



Culture and Faith Encounter Spaces: An Intercultural Approach to Sasi Worship in Formulating Contextual and Responsive Christian Religious Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses culture and faith through an intercultural approach in the approach of Christian Religious Education (PAK) and places the traditional culture of Sasi worship in Halmahera as the main case study. This research uses a reflective qualitative approach with hermeneutic, phenomenological and cultural philosophical analyses to interpret the meaning of Sasi worship as a cultural practice but which has also undergone integration with the Christian faith. The results of the study will try to show that Sasi worship is not only a celebration of buaday with a customary-ecological mechanism, but also a theological and pedagogical space in representing ecological spirituality, responsibility ethics, and contextual and transformative faith education. From the perspective of PAK, this tradition serves as a learning medium for grounded faith, teaching the value of creation ministry, social solidarity and life balance.

INTRODUCTION

In the reality of human life, culture and faith are not two separate entities but two dimensions that interact with each other and form each other. Culture is a space where humans express values, symbols and meanings of life, while faith is present as a transcendent force that gives direction, meaning and purpose to human existence. (Geertz, 1973; Berger, 1967) In this context, the understanding of faith cannot be separated from the cultural context in which it grows, takes root and transforms. The encounter between culture and faith creates a dynamic space of dialogue, where value systems, traditions and religious experiences influence each other. In addition, culture gives form and language for the expression of faith, but also faith provides moral and spiritual orientation for cultural development. Therefore, the study of "cultural space and the meaning of faith" requires an interdisciplinary approach that is able to bridge the gap between cultural science, religion and philosophy. (Brueggemann, 1997; Wright, 2006; Sumule, 2015) an interdisciplinary approach allows readers to be more comprehensive about the experience of human diversity. So through a cultural perspective, we understand how symbols, rites, and traditions frame the expression of faith. This is where the religious approach leads us to trace transcendent values as a source of human inspiration. Meanwhile, through philosophy, we examine the existential meaning of belief itself. How man understands himself, the world and his existence before the Divine. This study is important in the midst of a plural and global world, where people from various cultural backgrounds and beliefs interact with each other. A cross-cultural understanding of faith helps us value diversity as a wealth, not a threat. Thus, this article is expected to open up new insights for us to understand that faith always finds form and therefore in the space of human culture that is alive, changing and also diverse. This view is then used in interpreting the culture of Sasi worship in Halmahera as a way to build an attitude of tolerance for all people of Halmahera.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a reflective-interpretive design based on intercultural studies. This approach was chosen to deeply understand the meaning of the relationship between culture and faith in the practice of Sasi worship in Halmahera as a living phenomenon that cannot be reduced to quantitative data alone. The analysis is carried out through a hermeneutic framework to interpret the cultural-religious symbols, rites and narratives that accompany Sasi practices; phenomenology to capture the experience of community faith as an existential reality; as well as reflection on cultural philosophy to read its ethical implications and spiritual meaning in the context of modernity and globalization. The study data is sourced from cultural traditions, worship practices, theological reflections, as well as relevant contextual theological literature and Christian religious education. Through this approach, the research seeks to build a complete and contextual understanding of Sasi worship as a dialogue space between the Christian faith, local culture and human responsibility to creation, while affirming its relevance for the development of Christian Religious Education that is responsive to today's plural and ecological context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the dynamics of modern life, humans live in the midst of rapidly changing global cultural trends. Technological developments, social mobility and cross-cultural interactions have shaped a complex new reality, in which the boundaries between traditions, values and beliefs are increasingly blurred. In this context, the experience and meaning of faith are no longer in a homogeneous space, but rather interact with different value systems, ways of thinking and cultural practices. This phenomenon poses new challenges for modern humans in understanding and living the meaning of faith in the midst of a growing cultural plurality. The main challenge that arises today is the shift in the meaning of faith and spirituality in human life. On the one hand, modernization and rationalization

bring tremendous advances in science and technology, but on the other hand, they often leave humans with a crisis of meaning, losing their way in understanding life's purpose and underlying values. Faith that was once a source of moral and spiritual strength is now often reduced to a social identity or religious formality without existential depth. This phenomenon can be seen from the increasing tendency of individualism, consumerism, and the weakening of the sense of solidarity and spirituality in people's lives. In addition, cultural globalization has a great influence on the way people believe. Religious traditions are no longer standing alone, but continue to interact and even compete with popular culture, digital media and global ideologies. In the modern public sphere, religion is often caught in two extremes: on the one hand, there is a fundamentalism that rejects cultural dialogue, on the other hand, a secularism that removes spiritual values from the realm of social life. Both cause fragmentation and loss of balance between the dimensions of culture and faith. Raising the topic of culture and beliefs for the Indonesian people, one is invited to pause for a moment and see all these changes by deliberately not 'depriving' something that has high value for the lives of the people in a group must be lost or also forcibly eliminated because it is considered contrary to the beliefs that are developing or because the development of globalization affects the routine of today's people. One of the traditions of the community in Halmahera runs a tradition of Sasi Worship. (Niebuhr, 1941; Berger, 1967)

Sasi Worship in Halmahera: A Symbol of Cultural Integrity and Faith

The tradition of Sasi worship in Halmahera is a local cultural heritage that is full of ecological, social and spiritual meaning. In the context of cultural anthropology, Sasi is a customary system that functions as a mechanism for regulating and protecting natural resources, both at sea and on land. Through this tradition, the community establishes a certain period during which activities of harvesting crops or natural products, such as fishing, harvesting coconuts or taking forest products are temporarily

prohibited. The goal is for nature to have the opportunity to recover, maintain the balance of the ecosystem, and ensure the sustainability of resources for the next generation. However, what makes this tradition interesting interculturally is when Sasi activities are not only understood as a socio-ecological practice, but also as a form of sacred worship. The term 'worship' in Ibadah Sasi reflects the process of integrity between traditional values and religious values, especially after the entry of the influence of Christianity in the Halmahera region. In this process, the traditional practice that was originally cosmological in nature, namely respect for nature and the guardian spirit, has undergone a theological reinterpretation, where respect for nature is understood as a form of gratitude and obedience to the Creator.

Thus, Sasi worship is not only a traditional activity, but also an ecological spiritual expression of the Halmahera people for the results received. This ritual contains the awareness that protecting nature is the same as respecting God's creation. In the worship that accompanies the opening or closing of the Sasi Ibadah, usually the community gathers in the church or place where the worship is held to pray together, ask for blessings and give thanks. This process shows a positive syncretism, an encounter between local beliefs and the teachings of the Christian faith that produces a new form of religiosity that is contextual and grounded. From a contextual theological perspective, Sasi Worship shows that faith does not always have to be expressed separately from culture, but can be alive and rooted in local customs. Through this tradition, the people of Halmahera practice the values of the Christian faith such as responsibility to creation, social solidarity, and ecological justice in the context of daily life. Sasi is a tangible form of spirituality that emphasizes the harmonious relationship between humans, nature and God. Furthermore, Sasi worship has a deep philosophical dimension, then affirms the view of life that humans are not the rulers of nature, but part of creation that has a moral obligation to maintain it. Looking at the current context in Halmahera which is very close to mining activities,

this view can also be a form of resistance to the exploitation and greed of modern humans who tend to view nature only as an economic object. With Sasi activities able to maintain spirituality to build awareness of commerce and respect for the rhythm of nature, the people of Halmahera maintain an ecological perspective as a form of local wisdom which is now increasingly relevant in the midst of a global environmental crisis. In the interdisciplinary framework of culture, religion and philosophy, Sasi worship can be seen as a cultural space that unites faith and real life. He shows that religious values are not only in formal worship spaces, but also in social actions that maintain the harmony of creation. Sasi's philosophy emphasizes the concept of balance and human ethical responsibility to the world. Theologically, it is an expression of faith that is expressed in the real action of protecting the earth as a form of love for God, nature and others. Thus, Sasi worship in Halmahera is a concrete example of how faith and culture can interpret and enrich each other. This is not just a traditional heritage, but a mirror of the theology that lives in the Sasi culture, becoming a form of local spirituality that teaches people to find God in the midst of daily life, in the universe and in every responsibility to maintain the sustainability of His creation. Although there is an awareness that this is a tradition in early Christianity, everything related to culture should be avoided.

In addition, what is increasingly coming to the surface is this tradition in a positive view by the non-Christian people of Halmahera, namely Islam. They see this act not just as a religious ritual but as a respect and preservation of nature and because in the form of prayer they have not been able to practice it so that there are some families from Islam who when they enter the harvest period then part of their harvest will be sent down to the church and then asked to be prayed for by the pastor and after that the result will be left to be enjoyed by the church ministry in this case the pastor and the assembly. In the development of the times, digital culture, for example, digital culture has created a new space for interaction in expressing one's spirituality but at the same time has changed the pattern of interaction in the habits and

traditions and culture of a certain group or region. As a result, the experience of faith becomes superficial and instantaneous due to the loss of reflective depth and the diminished meaning of its relationship with the cultural context that has become the system of human life. Even digital culture opens up information that is young to the public so that many of them then start looking for information on ways to get more and more crops and 'profitable' so that some people start to go through the Sasi model, namely harvesting enough and the rest returning to the lamb, because of the change in public understanding from farmers to producers who need to get a lot of results. It is in this situation that an interdisciplinary approach becomes important, as it tries to link the study of culture, religion, philosophy and microeconomics so that these aspects are preserved according to the context. Cultural studies help us see how symbols, rites and language shape the way humans perceive the transcendent. Philosophy provides a reflective framework for interpreting the meaning of faith in the context of modern rationality. While the study of religion provides a spiritual and moral foundation that leads humans in the search for truth and value in life. Thus, the discussion of 'cultural space and the meaning of faith' is not only theoretical but also relevant to today's reality, where people are challenged to rediscover the meaning of faith in the midst of social change, cultural pluralism and rapid technological developments. An interdisciplinary approach is a way to build a complete, reflective and dialogical understanding between faith and culture, so that the two do not negate each other, but enrich each other in human efforts to find the true meaning of their lives.

Cultural perspective: Sasi worship as an expression of local wisdom

From a cultural perspective, Ibadah Sasi is a tangible form of the local wisdom of the people of Halmahera in maintaining a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. This tradition was born from the view of people's lives who see nature not just as an economic resource, but as part of a common life that must be maintained and respected. Through this Sasi system, the community regulates the time, when the sea or garden products can be taken and when they must be 'rested'. Quoting the views introduced by Walter Bruggemen on; The church needs to be present in the midst of the local culture with a transformative approach to theology so that the theological teaching built to the congregation becomes contextual, because every tradition in the culture is very intersecting with the local culture, so that when the church can enter it, culture becomes a tool to apply theological teaching. But it is also important for the Church to always be willing to see spaces for dialogue between cultures and Christian values to be carried out, this is where the church is present as a counterbalance to the context in which society lives. In fact, Niehbuhr introduces that humans need to be aware of everything they do, so as not to fall into the circle of sin, which is related to the desire or goal to dominate.

According to Niehbuhr, sin is not only a moral problem, but also an existential and social problem rooted in human limitations and pride. Five interrelated ideas that Niehbuhr introduced: First, sin as pride. Second, sin as fear and unbelief. Third, sin as a socio-structural force. Fourth, sin as a tension between the natural and spiritual aspects. Fifth, sin as a human limitation in achieving justice. Niehbuhr helps us to understand that sin is a reality inherent in all dimensions of human life and that only through the grace of God can man experience true renewal. This is where it is important for the church to remember its duty so that it is always a bridge in building human relations with God in the act of applying Christian values, including protecting nature and bringing people not to be anti-to the view of protecting nature or friendly with nature. Sasi

worship leads us to feel that in traditional society, this forms a collective lifestyle that prioritizes common interests over personal interests. When religious elements enter through Christian worship, then it begins to erode traditional values and even eliminate some important aspects. Thus, Ibadah Sasi shows how local culture can adapt to new values without losing its identity, even becoming an example of harmonization between customs and faith, between ancestral values and Christian values.

Perspectives on Christian Religious Education: Sasi Worship as a Contextual Faith Learning Media

From the perspective of Christian Religious Education, Sasi worship can be understood as a contextual faith learning space. Christian Religious Education focuses not only on teaching doctrine in the classroom, but also on how the values of faith are embodied in real life. Through the tradition of Sasi worship, the values of the Christian faith such as gratitude, responsibility for creation, discipline and social solidarity are taught practically in the community. (Nuhamara, 2019; Groome, 1980) In this section we can learn from the view introduced by Berger, namely the importance of conducting cultural paradigm analysis in cultural interaction. Berger structured it in four sections: social construction, objective-subjective reality, sociology of knowledge and religion in legitimacy. In principle, both culture and religion are part of human creation to help humans understand the reality that occurs in the midst of their lives.

This view makes us not have a narrow fanaticism of religion or culture, because all of them have their own weak points, and of these four approaches according to Berger we are aware of this. When people gather to pray before or after the implementation of Sasi worship, they not only carry out cultural rituals but also religious rituals and teach faith, that is, humans are called to be faithful stewards of the earth and all its contents (Genesis 2:15). The ecological values contained in the procession of Sasi worship are in line with the principles of ecological theology of creation, where

humans are given a mandate not to control nature but to maintain it. For Christian Religious Education, Sasi worship is a concrete example of faith education based on local culture (contextual theology of education). Teachers, pastors and parents can use this tradition as a means of teaching a faith that is alive and relevant to the context of Halmahera society. Through Sasi Worship, theological values do not stop at theory, but become a real experience of faith in social and ecological action. Thus, Christian Religious Education teaches that true faith is not only expressed and memorized in words but also lived in actions that love creation and respect the order of life.

Philosophical Perspective: Sasi Worship as a Reflection on Ethics and Existential Meaning

From the philosophical perspective, Sasi worship can be seen as a manifestation of human ethical and existential awareness of nature and life. This tradition contains a profound moral principle: that man has a moral responsibility to the world he inhabits. In the language of ethical philosophy, Sasi reflects the ethics of human responsibility to act not only for the sake of himself, but also for the sake of the preservation of common life. Existentially, Sasi worship also talks about the meaning of human existence in the midst of creation. Through this tradition, man realizes that he is not the center of everything. But it's part of an interconnected network of life. This is in line with the view of ecophenomenology philosophy which emphasizes the relationship between human consciousness and nature as a unit of experience. Peter Berger shows that symbols are a means by which a person feels God. The value of Kriatuwari which means the creation of truth is inherent in humans, because humans have a relationship with God who has the truth. Value to humans, because humans have a relationship with God who has the truth. This value then provides the balance to find value when humans act with Tuban. (Berger, P. L. (1967).

In addition, Sasi worship presents a reflection on the harmony between rationality and spirituality. In the modern context, humans often use their intellect to exploit nature without regard for moral values. However, Sasi instead presents a balance between practical knowledge (preserving nature) and spiritual awareness (respecting God's creation). Here it can be seen that local wisdom is not only traditional, but also philosophical, since it teaches principles of ecological ethics that are relevant to modern civilization.

Relations of Religion, Customs and Daily Life

In the context of the people of Halmahera, religion, customs and daily life are not Standing as three separate realms, but intertwined to form a unity of the meaning of life. Anthropologically, religion is not only understood as a formal belief system or doctrine, but as a *way of life* – a way of life that is manifested in social relations, customary practices, and daily ethics (Geertz, 1973). Therefore, the Christian faith that is present in Halmahera always encounters local cultural structures that have previously shaped the way people understand the world, relationships and values of life. Customs in the Halmahera community function as a moral and symbolic space where life values are inherited and maintained. Customs are about human relationships, relationships with nature, and how communities maintain social balance. In this perspective, it is not just a tradition of the past, but a living and dynamic local knowledge system. When Christianity is present, it does not enter into an empty space, but dialogues or sometimes conflicts with established systems of meaning. This tension often arises when Religious Education is brought within a normative and ahistorical theological framework, so that the custom is positioned as something secular, neutral or even contrary to the faith. (Bevans, 2002) However, the contextual theological approach affirms that the gospel is always preached and lived in a specific cultural context. Stephen B. Bevans emphasizes that context including culture, life experiences, and social structures is not just a background, but **an integral part of the theological process** (Bevans, 2002).

In the context of Halmahera, this means that the daily practices of the community can become a *locus theologicus*, that is, a space where the Christian faith is understood, interpreted and concretely realized. The daily life of the people of Halmahera in family relations, community, cooperation and slaing practices helps to become the main field where faith is tested and lived. The Christian faith is not primarily judged by the ability to memorize doctrine, but by the quality of relationships: whether a person lives in peace, fairness, and responsibility for his or her community. Within this framework, effective Christian religious education is not one that separates faith from culture, but one that *bridges the gospel with the concrete life experiences of the people* (Schreiter, 1985). Religious and customary relations are also inseparable from the historical experience of the people of Halmahera, including the experience of conflict and reconciliation. In post-conflict situations, religion and customs are often the two main sources of identity formation and social recovery. Christian education has a strategic role to interpret faith contextually so as not to deepen polarization, but instead to strengthen the values of peace, reconciliation and living together. This is where intercultural Christian Education serves as a theological praxis that not only educates individuals, but also builds a more just and different community. (Groome, 2011). Thus, the relationship between religion, customs, and daily life in the context of Halmahera requires Christian Religious Education to move beyond the approach of doctrinal transmission to a *dialogical, reflective, and pragmatic* approach. The Christian faith does not lose its purity when it dialogues with culture, but instead finds its depth and relevance when it is lived in the concrete reality of the people. Christian education that ignores this relationship risks becoming alien and ungrounded; on the contrary, PAK that embraces customs and daily life has the potential to be a means of authentic faith and social transformation.

CONCLUSION

Furthermore, the reflection on Sasi worship in the context of the Halmahera community emphasizes that the faith of Kiristen is not present in a vacuum, but is always incarnated in the concrete culture of humans. This practice shows that man's relationship with God is not only expressed through formal liturgy or verbal teaching, but rather through ethical actions, nature management, and a commitment to living together in community. Thus, faith becomes real not only in the discourse that is spoken, but in a responsible, just and sustainable way of life. Within the framework of intercultural Christian Religious Education, Sasi Worship challenges the narrow and monocultural pedagogical paradigm. He invites educators and the church to re-read local culture not as a threat to the purity of the faith, but as a partner in meaningful theological dialogue. Contextual faith education allows the gospel to be lived more deeply, because it is in direct contact with life experiences, communal values and ecological awareness of the community. Finally, practices such as Ibadah Sasi opened up new horizons for theology and Christian education in Indonesia, especially in responding to ecological crises, social relations crises, and the challenges of pluralism. By embracing local traditions as theological and philosophical reflections, Christian Religious Education can act as a transformative force not only in shaping personally righteous individuals, but also communities of faith that care for others and creation. This is the face of faith that is grounded, dialogical and relevant to human life today.

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