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The First MSC Missionary Work in Merauke

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Abstract

The arrival of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) in Merauke in the early 20th century brought significant changes to the Marind community, both in the religious, educational and social fields. This article discusses how the first MSC missionaries introduced the image of God to the Marind tribe in Merauke. Using a critical historical approach, this research highlights how the missionaries introduced the image of God in the light of the Catholic faith in accordance with the theological truths of the Council of Nicea (325 AD). The Council affirmed that God is one in essence (ousia), but three in person (hypostasis), namely God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit. In the context of the Marind tribe, it is God who is close to humans, and God who brings social transformation. In the Marind belief tradition, the image of God does not always refer to the monotheistic concept as in Abrahamic religions, but rather to animistic and cosmological belief systems that connect humans with ancestors and nature. Marind religious concepts such as Dema, respect for ancestors, and a close relationship with nature serve as a bridge in the proclamation of the Catholic faith. This study shows that the first MSC missionary mission was not just the spread of religion, but also a social transformation that still respects local cultural values and the continuity of the MSC mission in Merauke and the challenges of evangelization in the modern era.

Keywords

MSC Missionaries, Merauke, Marind, Council of Nicea, Image of God, Evangelization.

INTRODUCTION

The Marind tribe is one of the tribes or indigenous people of the city of Merauke spread along the coast from Kondo to Digul. Before the entry of the Dutch government (1902) and the Catholic church (1905) in Merauke, the Marind tribe was famous as one of the brave headhunter (human beheaders) tribes[1]. They usually go as far as across the Digul River and Papua New Guinea (PNG)[2]. Headhunting for a Marind man is self-affirmation as well as proving himself as an *Anim-Ha* or a true man. They live isolated

[1] C.J, Bohm, Sejarah kehadiran dan karya Tarekat MSC di Maluku tahun 1903-2020 (Yogyakarta:Kanisius,2021),19.

[2] Jan Boelaars, *Perkembangan wilayah Selatan Papua*, (stensilan) No Date, 3.

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from other tribal groups and live in groups. The feeling of ethnocentrism (an attitude or view based on one's own society and culture) is still very strong in each group[3]. But at that time there was an outbreak of granuloma or venereal disease and Spanish flu which made the tribe Marind was threatened with extinction. It was during this situation that the missionaries came to meet the Marind tribe.

This research is important to open up insights about the Marind tribe and also look back at the struggles of the first MSC Missionaries who worked in Merauke. This research is important for the author to look back at how the role of the mission and the missionaries introduced the image of God who is close and how the Marind tribe turned from the habit of headhunting and accepted the missionaries.

From the existing background, the author found a formulation of the problem in the form of questions: How did the first MSC missionaries begin their work and how did they introduce God's message to the Marind tribe in Merauke? The objectives to be achieved in this study are an understanding of the mission or evangelization strategy and its impact on the Marind community. To achieve this purpose, this research uses the historical analysis method. This method is used to examine and analyze past events and social conditions but also to reconstruct the missionary work of the first MSC missionaries who worked in Merauke.

METHOD

This research uses the historical data analysis method using descriptive techniques to examine past events and reconstruct the missionary work of the first MSC missionaries in Merauke. The author uses historical data analysis techniques to identify what happened in the past. The stages carried out by the author in this research are collecting texts, books and historical records about the missionary work of MSC missionaries. The next stage is to study the text and analyze the text from this analysis, the author reads, interprets and draws conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Arrival and Beginning of the Mission of the MSC Missionaries

The first MSC Missionaries arrived in Merauke in the early 20th century. In 1902 the first Assistant Resident J.H. Kroesen invited the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart

[3] Jan Van Baal, DEMA: *Description and Analysis of Marind- Anim Culture South New Guinea,* (Amsterdam: The Hague-Martinus Nijhoff, 1966).11.

of Jesus (MSC) who had begun to work in eastern Indonesia with their center in Langgur to come to the south coast of Irian for evangelization work[4]. Although there had already been a visit from Fr. Mathias Neyens MSC in 1904, the MSC officially came and settled on August 14, 1905 with 4 initial missionaries: Fr. Hendri Nollen MSC. Fr. Philipus Braun MSC, Brother Adrian Van Roesel MSC, and Brother Melkior Oomen MSC[5]. This was followed by many other priests of both MSC and other religious orders as well as dozens of lay people and catechists[6].

The initial challenges faced by the first MSC missionaries in Merauke were the harsh environment and the character of the Marind tribe who still have the habit of headhunting, but also tropical diseases and language barriers to communicate with the local community. The most obvious challenges were the venereal disease or granuloma and the Spanish flu epidemic that hit the Marind tribe in Merauke[7].

Historical and Cultural context of Merauke

Prior to the arrival of MSC missionaries in Merauke, the Marind people had a strong traditional belief system, including respect for ancestors (*Dema*). As described by Van Baal, the Marind people or Marind tribe are people who are proud of their culture and region[8]. This pride arises because it is their culture and region that allows them to live securely. Both old and young people are generally aware that they are *Anim- ha* (true human beings), because, according to the Marind people, a human being is the embodiment of *Dema.* Dema's nature as the source of life for the Marind tribe is believed to be shared by every Marind person. This also means that in togetherness, all people are equal and dignified as fellow human beings. Relationships within and between clans show an equal relationship among the Marind tribe.

For the Marind tribe, another person can become a neighbor and a relative if that other person has also been filled with the power of Dema.[9] The power of Dema enters humans through initiation and through traditional activities or other

[4] Bohm, Sejarah kehadiran dan karya Tarekat MSC di Maluku tahun 1903-2020, 18- 19.

[5] Willem Hanny Rawung, *Menelusuri jejak Misionaris di Papua Selatan* (Merauke: Seksi Sejarah Panitia 100 tahun Gereja Katolik di Papua Selatan, 2015), 13.

[6] Herman, Pongantung*, Kami Misionaris*, (Manado: Percikan Hati,2015), 48.

[7] Jan Boelaars, Head Hunter About Them Selves: An etnographic Report From Irian Jaya Indonesia, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1981), 10.

[8] Van Baal, DEMA: Description and Analysis of Marind- Anim Culture South New Guinea, 13.

[9] Baal, Jan Van, *Man's quest for patnership*, (Nedherland: Van Gorcum, 1981), 16.

traditional ceremonies[10]. This means that if another person wants to be part of a kinship or enter into the association of other people's lives as equals, that person must be seen in the customs of the Marind tribe that have been determined by Dema. If this is not the case then the other person is always considered a threat to him.

Mission Strategy of the MSC Missionary

MSC missionaries not only preach, but also build schools and hospitals. They learn the local language, understand Marind culture, and find ways to convey Catholic teachings (introducing the image of God) in the local cultural context. The Marind tribe in their daily lives are close to *Dema*, the ancestral spirits and also Nature they have an image of God that is close to them. hence Inculturation became the main strategy in the mission approach of the first MSC missionaries. The missionaries introduced the image of a God who is near and also a God who brings social transformation in the lives of the Marind through education, health and the teaching of faith.

Some of the remarkable things the missionaries have done are: establishing model villages, establishing civilization schools and also teaching work through KKK (Kongsi Kali Kumbe) which eventually became *Samkay*. [11] These became the hallmarks of early mission work and developed later on.

The model village was established to save the Marind tribe, which was almost extinct due to the outbreak of venereal disease and Spanish flu. These became family homes and became large villages. Civilization schools that taught ethics and character building were upgraded to future-directed schools. The KKK (Kongsi Kali Kumbe) project evolved into *Samkay,* a way of dialogue and deliberation on how the Marind overcome their problems and the missionaries learned from them how to overcome their problems[12]. This is the basis of how mission or the proclamation of faith must be based on local customs or culture.

The Impact of the MSC Missionary Work

In the process of mission work in Merauke, Mission (Church) is understood as a sign and means of salvation. The mission is present in the midst of the Marind tribe

[10] Van Baal, DEMA: Description and Analysis of Marind- Anim Culture South New Guinea, 14.

[11] Arie Vriens, and Jan Boelaars, Mengantar suku- suku Irian kepada Kristus Sejarah perekembangan agama dalam Keuskupan Agung Merauke, jilid II. (Stensilan) No date, 13.

[12] Jan, Boelaars, Manusia Irian, Dahulu, Sekarang dan Masa Depan, (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 1986), 31.

as a savior, healer and savior of the rich (saving the Marind tribe from extinction due to the granuloma disease or venereal disease and Spanish flu). The church is present as a means of salvation that presents an image of God that is close to the Marind tribe and provides social transformation. The church as an association of believers, the Marind Tribe meets the love of God that is offered visibly. This became apparent when MSC missionaries came to visit the Marind tribe in villages around the coast. They offered the love of Christ by visiting, meeting, bandaging wounds and caring for the Marind tribe who at that time were hit by an outbreak of the granuloma disease and Spanish flu. The mission (Church) through the MSC missionaries offered and introduced the image of Christ as God who is all-womb and close to the Marind Tribe through their life attitudes and actions and life examples.

The Council of Nicea: The Divine and Human Nature of Jesus Christ

The Council of Nicea was the first ecumenical council in the history of the Christian Church, held in 325 AD in Nicea. It was presided over by Emperor Constantine and attended by around 300 bishops from various regions. The council aimed to overcome the teachings of Arius, who claimed that Jesus Christ was not true God, but only the highest creation. The Council affirmed that Christ is "one with the Father" (homoousios to Patri). It also formulated the Nicene Creed, which affirmed the divinity of Christ and became the foundation of the Christian faith[13].

The Image of God in the Light of the Catholic Faith in Accordance with the Theological Truth of the Council of Nicea (352 AD)

MSC missionaries in the spirit of the great commission "*go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Mt 28:19). And also the motto of the MSC Order "*May the Holy heart of Jesus be loved throughout the world forever and ever"* they finally arrived in Merauke. In the context of the work in Merauke, the missionaries introduced the image of Jesus Christ who is truly God and truly human as God who is close to, meets and lives with the Marind tribe.

This is manifested in their early work. The MSC missionaries depart from the Marind tribe's understanding and appreciation of Dema, a divine figure who is transcendent but also immanent in the lives of the Marind tribe. As the Marind tribe

[13] Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Volume 3: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 627–629.

relates to Dema, ancestral spirits and Nature, this closeness is established in traditional ceremonies and rites including initiation ceremonies. Jesus is introduced as the true Dema, not just a sacred ancestor, but God made flesh (incarnation). Missionaries pointed out that Jesus not only brought new teachings, but also gave up his life for the salvation of humanity. For the Marind people who have a tradition of sacrifice in Dema rites and mythology, the concept of Jesus as the perfect sacrifice can be an entry point for understanding the Christian faith.

Thus, inculcation becomes a way or bridge that connects the Marind tribe's appreciation of Dema and the image of God introduced by missionaries in the process of evangelization in Merauke. Jesus, who is truly God and truly human, who is close to and lives with humans, was introduced by the missionaries as Dema. With such a way or method of evangelization, the concept or image of God who is close and provides social transformation can be accepted by the Marind tribe.

The Image of God That MSC Missionaries Introduced ti the Marind Tribe

The presence of MSC missionaries in the lives of the Marind tribe has a significant impact, especially in understanding the image of God. Their involvement in the daily lives of the Marind tribe became the forerunner of how the non-violent image of Christ was introduced. Through the real actions of the missionaries who bandage wounds, care and heal, the Marind tribe recognizes the God who cares, bandages wounds and heals. Slowly but surely, through acts of love for others, the missionaries introduced the image of a loving and non-violent God.

Meeting and living with the Marind tribe for a long time is an opportunity to learn their language, customs, culture and belief system. After learning and understanding, the MSC missionaries introduced the image of God according to the context of the Marind tribe. God is introduced to the Marind tribe as: God who is near & lives with human beings (incarnation). Caring, bandaging wounds and healing.

Findings

From the results of the research and analysis made, several things were found as findings, namely the role of MSC missionaries:

In the field of education: established a civilization school and began educating the Marind tribe. Education is difficult for the Marind because they are accustomed to natural schooling and oral education heritage. Knowledge is gained in practice in the field not by sitting and writing, reading and calculating. However, the missionaries

made a conscious decision to build a school to educate the Marind tribe by setting an example through practice in daily life. That is why the school was named the School of Civilization so that the Marind tribe is civilized.

In the field of health: established a hospital; treated, bandaged wounds and healed those who were sick due to the granuloma epidemic and Spanish flu. The context and situation of the Marind tribe at the time the MSC Missionaries arrived, Merauke was temporarily hit by granuloma disease and Spanish flu. These diseases threatened the Marind tribe with extinction, but the presence of the missionaries gave the Marind tribe hope of live.

In the field of faith: recognizing Christ who is close, Jesus without violence, Jesus who does not exploit. The Marind tribe has a strong belief in Dema as a divine spirit who is close to the Marind tribe through rites and initiation ceremonies and dances. The presence of MSC missionaries introduced the image of God who is not only near but became human in Jesus Christ. This became evident in the many works done by the missionaries that gradually influenced the Marind tribe's perspective.

In the area of social transformation: abandoning the habit of headhunting and learning to love others through the example of the missionaries. The Marind are accustomed to the view of themselves as Anim- ha (true human beings) who are far above other tribes who only deserve to be beheaded through the habit of headhunting. This habit slowly but surely began to change through the example of missionaries with their real work, bandaging wounds, caring for the sick and healing diseases. Simple things, but for the Marind tribe, they are extraordinary things. The compassion practiced by the missionaries influenced the Marind Tribe's perspective on others and began to slowly leave the habit of headhunting.

CONCLUSION

This final section summarizes the main findings of the article, emphasizing the importance of MSC mission work in the history of the Church in Merauke, not only preaching but the missionaries in their work they managed to introduce the image of God close to humans. By using an inculturation approach the missionaries departed from the Marind tribe's understanding and relationship with Dema, ancestral spirits, nature and cultural rites, the missionaries succeeded in introducing the image of God close to human through the practice of caring, healing and educating. This understanding of God's closeness to humanity became the entry point for the missionaries to change the Marind's way of life and convert the Marind from the habit

of headhunting. The Marind tribe stopped doing evil things that were not in line with Christian values and accepted the value of love. This became concrete in the actions and practices shown by the early MSC missionaries who treated and bandaged the wounds of the Marind tribe due to venereal disease and Spanish flu. In the social life of the missionaries' loving life also influenced the actions of the Marind tribe who originally had the habit of headhunting now they learned to love and show love to others. The actions of these missionaries are the forerunners of the Marind tribe accepting evangelization and the good news and repenting of their evil deeds, namely headhunting. In various ways the missionaries worked and succeeded in introducing the image of God who is close to humans once also God who brings social transformation in the lives of the Marind tribe in Merauke.

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