

# Trinitarian Missiology As An Effort to Establish Interfaith Dialogue and Relation in Indonesia



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## **Abstract**

*This paper shows that the Christian mission is often understood only as an attempt to make a person become Christians. The paradigm was born as a result of the practice of Christian mission that laden with discrimination and injustice and tend to reject differences. That's necessary to grasp the understanding of Christian mission as the mission of the triune God, not the mission of the church. By using the library research method with an interdisciplinary approach, this paper offers the mission model of the Triune God (trinitarian missiology) as a humanitarian mission and the church is invited to participate in it to manifest God's mission to all creation. Christian mission also means seeking interfaith dialogue in fighting and overcoming social problems such as poverty, injustice, and others as being common to other faiths (the other). The Christian mission which rests on the doctrine of the trinity is not a barrier to dialogue but emphasises the importance of unity in diversity.*

**Keywords:** A Trinitarian Missiology, Trinity, Discrimination, Interreligious relationship.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Religious discrimination is often identified as an arbitrary act by followers of the majority religion against minority religions. Religious discrimination can be found in all religions, both majority, and minority, but in different forms. Therefore, although these actions can be found in each of the religions in Indonesia, this article will focus on the attitude of Christians towards the adherents of other faiths. This attitude began when the early Christian mission in Indonesia alongside Western imperialism was seen as an attempt to convert other people to become Christian. The mission paradigm also had an impact on the relationship of Christians with followers of other religions. In this paper, an understanding of the early Christian mission which will unwittingly support the practice of religious discrimination will be highlighted. Later in this paper, a form of mission understanding that respects differences while remaining faithful in carrying out God's mission will be reflected in a model: Trinitarian Missiology.

## II. METHODE

This research used the method of qualitative research, especially on the library research method with an interdisciplinary approach, namely the integration of various approaches such as theology, missiology, sociology, etc.[1]

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. Discrimination Practices in the History of Christian Missions in Indonesia

Since Christianity entered Indonesia together with Western imperialism, since then the interfaith upheaval in Indonesia began a new chapter. This happened because the zending who spread Christianity carried out a mission to make people better, but unfortunately, they ignored the context from which the person came from. According to Ati Rambe, the historical record of the Christian mission in Indonesia cannot be separated from the historical record of the conquest because the early Christian mission in Indonesia came hand in hand with foreign imperial forces who wanted to conquer Indonesian territory through the conquest of economic resources, as well as the conquest of culture and religion- religion that already existed in Indonesian territory at that time, both conquered Islam and local religions.[2] Besides, in the early zending era in Indonesia, non-Western cultures and religions were seen by zending as infidels, which needed to be converted to Christianity. This caused a Christian to be exiled from his culture. As a result, what happens is very ironic: the Christian mission becomes a process of removing one's cultural roots.[3] This happened because the zending departed with the understanding that they offered religious teaching that was superior and superior to local culture and beliefs.[4]

This condition was also shown by Aritonang who said that "badan-badan zending tidak hanya memberitakan Injil pada orang-orang "kafir" yaitu penganut agama suku, melainkan juga membawa peradaban bagi mereka" (the zending not only preach the Gospel to "infidels" who are adherents of tribal religion but also bring civilisation to them).[5] During this time, the practice of religious discrimination surfaced. During the colonial period, especially during the Dutch era, the Dutch East Indies government gave different treatment to Christians. The government supports Christian schools established by zending agencies while traditional Islamic schools are considered as wild schools and this is very offensive to Islamic leaders.[6] Thus it can be concluded that the practice of early Christian mission in Indonesia in the colonial era was full of discrimination and deprived people of other faiths and religions of their freedom. The hatred of Muslims towards the Dutch invaders was intense and the hatred was ultimately more or less directed towards Christians, who in the eyes of many Muslims were identical with the Dutch.[7] This is understandable because the Dutch government also runs Christian politics called *kersteningpolitiek* which is a policy and political support for the Christianization efforts carried out by zending.[8]

After the end of the colonial era and Indonesia becoming an independent country, the practice of evangelism would no longer be able to apply the same methods. However, the legacy of Western thought about the superiority of Christianity still dominates the minds of most Christians in Indonesia, and this has influenced the relationship of Christians with other religious communities. One of the attitudes held in the Christian mission is to regard others as objects of evangelism. According to Rambe, such understanding makes the meaning of a Christian presence counterproductive because it is not the peace of the harvest but hatred and suspicion.[9] Often the weaknesses of others are exploited through material persuasions, promises about education and employment opportunities, etc. to bring that person to Christianity.[10] The history of the practice of Christian mission in Indonesia, which often falls to manipulation and exploit economic weaknesses to persuade someone to become a Christian (to obtain salvation), actually makes the meaning of salvation superficial. Also, the legacy of Western thought that pervades the minds of Christians living today can be found in the reality of daily life. Discrimination or discriminating against adherents of other religions can be found in several areas of life, for example, in matters of work. A person can be accepted to work for a company just because he adheres to the same religion as the owner of the company, even though there are other applicants who better meet the criteria for the job vacancy but are not accepted because they follow a different religion. This is one example of the manifestation of discrimination committed by Christians.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

B. Trinitarian missiology: A mission that promotes dialogue in the spirit of equality and freedom. If the early Christian mission often fell to arrogance and exclusivity, was discriminatory, and tended to be imperialistic, then what kind of Christian mission should the church have and apply today? If the history of Christian mission was formed in the context of colonization and then inherited in the current generation, then what should be the difference between the Christian mission of colonial European nations and the contemporary Christian mission, especially in its encounter with other religions?

The Christian mission must first be understood as the Mission of God in which the church carries out its calling. The mission of God, also called *Missio Dei*, is a phrase that was introduced by the German missiologist Karl Hartenstein in 1934 and popularised by Georg Vicedom in his book published in 1963.<sup>[11]</sup> According to Mark Hildebrandt Rambe, God's mission is God's initiative and movement, sending Himself into the world, communicating His salvation to His creation. God is a missionary God, and his mission to the world as a whole. Before humans sought God, God had found humans.<sup>[12]</sup> This explanation once again emphasizes the need for an awareness of understanding that Christian mission is not the mission of the church but the mission of God (*Missio Dei*), the mission of the Triune God (*Missio Dei Trinitatis*).

If the Christian mission is seen in the light of the fellowship of the Triune God, then the practice that took place in the history of the early Christian mission contradicts the principle of the union of the Triune God. If the tradition of the early Christian mission was identical with manipulation, oppression, and discrimination (differentiating humans based on religion, ethnicity, culture, gender, etc.), then such a mission was certainly not in harmony with the mission of the Triune God who came to the world to free humanity and bring love and peace among humankind. This is as said by Stephen Bevans:

Christian mission is nothing more or less than participation in God's existence in the world. It is about a respectful, dialogical crossing of cultural, religious, personal, racial, class and even geographical boundaries; it is a "single but complex reality," of proclamation and witness, liturgy and contemplation, efforts at inculturation, participation in interreligious dialogue, commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation, and engagement in reconciliation.<sup>[13]</sup>

This means that the mission does not only involve Christians, but the mission is carried out in togetherness and dialogue with followers of other religions to focus attention and concern for existing social problems jointly. Christian mission is a mission that moves out of him. If it moves out, it means that it opens itself up to experience an encounter with "the other." An encounter always presupposes interaction and communication. Understanding the mission of a Trinitarian nature, in turn, is expected to be able to give a new direction in viewing the presence of others not as competitors, enemies or objects of evangelism, but as fellow creatures who strive to achieve harmony in living together in diversity. This means that the church carries out its mission as a form of participation in the mission of the Triune God. So just as the unity of the Triune God is characterized by equality, freedom, love, mutuality, and inclusiveness, also the Christian mission is explicitly built-in relation and encounter with other religions. The Trinitarian Christian mission, in this case, means meeting other faiths in a communicative and equal way. This should be a new way of manifesting the Trinitarian missiology in the Indonesian context. Robert Schreiter, as quoted by Bevans and Schroeder, explicitly talks about the Trinitarian style of mission and its importance for a new understanding of mission today:

Pertama, kesatuan dalam keragaman Allah Tritunggal akan menjadi kunci bagi sebuah teologi agama dan kemajemukan budaya yang menandai pemikiran dan peradaban pasca modern. Kedua, eksistensi Trinitaris menyajikan suatu fondasi teologis yang kokoh untuk misi sebagai suatu proses dialogis antara memberi dan menerima,ewartakan dan belajar, berbicara lantang dan membuka diri terhadap kritik (First, unity in the diversity of the Triune God will be the key to a religious theology and cultural pluralism that marks postmodern thought and civilisation. Secondly, the existence of Trinitarians presents a solid theological

foundation for the mission as a dialogical process between giving and receiving, proclaiming and learning, speaking out and opening up to criticism). [14]

It also means that Trinitarianis missiology is a mission that opens itself to authentic dialogue in the encounter of Christianity with other religions. It will help us to appreciate the differences that exist, including differences in belief. This is not surprising because the Christian mission is participation in dialogical life and the mission of the Triune God.[15] According to Yewangoe, the mission of the church has never changed, which is to preach the good news to all beings.[16] Christian mission is understood as a presence in a society that is proactive, shows solidarity, fights for justice, combats poverty, and pioneers respect for human rights.[17] Christian mission also means fighting for the freedom of worship and religion (not only for Christianity). Christian mission is to preach the good news, and the good news is not just for himself. Discrimination is a form of inability to accept and acknowledge differences. The act is filled with injustice and is contrary to the Christian faith, which teaches fellow human beings as God's creation, as fellow bearers of God's image. The church needs to be made aware of and make the people aware of others as neighbors, not threats or opponents. The church also needs to align the congregation's understanding of the imperialistic mission, which is full of discrimination and contains the values of exclusivity to the mission that exemplifies the triune God who promotes love, freedom, and equality. Thus, each religion can return to its original purpose of creating order and bringing peace to all humanity and all creation on this earth. I would like to thank Toraja State Christian Religion Institute, especially the rector Mr. Joni Tapingku who always supported me when working on this research.

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