competency and validity for engaging in the contextualization of the gospel, one would have to consider their intense immersion in *ngelmu* which can be translated as esoteric knowledge. The search for *ngelmu* can be described as a major characteristic of the Javanese. Previous to hearing about the gospel, they

had already developed their own ideas and truths about themselves and codified them into in a social system called *kejawen*. This involved everything related to their *adat* (customary law) and to their indigenous religion. In addition to this, they had incorporated Islamic beliefs into this system so that they operated with two belief systems or two worldviews simultaneously.

At first, Coolen began to postulate about Jesus and the gospel in a way that varied from European forms. For example, he incorporated the structure of the Islamic statement of faith (*shahādah*) to read, “There is one God and Jesus Christ is the Spirit of God.”¹¹ Later, the missionaries challenged him concerning that statement saying that Jesus is the Son of God and not the Spirit of God. But Coolen felt that the concept of Spirit was more attractive to the Javanese. He also compared Jesus to mythological Javanese characters because he believed it would attract the minds of the people.¹² In 1841, Walter Medhurst was the first missionary to visit Coolen and he was pessimistic about these approaches. But Coolen was undeterred.

There were also differences between Coolen and the city Christians in Surabaya concerning “...sacraments, baptism, clothing, language (Malay/Dutch or Javanese), the arts (the gamelan orchestra and shadow plays), circumcision, etc..., their attitude toward Islam.”¹³ Coolen arranged the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer in *tembang*, a Javanese musical form.¹⁴ These

¹¹ David Bentley-Taylor, *The Weather-cock’s Reward: Christian Progress in Muslim Java*. (London: Overseas Missionary Fellowship Lutterworth Press, 1967), 69.

¹² *Ibid.*, 70.

¹³ Th. Sumartana, *Mission at the Crossroads: Indigenous Churches, European Missionaries, Islamic Association and Socio-Religious Change in Java 1812-1936*. (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1993), 47.

¹⁴ Sutarman S. Partonadi, *Sadrach’s Community And Its Contextual Roots*, 134.

propositional aspects concerning Christianity among the Javanese would be debated for over 100 years.

Later, Sadrach followed Coolen's example by trying to expose ways the message was already in the culture.¹⁵ "Before beginning his own community, Sadrach himself had made several tours to Javanese Christian communities in East Java. He had been very much impressed by Coolen's community, and seems to have derived some aspects of the liturgy used by Coolen's community."¹⁶

He emphasized the parts of the gospel that spoke to the Javanese spirit, "...the importance of good deeds, piety, obedience to God's law, following Christ as an example, and the ministry of healing and exorcism."¹⁷ Sadrach created a Christian marriage ceremony to replace the Islamic one.¹⁸ In effect, this changed the believers' worldview concerning marriage. In ways like this, these early leaders embedded an entirely new set of ideas and truth in the culture.

Existential

It is not enough for leaders to define new ideas and truths to be incorporated into the lives of Christians but they also have to interpret the way they should be carried out in the everyday life of the church. Javanese life cycle ceremonies illustrate this. All of these ceremonies were oriented around the appeasement of spirits. Sadrach maintained most of the ceremonies but

¹⁵ Philip Van Akkeren, *Sri and Christ*. 75.

¹⁶ Sutarman S. Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community And Its Contextual Roots*, 134.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 145.

omitted the aspects of spirit worship and simplified many of them. Children were dedicated in the church and circumcision was continued because it was linked to being a Javanese as well as to being a Muslim.

Sadrach continued the annual harvest festival but reoriented it to God's creation and the goodness of God in place of the traditional cleansing ceremony to prevent evil and disaster. Many other Javanese holy days were reinterpreted for the Christians. Public celebrations closely linked to Islam were rejected.¹⁹ In this way, biblical worldview was embodied in the daily lives of Christians.

They set up rice barns in every community where the church existed so that they could care for the needs of the poor. Believers were encouraged to give money for this purpose.²⁰ Their church buildings were simple structures made from local village materials. Like the Muslims, they called them mosques and used a drum or hollow bamboo to call people to prayer. These churches were placed in the leader's (*imam*) yard to show the theological centrality of the leader. The church in Sadrach's yard was "built in the old rural mosque style"... with ... "a *cakra* (a disc with several protruding arrows) on the roof in place of a cross."²¹ [The *cakra* is the weapon of Dewa Wisnu in the Hindu myth (*wayang*) that is the end of all life.]

Van Akkeren comments on Coolen's village, "One gains the impression that this Javanese *desa* must have been like an Old Testament community, with hardly any division between the civil and the religious aspects."²² People sought to live out the implications of their

¹⁹ Sutarman S. Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community And Its Contextual Roots*, 149-151.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

²² Philip Van Akkeren, *Sri and Christ*. 62.

faith. This is illustrated by the life of the church in Sadrach's time. "In general, members of Sadrach's community did not participate in gambling, polygamy, or the use of opium." "The impression is left that the life of the community was marked by simplicity, modesty, and honesty."²³

Application

When people of the UPG come in contact with the gospel it will introduce new ideas and truths into their concept of the world. These biblical truths will challenge their traditions and tenets of faith and they should be encouraged to wrestle with these new ideas in their cultural context. Some cross-cultural church planters seem afraid to let the cultural systems of the UPG challenge the gospel while others seem afraid to let the gospel challenge the culture. For example, some want to allow circumcision without letting focus people work their way through the issues involved, using the gospel as their touchstone. Other outsiders translate the Bible to eliminate terms such as Son of God because they think those terms would be repugnant to the people. As the Holy Spirit leads, believers can make the right decisions in these matters. This tendency on the part of outsiders to encourage withdrawal from a struggle with the scriptures can be illustrated in many ways, such as teaching the poor that they don't have enough money to give a tithe, or insisting that the dead be buried in coffins.

Holiness is the scriptural model for the Christian life. It is the existential life of the believer. The early Javanese leaders knew this instinctively. Although Coolen was remarried illegally, he never justified it before the people. He required them to live by Christian standards or leave his community. In Sadrach's case, "Emphasis was placed on Christian ethics and the

²³ Sutarman S. Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community And Its Contextual Roots*, 154.

obedient fulfillment of the divine law which was taught by nabi Ngisa Rohullah. Jesus was the exemplary figure whose entire life, as viewed by Sadrach, consistently proved the truth and triumph of his Christian *ngelmu* through obedience to the law even unto death.”²⁴ Sadrach’s life was dedicated to emulating Jesus in all that he did and said.

3) “GROUNDED IN SCRIPTURE”

The Javanese evangelists and pastors owned a Bible and taught from a Bible. At no time in the development of Javanese Christianity did the leaders fail to consult with the canonical scriptures and the church tradition. The Bible was translated into Javanese as early as 1828 but was not used widely until a better translation of the New Testament was made in 1848.²⁵ The Javanese Bible has always been translated on a word for word correspondence model and has not been adjusted to Islamic terms or theology. The interpretation of the scriptures in Islamic contexts has been left up to the evangelists and pastors.

Despite the complicated process of trial and error in contextualizing the gospel to a culture that was previously influenced by both *kejawen* and Islamic religious systems, the Javanese Christians never blurred the unique status of Jesus as Son of God and Savior. For example, all the translations of the Javanese Bible have used the name *Yesus* (a transliteration of the Greek) instead of the Arabic term *Isa Almasih*. Like the Shellabear Malay Bible’s use of indigenous Malay terms in place of Arabic, the Javanese Bible has always used indigenous

²⁴ Ibid., 220-221.

²⁵ David Bentley-Taylor, *The Weather-cock’s Reward*, 53.

Javanese terminology.²⁶ The Javanese translations support the historic creeds of the Church concerning the person and work of Christ and other theological foundations of Christian faith. Surely, endless discussions and great amounts of prayer were behind these decisions.

Coolen and Sadrach were characteristic of most of the Javanese evangelists and pastors. All of them were influenced by Christians of long standing who came alongside them to discuss theology and the gospel message. Although Coolen never had a missionary living at his village, reports by missionaries show that he interacted with them on many occasions and also with Dutch officials who were Christian. When his disciples, Paulus Tosari and Abisai moved to the village of Modjowarno they related closely with the missionary Jellesma.

Coolen realized the importance of Bible stories and taught them using *wayang* (Javanese drama) and other art styles.²⁷ He also wrote prayers that would counter the power of sacred places²⁸ and he translated hymns from the Dutch hymnbook.²⁹

Sadrach worked with mature Christians throughout all of his first twenty years in ministry. He was strongly influenced by F.L. Anthing, Christina Stevens, and many others in the formation of his Christian doctrine. The missionary, Jacob Wilhelm, had the most influence on his congregational teaching during the height of his ministry. This missionary also corrected misunderstandings of the Bible and guided the believers in searching the scriptures for themselves.

²⁶ Robert Hunt, *Shellabear: A Biography 1862-1948*. (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1996), 164.

²⁷ Hendrik Kraemer, *From Missionfield to Independent Church*. (The Hague: Boekencentrum, 1958), 74.

²⁸ Sutarman S. Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community And Its Contextual Roots*, 67.

²⁹ Philip Van Akkeren, *Sri and Christ*. 65.

Sadrach used worship aids from Coolen, Wilhelm, and others and also arranged the Ten Commandments in *tembang*.³⁰ Although he did not use a fixed liturgy, Sadrach composed a handbook for services with the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and a summary of the law from Matthew 22:37-40. He added prayers to this collection.³¹ In addition to this, Jacob Wilhelm translated materials that would enhance the teaching of biblical knowledge among the congregations.³²

Partonadi reports "...the distinctive and basic Christian doctrine of the resurrection of Christ became the main theme of the preaching of Javanese evangelists in the nineteenth century, including Sadrach." "Christian obedience became the second emphasis of preaching."³³ These men and women worked out a contextual theology for Javanese but it was done in a biblical framework. The interaction of both worldviews was constant throughout the formative years.

The clear differentiation of the gospel from their other belief systems has allowed Javanese to make a choice between worldviews. The gospel is not considered the completion or the apex of other systems. It stands alone as the revelation of God. It is a choice, not an echo. At certain periods of the church's development, it depicted Jesus as the "*Ratu Adil*" (the Just King) who was to appear for the Javanese.³⁴ At other times, Jesus was presented as the "*Imam Mahdi*" who completes the Muslim faith and delivers the people from spiritual bondage. Eventually,

³⁰ Sutarman S. Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community And Its Contextual Roots*, 137.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

³² *Ibid.*, 80.

³³ *Ibid.*, 144.

³⁴ Lawrence McCulloh Yoder, "The Introduction and Expression of Islam and Christianity in the Cultural Context of North Central Java" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1987), 85.

however, the dominant view of Jesus Christ became that of the Savior God who delivers from sin and demands total obedience from all people. This uncompromising message has produced good fruit in Java's soil.

Application

Bible translation should be faithful to the text and not adjusted to an Islamic or specific cultural context. The interpretation of the scriptures should be left up to the believers themselves but not without input from more mature Christians. The evangelists and pastors used Javanese art forms which they deemed appropriate but there was a continual evaluation of these teaching aids. Miscellaneous other Javanese and European teaching models were also used to teach the Bible and Christian doctrine. All these models were adjusted as biblical worldview became clearer.

Leaders should seek worship forms that will convey a biblical worldview to the people. Experimentation with worship aids was a process that lasted for many decades among the Javanese and both Javanese leaders and European missionaries were involved. Their goal was to ground all aspects of church life and worship in scriptural truth. Tension with the Javanese culture complicated this endeavor.

4) “INTERDISCIPLINARY IN ITS APPROACH TO CULTURE”

The way in which comprehensive contextualization encompasses all the complexity of culture is perhaps the most difficult concept for cross-cultural church planters. Even workers who are trained in missions seem to struggle with this concept. Many workers have difficulty understanding how the church can and should be involved in all the structures of a culture. Some are isolated on the religious aspect of culture whereas the church’s task is not simply to change the religious worldview and habits of a people. It must be involved in modifying all the cultural systems. We can observe some examples of this comprehensive contextualization in the Javanese church experience.

Psychology

Hendrik Kraemer writes that Coolen’s “main idea was that the Javanese embracing Christianity should remain Javanese.”³⁵ To do this, they must truly belong to the Church and truly belong to the Javanese. Coolen believed that the struggle with the Surabaya group over baptism had psychological and cultural implications. If the Javanese were baptized, he felt that they would be identified even more with the Dutch colonial masters and would be further ostracized from Javanese society. His main goal was to keep the Javanese in their local society. Although he lost the short struggle over baptism, Coolen established the principle that Javanese must stay within their cultural environment.

An example of this is the strong psychological bent of the Javanese toward belief in the spirit world. When the early evangelists introduced Jesus into the Javanese worldview, he was

³⁵ Hendrik Kraemer, *From Missionfield to Independent Church*, 74.

portrayed as the most powerful of all supernatural beings. Coolen created Christian forms to mark the transitions in life because he knew that Javanese were “accustomed to accompany the joys and sorrows of life by fixed ceremonies.”³⁶ Sadrach was honored partly because he had the “...ability to control the devil and evil spirits.”³⁷ He could cultivate haunted rice fields without experiencing harm. The gospel spoke to the worldview of the people.

The principle of staying within the culture was not an easy transition for either the Christian Javanese or for the majority Muslim population. “Javanese Christians were considered as outcasts by their fellow-countrymen- to profess Islam and to be a Javanese were practically the same thing- and it was not until more than a century later that Christians were recognized as Javanese and Indonesians.”³⁸

Sociology

Government influence cannot be ignored in the development of a church. In the Javanese church history, permission to be baptized came from government officials. They were afraid of the reaction of local Muslim leaders if persons were allowed baptism. They also had control over who was authorized to baptize. In the early days of the church, believers were baptized by the ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church and, after the mission agencies came, by missionaries. Only much later were Javanese pastors allowed to baptize. Government officials controlled church documents such as baptism and marriage certificates because these were considered legal records. Officials were involved in giving permits to bury one’s dead, to develop land, to build,

³⁶ Ibid., 78.

³⁷ Sutarman S. Partonadi, S. *Sadrach’s Community And Its Contextual Roots*, 66.

³⁸ Philip Van Akkeren, *Sri and Christ*, 76.

to move one's residence, and to perform many of the functions of a church such as evangelism. Many of the Javanese leaders had serious conflicts with the government.

The early leaders sought ways in which they could integrate the life of the church into the existing Javanese society. Although Sadrach differentiated the gospel from Islamic theology, he maintained close ties to the sociological aspects of Islam. "The organization of the community grew up and developed along the lines of Javanese culture... comparable to the *pesantren* [Muslim school] system. Personal and emotional relationships were emphasized..."³⁹

Sadrach's network operated like a Javanese extended family with the leader of the family playing the dominant role. In church life, this is called an Episcopal system. Sadrach appointed elders and delegated responsibility. "In short, all things dealing with the life of the community as a whole were discussed and the problems tackled. From these meetings the elders gained new insight into the Christian community's life and a broader vision of what Christian community meant."⁴⁰

For a period of time, the Dutch missionaries influenced Sadrach to install a Presbyterian system where authority was divided among elders in the various village churches. However, when Sadrach joined the Apostolic Church in 1899, he reverted to his natural Javanese family model.

Economics

One of Coolen's goals was to make the Javanese church community financially self-sufficient. His rules for work were stringent and those who stayed in his village were successful

³⁹ Sutarman S. Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community And Its Contextual Roots*, 114.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

economically. When famine hit East Java in 1852, Coolen's community had sufficient rice to sell and give away.

A spin off of Coolen's work was the development of the most famous of the early Christian communities at Mojowarno in East Java. This also was a farming society. Its influence was such that Javanese Christians were primarily farmers for the next 100 years. However, farming allowed them to have economic stability and to develop their own type of Christian Javanese group. This enabled them to gain leadership experience in operating their own society. The churches in Central Java also continued to keep their members in touch with Javanese culture so that they would never develop a ghetto mentality.

Application

Contextualization that results in a strong church will incorporate and transform such cultural forms as politics, education, economy, labor, social organization, and family systems. The list is too comprehensive to include here. Contextualization is not simply about whether believers sit on the floor, or chant as they pray, or bow toward a certain place. While knowledge and understanding of all religious and cultural forms is important, contextualization encompasses more than that. It is important for all missiologists to develop a comprehensive model of contextualization and not get diverted by inadequate conceptions.

In the early days of cross-cultural church planting, it is highly unlikely that the majority culture will welcome and value new believers. Rejection, ostracism, and persecution are common experiences for new believers. The Church, however, should never allow members to isolate themselves from their wider society whether it is their original community or another

ethnic Christian group. The role of the Church is to be a blessing in changing every facet of society that is ungodly.

5) “DYNAMIC”

Many workers will likely not feel the dynamic aspect of comprehensive contextualization because progress and change come slowly. Some cross-cultural church planters expect to establish a flourishing congregation in months or at least in a few years. The actual growth, however, may be far slower. Even though the Javanese churches developed slowly over more than half a century, they were still dynamic. Both progress and failure involved insiders and outsiders. Change went on continually.

The effective cross-cultural church planter looks for dynamic changes in the lives of individuals, for it is through those people that the church will come into being and grow. The Javanese work in Central Java began as house churches and did not have much organization. As Sadrach led more people to faith, he had to appoint elders to carry out leadership duties. As members increased, multiple cultural issues came into focus in the lives of the members. The church had to wrestle with these issues.

Growth was characterized by the interaction of Christian theology, church life, cultural issues, and the Javanese religions and traditional culture (*kejawen*). Leaders have struggled with the relationship of the gospel to the culture up until modern times. For example, the 1974 Synod meeting of the The East Java Christian Church (GJKI) in Malang was challenged to relate the Christian theology of farming to *kebatinan* beliefs [inter-life disciplines].⁴¹

⁴¹ *Benih Yang Tumbuh 7: Gereja Kristen Jawi Wetan*. (Malang: Gereja Kristen Jawi Wetan, 1976), 245.

This continuous contextualization creates a dynamism that keeps believers focused on the work of the Holy Spirit. An example is the interplay of Javanese *ngelmu* (esoteric wisdom) and biblical teaching. During the first half century of the church, the believers' understanding of the *ngelmu* was superior to their knowledge of scripture. The greatest contribution of the missionaries was their concentration on biblical worldview. Even though they can be criticized for many mistakes in cultural adjustment, they did not fail to constantly relate the Bible to the lives of the Javanese.

The dynamic interaction of biblical worldview with that of the Javanese created a gradual shift in their theology and cosmology. For example, aspects of the culture that were spirit related gradually began to fade in importance or to disappear altogether. Even today, it is not unusual for a convert to continue to keep his magic amulets even though he will not admit it to the church. When one understands the sovereignty of God, the amulets become invalid. The dynamic transition of the believer not only to saving faith but also to a holy life is the goal of the church planter.

Application

The cross-cultural church planter must not allow him or herself to be deterred by personal failures, collapses in ministry, persecution, or other outside problems. Problems will happen on a regular basis but this does not mean that the ministry will be stopped or even crippled in the long run. In our UPG, many workers fell away for various reasons. Government opposition and persecution by other religious groups has temporarily slowed forward movement in our UPG. But the work is far stronger now than it was 40 years ago.

The single most important aspect of the dynamic factor in comprehensive contextualization is biblical worldview. As the Bible is faithfully taught as the living word of God, people's lives will continually change. They will relate God's word to their cultural situation and discern the similarities and the differences and make their own decisions concerning it.

6) "AWARE OF THE IMPACT OF HUMAN SINFULNESS ON THE PROCESS"

Some aspects of this characteristic of comprehensive contextualization have already been mentioned but it is good to reflect on it in a deliberate manner. All the problems we face in cross-cultural church planting come from the human heart. At times, those outside the church are at fault but frequently the fault lies with the believers. Hendrik Kraemer quotes one of the Dutch missionaries concerning the motives of the Javanese in becoming Christian.

Encouragement by more or less influential persons, above all by Europeans, sometimes coupled with the prospect of increased material prosperity; inclination towards equal status with Europeans; tendency towards imitation in general, especially among relations; marriage, supposed or genuine concurrence between Christian teaching and *ngelmu* desired or long sought after, sometimes coupled with striving after morality or with the recognition that some points in the Christian teaching are clearer or better, the latter in connection with disapproval of the teaching or behaviour of their own *gurus* or priests; seldom free from superstitious notions about baptism, which often occasion making a vow.⁴²

In the same breath, we can relate the despicable actions of some of the missionaries who sought to take over Sadrach's work through devious and dishonest means. History records that one such missionary was P. Bieger. "Bieger was very ambitious and had been attempting to take the leadership of the community away from Sadrach ever since his arrival in Bagelen. When his

⁴² Hendrik Kraemer, *From Missionfield to Independent Church*, 82.

attempts failed, he became impatient and accused Sadrach of disloyalty to the government.”⁴³
This false charge resulted in Sadrach’s arrest. Bieger then became the head of Sadrach’s churches. Fortunately, this situation did not last long.

Sadrach’s flock was quite large. The Dutch missionaries had very few converts. Some of the missionaries were jealous of Jacob Wilhelm when he negotiated a working relationship with Sadrach. This continual pettiness on the part of some Dutch missionaries eventually caused a break with Sadrach and drove him into the Apostolic Church.

The Dutch colonials who were members of the State Church were also resentful that their pastor was helping Sadrach. They felt that he should not spend time in Javanese ministry. The Dutch colonial government also obstructed Sadrach in various ways. “The rapid expansion of the community independent from Dutch control aroused the suspicion of the local government.”⁴⁴
These are but a few of the examples of human sinfulness that impeded church growth.

Application

The cross-cultural church planter must expect opposition. When we enter land that Satan has controlled for centuries, it is not easy to establish a new worldview in a short time. Everyone who has an agenda in controlling some aspect of society is going to react to the gospel as a threat. Those who rule do not want things to change. This applies to religious, political, and educational leaders.

⁴³ Sutarman S. Partonadi, *Sadrach’s Community And Its Contextual Roots*, 73.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

Many problems will arise from within the church and even from within the church planting team. Church planting is hampered and even destroyed by people. The sinfulness of the human heart is our biggest problem.

7) “A TWO WAY PROCESS IN WHICH ALL SIDES CONTRIBUTE”

The Javanese church experience is valuable as an example of comprehensive contextualization because the gospel was introduced in a passive way. By this we mean that the initial contacts were not pro-active evangelism done by a foreign missionary but rather indirect approaches through literature and by way of personal relationships. The Javanese who received the gospel began to process its meaning through conversations, by reading the Bible, and in fellowship with others who were also investigating this new message.

When the missionaries came to Java, there were already growing congregations of believers who could trace their Christian heritage to Europeans whom they did not personally know. The missionaries brought their ideas of social life, church life, and political life. But the gospel message had already impacted the Javanese concerning those concepts. Coolen had struggled over the meaning of baptism with the group in Surabaya. At the time the Dutch missions entered Central Java, Sadrach had already been interacting with numerous Indonesian, Eurasian, and Dutch nationals concerning how the gospel should be proclaimed and lived out in Javanese society. The missionaries wanted to take control but both Coolen and Sadrach resisted them.

Eventually, Coolen grew old and some of his apprentices joined the missionaries to form new congregations. Leadership of the church in East Java gave way to Dutch missionaries. However, the story in the south of Central Java was different. “Those who were acknowledged

by the government and ordained by the church were not accepted by Sadrach's congregations as their leaders."⁴⁵ [author's trans.]. Although Sadrach did not openly reject them, it was understood by the people that he did not give way to them.

The tension between the Dutch missions and the Javanese leaders was beneficial for the church because it impressed on them their role in dialogue about their faith. Local church lay leaders were strengthened by this vitality. Elders in Sadrach's community attended regular meetings at which they shared mutual concerns about local authorities, other religious leaders, new buildings, health, education, labor, and general livelihood.⁴⁶

Missionaries like Jacob Wilhelm introduced Reformed church organization and biblical worldview. Wilhelm formulated a confession that included the church, the secular government, and the Christian attitude toward the government to guide those who were persecuted.⁴⁷ The give and take between all the actors invigorated the church and encouraged new growth in other areas of Java.

Application

Introduce the gospel in such a way that people are not threatened when they interact with it. Encourage inquiry even if it means that people challenge both you and the gospel. When people consider a new worldview, they must process it through the lens of the one they have. It is not possible for people to adopt a new worldview without working through its many facets.

⁴⁵ Th. Müller-Krüger, *Sedjarah Geredja Di Indonesia*, (Jakarta: BPK, 1966), 179.

⁴⁶ Sutarman S. Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community And Its Contextual Roots*, 113.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

Translate the Bible as authentically as possible so that people can wrestle with its uniqueness and the Holy Spirit can affirm its truth.

Understanding how Christian theology and practice impacts a culture comes more quickly when many people collaborate in reflection and agreement. This is always a long process in a UPG, taking years to resolve many aspects of the culture. The leaders of the focus group should lead the contextualization process. The expatriate church planter should only be a catalyst to enhance this process. Any model imposed by the expatriate will only hamper the natural development of contextualization. The expatriate can suggest various models and ideas as long as leaders are able to interact vigorously with that input.

To God be the glory!

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