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Living Out Gospel Values in Culture: a Study of Local Christian Theology and The Cultural Identity of The Asumanu Community Amidst The Tide of Globalization.

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Abstract

This study attempts to examine how local Christian theology in Asumanu views and responds to the challenges of cultural identity and the growing globalization that influence local values. These changes can impact every foundation, especially in ways of life and fundamental practices within society, reflecting the true reality. A community that upholds traditional values is now influenced by the increasing development of globalization, making society increasingly pluralistic, especially in practices of communal life. This, in turn, can influence the values that have become the priorities passed down through generations. Through a case study approach and qualitative analysis of liturgical practices, sermons, and church symbols, this study found that the church in Asumanu creatively inculturates the Gospel into the local language, music, and traditional rituals. On the one hand, this strengthens the community's cultural identity; on the other, tensions persist between evangelical values and certain traditional elements. Local theology in Asumanu has proven capable of providing a space for dialogue between Christian faith and indigenous culture, as well as a tool for studying the homogenizing currents of globalization. This study emphasizes the importance of the continuity of contextual theology in order to build a relevant and down-to-earth faith.

Keywords

Local Christian Theology, Asumanu, cultural identity, globalization, cultural pluralism.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural diversity in Indonesia, or multiculturalism, is one of the key elements that signifies Indonesia as a nation with a diverse society. Culture encompasses systems of norms, beliefs, ethnicity, language, customs, arts, and the livelihoods of the

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people.[1] The distinctiveness found in every culture holds value that, in general, everyone is expected to preserve and respect, because this distinctiveness reveals their identity—especially the traits inherent to themselves. Thus, all forms of distinctiveness retain the same meaning and lessons, and these can be passed down from generation to generation.

The rapid pace of modern development brings significant changes to various aspects of human life, including the cultural sphere. This trend not only influences lifestyles but also challenges the sustainability of cultural values and distinctiveness within communities. In many cases, cultural identity undergoes a shift due to a lack of ability to adapt creatively to existing changes. Consequently, the distinctive nuances that serve as markers of a culture's identity risk fading away.

Theology is not a fixed, unquestionable discipline, but rather a body of knowledge that must continually renew itself to remain relevant and applicable to concrete human life.[2] The form of teaching applied in every aspect of societal life emphasizes that everyone is capable of fulfilling and living out their obligations, particularly in their individual actions, as each person is personally able to discern what is good and what is not. Theology serves primarily as a guide to help individuals respond to all circumstances that significantly shape human perspectives.

Globalization is a dynamic phenomenon in human civilization, constantly evolving within society and an integral part of the human life process.[3] The existing globalization creates new forms of teaching, particularly within all human systems as a whole. These new systems bring about new perspectives, especially in societies still deeply rooted in traditional ways of thinking. This can be observed in human mobility systems, particularly in their daily activities.

[1] Asti Widiastuti, et al. "Cultural Literacy and Citizenship as Efforts to Preserve Culture Amid the Diversity of Indonesian Society," *Semantik: Journal of Research in Education, Language, and Culture* 2.1 (2024): 86.

[2] Frets Keriapy, "Multicultural Theology: 'Local Wisdom as a Form of Theology and Culture,'" *MAGENANG: Journal of Theology and Christian Education* 1.2 (2020): 15.

[3] Lanny Nurhasanah, Bintang Panduraja Siburian, and Jihan Alfira Fitriana, "The Influence of Globalization on Young People's Interest in Preserving Traditional Indonesian Arts," *Jurnal Global Citizen: Scientific Journal of Citizenship Education Studies* 10.2 (2021): 32.

DISCUSSION

Theology in Culture

From the very root of the word "religion," religion should serve as a bridge that people can use to understand God through the culture that defines the identity of local communities.[4] The existence of culture demonstrates that each person exhibits an identity that is unique to a specific culture. The culture of the Asumanu community has its own distinct characteristics, which are synonymous with preserving and maintaining what makes it unique. The Asumanu community, in general, adheres to practices that are deeply intertwined with their daily lives and are in harmony with religious and cultural teachings.

In the existing practices, particularly in the cultural practices of the Asumanu community, the teachings that define their distinctiveness are strictly upheld and highly valued. Moreover, these practices have become a cherished tradition that is carefully preserved, making them highly relevant within the Asumanu community. These distinctive features also hold values intertwined with religion, such as the construction of traditional houses, the welcoming of important guests, the consecration of certain places considered sacred, and so on. Theology as a tool for interpreting events and history. This is what is meant by the term 'theologizing,' which means reflecting on human experiences and history in this world.[5] Human life experiences serve as a form of reflection to recognize that one's very presence constitutes a profoundly meaningful existence. Life, when reflected upon, reveals that this existence is truly accountable as a foundation of profound meaning. Every activity undertaken by humans demonstrates humanity's nature as social beings who build positive interactive relationships, particularly with others, characterized by mutual reciprocity. Such relationships are inseparable from various aspects of human life; just as humans create or build positive interactive relationships, they are also the ones responsible for maintaining and continuing to develop them.

The human way of life demonstrates that all forms of connection with nature, as well as interactions with others, embody a profound ethical value, as everyone is expected to cultivate awareness, particularly in communal life. Theology does not

[4] Frets Keriapy, "Multicultural Theology: Local Wisdom as a Form of Theology and Culture," *MAGENANG: Journal of Theology and Christian Education* 1.2 (2020): 12.

[5] Warseto Freddy Sihombing and Seri Antonius, "Building a Theology of Christian Religious Education in the Local Church," *Jurnal Teruna Bhakti* 5.1 (2022): 130.

merely aim to discard easily accessible values but seeks to shape human thinking in evaluating and presenting new essences of value while preserving their authenticity. The relationship between theology and culture indicates that both concepts aim to be developed in a way that maintains equality between them, thereby ensuring that the value of authenticity in culture is preserved, while theological knowledge becomes a conceptual framework that upholds this equality through both traditional human thought and critically evolving human thought.

Cultural literacy encompasses an understanding of the values, norms, traditions, language, arts, and cultural practices within a group or community. Cultural literacy helps individuals strengthen their own cultural identity while understanding other cultures in an increasingly interconnected world. [6] Culture presents various forms of values, and these become relevant in any given situation, particularly in any action taken.

Cultural Practices of the Asumanu

The culture that has emerged within Asumanu society is characterized by its distinctiveness. This diversity reflects various aspects, particularly in the way of life whether in fostering community with others or in the practice or observance of specific customs. In every situation, the diverse circumstances present these as valuable assets, highlighting various forms of uniqueness, especially within Asumanu culture.

The values embedded in culture cannot be measured in material terms; rather, they function as unwritten guidelines or principles that direct human behavior. This local wisdom encompasses ways of thinking, interacting, and adapting to the environment, as well as the norms respected by the local community.[7] Practices with their inherent distinctiveness reflect attitudes that define human behavior and foster interactions, particularly in building a sense of community. This is because attitudes toward preservation—especially the actions of every individual—collectively embody the unity inherent in humanity, which is lived out within the culture. This is

[6] Syahla Rizkia Putri Nur'insyani, Dinie Anggraeni Dewi, and Rizky Saeful Hayat, "The Urgency of Strengthening Cultural Literacy and Citizenship in Preserving Indonesian Society's Culture in the Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution," *Daya Nasional: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Education* 2.1 (2024): 36.

[7] Mamik Indrawati, and Yuli Ifana Sari, "Understanding Cultural Heritage and Local Identity in Indonesia," *Journal of Social Studies Research and Education* 18.1 (2024): 78.

significantly reflected in all existing circumstances, shaping the value of life through uniqueness and diversity that distinguish one from another.

Diversity arises primarily in how humans express themselves through various actions and in building the value of uniqueness that is inherent in every individual. The Asumanu community serves as a model through its various forms of uniqueness, particularly in practices that demonstrate the value of distinctiveness; this distinctiveness becomes a guiding example, especially in preserving and nurturing it so that it remains a relevant form within the Asumanu community.

Local wisdom can be a form of wisdom that has recently emerged within a community, resulting from its interaction with the natural environment and its engagement with other societies and cultures.[8] The existing wisdom reflects all forms of circumstances, particularly in the implementation of actions that are highly valuable and of great benefit. The Asumanu community, in its overall practices and actions, upholds these values as existing forms of value and preserves the values that constitute pure traditional wisdom.

Global Culture

The impacts of globalization and social media not only influence the external aspects of culture but also prompt profound reflections regarding the cultural identity of local communities. Cultural identity, as a complex concept, encompasses not only traditions and customs but also values, beliefs, and narratives that shape selfperception and understanding of one's place within the broader world. [9] The progression of globalization in every action, along with the significant and relevant proximity it brings, undoubtedly influences every action, particularly within each individual.

Globalization demonstrates various influences that make people more modern, thereby introducing spontaneous values, particularly in cultural practices that traditionally thrive and evolve within society. The impact of these developments is profound because, across various aspects, they significantly influence every situation.

[8] Putra Ahimsa, Heddy Shri, "Language, Literature, and Local Wisdom in Indonesia," *Mabasan* 3.1 (2009): 38

[9] Fadilla Fahma, and Desy Safitri, "Dynamics of cultural identity in the era of globalization: Challenges and opportunities for social media regarding local community culture," *Journal of Intellectuals and Scholars of the Archipelago* 1.3 (2024): 3675.

In every existing situation, especially those experienced by humans, significant diversity is evident due to the influence of globalization.

Globalization is the process of integration among nations worldwide, becoming increasingly close and interconnected across various aspects of life, such as the economy, politics, culture, and society. [10] The developments that are highly relevant in every aspect, particularly in every dimension, mean that the circumstances faced by humanity take on a profoundly meaningful form, especially in every action and implementation that holds such significance. In this context, the evolving culture takes the form of wisdom that is preserved and held in high regard, particularly in the foundational principles of implementation that depict a harmonious way of life within larger communities.

In every action and practice that serves as a foundation, particularly in the form of values that can be clearly observed and, as a whole, manifest as tangible reality. This serves as a benchmark that remains relevant, especially in the practice of traditional culture, as human actions and practices generally become the subject, particularly in the implementation inherent within humanity, while considering the development and growing influence of globalization today.

CONCLUSION

Local theology is an effort to understand and express the Christian faith within the context of local culture. These two aspects do not merely concern the proclamation of faith but also how that faith is lived out within the social realities, traditions, and cultural values of a specific community. In this context, local theology serves as a bridge between the universal message of the Gospel and the local richness possessed by each community. Such theology affirms that God is present and speaks within every culture, so that every culture has the potential to become a means of revelation and authentic living out of faith. With the rise of globalization, the relationship between theology and culture faces significant challenges. Globalization brings rapid changes in technology, the economy, lifestyles, and value systems. This phenomenon often leads to cultural homogenization and weakens local identities.

[10] Romlah Harniati Hapsah, Fatimah Az Zahrah, and Muhammad Yasin, "The Dynamics of Human, Social, and Cultural Interactions in the Era of Globalization and Modernization," *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan & Sosial (Sinova)* 2.2 (2024): 197.

Modern values such as individualism, materialism, and efficiency often conflict with the communitarian and spiritual values that thrive within local communities.

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