
Educating Compassionate Attitudes: Perkampungan Sosial Pingit as a Mode for Public Theology

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Abstract

This paper discusses the concept of public theology, which involves dialogue and engagement with society, aiming for social justice, community welfare, and the common good for the world. It emphasizes the necessity for public theology to address issues affecting the wider community and to use language and logic understandable and debatable by the public. Although aligned with political and liberation theology, public theology tends to be more reformative than revolutionary. The Perkampungan Sosial Pingit (PSP) in Yogyakarta demonstrates concrete involvement in social work, reflecting public theology. This research highlights the engagement of PSP volunteers, the relationship between emotional impulse and compassion, and the impact of social involvement on religion and theology. Furthermore, it shows how social activism and theology influence and enrich each other, providing inspiration for the involvement of young people in social work and public theology.

Keywords

public theology; Perkampungan Sosial Pingit; compassion; youth; social activism

INTRODUCTION PUBLIC THEOLOGY AND PERKAMPUNGAN SOSIAL PINGIT

Public theology is a branch of theological science that dialogues and interacts with the wider community and its various aspects and complexities. What is sought in public theology is social justice, the welfare of society, and the common good for the whole world. The way that needs to be taken to achieve this is none other than by finding it together through dialogue and involvement. Therefore, public theology should not only be busy with discussions about internal Church affairs but should discuss problems that occur in the general public. Another consequence, public theology must also use arguments and terms that can be understood by a wide audience so that they are also open to debate and critical study by the public.

Public theology will passionately engage in various public and global issues. In the last decade, mental health issues have become a global trend. This world trend apparently also applies in Indonesia. In 2022, an Indonesian national mental health survey (I-NAMHS) was conducted by researchers from Gadjah Mada University. The results were surprising. One in three Indonesian teenagers (15.5 million) has mental health problems. Meanwhile, one in twenty Indonesian teenagers (2.45 million) experienced mental disorders over the past year. In comparison, this issue was not discussed much before 2010. It could be that this problem already exists, it's just not as massive or mushrooming as recently.

If you look more closely, concern for mental health has become a phenomenon among the younger generation to pay more attention to themselves. For example, to overcome mental problems, a healing trend has emerged among teenagers. Healing is a term that is often used to refer to efforts to heal or restore mental health by going on holiday to certain tourist destinations. Although some groups, especially psychologists, do not agree with this concept, in fact many young people believe in this.

The good news is, not all young people are only busy caring about themselves. From the outskirts of Yogyakarta, precisely in the Pingit area, Bumijo Village, Jetis District, there is a group of young people who regularly make themselves available to help local residents who economically belong to the lower middle class. They are volunteers from the Perkampungan Sosial Pingit (PSP) Yogyakarta. This phenomenon is interesting because it is very contrary to the current increasingly individualistic era.

The question is, what is the basis and driver of their involvement? What are their goals and hopes that make them willing to take the time and devote their energy to help others? Previously, it should be briefly informed that PSP is an institution that is closely related to the Jesuits, a group of Catholic clergies. Related to that, does religion or theology have a significant influence on social involvement? Or are there other factors that are more empowering for these young volunteers, such as compassion and affection? Then, if reflected more sharply in the framework of public theology, what is the contribution of social involvement based on youth volunteerism, specifically PSP, to deepen and enrich theological treasures? This article aims to answer these questions.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, we will convey several important points as a result of the research we conducted on PSP volunteers as subjects. Next,

we will show several views of figures from social sciences and social theology who see a close connection between affection and compassion. Then we will outline an analysis of the extent and in what forms social engagement can influence religion and theology. Next, we will show how social activism and (public) theology form a cyclical pattern of mutual influence and enrichment. Finally, at the end of the article, we will state several important points as a conclusion and propose several inspirations regarding the involvement of young people in social work, as well as theology, especially public theology.

IMPORTANT POINTS FROM RESEARCH RESULTS

PSP was founded in 1966 by Bernhard Kieser, S.J. with the initial aim of accommodating homeless people who at that time were mushrooming in various areas of the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Thanks to Mr. Soebardjo's help, this simple movement obtained a plot of land on the banks of the Winongo River which continues to be used as a center for PSP activities to this day. In its development, PSP also helped former New Order political prisoners who were suspected of being related to G30S (Gestapu/Gestok) or the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Currently, PSP still accommodates several homeless and underprivileged residents and provides non-formal education for children living around PSP.

Those who volunteer at PSP for the 2022 period and are also the subjects of our research are students who serve Pingit residents regularly on Mondays and Thursdays. There are several services they provide. First, provide additional lessons for kindergarten, elementary and middle school age children. They are children from underprivileged families. The majority of their parents work as hawkers, scavengers, security guards, thugs, and so on. Second, pay attention to several assisted residents who live in the PSP area. These services include providing treatment when a resident is sick, obtaining identity cards for assisted residents who do not have identification, providing assistance to meet minimum physical needs and organizing various skills training so that they can earn income to live on, and so on.

The research was carried out with the following steps. First, the volunteers were asked to answer a series of questions regarding their motivation for being involved in PSP services, what and who influenced their involvement there, their dreams and hopes for being involved there, and tried to measure the extent to which religion, both teachings and institutions, had an influence on participation. their social. Then, the volunteers were gathered and invited to take part in a focus group discussion (FGD).

In the FGD activity, their answers to the questions previously asked were deepened, dialogued with each other, so that they enriched each other.

After that, they were invited to watch the film *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016) together. By being invited to watch the film, it is hoped that there will be a change or development in the motivation of the volunteers in their involvement in PSP. After watching the film, they were asked to answer several questions and return to the dialogue in the FGD activity.

From this series of research activities, there were several interesting findings as follows. First, the majority of respondents admitted that they were involved in social services because they were inspired by important figures in their lives, including parents (including grandparents for those whose childhood was not raised by biological parents), pastors, priests, and brothers and sisters. During adolescence, the adult figures around a person will be very influential in shaping their identity and interests. For example, a father or mother who likes to share with poor people directly or indirectly will be a role model for their teenage children. Usually when the opportunity comes to share with the poor, the teenager will do exactly what his father or mother did.

Second, the motivation of volunteers involved in PSP activities is very diverse, but most of them are at an affective level. For example, there were respondents who admitted that they wanted to take part in teaching children at PSP as compensation for missing their younger siblings in their hometown. There were also respondents who found it difficult to have close relationships with their younger siblings, so they considered it necessary to "practice" with the children at PSP. It should also be mentioned that respondents explicitly admitted that serving in Pingit was to emulate their social-minded father or mother figures.

Third, the dreams or idealism of volunteers involved in PSP activities are mostly in the psychological and humanistic categories. Some of them can be mentioned here. There are volunteers who feel comfortable and happy doing activities at PSP because they can meet children who educationally, economically and socially are not as fortunate as themselves. According to him, children who lack affection receive compensation in the form of attention and affection, even though the intensity is not high, from the volunteers who come to Pingit every Monday and Thursday evening. A world full of love became the volunteer's dream and idealism, so he involved himself in PSP activities.

Fourth, when the FGD guide tried to direct the volunteers (especially students with a background in secular sciences) to reflect on their involvement in PSP theologically or religiously, they were less welcoming or even seemed to be avoiding it. For example, when asked to reflect on their social activism and related to the film *Hacksaw Ridge* which has religious nuances, their reflections remained focused on humanitarian aspects.

Those are the four points that in our opinion are the most dominant from the results of research on PSP volunteers as participants. Of course, there are still other things that are really interesting to study and explore further. However, in order for this paper to be more focused and sharper, we must set aside other points for the time being.

COMPASSION AS A DRIVER OF ENGAGEMENT

From the research results in the previous section, it was discovered that one of the strongest factors that encouraged and influenced the involvement of volunteers was their compassionate attitude towards children in the Pingit area. For this reason, in this section we will outline several concepts about compassion (especially according to a contemporary philosopher named Martha C. Nussbaum), its relationship with affection, how to cultivate an attitude of compassion, and the role of compassion in a society that is always political.

Compassion is a form of attitude or choice of action that is driven by feelings to share in the struggles and suffering of others. As an altruistic human attitude, compassion arises from human emotions that see and respond to the circumstances around them. From Aristotle's perspective, the Greek word: *eleos* or compassion is defined as the emergence of a feeling of pain in a person due to misfortune or disaster that undeservedly befalls another person and one day this misfortune has the potential to befall him or herself. The term *eleos* is usually translated as pity in English. Aristotle said that pity is a painful emotion – *lupe tis*, the particular pain associated with suffering

Compassion, for Nussbaum, is an emotion understood as including an evaluative judgment (not just pain as Aristotle understands it through Nussbaum's own reading). Its existence can encourage us to imagine the pain of other people's lives and at the same time feel pain when imagining it. Here I as a subject want to imagine what it would be like if I were or experienced the bad things that other people experience. This makes Nussbaum understand compassion as a guide to the heart of

morality itself. The question “what should I do?” emerge following the emergence of compassion.

For Nussbaum, compassion has four basic structures. First, compassion is the result of thinking about serious things (seriousness). A person who is compassionate usually thinks that other people are suffering about very important and valuable (non-trivial) things in his life. Second, compassion is thinking about things that are inappropriate (non-desert): usually, people will not feel compassion if they think someone's suffering is because of something they caused themselves. Compassion will occur when people know that their suffering is not because of their fault, but because it is beyond their control. Third, think about the same possibilities (similar possibilities). Compassionate people think that people who suffer are similar to themselves and that their lives are likely to be the same as their own. Fourth, eudaimonistic thinking. Thinking that places the suffering person as an important part of the life of the person experiencing the emotion.

Through these thoughts, Nussbaum then concluded that the more important factor in compassion is imagination. Compassion is “an emotion that often relies on attaching our imagination to the goodness of others and placing them as the object of our intense concern.” Compassion is different from empathy and sympathy. According to Nussbaum, compassion is a “more intense” form of emotion. Empathy, for Nussbaum, is “an imaginative reconstruction of another person's experience, whether that experience is happy or sad, pleasant or painful or neutral” and therefore empathy “is distinct from and insufficient for compassion; not even necessary for him.” Sympathy, according to Nussbaum, is closest in meaning to compassion. Sympathy, similar to compassion, “involves a judgment that another person's suffering is bad.”

Nussbaum's thought contribution provides a new horizon that imagination has a special relationship with emotion and compassion. The ability to imagine being in someone else's position involves emotional aspects within a person. Imagination helps to understand abstract things, thereby enabling everyone to cultivate compassionate awareness. In developing his thoughts about imagination and its relationship to social life, Nussbaum was inspired by Auguste Comte (on humanity) and Giuseppe Mazzini (on nationalism). Comte argued that imagination should be developed from the beginning of a child's development and that this starts from the family. Meanwhile, Mazzini believes that to fight narcissism, sympathy is needed.

In a humanitarian context, Nussbaum asks: how are we able to view other people as fellow humans and not slimy slugs or social scum? In the context of Yogyakarta, for example, we can also ask: how do you view the person behind the Doraemon costume who seeks mercy at the Kaliurang intersection as a citizen and not a pest who must be exterminated? A person's humanity does not automatically appear when we deal with strangers. In the face of something abstract and sometimes absurd, Nussbaum invites us to contemplate the humans who often appear in front of us.

The presence of someone always confronts us with two choices: treating him as a fellow human being, or treating him as just something like various other objects around us. Nussbaum does not ask us to answer that question directly. He invites us to train our imagination. Just by imagining how the world appears through another person's eyes, we are able to see him as a person and not an object.

So how can people nurture and even develop that imagination? How can we ensure that when we see the reality of poverty, people don't stop at reasoning and logical arguments without action? In *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*, Nussbaum then revealed that literary works, music and drama, are inexhaustible sources for educating emotions and nurturing imagination. He calls it narrative imagination. What Nussbaum said regarding emotional and imaginative education is not entirely new. Nussbaum himself gave the example of the educational model developed by John Dewey in the United States and Tagore in India. However, the process risks becoming cold without emotional warmth if it is not balanced with art.

POLITICAL COMPASSION: LOVING THOSE WHO SUFFER IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

In *Compassion: Loving Our Neighbor in an Age of Globalization* (2009), Maureen H. O'Connell reveals that political compassion is a new term to name the relationship between humans, especially with those who suffer. political compassion is the ability to perceive self-critically both ourselves and our connections to the causes of others' suffering, the humble willingness to interpret situations of suffering with often overlooked aspects of human reason and in the context of larger social relationships and an active commitment to transform these situations through authentic relationships of participation and empowerment. Political compassion does so by fostering an authentic relationship with God, self, and others, and by proposing that justice is best understood as a collective and sensory vision that

animates and sustains ethical living rather than as an intellectual precept that supports abstract theories or paradigms.

In order to more easily understand the meaning of political compassion, Maureen explained through the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). According to Maureen, political compassion means being able to transform all the main entities in the parable. The three main entities in the parable are (1) the traveler, or those who suffer unjustly at the hands of others; (2) the Samaritan, or those who attempt to respond to those persons; (3) the road to Jericho itself.

According to Maureen, politically compassionate people listen humbly to stories of wanderers or those who suffer. When politically compassionate human beings (Samaritans) listen humbly and deeply to narratives of suffering, they absorb the wisdom of the storyteller and cause those listening to reconstruct meaning and this stirs the conscience. It is from this process of storytelling that there is an encounter between those who suffer and those who are compassionate. It is this encounter that makes the story a shared narrative that enables the compassionate and the suffering to find a common space and a new way of dealing with the reality of suffering. This political compassion leads to a new global ethic.

Compassion invites us to look into the faces of other people, to be present with them where they are, and to create fellowship in the midst of their pain. With our faces turned toward theirs, we realize that human development is not an intellectual exercise or a field for economic experimentation. When we stop long enough to gaze into the eyes of our suffering neighbors, we begin to see human development as a collective venture of groups of people rather than as an economic project or social program that targets a few. When we force ourselves to listen deeply to the narratives of others, we gain knowledge that is often overlooked or ignored by the usual benchmarks of human flourishing. And when we conjure their memories in our own imaginations, we begin to envision human development as a way of living in an intentional relationship with others rather than as a topic of political debate about how to distribute limited resources, protect basic rights, or transcend cultural moralities. To follow the example of the Good Samaritan in an age of globalization demands as much; it is only through such reflection and action that we can truly begin to "go, and do likewise."

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AS AN EDUCATIONAL VEHICLE FOR COMPASSION AND THE FIRST STEP TO FINDING FAITH

Political compassion always requires volunteers to listen and look critically at themselves when relating to those who suffer. Political compassion always prioritizes dialogue and the humble willingness of volunteers to interpret the situation of misfortune in Pingit with aspects that are often overlooked from human reason. In this case, the often-overlooked aspect is compassion or affection.

In the research findings, it was found that the volunteers stated that one of the shortcomings or "poverty" experienced by young children in Pingit is the poverty of affection, attention and love. It was this encounter between the children and the volunteers after the lesson that made the volunteers finally understand what the most basic needs were in Pingit. Many volunteers stated that they experienced a change in their perspective and way of approaching Pingit children after they met and got to know the children they worked with. Conversion appears to be experienced by some volunteers. Their approach changed, becoming a fun approach to learning by providing a personal affectionate approach to the children. The change in teaching approach experienced by the volunteers is one form that they have practiced political compassion.

It is no secret that many volunteers want to do social service at PSP with "thin" and less than steady motivation. This phenomenon is because they do not process and reflect on the rich experience of social engagement in a guided manner. The involvement of volunteers in PSP needs to be truly utilized to educate the competence of what Nussbaum termed as "narrative imagination" and develop their compassionate attitude. It is in order to educate the narrative imagination of the volunteers that the role of the Jesuit brothers is needed so that this thin motivation can slowly be properly interpreted. The presence of the Jesuit brothers is not only to be the main person in charge, but more importantly to be a friend for discretion and reflection in order to foster the narrative imagination of the volunteers.

In the research it was found that the motivation that emerged from the PSP volunteers was not from a holy-spiritual motivation, but rather they wanted to dive head first into the reality of those who were less fortunate. Pope Francis himself in *Christus Vivit* 170 states that social commitment is a special characteristic of young people today. Pope Francis believes that service is a privileged opportunity for growth and also for openness to the divine gifts of faith and charity. Many young people are

attracted by the opportunity to help others, especially young children and the poor. Often service is the first step to discovering or rediscovering Christian and ecclesial life. In other words, often the pattern of finding God goes from orthopraxis to orthodoxy.

COMPASSION THROUGH ENGAGEMENT: A REAL EXAMPLE OF PUBLIC THEOLOGY

After discussing how the research findings presented in section 2 are placed in the context of compassion, in this section I will review my research results through the lens of public theology. The big question is whether Pingit has really become a means for young people (volunteers) to do public theology?

From various previous explanations, an understanding can be drawn about the pattern of Public Theology which always departs from experiences, activities, or praxis that have been running in concrete reality and then raised reflectively to the realm of theological discourse. Praxis that takes place often in a very secular manner turns out to have its own contribution to enrich, deepen, and land theology itself. The next question that can be asked is: does the process stop there? Or is the theology that has been illuminated by concrete praxis in turn also able to inspire praxis that is already taking place so that in the future it becomes better? One more question that is equally important, how is the aspect of compassion concretely trained and developed through the involvement of volunteers in PSP? The experience of one of the following volunteers can answer these questions. The volunteer was recently suddenly confronted by someone riding a motorcycle while on his way home from a social service in Pingit. The good deeds he had done in Pingit were not well received. This kind of reality that does not match expectations can be difficult for the average person to accept. However, fortunately, the volunteer had a strong theological foundation given his background as a student of the Faculty of Theology. When asked to reflect on the unpleasant experience, it turned out that he was able to see the event from various sides, including:

- (1) He saw it as a test from God
- (2) He saw it as an opportunity to participate in Christ's mission (Mt 10:24-25).
- (3) He compared what he experienced to the suffering his Lord, Jesus Christ, endured on the cross.
- (4) He saw the experience as an opportunity for imitatio Christi.

It's worth highlighting that the volunteer was genuinely frightened when threatened. He also admitted that he was hurt that after making so many sacrifices, the reciprocity hurt him so much. However, he did not stop at humanitarian principles that may not be able to inspire when inhumane events occur. For him, it is theology and religious teachings that enable him to transcend all these paradoxes. The experience of being threatened means to him that the struggle to continue to be present there is not finished because there are still people whose attitudes are so concerning.

The story of one of the PSP volunteers in processing the experience of being threatened by his own assisted residents, in my opinion, is an example of how the role and contribution of theology is most evident in those who are involved in social work such as PSP. I think that the story can also be an example of the flow pattern of public theology. Previously, the subject may not have understood the meaning of the following theological concepts: participating in the mission of Christ, truly interpreting the passion of the Lord Jesus, and one's struggle to forgive those who hurt him. However, thanks to his experience of being involved in Pingit and experiencing the paradoxical, inhumane, unjust, and inappropriate reality (through the threat of Pingit residents), he understood all the meaning of theological concepts and orthodoxy that he had learned so far. Of course, the new understanding he got was not just an intellectual understanding, but an understanding that was really deep, embedded in the heart, and departed from his own experience.

Therefore, we agree with Ted Peters who believes that Public Theology will produce a cycle (circle) between praxis and doxa that is uninterrupted and mutually influencing. Indeed, in the belief of Public Theology, first the praxis experienced in reality when raised in theological reflection will be able to affirm, enrich, and clarify the meaning of theological doxa. But in turn, doxa theology that has been complemented in such a way by praxis will eventually also produce new praxis or be able to inspire, encourage, and transform existing praxis for the better.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOLUNTEER-BASED SOCIAL PRACTICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

From this research, several recommendations can be concluded for assisting youth social movements based on volunteerism.

First, there are various factors that influence young people's social involvement motivation. Mentoring youth social movements should provide space for various

kinds of initial motivations for this involvement. In this case, having companions for social movements is important so that the accompaniment process continues. Together with the companions, the volunteers are expected to become more mature in the virtue of compassion.

Second, there needs to be caution in using religious or theological jargon in volunteer-based social practice. Our research shows that young people who do not have a strong religious and theological background are quite resistant or at least hesitant to immediately interpret the experience of social engagement from a religious or theological perspective.

Third, although religion and theology are sometimes implicit or almost invisible in volunteer-based social practice, religion and theology play a role in providing platforms and networks that enable young people to be involved in social activities and inject material and moral support in their involvement, especially in crisis situations.

CONCLUSION

From this research it can be concluded that a transformation occurs in volunteers when they are involved in social movements. The most visible transformation is a change in motivation from the initial motivation which seemed egocentric (thinking about the usefulness of volunteer activities) to a more social awareness. In the context of our research location in the Pingit, the volunteers' direct encounters with the Pingit children brought about a transformation, not only for the volunteers but also the children they assisted. Meetings with residents assisted by PSP also raise awareness that their involvement in PSP is a form of their contribution to improving a world that is not going well.

In this case, the role of companions is very large. Through the evaluation reflection mechanism from the volunteer companions, it has been proven to help the personal transformation process. However, this research also shows that the social involvement of volunteers has a strong social-humanist nuance. Companions need to be more careful in immediately bringing the meaning of social involvement from the social-humanist realm to a more religious-theological realm. This is in line with the conclusions of previous studies, namely that compassion is stronger at the level of direct social encounters, rather than resulting from knowledge of certain religious or theological teachings. In other words, compassion arises from the experience of meeting and engaging with those who are weak, which gives rise to new imaginations

as a starting point for acting in responding to the reality of misfortune that is in front of them.

However, our research also found that religion still contributes to the growth of maturity in the virtue of compassion. It is true that compassion arises from direct social encounters, but the meaning of the social is also open to further development, albeit more carefully. It can be concluded and emphasized here that their involvement in social commitment is the first step to rediscover and renew their understanding of their faith. Often the door to faith is not a religious teaching in class, campus or church (orthodoxy). In fact, they will only gain a deeper understanding of faith when they are involved (orthopraxis) in serving those who are poor, weak and suffering.

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