



From Colonial to Educational: Dialogic Imagination of Matthew 28:19-20 and the Story of Apapuhang in Sangihe

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Abstract

This article addresses the issue of how the Christian mission in Indonesia is understood, specifically, the tendency to equate the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) with "Christianization". This perception is linked to a colonial legacy that has shaped biblical interpretation and potentially hinders religious moderation and interfaith peace. The study aims to reinterpret Matthew 28:19-20 from the perspective of the Sangihe people by engaging in a dialogue with the "Apapuhang" folktale. It employs the "dialogic imagination" method developed by Kwok Pui-lan within a postcolonial hermeneutic framework. Cultural analysis is supported by Clifford Geertz's concept of "thick description" and Raymond Williams's "structure of feeling" to understand the "Apapuhang" story as an expression of the Sangihe community's collective experience and reflection. The findings reveal that the dialogue between Matthew 28:19-20 and the "Apapuhang" story yields an understanding of the Christian mission oriented toward education, liberation, and community empowerment. In Matthew, the mandate to teach serves as the foundation for an educational approach rooted in love and aimed at human flourishing. Meanwhile, the "Apapuhang" story represents creativity, cooperation, and collective innovation as vital elements of societal development. The convergence of these two narratives demonstrates the relevance of local Sangihe values to theological interpretation and Christian educational practice. The article concludes that the Christian mission can be understood as an educational practice that humanizes, empowers, and supports the building of a shared life. This interpretation opens the way for Christian education to contribute to fostering religious moderation and peace amidst Indonesia's diversity.

Keywords: Colonial, Matthew, Mission, Apapuhang, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, Indonesia has had a bad experience in relation to inter-religious relations. There are so many conflicts that color inter-religious relations, including the Ambon conflict which started from a problem that was actually not related to religion,¹ and the Poso conflict which until now still leaves deep sorrow.² Apart from conflict, problems in inter-religious relations also arise from the issue of intolerance in the form of prohibitions on religious activities or the construction of places of worship.³ Various conflicts and problems that have emerged and continue to occur in Indonesia have made reconciliation efforts increasingly complicated. These conflicts have become traumatic and hampered conflict resolution efforts.⁴ All of this ultimately boils down to how difficult it is to create peace between religions in Indonesia.

The Indonesian government has made various efforts to address the issue of interfaith relations. The latest concept offered in this effort is “religious moderation”.⁵ This concept is offered as a middle way for religious adherents, so that they can remain devout followers of religion but also be tolerant citizens.⁶ This concept is considered familiar with the lives of Indonesian people and in accordance with several cultural and religious values. Religious moderation is considered in line with Muslims,⁷ but also live the spirit of Christianity.⁸ Therefore, religious moderation is now part of the Christian education curriculum.⁹ Religious moderation can be viewed from a cultural philosophy perspective, for example the culture of North Sulawesi in the spirit of “torang samua ciptaan Tuhan” (we are all God’s

¹ Jerry Indrawan and Ananda Tania Putri, “Analisis Konflik Ambon Menggunakan Penahapan Konflik Simon Fisher,” *Jurnal Kolaborasi Resolusi Konflik* 4, no. 1 (2022).

² Igneus Alganah, “Konflik Poso (Kajian Historis Tahun 1998-2001),” *Criksetra: Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah* 5, no. 10 (2016): 166–74.

³ Naufal Hakim, “Permasalahan Izin Pendirian Tempat Ibadah Dan Problematika Toleransi Keagamaan Di Indonesia,” *Gema Keadilan* 10, no. 2 (2023): 72–79.

⁴ Kusumawati Hatta, *Trauma Dan Pemulihannya Suatu Kajian Berdasarkan Kasus Pasca Konflik Dan Tsunami*, in *Dakwah Ar-Raniry Press* (2016).

⁵ Mohamad Fahri and Ahmad Zainuri, *Moderasi Beragama Di Indonesia*, 25, no. 2 (2019).

⁶ Ezra Tari, “Mengembangkan Moderasi Beragama Di Kalangan Generasi Milenial Melalui Perspektif Perjanjian Baru,” *Kurios* 8, no. 1 (2022).

⁷ Zahdi and Iqrima, “Implementasi Moderasi Beragama Pada Pembelajaran Al-Qur’an Di Mushola Nur Ahmad,” *Moderatio: Jurnal Moderasi Beragama* 01, no. 1 (2021): 142–59.

⁸ Efesus Suratman et al., “Moderasi Beragama Dalam Perspektif Hukum Kasih,” *Prosiding Pelita Bangsa* 1, no. 2 (2022).

⁹ Evans Dusep Dongoran et al., “Mananamkan Sikap Moderasi Beragama Melalui Pendidikan Agama Kristen Di SMAN 1 Bintan Timur,” *Real Coster: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 3, no. 1 (2021): 7–11.

creation).¹⁰ The implementation of this concept initially proceeded well. However, it was subsequently hindered by religious-based radicalism.

The hope in the implementation of religious moderation in suppressing radicalism and all forms of inter-religious conflict was well lived by the community. This can be seen through various activities that support the importance of religious moderation.¹¹ However, this changed when religious-based radicalism teaching activities were revived in various places of worship.¹² It appears that there is a movement that deliberately spreads hate speech wrapped in religious-based radicalism.¹³ This movement is an opposition to religious moderation in Indonesia.¹⁴ Efforts to popularize religious moderation have been hampered by the teaching of radicalism. The mature concept of religious moderation has been refuted again with accusations that religious moderation is an attempt to weaken faith. This happens in almost all religions. However, in the current study, it will be limited to how such understanding lives and spreads in Christianity.

It is a natural and Christian thing if Christians live by the spirit of religious moderation. From a Christian perspective, religious moderation is considered very biblical.¹⁵ This concept is in accordance with the spirit of loving others in the Bible.¹⁶ However, this spirit is hampered by the teaching of religious radicalism based on Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19-20.¹⁷ Simply put, one of the things that hinders religious moderation is ongoing Christianization.¹⁸ Efforts to increase the number of religious adherents on a large scale may occur in many religions, but what will be highlighted in this study is the Christianization effort in Indonesia.

The Christianization effort that was born from a radical understanding of the reading of Matthew 28:19-20 is an urgency for the Indonesian nation. In addition to hindering the popularization of the concept of religious moderation, this also revives the narrative of hatred

¹⁰ Sudirman Yahya, "Slogan 'Torang Samua Ciptaan Tuhan' Dalam Konteks Moderasi Beragama Di Kota Manado," *Dialog* 43, no. 1 (2020): 1–22.

¹¹ Gilberth R. Mangero et al., *Bincang Asik Dan Sosialisasi Pentingnya Moderasi Beragama Sebagai Upaya Membangun Persatuan Di Desa Tontalete Kecamatan Kema Kabupaten Minahasa Utara*, 4, no. 1 (2023): 1–8.

¹² Hamzah Harun Al Rasyid, *Radikalisme Berbasis Agama* (Alauddin University Press, 2021).

¹³ S. Usman et al., "Radikalisme Agama Di Indonesia," *Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar*, 2014.

¹⁴ Bartolomeus Samho, "Urgensi 'Moderasi Beragama' Untuk Mencegah Radikalisme Di Indonesia," *Sapientia Humana: Jurnal Sosial Humaniora* 2, no. 01 (2022): 90–111.

¹⁵ Reni Triposa and Broto Yulianto, "Konstruksi Moderasi Beragama Melalui Pembacaan Matius 23:25-32," *Jurnal Teologi Gracia Deo* 4, no. 2 (2022): 25–32.

¹⁶ Suratman et al., "Moderasi Beragama Dalam Perspektif Hukum Kasih."

¹⁷ B. Nainggolan, "Konsep Amanat Agung Berdasarkan Matius 28:18-20 Dalam Misi," *Jurnal Koinonia* 8, no. 2 (2014): 15–45.

¹⁸ Stefanus Sofyan Setyadi, "Kristenisasi Dan Islamisasi Dalam Hidup Bermasyarakat," *Osf.Io*, 2019, 1–10.

in today's Christian community. The understanding of Christianization from Matthew 28:19-20 needs to be refuted for at least the following two reasons: First, Matthew 28:19-20 does not contain a command to Christianize¹⁹ and the second is that even the authentication of Matthew 28:19 has been debated by New Testament scholars.²⁰ So the assumption that there is a command to Christianize in Matthew 28:19-20 is an inappropriate and irrelevant view.

However, this assumption still needs serious attention because it is spread among the Christian community. Although some Christian congregations today already understand the essence of Matthew 28, there are still many who are trapped in the Christianization ideology.²¹ Therefore, this study will reinterpret Matthew 28:19-20 and free the text from the bias of the colonial mission. The text of Matthew 28:19-20 will be viewed from the perspective of the Indonesian Christian community living in the midst of diversity, including religious diversity.

Because the context of Indonesia is formed from so many tribes and backgrounds, it is important to provide limitations in the discussion of this study. discussing the perspective of Indonesia as a whole feels almost impossible because some too many cultures and tribes unite as Indonesia. Therefore, in this study, the research will be limited to one area in Indonesia, precisely in the Sangihe Islands district, as one of the areas at the northern tip of Indonesia. The reinterpretation of Matthew 28:19-20 will be highlighted from the perspective of the Sangihe community.

The colonial mission is an issue that tends to be rarely discussed in Indonesian religious research. The colonial mission can be understood as colonialism hidden behind the Christian mission. Several studies have been conducted on this topic, including research by Alfons Embu which highlights the mutual symbiosis that existed between the Catholic Church and the Dutch during the colonial period in Indonesia.²² Furthermore, there is also research by Muhammad Isa which discusses the full support of the Dutch East Indies government for the penetration of Christian missions in Java during the colonial period, especially during the ethical political period.²³ Another study by Jost Cote analyzes the

¹⁹ Grets Janialdi Apner et al., *Pendidikan Jemaat Misional Menurut Matius 28 : 16-20 : Rekonstruksi Teologi Misi Sebagai Bagian Pedagogis Dalam Kehidupan*, 5, no. 2 (2021): 1–19.

²⁰ Jacob T. Hundu, *Examining the Evidence : The Case for and Against the Authenticity of Matthew 28 : 19 .*, 25, no. 42 (2024): 1–13.

²¹ Asia Briefing N, *Policy Briefing Indonesia : “ Christianisation ” and Intolerance*, no. November (2010).

²² Alfons No Embu, “Implikasi Poskolonialitas Relasi Kekuasaan Misi Katolik Dan Kolonial Belanda,” *Jurnal Masalah Pastoral* 3, no. 1 (2014): 51–67.

²³ Anshory and MUhammad Isa, “Kolonialisme Dan Misi Kristen Di Jawa,” *Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta*, 2010.

colonial mission in Central Sulawesi and its impact on the formation of community identity.²⁴ Then also found research on collective memories and Dutch colonial discourse about Indonesia as an archipelago in the obituaries of Calvinist missionaries. This writing is the work of Iris Busschers.²⁵

All of these studies highlight how Christian and Catholic missions during the colonial period received support from the Dutch (the Dutch East Indies government). Some of them also discuss the fact that this mission was colonial in nature because it went hand in hand with the goals of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia. The fact that this mission suppressed other religions that already existed at that time was inevitable. However, no research has been found that highlights the colonial mission in relation to the text of the Bible, especially Matthew 28:19-20 which is often used as a legitimization for the implementation of colonial missions and Christianization.

Matthew 28:19-20 is one of the famous Bible verses. People know this part of the Bible as the verses that are most closely related to the Christian mission. In the Indonesian context, Jesus' command contained in Matthew 28:19-20 is called the "Great Commission".²⁶ Therefore, research on the text in relation to the mission has been widely written. Therefore, this literature review will highlight previous research on Matthew 28:19-20 in relation to the colonial mission. Starting from Beatrice Okyere-Manu's research on colonial mission and the great commission in the context of African society.²⁷ Furthermore, Charles Capper and his friends also analyzed the text in relation to the Christian mission to Indian communities in America.²⁸ A very interesting study by Daniel Patte discusses the attempt to deconstruct the Western understanding of reading Matthew 28:16-20.²⁹

It can be noted that the three studies discuss the colonial mission from various perspectives and contexts. The basis for the implementation of the colonial mission is always the colonial bias towards Matthew chapter 28. However, none have discussed how Matthew 28:19-20 in the colonial bias in the context of Indonesia as a country that was once colonized by the Netherlands as a representation of the West. Therefore, the effort to release the

²⁴ Joost Coté, "Creating Central Sulawesi: Mission Intervention, Colonialism and 'Multiculturality,'" *Bijdragen En Mededelingen Betreffende de Geschiedenis Der Nederlanden* 126, no. 2 (2011): 3–29.

²⁵ Iris Busschers, *Missionary Commemoration in a Colonial World: Collective Memory and Dutch Colonial Discourse on the Indonesian Archipelago in Obituaries of Calvinist Missionary Workers Published between 1930 and 1951*, no. December (2011).

²⁶ Nainggolan, "Konsep Amanat Agung Berdasarkan Matius 28:18-20 Dalam Misi."

²⁷ Beatrice Okyere-Manu, "Colonial Mission and the Great Commission in Africa," *Teaching All Nations: Interrogating the Matthean Great Commission*, 2014, 15–32.

²⁸ Charles Capper et al., *John Locke, Christian Mission, and Colonial America*, 2 (2011): 267–97.

²⁹ Daniel Patte, "Reading Matthew 28:16-20 with Others: How It Deconstructs Our Western Concept of Mission," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 62, no. 2 (2006): 521–57.

Western domination of the text of Matthew 28:19-20 and present the Indonesian perspective in reading the text will be the novelty of this study.

METHOD

In this study, a reinterpretation of Matthew 28:19-20 will be carried out by freeing the text from colonial bias. In this interpretation effort, a dialogue will be built between Matthew 28:19-20 and the story of Apapuhang from the land of Sangihe, North Sulawesi province, Indonesia. The story of Apapuhang was chosen to be a partner for the dialogue in Matthew 28:19-20 as a text from the context of Sangihe. This text can thus be read as a literary work born of the local community. Interestingly, this work emerged from deep reflection and the community's collective memory.

Clifford Geertz gave his view that community culture is literature that can be read. In his book entitled "The Interpretation of Cultures", Geertz popularized an approach called "thick description", namely an effort to read culture like literature.³⁰ This is complemented by Raymond Williams' view that literature is the result of reflection carried out by society. In his writing entitled "Culture and Society", Williams said that society has a collective experience that can form a "structure of feeling". This structure of feeling is literature that is born from society.³¹ Therefore, these two theories will be used to analyze the themes addressed in this study.

In building a dialogue for Matthew 28:19-20 with the story of Apapuhang, "Dialogic Imagination" by Kwok Pui-Lan will be chosen as the hermeneutic method in this study. This hermeneutic method is part of post-colonial hermeneutics that can help free the text from colonial biases. Dialogic Imagination allows the biblical text to dialogue with other texts in a balanced position.³² So in the context of this research, Matthew 28:19-20 will be discussed in a balanced position with the story of Apapuhang. This method debates the colonial argument that the Bible is the only theological source. Through this method, narratives born from Asia are given credit as theological sources that also shape the faith of Asian people. Thus, Asian people (including Indonesia and Sangihe) do not need to become Western to understand the Bible.

³⁰ Clifford Geertz, "The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 40, no. 1 (2009): 58–61.

³¹ Raymond Williams, "Culture and Society 1780-1950," preprint, Columbia University Press, 1983.

³² Kwok Pui-Lan, "Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World," *Orbis (The Bible and Liberation Series)* 25, no. May (1996): 198–200.

So far, there have been many Theological studies in Indonesia that use the Historical Criticism hermeneutic method. This method has even dominated biblical studies in Indonesia in recent years. However, colonial patterns are often still very visible in these studies. This pattern is when the Bible is used as a superior text that can be used as a standard for assessing other texts, even as a standard for assessing the perspective of a community. This pattern feels colonial because it consciously rejects the possibility of new understandings that arise from contexts that can actually enrich theology. So in this study, the biblical text and literature from the community will be placed in an equal position and discussed. Matthew 28:19-20 and the story of Apapuhang will be dialogued in a balanced position. This dialogue is not to find what is right and what is wrong, but rather to find the integration of meaning and to unlock new understandings that can enrich the meaning of the Bible.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Exegesis of Matthew 28:19-20

These two verses are part of a passage that the Indonesian Bible Society has titled “The Command to Preach the Gospel”. Chapter 28 is the last chapter of the Gospel of Matthew and verse 20 is the last verse of chapter 28. So this section can be called the conclusion of the book of Matthew. This passage contains a narrative of when Jesus was about to be taken up to heaven and then Jesus gave a message to the disciples. The narrative in this passage opens with the statement that the disciples went to Galilee, precisely to one of the hills that Jesus had shown them.³³ This statement is important because the opening is a kind of “summary” of the entire book of Matthew.

There is a view that Matthew 28:16-20 is an important part of the book of Matthew. This passage is considered to contain a condensed version of the gospel according to Matthew that can help the reader to understand the text.³⁴ The great commission of Jesus Christ to the disciples is considered to be the core of Matthew's account.³⁵ Matthew's community, which is predominantly Jewish-Christian, considers the message in this passage to be very important because the author has succeeded in bringing to life the nuances of

³³ Alexandru Moldovan, “Matthew 28:16-20 - Hermeneutical Key to the Gospel of Matthew,” *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Theologia Orthodoxa* 68, no. 2 (2023): 109–24.

³⁴ David C. Sim, “Is Matthew 28:16–20 the Summary of the Gospel?,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 70, no. 1 (2014): 16–20.

³⁵ Henry G. Covert, “The Great Commission,” *Spiritual Reflections* 1, no. 2 (2024): 45–54.

Judaism. Indirectly, there are nuances of the Old Testament that Matthew brings to life in his gospel, especially in the closing section.

Benjamin Hubbard sees this passage as Matthew's attempt to bring to life the literary form of "commissioning" which is commonly used in the Old Testament. So Matthew deliberately brings to life the nuances of Judaism at the end of his writing. Patterns such as divine mandate, promises of inclusion and human responses that are seen in the sending of Old Testament figures (Moses, Joshua and Isaiah) are also seen in Matthew 28.³⁶ The narrative is continued by the author with his explanation in verse 17. It is said that when they saw Jesus, the disciples worshiped Him but some people looked doubtful. This doubt was probably shown by Matthew to fit the narrative he built in his gospel that there had been no meeting between the disciples and Jesus after the resurrection. The only ones who had met Jesus were a few women who came early in the morning to Jesus' tomb. This is certainly different from John's version.³⁷ However, the focus of this study is not on these differences, but on Matthew's efforts to emphasize the ascension and the great commission, rather than the resurrection. Not because the resurrection is unimportant, but rather because there is a message that Matthew wants to convey through the great commission. This makes more sense referring to what has been discussed previously regarding Matthew's efforts to bring the Jewish nuance to life in Matthew 28:16-20 which is indeed intended for the Jewish Christian community.

Matthew continues his story with the statement that the disciples' doubts were answered by Jesus. Jesus approached them and said that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Him. The word used by the author is ἐξουσία "eksousia" which refers to power, authority or leadership.³⁸ With this, Jesus explains that the meaning of His statement in verse 18 is that He has universal power, which covers everything. The dichotomy of heaven and earth was deliberately built based on the understanding of the Jewish community which views the world in three layers.

The focus of this exegesis lies in the last two verses, namely verses 19 and 20. These two verses are in the form of imperative sentences containing the mandate of Jesus Christ. Because of their imperative form, the contents of these two verses are certainly an obligation for the disciples. There are at least four mandates and one promise in the two verses. The

³⁶ Benjamin Jerome Hubard, "The Matthean Redaction of a Primitive Apostolic Commissioning: An Exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20," *The University of Iowa*, 1973, 1-24.

³⁷ See Abraham J. Malherbe et al., *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 21 (2004): 82-85.

³⁸ TDNT, "The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* 4 (1975): 166-74.

four mandates are: having gone, disciple all the nations, baptizing them, and teaching them. Then the promise of inclusion is conveyed by Jesus as the closing of His mandate. The interesting thing about this section is that the narrative of conquest can be felt through Jesus' mandate in the two verses.

Kenton Sparks suggests that there is a tendency for Matthew to deliberately emphasize this message of Jesus in an effort to portray Jesus as "the new Moses". Given how strong the Jewish nuances are in this passage, this is very possible. Thus, the colonial pattern was deliberately revived from the beginning by the author of this book. This is supported by the state of Matthew's community at that time which was threatened by the Jewish war.³⁹ So it seems that Matthew is trying to make the people fight to maintain their identity and existence. Although minor, the spirit of conquest is also seen through Matthew's efforts. This needs to be considered in interpreting Matthew 28:19-20, although in the end Sparks also argues that Matthew's efforts to describe Jesus as "the new Moses" are not entirely identical. He distinguishes between Moses who brought war and Jesus who brought love.⁴⁰ Referring to this view, the main purpose of Jesus Christ's message in this passage is actually about love.

The Story of Apapuhang

This is a folk tale from the Sangihe region. This story is about a tribe of primitive people known as the Apapuhang. This clan dwells in the eastern foothills of Mount Awu (the sole volcano on the Sangihe mainland), namely in the valley of Balang Apapuhang. They live in harmony following a fairly traditional pattern. Their everyday activities revolve around foraging, such as hunting animals and looking for fruits. They live in a forest that is rich in natural resources even now.

They eventually reached the beach area as a result of attempts to increase the hunting area. Today, the beach is referred to as Naha beach (one of the Sangihe towns). They jumped into the sea and enjoyed swimming there as soon as they saw how much water there was. However, they were unaware that the sea water tasted salty because they typically exclusively swim in rivers. They spat a lot as a result. Because they had never tasted salt and were accustomed to eating raw food, their tongues were not immune to salt water. They ate

³⁹ Francois Viljoen, "The Matthean Community within a Jewish Religious Society," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1–8.

⁴⁰ Kenton L. Sparks, *Gospel as Conquest: Mosaic Typology in Matthew 28:16-20*, 2001, 286–87.

raw food (fruit and raw game meat) on a daily basis. Because they were unfamiliar with fire, they took this action.

The Apapuhang are regarded as a non-nomadic people. Until the end of their life, they remain in one location. In the valley, they erect cottages on trees. They hunt and forage during the day, coming home to rest at night. They came back empty-handed that day since they had merely played on the beach and in the sea. They informed those who had not joined them the day before about what they had discovered the following day. As a result, the group gathered at the specified place. Many people went to play in the sea that day and came back when night fell. After that, this new practice developed into a habit. After hunting and foraging, they began coming to the water every day to play. However, they were exhausted from walking back and forth to the location because the activity was completed after hunting.

Once, an idea came to build a boat for them to utilize to travel to sea. The boat was built collaboratively by the entire group. After the boat was finished, they were perplexed as to how it would be released and flow into the sea, because there were steep rocks around the valley where they resided. To address this, the community once again collaborated to create a little river that flows from the valley to the shore. When they released the boat into the river, it did not float because the river flow was too low. They decided to launch the boat with a catapult. However, this tactic was ineffective, resulting in casualties.

They became apprehensive about the united plan's future after this episode. Eventually, one of them came up with an idea. Why do not they make the sea come to them if it was hard for them to get to sea? They made the decision to transport some seawater to their residences so they could use it on a daily basis. They therefore considered making a container that could transport seawater to their residences.

They were unsuccessful at the start of the experiment because they used a basket as the container. The accumulated water flowed from the basket's cracks and perforations. However, they started to refine their methods of transporting water, until one day they were able to transport seawater using various instruments. This marked the start of the development of numerous technologies in the lives of the inhabitants of Sangihe. Not only that, but they began to manage their behavior as social beings. They planned to establish a kingdom with a monarch as its leader. They proceeded to innovate and develop their group.⁴¹

The Dialogic Imagination of Matthew 28:19-20 and The Story of Apapuhang

⁴¹ Sultan Kurnia et al., "Cerita Dari Beranda Negeri: Buku Karya Tim UGM Maritime Culture Expedition 2017," *Universitas Gadjah Mada*, 2017.

As a passage that is the basis of the Christian mission, verse 19 is often the focus. It is as if Jesus' great commission is only contained in that verse, even though the great commission also includes verse 20. Because it is focused only on verse 19, it is not surprising that the emphasis of the mission will be limited to the activities of baptizing and disciple making, which is then further narrowed down to Christianization. This perspective is very likely framed by the pattern formed by Matthew from the beginning, namely the nuance of the gospel of conquest through the concept of Jesus as "the new Moses". Although partial, from the beginning this passage has had a colonial nuance.

The colonial reading pattern of the text of Matthew 28:19-20 is also experienced in the Indonesian context. Christianity, which entered together with Dutch colonialism, formed a colonial understanding of the text. Matthew 28:19-20 is considered a mission for Christianization. This understanding was deliberately formed by the Dutch to facilitate and maintain their colonialism in the archipelago.⁴² The church became a partner of the Dutch to perpetuate colonization and the plundering of people's wealth. Through this cooperation, the Bible was used as a legitimization of the absolute power of the Dutch over the Nusantara land.⁴³

For whatever reason, Christianization has survived to this day.⁴⁴ However, one thing that can be ascertained from this phenomenon is that the colonial legacy still influences Indonesian Christian society in reading the Bible. As previously explained, equating Christian mission and Christianization is a pattern that was built since the colonial era and persists today as a colonial legacy. There is indeed a colonial legacy that is beneficial for Indonesia,⁴⁵ but the colonial legacy in the form of Christianization is destructive and has the potential to damage national peace. Departing from this, a new pattern of reading and understanding is needed that is born from Indonesia and is not contaminated with colonial bias.

This study proposes a new way of reading and understanding Matthew 28:19-20 from an Indonesian perspective, especially the perspective of the Sangihe community as part of Indonesia. In this case, the perception of the Sangihe Christian community will be

⁴² Laode Abdul Rahim, "Persebaran Agama Kristiani Di Indonesia Pada Masa Kolonial," preprint, n.d.

⁴³ Harto Juwono, "Kerkelijke Eigendom : Memahami Hak Milik Gereja Di Indonesia Era Kolonial," *Jurnal Teologi Dan Pelayanan Kerusso* 9, no. 1 (2024): 91–104.

⁴⁴ Lukman Ma'sa, "Respon K.H. Ahmad Dahlan Terhadap Gerakan Kristenisasi Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Da'wah: Risalah Merintis, Da'wah Melanjutkan* 1, no. 02 (2018): 79–89.

⁴⁵ Mestika Zed, "Warisan Penjajahan Belanda Di Indonesia Pasca-Kolonial (Perspektif Perubahan Dan Kesenambungan)," *Diakronika* 17, no. 1 (2017).

represented by the story of Apapuhang as a legend of the Sangihe community. The story of Apapuhang and Matthew 28:19-20 will be dialogued to find an integration of meaning. This integration of meaning will then become an understanding of the Bible text that is born from the context, in this case the Sangihe Christian community. This new meaning will provide a new color in viewing and understanding Matthew 28:19-20.

Both texts are narrative texts that at first glance tell two very contrasting things. The first story is about Jesus being lifted up to heaven and giving a mandate to His disciples, while the second story is about a group of people trying to develop their community. However, the intersection of these two texts will actually meet in how efforts to develop society are in dialogue with Jesus' command in verse 20. Actually, there have been so many writings that try to free Matthew 28 from the shadow of Christianization. Because in fact the Christian mission contained there is not related to Christianization. The Christian mission version of Matthew 28:19-20 talks about developing others through education.⁴⁶

Education becomes the meeting point in the dialogue between these two texts. The first thing that must be considered is how Jesus places education as an important part, namely as a mandate for the disciples. The disciples here refer to the eleven people who met Jesus in Galilee, but the etymology of the disciple can be applied to all those who want to imitate Jesus as their "teacher". So the implications of the word disciple are automatically attached to Christians today. Thus, the mission of Christians today is not Christianization, but education.⁴⁷

Discussion of education is certainly a broad discussion and has many dimensions. Education is carried out in order to serve many purposes, be it to educate, shape character and even liberate.⁴⁸ In Matthew 28:20, Jesus gave the disciples a mandate to "teach" the people everything that Jesus had commanded. In simple terms, all of Jesus' commandments can be summed up by love for God and love for fellow humans.⁴⁹ However, if elaborated further, the love referred to by Jesus is complex and broad in meaning. The love referred to by Jesus includes so many other themes, such as liberation and empowerment.⁵⁰ This is

⁴⁶ F. B. Gerung et al., *Jesus the Great Teacher: Didactic Dimension Behind the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:16-20*, 2020, 16–20.

⁴⁷ Listari Listari and Yonatan Alex Arifianto, "Prinsip-Prinsip Misi Dari Teks Amanat Agung Bagi Pelaksanaan Misi Gereja Masa Kini," *Jurnal Teologi Gracia Deo* 3, no. 1 (2020): 42–55.

⁴⁸ A. P. Meti, "Rekonstruksi Misi Kristen Dalam Dunia Pendidikan: Mendaratkan Konsep Pendidikan Yang Membebaskan Paulo Freire Bagi Misi Pendidikan Masa Kini," *Filadelfia: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristen*, 2024, 61–75.

⁴⁹ Hardi Budiyan, "Kristus Sebagai Pusat Misi Pendidikan Kristen Untuk Mewujudkan Murid Kristus Dalam Gereja Lokal," *Teleios: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 1, no. 1 (2021): 45–63.

⁵⁰ Kim Danh Nguyễn, "The Way of Love According to Jesus (Jn 15:12-17)," *Khoa Học Công Giáo và Đời Sống* 2, no. 4 (2022): 39–42.

where Matthew 28 can directly relate to the story of Apapuhang and can be clearly understood by the Sangihe Christian community. The story of Apapuhang contains a narrative about a group of people who discovered a new world and tried to explore it. This narrative gives the impression that they were amazed by the new world they discovered and wanted to enjoy it. The decision to leave their homes to experience the new world is a narrative of liberation that can be found in the story of Apapuhang. Although it is not told clearly in the narrative, the Sangihe community knows one entity of God that they call "I Genggona Langi". This concept of God is considered close to the Sangihe community because it is present to them through nature, including the forest and the sea.⁵¹ So it can be said that the Apapuhang encounter with their new world is indirectly related to their concept of God. Matthew 28:20 implies Jesus as the liberator, and so does the story of Apapuhang imply the presence of "Genggona Langi" who is also a liberator.

Another important dimension of Jesus' love curriculum is empowering. This is stated repeatedly in the gospel narratives, especially the book of Mark.⁵² The narratives of the four gospels depict Jesus as a figure who enjoyed building relationships and then using them as a means of empowerment.⁵³ Luke even explicitly depicts Jesus as a person who empowers marginalized groups in society.⁵⁴ The Bible honestly classifies women as marginalized people whose voices are silenced. Jesus is an important figure who gives space for women to speak up. This gap to speak up can be seen as an effort to empower women amidst the dominant influence of men.⁵⁵ All of these efforts were ultimately considered by Jesus as part of the education that needed to be continued. So at the end of the book of Matthew, he passed on the responsibility of this education to his disciples.

This empowerment effort is also seen in the story of Apapuhang. When discovering a new world, one member of society did not enjoy it alone. He conveyed the news to his fellow men and took them to see the sea and the beach directly. Likewise, in the effort to innovate, all the equipment built not only impacted one person, but all members of the group.

⁵¹ David Rade Manat Simanjuntak and Ryanto Adilang, "Kepada Allah Yang Tidak Dikenal: Konsep I Genggona Langi Dalam Sorotan Kisah Para Rasul 17:23 Dan Implementasinya Terhadap Ekologi Dan Edukologi Masyarakat Sangihe," *Teleios: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 0642 (2022): 147–55.

⁵² Dipankar Haldar, *Mark : A Gospel of Empowerment*, II (2008): 147–53.

⁵³ Garden Eden and Gustave Courtois, *From the Gospel : Empowering Just Relations*, no. October (2024).

⁵⁴ Lukas Yuniarto Chandra, "Marginalized People In The Gospel Of Luke," *Conference Series* 4, no. 2 (2023): 103–10.

⁵⁵ J. Van der Westhuizen and L. M. Mudimeli, "Unheard Voices of Women in the Bible with Implications of Empowerment in the Context of the Church Today.," *Acta Theologica Supp*, no. 27 (2019): 118–31.

So empowerment took place through community innovation which had an impact on the development of the community collectively. This information then formed the Sangihe community as a maritime community. To this day, fishing and boat-building skills are part of the non-formal education that lives in the families of the Sangihe community.⁵⁶ This serves as a clear indicator that the skills being passed down do not go to waste; they are genuinely utilized in the lives of the maritime community and handed down from generation to generation.

The two narrative texts agree that the empowerment dimension is important in education. The Bible, through the narratives of the Gospels, confirms this. The concept of God in the Sangihe community also provides an illustration of the same pattern. In addition to what is stated in the story of Apapuhang, the Sangihe community, through their belief in the divinity of "I Genggona Langi," educates and is educated to treat each other humanely. This is evident through the culture of the Sangihe community who always share the forest and sea products they obtain.⁵⁷ In addition, there is also the tradition of "Palose" which teaches the Sangihe community to empower each other by helping each other in preparation for planting and going to sea. Not only in good and healthy conditions, "Palose" also applies when there are members of the community who are sick or grieving.⁵⁸ This spirit is in line with the concept of "Tomou Tou" from the land of Minahasa which is also a philosophy of empowerment.⁵⁹

Through the dialogue of the two texts, namely Matthew 28:19-20 and the story of Apapuhang, it can be seen that Indonesian society, in this case the Sangihe people, views Matthew 28:19-20 in a unique and different way. If the colonial legacy places Matthew 28:19-20 as the basis for the Christianization movement, the Sangihe people actually see the text as the basis for education to liberate and develop the community.

Contribution to Christian Education

⁵⁶ Julius Frans Wuaten et al., "Sasahamia Fishing for Fishermen on Bebalang Island, Manganitu Selatan District, Sangihe Islands," *Jurnal Ilmiah Tatengkorang Politeknik Negeri Nusa Utara* 6 (2022): 76–80.

⁵⁷ S. Sumolang et al., "Ruang Laut Masyarakat Kepulauan Sangihe-Talaud Di Perbatasan Indonesia-Filipina," *Kepel Press*, 2023, 1–239.

⁵⁸ Valencia Ozelin Aer et al., "Budaya Palose Masyarakat Petani Di Kelurahan Angges, Kecamatan Tahuna Barat Kabupaten Kepulauan Sangihe," *Jurnal Ilmiah Society* 2, no. 1 (2022): 1–11.

⁵⁹ Treesje Imran et al., "The Meaning of Sitou Timou Tumou Tou as a Model of Women Empowerment Management in Mapalus House in Southeast Minahasa , North Sulawesi," *Maker: Jurnal Manajemen Program Studi Manajemen STIE Sultan Agung* 9 (2023): 277–85.

The dialogue between Matthew 28:19-20 and the story of Apapuhang yields an understanding of Christian mission rooted in the context of Sangihe society. Through the “dialogic imagination” approach developed by Kwok Pui-lan, these two narratives are placed in a dialogical relationship that allows local cultural experience to contribute to the interpretation of the biblical text. This reading opens up space to re-examine the understanding of the Great Commission, which throughout the history of Christianity in Indonesia has often been linked to Christianization and the legacy of colonial missions. In this context, Matthew 28:19-20 needs to be read with attention to the full mandate given by Jesus, including the command to teach everything He has commanded. Focusing on the teaching dimension provides a foundation for understanding mission as something realized through education, the shaping of life, and responsibility toward others.

Within this framework, Christian Religious Education takes on an orientation closely linked to the effort of humanizing the human person (*memanusiakan manusia*). Christian education can be understood as a process that helps learners develop knowledge, skills, moral awareness, and social responsibility based on the values of love taught by Jesus. This orientation demands attention to the concrete lives of the learners and the communities in which they grow. The educational process must create space for critical thinking, creativity, participation, and the development of each individual’s potential. Thus, the success of Christian education can be observed through the changes occurring in the lives of individuals and communities, including their ability to build relationships that are just, mutually respectful, and supportive of shared growth.

The story of Apapuhang enriches this understanding by illustrating themes of discovery, cooperation, and collective innovation. In this narrative, knowledge acquired by an individual is shared with other group members and subsequently developed through joint action. Knowledge and skills gain significance when applied to meet community needs and sustain communal life. This pattern holds relevance for Christian Religious Education, particularly within the context of local communities. Educational programs can be developed by incorporating the knowledge, experiences, traditions, and social practices inherent to the community. Such an approach enables learners to grasp educational material through experiences closely tied to their own lives, while simultaneously fostering the ability to address issues within their respective environments.

The values reflected in the Apapuhang story also resonate with the cultural practices of the Sangihe people, such as the custom of sharing the bounty of the sea and forest and the *Palose* tradition. These practices demonstrate an awareness that communal life relies on

mutual care and support. Through *Palose*, for instance, community members assist one another in agricultural activities and daily tasks, as well as during times of illness or bereavement. Such values offer a source of reflection for Christian Religious Education as it develops learning experiences that foster solidarity, social concern, and communal responsibility. Engaging in dialogue with local culture also acknowledges that communities possess knowledge and ethical resources capable of enriching the understanding and practice of faith.

Another implication of this interpretation concerns how the church understands and carries out the Christian mission within a pluralistic society. When mission is framed within an educational context grounded in love and empowerment, the church's focus shifts toward the holistic development of human life. Educational ministry can be realized through expanding access to knowledge, providing community support, fostering skills development, and collaborating to address social needs. In practice, the church must remain attentive to the conditions and aspirations of the community while building relationships that honor the dignity of every individual. This orientation provides a foundation for Christian Religious Education to engage in public life through actions that benefit society, including those of different faiths.

This understanding is also relevant to the promotion of religious moderation in Indonesia. Christian Religious Education plays a role in shaping learners' perspectives on diversity, particularly through teachings on love, respect for others, and the responsibility to nurture communal life. These values must be translated into a learning process that encourages dialogue, openness, and the ability to coexist with people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. From this perspective, efforts to build interfaith peace are an integral part of the ethical responsibility of Christian education. The church's mission can take the form of active participation in building a society that values diversity and strives for the common good.

Overall, the dialogue between Matthew 28:19-20 and the "Apapuhang" story reveals the potential of local theology to broaden the understanding of mission and Christian Religious Education. The experience of the Sangihe community contributes to the interpretation of the Great Commission by emphasizing education, cooperation, empowerment, and community development. This contribution encourages churches and Christian educational institutions to prioritize human needs and communal life in the execution of their mission. By grounding education in love and aiming for empowerment,

Christian Religious Education can play a role in building a more humane society, strengthening social solidarity, and fostering interfaith peace.

CONCLUSION

An interpretation of Matthew 28:19-20 through a dialogue with the “Apapuhang” story highlights the importance of local context in constructing a theological understanding of Christian mission. In the history of Christianity in Indonesia, the Great Commission has often been associated with Christianization and the legacy of colonial missions. Such an understanding risks narrowing the meaning of mission to merely increasing the number of Christians and can hinder the development of peaceful relations amidst religious diversity. Employing Kwok Pui-lan’s “dialogic imagination” approach, this article offers a reading that places Matthew 28:19-20 and the “Apapuhang” story in a position of equal dialogue. This approach creates space for the experiences, collective memory, and culture of the Sangihe people to help shape theological understanding.

The dialogue between these two narratives reveals that the educational dimension of Matthew 28:20 connects with the values found in the “Apapuhang” story. The mandate to teach can be understood as an educational responsibility rooted in love. One that liberates people from limitations and fosters the development of communal life. The “Apapuhang” story illustrates creativity, cooperation, and innovation that benefit the community. These values also resonate with Sangihe cultural practices, such as the sharing of marine and forest resources and the *Palose* tradition, which reflect mutual care and empowerment. Thus, Sangihe cultural experience provides a source of theological meaning that enriches the understanding of education and Christian mission.

These findings have implications for the development of Christian Religious Education. The practice of mission can be directed toward humanizing and empowering others through education grounded in love and oriented toward community development. This responsibility also encompasses fostering mutual respect and maintaining interfaith peace. In the context of Indonesia’s diversity, reading Matthew 28:19-20 through a Sangihe perspective opens up possibilities for the church to carry out a mission that is relevant to societal needs and supports religious moderation. This article asserts that dialogue between the biblical text and local narratives can yield a more contextual understanding of Christian mission, while simultaneously expanding the contribution of local theology to communal life.

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