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Mennonite Church Mission in Indonesia: A Descriptive Review

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Abstract

This study seeks to describe and analyze the mission of the Mennonite Church in Indonesia, which has a rich history dating back to the 16th century. Despite facing challenges from fellow Reformed churches and Catholics, the Mennonites have persevered in their missionary endeavors. The Mennonite mission officially established a presence in Indonesia in the mid-19th century, with the arrival of Pieter Jansz, a missionary sent by the Doopsgezinde Zending Vereniging (DZV) Mission Agency from the Netherlands in 1851. Over time, the Mennonite mission has successfully established three church organizations: The Evangelical Church in Java (GITJ) based in Pati, Central Java; the Indonesian Christian Church (GKMI) based in Semarang; and the Indonesian Christian Church (JKI) based in Salatiga, Central Java. These organizations have carried out their missions in various regions of Indonesia, including Mount Muria, Central Java, as well as Sumatra, Jambi, and Lampung. Moreover, GKMI has expanded its reach to almost all parts of Indonesia, with churches established in both urban and rural areas. JKI has also extended its mission beyond Indonesia's borders. The Mennonite mission has had a profound impact on the development of churches in Indonesia, fostering mutual respect and appreciation among fellow churches as the body of Christ through the exchange of traditions and cultures.

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1. Introduction

The mission of Jesus Christ since the New Testament era (Matthew 28:19-20), has been the responsibility of the Church since the beginning. The early church has tried to carry out this mission, with the aim that the whole world will receive the good news or news of salvation. The Mennonite Church is one of the Protestant Christian denominations that has its roots in the Anabaptist movement in the 16th century[2]. Although it originates from Europe, this church has also developed in several countries including Indonesia [3].

Mennonite teachings emphasize the rejection of violence (non-violence) but love of peace, do not recognize the baptism of children (infants) and the separation of church and state[4]. In order to maintain this idea from the beginning they experienced oppression, suffering to the death penalty, had to live in remote areas, were refugees, and spread to various countries, especially to North America. For them, suffering and persecution to the point of receiving the death penalty, seemed to be the price that had to be paid to maintain their faith.

. [5] The mission is still carried out, as the Christian motto says 'the more it is cleared, the more it spreads' The Mennonite Church mission began to come to Indonesia in the mid-19th century brought by a mission agency from the Netherlands. They developed missions in several regions such as Central Java, East Java, and Sumatra. The main objective of this mission was to spread the teachings of Christianity, while also paying attention to the lives of the community in the fields of education, health, and socio-economics. Along the way, the Mennonite Church in Indonesia faced various challenges, ranging from cultural differences, resistance from local communities, to historical events such as World War II[6] . However, through the efforts and hard work of missionaries, this church continued to grow and develop to various regions. Currently, the Mennonite Church in Indonesia has a significant role in the lives of the community, not only in the religious field, but also in the social, economic, and educational fields. This church is also actively involved in social issues and promotes the values of peace and justice.

Europe as the birthplace and early development of the Mennonite church in the 16th century to the end of the 18th century. However, in the 19th century and beyond, many Mennonite immigrants from Europe moved to North America and other countries, so that the spread of the Mennonite mission spread to various parts of the world. At the beginning of the 21st century, Mennonite congregation members were no longer only in the Northern hemisphere, but had also spread to the Southern hemisphere, such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This happened because of global cooperation between fellow Anabaptist-Mennonite churches throughout the world.

The history of Christianity in Indonesia officially began in 1522, when the Portuguese built a fort in Ternate and brought Roman Catholic teachings with the missionary Francis Xavier. After the Dutch replaced the Portuguese as colonizers, the church that was brought was Calvinist Protestantism. During the Dutch colonial period, the church in Indonesia was under the control of the colonizers. However, in the early 19th century, the situation began to change after the establishment of mission

[2] Aritonang, Jans, **Berbagai Aliran di dalam dan di sekitar Gereja**, PT BPK-Gunung Mulia, Jakarta, hlm 105

[3] S.H. Sukoco & Lawarence M. Yoder, **Tata Injil di Bumi Muria**, Sejarah Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa (GITJ), Pustaka Muria, Semarang, 2010, hal 119

[4] Arnold, C. Snyder, Dari Benih Anabaptis: Intisari kesejarahan jatidiri Anabaptis, Ter. Yusak Setyawan, Semarang: Pusataka Muria, 2006, hlm 6.

[5] John A. Lapp, C. Arnold Snyder (ed), **Testing Faith and Tradition**, Global Mennonite History Series: Europe, Good Books, Intercourse, Pennsylvania 9

[6] J.C. Winger, **How Mennonite Came to Be**, ditulis ulang Charles Christano, Komisi Literaturs Sinode Muria, Panji Graha, Semarang, hlm 5

agencies in Europe. Most churches in Indonesia, including the Mennonite church, were established through the efforts of mission agencies and sending missionaries. The Mennonite mission in Indonesia was born thanks to the evangelization of the native Javanese and the Doopsgezinde Zending Vereniging (DZV) Mission Agency which was founded on October 21, 1847 in Singelkerk Amsterdam[7] . In 1851 they sent Pieter Jansz to Indonesia, precisely in Central Java. Pieter Jansz began his mission through Education because he was a teacher. But in 1854 he succeeded in baptizing 5 natives, so that event was used as the beginning of the birth of the Mennonite Church in Indonesia[8]. With various processes, the first Mennonite Church organization was finally established in Central Java, Pati, namely the Evangelical Church in Tanah Jawa (GITJ), then followed by the Muria Indonesian Christian Church (GKMI), and finally the Indonesian Christian Church (JKI).

The three church organizations each have different historical backgrounds in the formation of the organization. In addition to the three Mennonite Church organizations mentioned above, history records that the Mennonite mission has reached Sumatra, South Tapanuli, precisely in Mandailing Pakantan. The situation of the Mennonite Church has its own story. Before the missionaries officially served there, baptism had been served by Dutch soldiers who adhered to the Mennonite sect in the 1830s, but this moment has no historical evidence, only information. Furthermore, the Mennonite mission has been officially present there since early 1871 by Heinrich Dirks from Russia, precisely in Pakantan. With various obstacles including very minimal missionaries at that time and no financial support, finally the Mennonite Mandailing Pakantan Church handed over its services to the Angkola Protestant Christian Church (GKPA) in 1975. The Evangelical Church in Java (GITJ) has an interesting historical background. Initially, this church was called the Muria Javanese Church and is the oldest Mennonite church outside Europe and North America. The characteristics of the GITJ church, which stretches across the area around Muria, were formed through several stages and influenced by several streams, and all developed together to form one church, namely the Mennonite church.

The development period of GITJ can be divided into several parts chronologically historically, as the stages that were passed through reflect the characteristics and events that Javanese Christians went through around Mount Muria. The stages are as follows: a. The era before Zending, b. Zending Era: 1854-1940, divided into two, namely: - the era of the entry of Dutch influence, namely Pieter Jansz and - the era of the entry of non-Dutch influences such as from Russia, Germany and Switzerland, c The era after Zending or the church was established independently in 1940 - until now, divided into three, namely: - the transition period as well as the testing period with the Japanese occupation (1941-1942) and the Revolutionary period (1940-1949), the Development and Development Period (1950-1965) and the Redevelopment and Development Period (1966 until now….)[9] . With all efforts, GITJ tried to improve its services, in the fields of spirituality, education and health, including the economic field.

All of this can be achieved with the assistance provided by social institutions from Mennonites abroad. In 1967, the Joint Economic Commission was formed with the aim of helping the congregation in the economic field, especially in agriculture. Likewise, with efforts to improve church services, mutual cooperation was formed to help each other and provide mandatory funds to the church, this cooperation was formed since 1972. With the efforts made, it turned out that the church grew, for that in the 1970s foreign partners began to make GITJ independent and decided to reduce their role.[10].

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[7] S.H. Sukoco & Lawrence M. Yoder, Tata Injil di Bumi Muria, Sejarah Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa (GITJ), Pustaka Muria, Semarang, 2010, hal. 119.

[8] I b I d, hlm 133.

[9] ‘'until now' means in this explanation until the deadline for submitting the research report assigned by the DGI Research and Study Institute, now known as PGI in 1974. For this reason, further events will be added until the beginning of the 21st century..

[10] John A. Lapp, C. Arnold Snyder (ed), Churches Engage Asian Tradisions, Global Mennonite History series: Asia, Good Books, hal. 66-68.

The development of GITJ can be seen through statistics GITJ Church data: Number of Churches/congregations as of 2022: 120 adult churches and 50 pepanthan/sub-branches located in 6 classis regions. West Classis 27 churches, South Classis 13 churches, Sumatra Classis 12 churches, Central Classis 15 churches, East Classis 31 churches and North Classis 27 churches. The number of congregation members is 68,205 people. The number of pastors is 91 people, Emeritus Pastors 24 people, Assistant Pastors 17 people, and the number of other servants is 2,307 people (Gospel Teachers, Elders, Deacons and Sunday School Teachers) [11] .

Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI), this church organization began with the formation of a Chinese Christian group in Kudus in 1920 led by Tee Siem Tat. On September 27, 1925 they formed a congregation by electing candidates for church council leaders, by requesting permission from the Dutch East Indies government. Two years later on February 3, 1927, the decision was given and given the name Chineesche Doopsgezinde Christengemeente, and Mr. Tee as the leader[12] . Since then they worked hard to build the congregation, and tried to build a church building. It turned out that not long after that they succeeded in building a church building on February 16, 1928. This success was also influenced by Tee's wife, Mrs. Sie Djoen Nio, who always accompanied her husband to hold services, especially to approach women[13]. Since 1958, GKMI has been more open to accepting other ethnic groups and has begun to move to the areas around Mount Muria, not only in the Kudus area, and not only the Chinese ethnic group anymore. Making this church grow even more. Coupled with the increasing attitude of building among young servants, developing methods of service. Especially with the development of services in the city of Semarang, as the capital of Central Java, it is a promising future. It turned out that later this city became the center of the GKMI Synod. The service reached Jakarta which was started by Herman Tan, after resigning as chairman of the Synod. The fellowship began on April 17, 1966, with a small number, but three years later the number increased, thanks to the Gospel Sending and Love Service (PIPKA) service, which had been formed since 1965[14].

GKMI has been a member of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) since 1959 and has been involved in ecumenical church development, as well as joining the Mennonite world church organization. Many reforms have been carried out in GKMI, including supporting theological education. GKMI in its mission continues to support services in the fields of education, health, and diakonia when the crisis occurs. GKMI Church Statistics Data: Number of churches/congregations 67 adult churches, 52 branch churches, and 59 PI posts, located in Java, Jabodetabek, Bali, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Batam and Medan. Number of congregation members 19,208. Number of Pastors 71 people; and young pastors 30 people. Number of other servants 38 people (8 evangelists and 30 orientation workers) [15] .

The Indonesian Christian Church (JKI), began with a revival of the youth of GKMI (Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia) around Mount Muria in 1960-1970. At that time, GKMI was in a transition of leadership, so many Javanese churches invited foreign evangelists to start a spiritual revival. The GKMI youth group initiated by Adi Sutanto formed the 'Keluarga Sangkakala' group which then grew rapidly. However, when Adi Sutanto returned from his studies, GKMI did not approve of this group joining because of differences in charismatic liturgy. Finally, on May 22, 1977, this group separated from GKMI and founded the Sangkakala Foundation which aimed at evangelism and social services.

[11] www.sinodegitj .or.id, Senin, 15 Juli 2024, pkl 20.00 wib

[12] Yudha Lelana, **Tunas Yang Tumbuh, Sejarah Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia 1920-1977**,Sinode GKMI, Semarang, 2000, hal. 45.

[13] Lawrence M. Yoder, **The Muria Story, A History of the Chinese Mennonite Churches of Indonesia,** Kitchener On: Pandora Press, 2006, hal. 89.

[14] Yudha Lelana, Tunas Yang Tumbuh , Jilid 2, hal. 201

[15] http://www.sinodegkmi.com, 16 Juli 2024 pkl 19.00

The results of these various services gave birth to many prayer fellowships in Semarang[16]. The development of JKI was very significant with the empowerment of youth in various service activities, and starting with prayer groups. In May 1984 there were already forty groups with a total membership of 1,600 people[17]. JKI formed a new synod in 1985, named the Indonesian Christian Church (JKI). The JKI Synod officially became a member of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) at the PGI Full Workers' Assembly (MPL) meeting in Nias, North Sumatra on November 10, 2014. The JKI Synod was appointed as the 89th member of the PGI[18]. They were officially accepted after 29 years of existence, since 1985 the JKI Synod was officially established, then since 1989 they were registered with the Christian Community Guidance, they also became members of the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) [19].

In 1985, JKI was registered with the Christian Community Guidance of the Department of Religion (Decree of the Director General of Protestant Christian Community Guidance No. 4 of 1989, and also became a member of the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) [20]. Various efforts were made to advance the newly formed synod while carrying out its mission, such as developing services in housing locations built by the government, as well as conducting services abroad such as Los Angeles and other cities abroad. The development of the JKI Mission is somewhat different from the two Mennonite Church organizations (GITJ and GKMI), a very significant development because the church has spread abroad. JKI Church Statistics Data: the number of churches is 223 local churches spread across 19 provinces in Indonesia and in 3 other countries (the United States, the Netherlands and Australia). The total number of adult congregation members is 42,000 people[21].

2. Research Method

The method used in this study is a qualitative method. According to Sharan B. and Meriam in Sugiyono, with the aim of achieving a deep understanding of how to understand the mission carried out by the Mennonite Church in Indonesia. Researchers use references related to the history and mission of the Mennonite Church in Indonesia, supported by evidence through observation and research in the field. A literature review is needed to clearly explain since when the Mennonite mission was present in Indonesia and its development until now in Indonesia. [22]

3. Finding and Discussion

The mission that has been carried out by Mennonites in Indonesia, through missionaries who have worked since the beginning, in the mid-19th century. Their mission is not only in the field of Evangelism (PI) but also includes the fields of education, social health and economy.

Educational Mission through Schools; Since Pieter Jansz first worked in Jepara and its surroundings, the field of evangelism was initially through schools. From this school he began to teach the community to read and write, count and sing[23]. At first, there were only a few students, but over

[16] John A. Lapp, C. Arnold Snyder (ed), **Churches Engage Asian Tradisions,** Global Mennonite History Series: Asia, Good Books, Intercourse, Pennsylvania, hlm 106

[17] I B I D, hal 107
[18] Berita PGI, Jakarta, PGI.OR.ID, Desember 2014

[19] I B I D, hal. 111.
[20] Berita PGI, Jakarta, PGI.OR.ID, Desember 2014
[21] Jkisynod.org, 16 Juli 2024, pkl 20.00
[22] Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*, ed. Sofia Yustiyani Suryani, Cetakan ke. (Bandung: Anggota Ikapi Penerbit Indonesia (IKAPI), 2018).
[23] Sukoco & Lawrence M Yoder, Op-Cit hal. 157

time the gospel became more popular through teaching at the school. Education continued with the help of the next missionary named Schuurmans. For the next period, the school was also an effective means for the Mennonites to develop the gospel, the teaching staff received more attention, and the number of students increased. Later, after Indonesia became independent, they began to initiate education in the field of theology in collaboration with the MCC and the Muria Chinese Church, with the aim of being able to educate prospective servants at the Mennonite Church. Likewise with the establishment of the Christian Religious Education School (PGAAK), which is expected to be able to educate prospective religious teachers who can teach in state (public) and private schools. In the educational mission, the Mennonites finally succeeded in establishing several public schools and Christian schools, including those in collaboration with the government.

Health Mission; since the beginning, missionary Pieter Jans had thought about how to help the people around Muria, not long after his service, he provided medical treatment to the community with the help of medicines that he obtained from individuals, social institutions and the government. Not long after he succeeded in establishing a polyclinic and presenting health workers who were not doctors, with the hope that more people would be served in the health sector. It turned out that with various diseases that were spreading, a doctor was needed who was truly able to treat various common diseases, so that assistance was requested from missionary doctors who were willing to work with devotion to the Mennonite Mission.

[24] It turned out that a doctor named Bervoets and his wife were willing to work as health workers at the polyclinic that had been established in Margorejo. Not long after, the doctor tried to build a hospital according to their plan together with other missionaries. Many people were served in the health sector, not only Christians, but in general the people around Kedung Penjalin, Margorejo and Kelet were happy, because health services were increasingly affordable. Later, the Mennonite missionaries not only paid attention to people with common diseases, but also cared about people with the specific disease of leprosy, so that health services became more effective, with a mutual agreement they built a Leprosy Hospital, specifically treating people with leprosy, this program received assistance from Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands. The Mennonite missionaries were very enthusiastic about supporting general health services around Muria. Furthermore, problems arose in the management of the hospital organization, so that disputes occurred. There was clarification and renewal, by bringing in new doctors, to improve the organization of the hospital. Over time, the development of hospitals also occurred around Muria, including in Pati, in Bantu Tayu, also with the establishment of polyclinics in the areas around Muria.

Economic and social mission; The first missionary Pieter Jans had a plan to develop the life of the Mennonite congregation in Jepara. The idea was to form a Christian plot village, meaning he tried to build a village with extensive rice fields to be worked on by the Mennonite congregation in building the congregation's economy. They were placed in the Christian village by cultivating the land that had been provided, thus their basic needs were met in the form of food. This business was further developed by his son named P.A. Jans. The plot village developed and more and more people around were interested in becoming Christians through this method or mission[25]. The next development was that this idea was also supported by the government at that time, also assisted by Mennonite church servants who had been trained to follow the missionary concept of P.A. Jans, namely Pasrah Karso. For the order of life of the congregation living in the Christian village, a number of regulations were made that must be obeyed by the people living in the village. There, social life is also regulated according to the Christian teachings that they have received, namely that they must love one another.

[24] Sukoco & Lawrence M Yoder, I b I d hal. 237

[25] Sukoco & Lawrence M Yoder, I b I d hal. 179-181

The village is also always under the supervision of the assigned missionaries, to maintain the good name and development of the faith of the congregation living in the village of Persil. Thus, the village of Persil is not only in one place, but they are trying to develop this mission in areas that allow land to form other Christian village of Persil. This effort is also supported by many parties, including non-Christians who are willing to let their land be used as a village of Persil by providing compensation. The government also supports this, with efforts to build the economy and social community around Muria.

The success of the Mennonite mission in Indonesia

The Mennonite Mission has succeeded in establishing three Church organizations in Indonesia, namely GITJ, GKMI, and JKI. They have developed until now, and are already in almost all regions of Indonesia. They focus on the vision and mission of serving as taught by Jesus, especially in terms of rejecting violence, and acting like Christians in the New Testament (Matthew 5-7). The Mennonite Church organization worldwide supports Mennonite church programs in Indonesia, including in the fields of education and social assistance. Overall, the Mennonite Church in Indonesia tries to get closer to the Mennonite Church organization worldwide and cooperate with other church denominations in Indonesia.

One of the significant contributions of the Mennonite Church in Indonesia is its commitment to promoting peace and non-violence. In a country with a complex history of conflict and social unrest, the Mennonite Church has played a vital role in fostering a culture of peace and reconciliation. Through its various programs and initiatives, the Church has encouraged its members to embody the values of love, compassion, and forgiveness, as exemplified in the teachings of Jesus. This has led to the establishment of peace-building initiatives, conflict resolution programs, and community development projects that have positively impacted local communities.

The Mennonite Church in Indonesia has also been at the forefront of promoting education and social assistance. Through its network of schools, universities, and social service organizations, the Church has provided access to quality education and healthcare for thousands of people, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas. The Church's commitment to education has enabled many young people to acquire skills and knowledge that have improved their socio-economic status and empowered them to become agents of change in their communities. Furthermore, the Church's social assistance programs have provided critical support to vulnerable populations, including orphans, widows, and people with disabilities.

As the Mennonite Church in Indonesia continues to grow and develop, it remains committed to its core values of simplicity, community, and service. The Church's emphasis on simplicity has encouraged its members to live modestly and responsibly, avoiding the trappings of wealth and materialism. Its focus on community has fostered a sense of belonging and mutual support among its members, who come from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. And its commitment to service has inspired its members to engage in acts of kindness, compassion, and charity, demonstrating the love of God in practical ways. As a result, the Mennonite Church in Indonesia has become a beacon of hope and a model of Christian discipleship in a rapidly changing world.

4. Conclusion

The Mennonite Church mission in Indonesia has traversed nearly two centuries, since its inception in the mid-19th century. The tireless efforts of missionaries to spread the gospel have had a profound impact on the lives of Indonesian people, fostering spiritual growth and holistic development. The establishment of three church organizations - GITJ, GKMI, and JKI - has enabled the Mennonite mission to expand its reach and adapt to the diverse cultural and social

contexts of Indonesia. Beyond evangelism, the Mennonite mission has made significant contributions to education, healthcare, agriculture, and socio-economic development, demonstrating its commitment to improving the human condition. Despite facing numerous challenges, the Mennonite Church has remained steadfast in its faith and remarkably adaptable, ensuring its continued relevance in the 21st century.

As Christians, we can draw valuable lessons from the Mennonite Church's journey, including the importance of inclusivity, humility, and cooperation. By embracing the diversity of Christian denominations, we can avoid fanaticism and instead foster a spirit of unity and mutual respect. Furthermore, we are encouraged to continue supporting the church's mission, thereby advancing the cause of Christianity in Indonesia and promoting a brighter future for all.

As we reflect on the Mennonite Church's remarkable journey in Indonesia, we are reminded of the power of faith, perseverance, and collaboration. The Church's commitment to serving others, promoting peace, and fostering community has inspired countless individuals and communities. Its legacy serves as a testament to the transformative impact of Christianity, demonstrating that faith can be a powerful catalyst for positive change. As we look to the future, may the Mennonite Church's story inspire us to continue striving for a world where love, justice, and compassion reign supreme. May its example encourage us to work together, across denominational lines, to build a brighter future for all people, and to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to a world in need.

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