

Evangelism Mission in the Trap of Christianization Issues: An Attempt to Restore an Inclusive Alternative Evangelism Model in Diverse Indonesia

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Abstract

The mission of evangelism in Indonesia is often hampered when non-Christians identify it as a Christianization movement. For Muslims in particular, Christianization is considered apostasy. This issue has long been *fanned* as a trigger for the emergence of radical Islamic movements. Many sources record that Christianization is launched not only to atheists or anists, but also to those who have adopted official religions. Indeed, the pure and sincere mission of evangelism has been tainted with a new form of what non-Christians call Christianization? What is the difference between evangelism and Christianization? Is it true that Christianization has become a coordinated, systemized and massive movement as is widely discussed by many media, or is it just a one-sided accusation? This paper will examine the empirical facts and re-question the truth. The research method used is qualitative descriptive, through *library research* and in-depth observation of facts in the field. The result of this article is a call for a more inclusive and subtle approach to evangelism in Indonesia, distinguishing it from Christianization, to foster interfaith harmony and avoid colonial perceptions. This article contributes by distinguishing between evangelism and Christianization, highlighting the importance of adopting a subtle, inclusive approach to evangelism in Indonesia to avoid the perception of it as a form of Christianization and to foster interfaith harmony.

Keywords:

mission; missiology; evangelism; religion; islamization; christianization

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of heated political turmoil in Indonesia, Christianization (and Islamization) activities are still a major issue that indirectly disturbs the peace of mind of religious people. Indonesian law regulates religion very clearly that it is the right of every Indonesian citizen to embrace or adhere to a religion without coercion or intervention from any party. The Big Indonesian Dictionary defines religion as a teaching and system that regulates the belief and worship of God Almighty and the rules

relating to the association with humans and their environment (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2022). The meaning contained in it is; with the presence of religion, humans live in harmony with one another in a wiser way through the rules that exist in each religion, thus humans live their lives with more dignity. However, it would be naive if religion, which was originally created for a harmonious life order between people, is destroyed by a group of pseudo-religious people who are narrow in interfaith interactions.

It must be recognized that every human being with his basic nature wants to excel, including the desire to excel in what he adheres to. Humans tend to want others to conform to their ideals, hence the fanaticism. This condition was emphasized by Alwi Shihab where these religions have their own characteristics and influences, although the level of influence is not the same, either in depth or in breadth. Of all the official religions in Indonesia, Islam is the most pronounced (Shihab, 1998: 15; Ernes, 2004: 145). The most obvious concrete example is the Christianization and Islamization that is often discussed among Indonesians. This is what triggers conflict and intolerance regarding the mission of each religion, especially Christianity and Islam.

In fact, in a neutral sense, both Christianity and Islam have commands or calls to preach their respective teachings to the public. For both camps this is a noble act and obedience to their religion. In Christianity the command is contained in the very sacred and holy Great Commission of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20). Christians are obliged to carry out an acclamatory mission (read: preaching the gospel), the goal being that as many people as possible believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and savior. Christians are obliged to deliver their exclusive message based on the creed that without Jesus Christ man will not be able to achieve the salvation he desires. This is stated in John 14:6: "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*"

Likewise, in Islam, it is taught to *proselytize* or *spread* religion so that as many people as possible get *guidance* (encounter with the Creator). The Qur'an states that salvation is the result of synergy between faith and human deeds (Qs baqarah 25). Islam interprets human salvation as the result of human efforts in producing deeds made from humans themselves which are ultimately determined by Allah. Each of the results of practice as a human effort to do the commandment (reward) and avoid the prohibition of God (avoiding sin) is what determines his salvation, namely Heaven or

Hell. In order to enter heaven, apart from embracing Islam, Muslims are also required to carry out religious commands, and carry out the pillars of Islam.

Similarly, the Buddha, although he did not encourage others to convert to Buddhism, did encourage as many people as possible to experience *enlightenment* which leads to happiness. A Buddha is not a Savior who releases others with his forgiveness, but a guide, who only points the way to happiness. The Buddha taught, "you yourself must make the effort, those who are perfect only preach" (Chavan, 2007: 247-352; Dhammapala: 276). So, a Buddha is neither a God nor an incarnation. It is important to note, however, that in Buddhism it is never taught that the Buddha is the creator or the ruler of a world of suffering, but rather that he is only a teacher and gives correct instruction to people (Honig, 1994: 165-166).

The Buddhist teaching of salvation (redemption) is expressed by the expression *Wimoksa* or *Wimukti* (Utomo, 1992, 25)¹ culminating in nirvana. Nirvana means extinguishing or cooling. Things that need to be extinguished are things that cause suffering and negative things in human life such as: desire, fire of lust, hatred etc. Nirvana is described as a place of bliss where suffering (*samskara*) is perfectly suppressed, all *skanda* is dissolved, all desires are eliminated so as to achieve a state of complete peace. a Buddha is not a Savior who releases others with his forgiveness, but a guide, who only shows the way to happiness. The Buddha taught "you yourself must make the effort, those who are perfect only preach" (Chavan, 2007, 247-352; Dhammapala, 276). So a Buddha is neither a God nor an incarnation. It is important to note, however, that in Buddhism it is never taught that the Buddha is the creator or the ruler of a world of suffering, but rather that he is only a teacher and gives correct instruction to people (Honig, 1994, 165-166).

Looking at the empirical facts on the ground, it is only Christianity and Islam that are the most vigorous and persistent in broadcasting the message of salvation. Various efforts are made to fulfill this demand, ranging from gentle, inclusive ways to violent, radical and covert efforts. It is not uncommon for such religious broadcasting activities to cause social turmoil and inter-religious conflict. In interfaith dialogues, accusations of Christianization and Islamization are often made.

¹ *Wimoksa* or *wimukti* means salvation or deliverance.

This article aims to distinguish between true evangelism and the practice of Christianization, which is often perceived as a threat by non-Christians, particularly in Indonesia. The main contribution of this article is to provide a deeper understanding of the differences between the two, while advocating for a more inclusive and subtle approach to evangelism that avoids the perception of Christianization as a colonial movement imposing beliefs. By emphasizing the importance of local context and sensitivity to Indonesia's diversity, this article offers an alternative mission model that has a more positive impact and does not generate interfaith tensions.

RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative descriptive research is one of the types of research included in the type of qualitative research. This research aims to reveal an event or fact, situation or phenomenon that occurs when the research takes place by revealing concrete facts as they are. This research also represents predictions and describes data related to the current situation, attitudes and views that occur in a society, conflicts between two or more circumstances, relationships between variables that occur, differences in existing facts and their impact on one status and so on. In terms of data approach, it is included in qualitative research. Thorin argues that this type of research is research that in detail describes and analyzes perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, social activities, events, phenomena, individual and communal mindsets (Thorin, 2012, 1).

RESULTS

Christianization According to Non-Christian Views

The issue of Christianization in Indonesia is in the spotlight. The following is an excerpt from a viral news story released by syahida.com that will give a little insight into the Christianization effort from a non-Christian perspective (Syahida, 2014):

The channel informed that there had been an act of covert Christianization during the Jakarta *Car Free Day*. This action was caught on camera. The video was recorded during *Car Free Day* in Jakarta on Sunday (2/11/2014). The video recording was uploaded by a YouTube channel called "rtkChannel HD" on Monday (3/11/2014) entitled "Special: Covert Christianization at *Car Free Day* Jakarta". The video revealed that the perpetrators of the Christianization disguised their actions with a national theme, and sought children, teenagers, and seniors as targets. It is regrettable that it turns out that the missionaries are targeting those who already have other beliefs

outside of Christianity, because the Christian missionaries are targeting "*Car Free Day*" enjoyers who wear headscarves (shahida / hdn).

The next viral news is Irena Handono, a former nun who converted to Islam. In her YouTube channel, Handono eloquently explained a number of modes of Christianization practices. The nine modes of Christianization according to her include (Handono, 2019):

1. Capitalize on disaster conditions.
2. Capitalizing on the economic downturn.
3. Through a cultural approach, using Muslim attributes as a disguise.
4. Using the Arabic gospel.
5. Using the adaptation of Syriac Christian prayers to Islamic prayers. In this stage, the Syriac Christian prayer is said to be 7 times more perfect than the Islamic prayer which is only 5 times.
6. Approach with cultural songs composed with Christian lyrics.
7. Reciting the Quran in the local language. With this style, the message of the Gospel is easily accepted by various ethnicities.
8. Reciting the Quran to the accompaniment of serious songs accompanied by a choir - similar to a church choir.
9. Enhanced by Gregorian chants (Catholic meditation chants), two singers as *backing vocals*, one person chanting the call to prayer and a soloist singing Ave Maria

In addition, information about the mode of Christianization by utilizing the conditions of natural disasters was also circulated. The truth of this viral news was confirmed by Din Syamsudin in a report released by the portal Jurnalislam.com. Din Syamsudin, who is the Chairman of the MUI Advisory Council, confirmed the issues, including the issue of Christianization that emerged after the earthquake in Lombok. In fact, Din emphasized that every time there is a natural disaster in any area, Christianization is often carried out by humanitarian agencies with a hidden religious mission (Christianization) (Abduh, 2018).

No less excited, another Christianization issue came from Indoprogress.com, which released the news that on January 28, 2018, a social service action was held by the congregation of St. Paul's Catholic Church in Bantul, Yogyakarta, which was disbanded by a group of people alleging that the action was a form of Christianization of

the community around the church (Atomoko, 2018; Sitepu, 2018). The issue of Christianization is incessantly accused of Christian groups to this day, both those recorded on video and viralized and those untouched by the mass media. This is a small portrait of religious life that often appears in the Republic of Indonesia. Various forms of violence and intimidation in the name of religion against certain groups of people, especially minority groups, are increasingly common

Back in the 80s and 90s, the issue of Christianization became a trending topic among Muslims. Ustad Zainudin MZ, dubbed as "Dai sejuta umat" became an icon and spokesman for Muslims in protesting Christianization, or at the same time a reference in discussions related to Christianization. One of the popular phrases in his famous syiar is the appeal for Muslims not to mortgage their faith with Supermi, one of the most famous instant noodle brands at that time (Murtadho, 2018).

Furthermore, during the New Order era, many *stakeholders* were not convinced that a massive Christianization movement was sweeping Indonesia. However, after the publication of the book "Facts and Data About Christianization in Indonesia" by the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Council (DDI), many parties realized and were shocked that it turned out that Christian missionaries had tried their best to Christianize Islam systemically (Sharkey, 2002).² Then in the Reformation era in 1999, it was rumored that this movement was even more intensive and they even used the twisted Al-Quran and Hadiths to divert Islamic teachings to their teachings.³

Then, on November 30, 1967, the upheaval intensified until M. Rasyidi published a booklet exposing the practice of Christianization in Indonesia. The booklet was titled "Why I Remain a Muslim". In it, he mentioned his critical responses and views on the Christianization movement that took place in Indonesia during his lifetime and why he remained faithful to the teachings of Islam (Hanbal, 2012).

² The Christianization efforts of the Republic of Indonesia were supported by colonialists, missionaries and orientalist, which is why the practice of Christianization is deeply rooted today. During the New Order period, the practice of Christianization received support from the authorities, making it more aggressive, expansive, organized, and systematically arranged. The New Order regime supported the Christianization of the former PKI. Support also came from Christian organizations, both from the West and from Europe, flowing into Christian hands for the guidance and Christianization of poor Muslims.

³ Even Christianization in Indonesia from 1966 to 1990 was increasingly massive, without tolerance for Muslims, although as a minority, but dared to enter Islamic enclaves and dared to reject various rules that had been agreed upon. (cf. Ibid). The NEHEMIA Foundation is one of the Christian foundations that is aggressively engaged in Christianization projects, coordinated by Dr. Suadi Ben Abraham, Kholil Dinata and Drs. Poernama Winangun. They have released several anti-Islamic books.

Muslim investigations revealed several studies showing that the *Protestant Annual Growth Rate* is increasing, especially in Muslim enclaves, such as Yogyakarta and West Sumatra (Yona, 2018). Conversations about Christianization are increasingly widespread in Indonesian society to various regions. In her article, Melissa Crouch, a professor of law and social affairs from the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sidney, confirms that there are serious debates between religious leaders and that even the dispute between Islam and Christianity in the reform era has moved from the center to the regions. The case he revealed was actually a national issue. However, regional autonomy usually plays a role in the localization of cases where national debates become cases at the regional level (Mubarok, 2014).

In addition, there is also a lot of information about Christianization in Indonesia, which often triggers excitement and tension between the two Christians and Muslims who are both from the Semitic religion family. The issue of Christianization makes Muslims feel undermined.

What exactly is Christianization?

Referring to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ for Christians, the mission of preaching the gospel is international or *to the ends of the earth* (Matthew 28:19-20). The ends of the earth referred to here can simply be understood as a place where there is a human being or a group of people who have not heard the gospel message. Similarly, Muslims, because they also have an obligation to spread Islam throughout the world, can accept that this is their human right as religious people. However, it is equally important to recognize the need for a safety line to prevent conflict so that members of each religion do not feel compelled to try or persuade or attempt to convert. This line must be clearly and firmly adhered to, especially by followers of religions such as Islam and Christianity that are formalized by the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Siswosoebroto, 1977).

The mission of evangelism must be seriously examined so that it does not cause chaos among people, and damage the image of Christianity itself as a bearer of light in the darkness. Evangelistic efforts that are distorted due to the ambition or fanaticism of a group of Christians are certainly not good. Between evangelism and the realm of Christianization, guidelines must be made that can see the difference (Narciso, 2008).

If the Christianizing influence is successful at the community level and the same happens in the political sector, it opens the way for the whole society to breathe the breath of Christianity, and it is expected that Christians will soon become the majority. An example of this can be seen in the Philippines, which has become the base for the expansion of Christianity throughout Southeast Asia (Siswosoebroto, 1977).

From the above notes, many non-Christian assessments formulate the Christianization movement or Christianization as an activity that seeks to turn adherents of other religions into adherents of Christianity by involving all kinds of means and all efforts so that the order of life in society is based on Christian *creed* (belief) and *sharia* (laws). Christianization is done not only to Muslims, but to all people who have different beliefs from Christianity.

DISCUSSION

Uncovering Empirical Facts; Evangelistic Mission or Christianization?

The mission of evangelism must be seriously examined so that it does not cause chaos among people, and damage the image of Christianity itself as a bearer of light in the darkness. Evangelistic efforts that are distorted due to the ambition or fanaticism of a group of Christians are certainly not good for their followers. Between evangelism and Christianization, a guideline must be established that can clearly see the difference. Between the mission of evangelism and the spread of Christianity (Christianization), in the mission field these two segments often clash and overlap. The preaching of the Gospel both by acclamation and charitable diakonnia with a touch of humanitarian social service is sometimes suspected of being an effort to Christianize. This has become a polemic for Christian mission work in Indonesia. Humanitarian social services are certainly very important in the midst of a disaster, but however the proclamation of the gospel is delivered in public areas. This is the danger point if it is wrong and untrained in preaching the gospel.

The author reminds us of an important lesson from the failure of the mission carried out by the *Social Gospel Movement* in America in the mid-18th century which only emphasized on its inclusive social service actions rather than proclaiming the gospel exclusively and boldly. As a religious person, there is nothing wrong with telling other people or individuals what one thinks is right or sharing the gospel. Religious people are not guilty of spreading love through words or deeds. But it should be limited

to sharing the news and without forcing other individuals to accept it. It is the motive that can distinguish between the two. The existence of a number of missionaries who are not trained in the correct and biblical method of evangelism has also contributed to the confusion of Christian mission activities in a number of places in pluralist Indonesia. Not to mention that Christianity in Indonesia carries the burden of past history since the Crusades and Wars of Sabil. Christianity entered Indonesia with the influence of European social and cultural values. Without realizing it, this became a divide in terms of value and cultural orientation between European culture and Indonesian society (Ahmad, 2024: 84; Akinola, 1972: 215–228). The religious sensitivity of (some) Muslims is certainly still scratched by this historical romance.

FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EVANGELISM AND CHRISTIANIZATION		
VARIABLES	PREACHING THE GOSPEL	CHRISTIANIZATION
Motivation	For the Glory of Christ	For self/organization satisfaction
Methods	Constructive: Only use civilized methods; friendly, tolerant, anti-hoax, familiar, etc.	Free/destructive: Legalize all means: Intermarriage (<i>Pacarization</i>), practical politics, politicization of religion, terror, etc.
Contextualization	As a method of approach: adaptation	Contextualization as mode: 'disguise' (?)
Orientation	The element of love is emphasized	The important thing is that the goal is achieved (pragmatic), the gospel is imposed
Metanarratives	Jesus the Savior of the World	Islam is a bad religion, full of lies
Attitude	Offer the gospel, no coercion, no lure (Mt 10:14).	Forcing the gospel, (intimidating), 'gospel plus-plus'
Azas	Loving all people	Hating Muslims
Normative foundation	Great Commission, Calling of the heart	Church/Zending assignments
Slogan	'Come all you who labor and are heavy laden'	"Christianity is the top religion", "Christians are more powerful", "Many developed countries are Christian", "Islam is a terrorist", etc.
Conception of Outreach	Convincing people that Christ is Lord and Savior	Conversion of other religions to Christianity
Scale	To the ends of the earth	To the ends of the earth that hold benefits

Table 1. Fundamental Difference Between Evangelism and Christianization

In addition, Christianity was brought to Indonesia by foreign missionaries who were the same as the colonizers. The colonial government's support for Christian

missions at that time further created a negative perception in Muslim audiences that Christianity was a colonizing religion. This crisis must be examined carefully and cautiously. Christian mission studies institutions need to address this problem wisely, be measured and find clear boundaries between these two segments. Christians must be willing to let the mission of evangelization be identified with Christianization, and it should always be remembered that Christianization in the Islamic view means apostasy. But if we look seriously and deeply, the boundaries will be clear. By observing empirically and studying biblically, the author has compiled a simple table to distinguish between the mission of evangelism and the practice of Christianization.

From the table above, it can be concluded that evangelism is different from Christianization. With a simple slogan, we can compare "gentleness versus violence", "love versus intimidation", "mission versus ambition", and so on. Because of this difference, the Christian mission of evangelization must be refined in its meaning, including its models of approach.

CONCLUSION

Although Christians are a minority religious group in Indonesia, Christians should not take offense. It is a fact and reality that must be accepted gracefully. The mission of evangelism is noble in nature, it must continue regardless of the obstacles. The church fathers who were martyred have reflected this missionary activity to the end. But in the context of pluralist Indonesia, where Christianity is stigmatized as a colonialist religion, and has also been tainted by the extreme actions of radical Muslim elements, evangelism must be repackaged in a more subtle, inclusive way, away from the impression of Western colonialism. Evangelism must be acclamatory but it does not always have to be proclamatory, aggressive and a campaign of faith. Ingenuity is the key to the entry of the gospel to new souls (cf. Mt 10:16). The contextualization of evangelism must certainly be reviewed to find models that are more subtle, familiar, but also convey the gospel message through speech.

Mission agencies and churches must agree, unite and not clash with each sect's denominational mission. Evangelism trainings are kept as simple as possible, to avoid arguments between religious theologies. Lay people who are eager to become evangelists must be screened for qualifications, until they are worthy of being sent out into the community. New breakthroughs in the world of missions (missiology) should

be reconstructed in order to save the title of "loving Christianity", not a cheap religion that sells the gospel with this and that lure. Missionaries must be demystified about the laws of the Republic of Indonesia regarding the issue of Christianization, which will be self-defeating. All information from "overseas" about radical movements that want to bring down Christianity needs to be filtered before being *shared with* the church public.

The principle of mutual cooperation in carrying out the mission of evangelism must be strengthened between church denominations. Christianity at the national level must have the courage to voice the meaning of the mission of evangelism which is a must for Christians, if necessary returning to the New Order era where interfaith dialogues were often held. Christian institutions in the legal field should encourage the government to take a firm stance to protect minorities who are often intimidated and even persecuted.

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