



Effective and Relevant Contextual Christian Education In Plural Society

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Abstract

Education theory is also shaped by the particular context of society. Therefore, plurality as the context of Alor regency cannot be ignored, by ignoring it, the efforts of theology and education in Alor will not be as contextual as it should be. Therefore, the aim of this research is to explore the existing context in Alor regency, in order to find a relevant contextual Christian education approach. The population of the research is church teachers and pastor in West Kalabahi Alor. Twenty five church teachers and five pastors in five churches are chooses by using a random purposive sampling technique. The data collection techniques are observation and interview. In analyzing the data, researcher used descriptive qualitative research. The results showed that the approach to Christian education was only limited to a spiritual development approach, while other Christian education approaches are not used. Based on the analysis in this research, Christian education in Alor regency should be a multicultural education. This is because the vision of multicultural education itself fits into the model of the Christian education approach of pursuing a social transformation.

Keywords: *Multicultural Education, Social Transformation, Plurality.*

Introduction

In reality pluralism in Indonesia is a gift from God. Based on statistical data (*Profil Penduduk Indonesia Hasil Sensus 2016*), pluralism in Indonesia is characterized by 700 more tribes inhabiting 17,504 islands. There are more than 746 regional languages, various races, religions and cultures. Pluralism is a power of the Indonesian nation, but the reliance of plurality also has the potential for national disintegration. According to Isnaeni (Isnaeni, 2017), this plurality is often used to trigger conflicts that have nuances of ethnicity, religion, race and inter-group (SARA), even though the actual causes of the disputes are more about the problems of economic inequality as well as social and political injustice (Lay, 2009).

According to a report by the Wahid Institute (*Laporan Kebebasan Beragama dan Toleransi di Indonesia*, 2011), tolerant attitudes in the lives of Indonesian people were in the status of "red lights". This means that the problems of intolerance requires more serious attention before the situation gets worse. According to (Muqoyyidin & Andik Wahyun, 2013) this situation has been proven by a number of conflicts that occurred in the following years. Namely, in 2009 the second Bali Bombing took place at J. W. Marriott and Ritz-Carlton Hotels. As a result of this bombing hundreds of people died and were injured. Furthermore, on July 17, 2015, Indonesia was struck by the Tolikara Papua incident. The event began with the sending of a letter from the local Evangelical Church Council (GIDI) that banned the use of loudspeakers in the Eid prayer. The reason was at that time an international seminar was being held which was attended by thousands of GIDI people. Muslims, who were mostly migrants, did not make the warning letter. They still signed Shalad Ied. Christians then became angry and burned houses; a mosque was also burnt. Finally, one person died and dozens were injured due to gunfire from security forces.

The next event was on October 13, 2015 in Aceh Singkil. Burning of the church building by the Islamic youth care movement Aceh Singkil and Dukiman villagers in Gunung Meriah District, Singkil District of Aceh. As a result, three residents and TNI personnel suffered minor injuries and one citizen was killed. The agreement that was finally made was to dismantle 10 churches without permission. Even in recent years, there have been many bombings in churches and other places of worship,

This is what encourages researchers to look at the issue of plurality in the context of Indonesian society and to see whether religious education can offer contextual education that can provide awareness to diversity of life. One of the main tasks of the church is to educate. Since the past, the church has carried out education; various patterns and goals of education carried out by the church have continued to grow. Religious pluralism is part of the context of the existence of the church. Therefore the church must help its citizens to live their faith more fully and deeply; recognize their faith more accurately and prepare them to live together in a pluralistic Indonesian society with more integrity through Christian education carried out by church members.

Issues of religion in Indonesia are related to ignorance of other religions, intolerant attitudes, suspicion of other religions and the growth of narrow fanaticism and fundamentalism of religions with unequal degrees. This is an undeniable reality that occurs in between communities. According to Mariam Kurniawati (Kurniawati, 2015), we need a theology that does not make the Christian faith a fortress. We need a theology that can interact with other ways of belief and life, and, above all, we need a theology that makes us friendly. An unfriendly theology cannot produce friendly people.

Paulo Freire, in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, offers the idea of consciousness, namely the process of facilitating public awareness of the socio-political and economic realities

faced. (Freire, 1970). Through this idea, students are aware to always be creative and mobilize all their abilities to continuously overcome concrete situations and improve their quality of life. Christian education must be so, namely giving awareness to each individual about the reality of their lives. Therefore, by realizing the diversity of plurality in Indonesia, Christian education is on the right track.

Theories of education is also shaped by the particular context of society. Therefore, pluralism as a context from Indonesia cannot be ignored, by ignoring it, efforts to conduct theology and education in Indonesia will not be as contextual as it should be. In fact, many of us are transplanting theological thinking and theories of education from the outside, especially those in the west. Adopting something from outside, directed at Indonesia's vision of goals and national identity in some cases, has sacrificed some of Indonesia's identity because it ignores the social, economic and political relations that afflict Indonesian life.

In All of Asia, the Christian education approach has become more down to earth. Therefore, one must start by continuously analyzing the root causes of the problems and influences in people's lives (Thomas, 2002). Therefore the theory of education must be contextual (Kham, 2015).

Thomas H Groome, in his book *Christian Religious Education: Sharing our Story and Vision*, talks about how Educational theory develops in responding to changes needed by and from a context. In harmonizing Christian education, educators and facilitators need to develop an open, tolerant and critical attitude in other religious traditions as traveling companions in seeking the mysteries of life (Groome, 25). The mission of the church is a dialogical mission. The church not only testifies to others, but also hears testimony from other parties, is able to appreciate the diversity of cultures and religions and at the same time does not lose its identity. In this spirit, we no longer see other people as our eternal enemies, people who are not saved



from the plagues of hellfire, or as people who worship idols or infidels. We need to learn to consider them our brothers and sisters who God also loves. We can learn about life from them and in them we can also find a picture of God.

Researchers tried to explore the context in Alor-Nusa Tenggara Timur district, in order to find relevant contextual Christian educational theory. Alor is one of the districts with a very diverse community background in the East Nusa Tenggara Province. The district is located in the northeastern part of the Indonesian archipelago and is one of the regions that consists of many religions and unique cultures. According to Bech (Bech, 2012), the uniqueness is marked by 17 types of language groups. Plurality is also the context of the Alor community. Unfortunately this plurality has also resulted in a variety of dark conflict incisions. For example, conflicts between religious youths (Pemuda Wetabua and Pemuda Batu Tenata) in 2006 and 2009. This shows that when a religious community is not properly managed, division is the worst thing that will be encountered. Other conflicts that occur are conflicts between young people of different ethnicities which have occurred over the past five years.

The acts of violence carried out were very disturbing to the people. The resolution is to arrest the perpetrators and prosecute them legally. But the events of violence still continue. This shows that intolerant attitudes towards people who are different, has a quite harmful effect. In such conditions, what kind of Christian education theory needs to be implemented, that can ultimately be effective and relevant? According to the author, the theory of multicultural Christian education is a theory that needs to be implemented in the context of the Alor community. This is because the vision of the multicultural Christian education itself is compatible with the Christian education approach model which seeks a social transformation.

Literature Review

In literature review, we have to understand the models of Contextual Christian Education and Models of multicultural education approaches.

Contextual Christian Education (CCE)

Contextual Christian Education is the educational process by which people learn to become Christian and learn Christian beliefs, attitudes, values and dispositions in order to engage in Christian actions (Astley & Crowder 1996: x). Contextual Christian Education shows sensitivity to a context as educators listen to people at the grassroots level. Once ordinary people are involved in the education process, churches have the potential to become centers of contextual educational teaching, for holistic transformation. The education process helps people towards a “Christian interpretation of life that is conscious of its circumstances” (Bergmann 2003:16).

Contextual Christian Education is informed by contextual theology that promotes the view that “there is no such thing as ‘theology’; there is only contextual theology” (Bevans 2002:3). The place of context as a source of the theological enquiry, along with Scripture and tradition, has been an important development within contextual theology (Bergmann 2003:16).

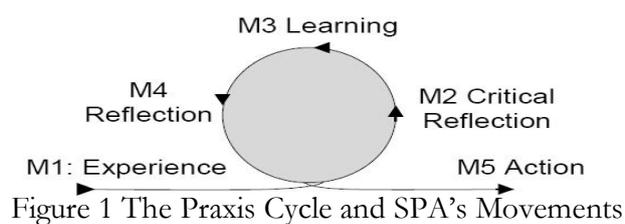
These forms of Contextual Christian Education are encouraged, as they take into account the experiences of oppressed and marginalized communities, for both theological reflection and as a source of theological wisdom, and emphasize justice, action and social transformation.

Thomas Groome model of Shared Praxis Approach (SPA)

Work connecting educational philosophies to the grassroots level has been lacking and there has been a shortage of empirical research done within South Africa, relating to Contextual

Christian Education. Within the South African context, however, Groome's *Shared Praxis Approach* (SPA) (1980, 1991, 2011) is seen as a useful pedagogical process. As a model, it is relevant for several reasons; it follows a participatory approach to education, which is perceived as necessary for Christian Education to become more effective and contextual; it is influenced by liberation theology and critical pedagogy and has relevance to the context, and it places greater emphasis on the importance of the biblical tradition involved in the teaching and transformational process.

Groome (1991:135) defines SPA as: a participative and dialogical pedagogy in which people reflect critically on their own historical agency in time and place and on their sociocultural reality, have access together to Christian Story/Visions, and personally appropriate it in community with the creative intent of renewed praxis in Christian faith toward God's reign for all creation. SPA's education process is modelled on five movements, enabling facilitator and participants to journey together in exploring how the Christian faith can bring revised thinking and action in one's life. SPA's education approach encourages participants to engage the praxis cycle of Life-Faith-Life as shown in Figure.1.



1. Movement 1: Naming Life. Participants are invited to name their own activity concerning the topic for attention.
2. Movement 2: Critical Reflection. Invites participants "to reflect on why they do what they do, and what the likely or intended consequences of their actions are".

3. Movement 3: Christian Story. “The educator makes present to the group the Christian community Story concerning the topic at hand and the faith response it invites”.
4. Movement 4: Appropriating Faith to Life. Invites participants to appropriate the Christian Story to their lives.
5. Movement 5: Decision. After appropriating Faith to Life, participants are encouraged to make a personal faith response for the future (Groome 1980:207–208).

These five movements follow a praxis cycle of Life-Faith-Life. Praxis is viewed by Groome as theory and practice interwoven and working in unison to encourage transformation (1980:152). Central to SPA is the idea of education being *shared* as “one of mutual participation, and dialogue with oneself, with others, with God, and with Story/Vision of Christian faith” (1991:142). In conversation with participants, the teacher is willing to learn as well as teach, to be questioned as well as to question. *Shared* is also a dialogue between participants’ lived experience and the Christian Story/Tradition (1991:143).

Multicultural Education

According to Kurniawati (Kurniawati, 2015:10), multicultural education develops in America, especially among black people. One of the pioneers was James Banks who stated that all students, regardless of which group they came from, such as those relating to gender, ethnic race, culture, religious class or exceptions, had to experience equal education in schools. Multicultural education is an idea of the educational reform movement.

One of the main objectives of multicultural education is to prepare students to be open and inclusive in the sense of understanding and accepting differences, being able to respect

others who are of different ethnicities, races, religions, cultures and social classes by constructing all forms of stereotypes, prejudice and ethnic discrimination, race, religion and culture to build cross-cultural togetherness (Eilane G. Schwartz, 1995)

According to Yagin, multicultural education is a consciously designed educational design, in an effort to cultivate a way of life, that is respectful, sincere, and tolerant of the diversity of cultures that live in the midst of a pluralistic society. Moreover, multiculturalism education is very strategic to manage pluralism creatively, so that conflicts that arise as a result of social transformation and reform can be managed intelligently and become part of the future enlightenment of national life (Yagin, 2010: 27-28)

The definition of multicultural education, according to Ibrahim, is a process in the development of all human potentials that respect plurality and heterogeneity as the consequence of the diversities of culture, ethnicity, tribes and belief (religion) (Ibrahim, 2013: 130).

Multicultural Education Focuses on The Need for Social Change and Transformation

Multicultural education focuses on the need for social change and transformation because it:

- 1) Helps students to gain a deeper understanding by seeing themselves from the perspective of ethnicity, race, religion and other cultures.
- 2) Helps students to get to know and understand ethnicity, race, religion and culture outside of their own ethnicity, race, religion and culture.
- 3) Prepares students with the skills and knowledge needed so that they are able to participate fully in the life of a multicultural society
- 4) Reduces the treating trauma-sickness arising from racial discriminatory treatment of different ethnic, religious, racial and cultural groups

- 5) Helps students to develop the specificity or uniqueness of the potential of each ethnic group, race, religion and different cultures

Four Levels of Approach In Multicultural Education

According to James Banks (Banks, 229-231), There are four levels of approach in multicultural education:

- 1) The Contributions Approach

Integrating various cultures and groups to illustrate basic concepts, principles, generalizations and theories to various disciplines.

- 2) The Additive Approach

Educators add content, concepts, themes and perspectives from other cultures into the curriculum but do not change their basic structure, goals and characteristics. This increase has been more significant than level one but both have not reversed the main curriculum which contains a lot of bias

- 3) Transformation Approach

At this level, the basic assumptions of the curriculum are changed to help students see concepts, issues, themes and problems from the perspectives of several different ethnicities.

- 4) The Social Action Approach

This level aims to enable and help participants reflect socially critically, and be involved in making social changes. Looking at the explanation of multicultural education, this approach is very relevant for use in the context of a pluralistic society. with this approach, pluralistic life can be managed well. therefore, it is very appropriate if this approach is used in Christian education in plural society.



This research method is a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. A descriptive research method aims to collect actual information in detail that describes the symptoms that exist, identify problems or examine the conditions and practices that apply, make comparisons or evaluations, and to determine what others do in dealing with the same problem and learn from their experience to determine plans and decisions in the future (Schreiber, 2011:11) (Bordens, K. S., & Abbott, B. B. 2011: 179-180).

Discussion

In this discussion, the author would like to explain the results of an analysis of the model of Christian education which has been used in Christian education in Alor.

The Christian Education Approach Used So Far

The approaches to Christian education, that took place in Alor regency, were only limited to spiritual development approaches. The results of the study show that these two models are very commonly used. According to Seymour (1997) and based on the results of research, five church denominations (three of Timor Evangelical Christian Church, one of Assemblies of God and one of Bethel Church of God) in the West Kalabahi Village, use the approach of spiritual development.

As we know, approach to spiritual development makes use of developmental prological theories. Everyone in the church is grouped by age and coaching is based on the developmental prology of each age. For example, children's commissions, youth commissions, adult commissions and elderly commissions. Based on the results of the study, even though some of



the churches are pentecostal and some are Calvinist, their approach towards Christian education is the same, namely the approach of spiritual development.

This model of approach focuses on growing faith from the church community. This is indeed good, but the disadvantage of this approach is that the church will tend to forget its task in the field of *marturia*, which is meaning the purpose to seek social change. Based on this, it can be stated that this approach ultimately has an impact on the creation of an exclusive community. The churches have become closed. An open church means that the church is carrying out God's mission to declare God's kingdom on earth. The only thing is to declare peace to our fellow human beings who are different from us. Therefore, it is not surprising that the pluralism in Alor district can be the cause of disputes, if this is allowed to continue. If so, what kind of approach can be offered, or what kind of Christian education is important to offer for the plural Alor community. A relevant and effective approach, to Christian education in Alor regency, is multicultural education. With this approach, this pluralistic life can be managed well. Therefore, it is very appropriate if this approach is used in Christian education.

It is undeniable that differences in beliefs, ways of life, habits and customs can be triggers of conflict in society. It is interesting that, in Alor there are many local concepts that exist in society that also contribute to the creation of harmony in life. The awareness of these differences must be shared by each person, so conflicts that are Nuanced can be minimized.

Moreover, the community of Alor is a very pluralistic society, the potential for conflict is really in front of the eyes. Therefore, an effort to strengthen the environment in minimizing conflict in this manner must be sought. One of them is through Christian education. Christian education in Alor needs to be re-examined. The effort to create harmony is not a one-time effort or should be undertaken because there has been a conflict. Efforts to maintain harmony in a



pluralistic life must be carried out continuously, on purpose and with full awareness so as to create a harmonious life.

Based on the theory described above, and based on the results of the study, the approaches to Christian education that took place in Alor regency were only spiritual development approaches. This is not wrong, but, for the author, this approach is not enough for the changing Alor context. Recall that the context shapes educational theory. It is time for Christian education in Alor Regency to undergo a transformation. Namely by organizing multicultural Christian education as part of the social transformation approach. With a multicultural Christian education applied, in Alor Regency, there is expected to be minimize violence.

Conclusion

Why should we use the multicultural education with social transformation approach? Because once again, we see that the purpose of this approach is to make students who become agents of social change to the realization of the kingdom of God in the world. The aim is to help people and communities become loyal citizens and make social changes. The educational process is in the form of seeing action. In this approach students learn about the meaning of being a faithful Christian and being God's partner to realize world care, justice and change.

This aspect of religion may have been forgotten for too long by the Christian religious education approach. Therefore, most of our church members are only given a kind of doctrinal understanding without being equipped to become agents of social change, namely people who are sensitive and care about social issues around them. Just by making them rooted in the teaching of faith and caring for their social conditions, they will be able to believe in their lives more fully.



Effective and relevant contextual Christian education, in Alor district, must now be multicultural education, using the social transformation approach.

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