

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN A TIME OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Author's Name: Mehamad Wijaya Tarigan

Affiliation: Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Abdi Sabda, Indonesia (Abdi Sabda Theological College, Indonesia)

E-Mail: mehamadwijayatarigan@sttabdisabda.ac.id

DOI No. – 08.2020-25662434

Abstract

Our lives during Covid-19 pandemic are mostly working from home as students, employees, pastors, lecturers, and others. Not only in terms of the teaching and learning process but also other activities we do online. Covid-19 forced the church to change its mission. The mission of the laity is one of the ways the church continues its mission during the pandemic. The church is closed and worship is carried out through internet media such as zoom, youtube and others. The author sees that there is trauma due to the pandemic. The trauma of this pandemic will not go away even if this Covid-19 pandemic passes. Many people have experienced stress and trauma as congregants, ministers and prospective ministers in the church. Counselors must be increased in our church if we want to heal this stress and trauma. This is not only the pastor's job, but must include church members. besides that the church must also participate in health services in the midst of the congregation and the community.

Keyword: Mission of Church, Covid-19 Pandemic, Congregation

INTRODUCTION

The title that the author offers is the Church's Mission in the Pandemic. The author will try to convey how the current mission is, the author also reminds not to rush to make a mission program at this time. The important thing is to think that God has a special purpose for us who live in this day and age. Not all of us can go through this pandemic. Some of our friends, family and even those of us present at this time have experienced suffering due to Covid-19 (Amorin-Woods, Fraenkel, Mosconi, Nisse, & Munoz, 2020).

The pandemic period will make us wiser and move forward, we need strength from God to get through it (Walsh, 2020). Need to remember how our life experiences during this Covid-19. Living out of the ordinary before this pandemic period, such as using the internet more often, having dialogue via the internet, and preaching online. Apparently not only today, since the OT and NT times God's people have experienced suffering, not only because of disease but also due to oppression from other nations. The church in the past also experienced pandemics, smallpox, the Black Death, and others, but the church still exists today. Of course this is the power of the Holy Spirit, not because of human intelligence and strength alone. Our responsibility is to keep on mission while preparing the next generation of the church and this nation so that their enthusiasm for missions does not decrease due to this Covid-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research used descriptive qualitative methods. The descriptive qualitative research means that researchers describe the mission of the church in concrete forms of ministry in Covid-19 pandemic. This study uses literature sources in the form of books, journal articles, as data in describing the purpose of the study. In addition, researchers use data collection techniques with documentation and observation. Data analysis techniques using data collection techniques, data reduction, display data, and conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the first study discussed about Covid-19 which became a pandemic. Coronavirus was discovered around 1960. The first coronavirus caused infectious bronchitis virus (IBV) in chickens and two other coronaviruses that infect the nasal cavity of humans with the common cold, called human coronavirus 229E and human coronavirus OC43, respectively. Since then, several members of the coronavirus family have been identified until December 2019 when SARS-CoV-2 was discovered in Wuhan, China (Wasito & Hastari, 2020). The virus is thought to have originated in an animal market in Wuhan. This is what causes the world to be not what it used to be, including the church in all its activities. This virus has spread so widely that it is called a pandemic. When will this pandemic subside? No one knows for sure.

Scientists continue to look for solutions to overcome them, not only getting vaccines but also trying to find where this virus came from. But so far China has rejected the WHO's proposal for a phase two study in the laboratory where the virus was first identified. This study is very important to find out whether this virus is really not man-made or man-made. Dr. Li Meng Yan knew the true origin of this virus. He said that this virus is man-made. Then he fled to the USA because he was afraid of dealing with the Chinese government and information about him was deleted from the Chinese government database (Dev,2020). Richard Percival was more assertive in explaining what Li Meng Yan said that this virus was made in a Chinese military laboratory (<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1317588/China-coronavirus-cover-up-scientist-military-lab-wet-market-where-did-coronavirus-start>). But the Chinese government rejected this second phase of research. Finally, it is not clear until now the origin of this virus (Zhou, 2020; Witt, 2020).

The results of the second study discussed about living out of the ordinary (before the pandemic). In our lives during this pandemic, we mostly work from home as students, employees, pastors, lecturers, and others. Not only in terms of the teaching and learning process but also other activities we do online. This causes the movement of our bodies is also not like before. Even though we live in simple activities, our bodies become unhealthy due to lack of movement. Only some of us are working as usual during this pandemic.

Living out of this habit, makes us closer to computers, cellphones and further away from our habit of meeting fellow humans. This also causes the congregation to experience boredom in worship that only sees from virtual media. The virtual world seems to exist but not exist, nothing but exists. This habit seems to be slowly changing again because some of our churches have carried out worship in the church building even though it is divided by the number of congregations present so that the church is not crowded.

During the pandemic, the use of internet media has become commonplace for us. In college we use the internet. Not only that, some of the church rooms have become virtual spaces. Sermons are carried out via zoom, FB and Youtube. This is a new experience that we have had. It reminds us that we have walked through a pandemic, are living it and will go through it with society and the rest of creation. The pandemic is not over yet and may still continue. If Omicron is present now, there will be others in the future.

This virtual world also has a weakness because during worship or lectures, if we go through zoom or google meetings we can close the camera so we don't see what we really look like. Is cheerful,

gloomy or asleep while attending events. Of course the mission will also face problems which is similar to our current experience. It's a good idea to get used to all lecture meetings or other activities virtually to open the camera.

The results of the third study discussed about the mission of the laity. Moltmann says that the laity are also on the mission. He said that mission is not just ministry in the church but ministry in daily life. Practical applications such as shepherding, political life, education, worship, and others (Bosch, 2016). But the current reality, as if the only mission in the field of diaconia that we can offer. We seem to be running out of energy to think about what else the mission program can do. The author sees that there are Whatsapp (WA) groups and others moving to collect help for others who need help. All participants in the WA group are used to giving with joy without any strings attached. No longer remembering the gift, doing it as for God, not for humans.

But according to the author, diakonia alone is not enough, because nowadays, humans need friends to exchange ideas and not just browse facebook, Whatsapp, and others. Humans need other humans to socialize and not just talk to their family members. Humans need answers to their life problems and not only that, humans also need to do what they think, their ideas also want to do and not only theorize but directly practice. This is a problem for us, when boredom in the virtual world arises, then we want to gather as soon as possible like before the pandemic and forget to follow health protocols. It is important to avoid this from happening.

The results of the fourth study discussed about pastoral counseling services. The author saw that there was a book Counseling Practice During Phases of a Pandemic Virus, but the author has not been able to get it until now. The trauma of this pandemic will not go away even if this pandemic passes. Many people have experienced stress and trauma as congregants, ministers and prospective ministers in the church. Counselors must be increased in our church if we want to heal this stress and trauma. This is not only the pastor's job, but must include church members as Moltmann said above. The last few months we have relied on the virtual. But we have met face to face now, this means that we will again experience trauma while working on this face-to-face program proposal.

What model is suitable in this face-to-face form? So far, virtual space is a room that we cannot fully enjoy. Then now we are faced with a face-to-face meeting. This creates a sense of "anxiety" in our hearts, who is this close friend of mine? Healthy or not? To overcome this, a pastoral counseling team is needed. For this, at least the basic skills of the pastoral team are needed to communicate with other humans who are experiencing stress and trauma. Including communicating with friends who have lost family members due to the pandemic.

Church members and all human beings need protection for their lives during a pandemic. The spirit of mission is also influenced by the history of trauma (Carr, 2014). The cross which is a symbol of Christianity is a trauma that we face with God. In I Corinthians 15 it says that Jesus died for our sins, died, was buried and rose from the dead on the third day (verses 3-4). Likewise with Hosea 6:2 which appears when God's people confront the Assyrians and hope for the revival of their community. This is a picture of the trauma that God's people faced earlier in the OT. The same is true of Isaiah 53 verse 4, that He bears our sicknesses and afflictions. This is a picture of the trauma of God's people in Babylon (Carr, 2014). Thus spirituality grows out of the midst of a crisis. Our spirituality must be able to overcome trauma during this pandemic. The church must recognize

that we are not perfect and continue to learn today about the mission of the church. The cross and crucifixion of Jesus was considered by the Roman government to make His followers despair, no, on the contrary, His followers rose on a mission.

The results of the fifth study discussed about health services. In addition, from a mission perspective, we are now increasingly aware that the growth of Christianity is not only due to religious conversions. This shows that Christianity is not the only major path that results in church growth. But another reason was because of the arrival of smallpox in 165, at that time the church's social ministry was developing and overcoming the problems of the time (<https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol41/iss1/5/>). At the time of the plague, the understanding of church solidarity resulted in the growth of the church. The spirituality of Christians is growing and the number of Christians is surviving and growing, there are not many victims of Christians. It appears that Christianity has spiritual power. Christians at that time survived and thrived in times of crisis. History proves that Christianity survived in times of crisis. But the act of love for Christians at that time was willing to die a martyr's death to treat the community Don't say anything else. They are willing to get infected while treating him because his death is considered death for God. The Lord Jesus set an example for caring for the sick (John 5). This is an example for the disciples of the Lord Jesus in continuing the mission of Christ on this earth.

At that time Christians were exploring their culture. For example they use Matthew 7:12 about the Golden Rule in their life, do what other people want to do to you. This was the practice of their life at that time, there was a moral of living together that was developed at that time. Diakonia is one of the strengths of Christianity. Transformative diakonia became central at that time, it became a marker of early Christianity at that time. They are a community that is able to survive in times of crisis.

Since the dawn of Christianity, the ethic of solidarity is highly developed. At that time also the issue of health is of great concern to Christians. This shows that Christianity at that time served holistically. They also serve health. So it is necessary to reshape the model of the church's mission in the context of this pandemic. The early concept of establishing a hospital in its history was also influenced by the understanding of love in Christianity. Christian hospitals were established to carry out charity work and provide medical assistance to those in need. Basil was the first to establish a hospital according to the Christian concept in 368/369. He set up his hospital around Caesarea, not only praying for patients but also treating them with Greek medicinal methods. He also became bishop of Caesarea (Ferngren, 2009). The contribution of Christians in helping the community around them is an effective way to make the surrounding community a follower of Christ (Ferngren, 2009). For this program, at least in every church assembly there is a clinic opened.

The results of the sixth study discussed about mission with faith in a time of pandemic. The understanding of God in Mission that has been studied so far is God who has created everything good (Gen. 1:31). But Covid19 has changed our understanding. A A. Yewangoe quoted Prof. Yuval Noach Harari who distinguishes the mysterious God from the religious God. The religious God is the God understood in religions. And the mysterious God is the God who works in technological inventions. He said Harari believed in a mysterious God more than a religious God. Then he continued if the first question was: "Do you believe in God?" Now changing, the question today is:

“What do you believe about God?” (Yewangoe, 2020), Of course this question challenges the church to have a mission not only through preaching the Word but must be added through deepening the teachings of our church. How the teachings of our church understand God who was willing to be crucified by the Roman government and it awakens the spirituality of his followers. Likewise, church history shows that in the midst of a smallpox pandemic, the church survived and continued to serve well (Hughes, 2021).

In Leviticus 13 and 14, the priest must also examine the leper. This shows that from time immemorial, the stewards of God's people have been responsible not only for the spiritual care of the church but also for the physical church. And the writer is reminded of the story of Job who was tempted by the devil. Job knew that it was impossible for God to give him disease, it was the devil's work (Job 2:6). God gave the devil permission to test Job's faith. Indeed, Job felt like he had been abandoned by God (Job 16). He thought God didn't care about him. Even though this is not the case, God still loves Job who remains faithful and has hope in God. This is also the same as what happened to the Lord Jesus on the Cross, the Lord said: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 14:34), Davidson defines "*lemakh* (Hebrew)" with "for what reason?" (Davidson, 1962). We are the same way during this pandemic. We consider God to leave us, especially those of us who have lost family members due to this covid19. We know that the dead God will rise on the third day, as well as our trauma will be resolved by keeping our hope in God alone. God who remains with us through this pandemic. For that we must continue the mission of the church even though we are in a state of difficulty in various fields.

The results of the seventh study discussed about the church tries to keep on mission during the pandemic. Currently the church is experiencing difficulties, not only in funds and resources, but also in theology because it is dealing with covid19. Prof. Joas Adiprasetya said that the church during the pandemic was a church that was imprisoned (lockdown). Then the church in the post-pandemic period is a church that must come out of its shelter (bunker) (Adiprasetya, 2021). There are two options for the church in its mission, first the church moves forward with the love of Christ to be in solidarity through doing justice to the world. Second, the church can choose to give in to despair and eliminate the church's social consciousness, this means negating the presence of God in the world (Adiprasetya, 2021). The author will choose first, the church must continue to move forward, towards a better mission with the Holy Spirit.

Then Prof. Stephen Bevans, an expert on missiology of the Catholic church, said that during this pandemic there are four mission actions that can be carried out, namely preaching the Word well. Allah is with us through this pandemic to get a vaccine. Covid-19 is not God's punishment, God is with us to face it. The Holy Spirit teaches us to get forward the mission method. Second, we have to tell the truth, there is a lot of fake news outside the church, we have to fight it by supporting and accepting vaccines and taking care of our health (implementing health protocols). Third, we will not return to the past, but we rise to remain joyful and hopeful in God who will help us through the pandemic and post-pandemic times. Fourth, is to uphold justice, to do justice to all humans, between ethnic groups, religions and all creation. This is all done by starting with personal and collective prayer, then through the mission of inter-religious dialogue, dialogue on shared life experiences, joint action against Covid-19 (Ummah, 2022). For that we must learn to make peace with all of creation and reduce punishment, revenge, hostility with other humans who are in a state of stress and trauma due to Covid-19. Then prioritize peace, honesty and acts of love.

To carry out the mission, the church must learn the latest technology. Furthermore, by using the latest technology, today's church can have a mission to reach the whole world. If above, the author has reminded that every church should form a pastoral counseling team to heal the trauma caused by this pandemic. So today's technology is not only for that, but can also be a method of evangelizing the world by using good and polite language and sentences without offending other ethnic groups and religions. God is with us on a mission during this pandemic.

CONCLUSION

We need to remember that the mission is not directly making a program, but we must see how the church continues to work during the pandemic, not jump straight to the post-pandemic period. There must be trauma left in the human being who is a member of the church. For this reason, it is necessary to strengthen the mission in the field of Pastoral Counseling because we have definitely experienced trauma during the pandemic. In addition, missions in the field of health, preaching the Word, church teachings, and others. That is the content of a very simple general lecture as the opening lecture for this semester, that it is true that we are afraid to go on a mission, but we must not hesitate to live it with the Holy Spirit.

REFERENCES

1. Adiprasetya, J. (2021). *Gereja Pascapandemi Merengkuh Kerapuhan*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia.
2. Amarin-Woods, D., Fraenkel, P., Mosconi, A., Nisse, M., & Munoz, S. (2020). Family therapy and COVID-19: International reflections during the pandemic from systemic therapists across the globe. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 41(2), 114-132.
3. Bosch, D. J. (1991). *Transformasi Misi Kristen*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia.
4. Carr, D.M. (2014). *Holy Resilience, The Bible Traumatic Origins*. USA: Yale University Press
5. Davidson, A.B. (1962). *An Introductory Hebrew Grammar*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark
6. Dev, S. (2020). *The Modern Plague*. India: BlueRose
7. Ferngren, G.B. (2009). *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity*. Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press,
8. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1317588/China-coronavirus-cover-up-scientist-military-lab-wet-market-where-did-coronavirus-start>
9. Hughes, J. S. (2021). *The Church of the Dead: The Epidemic of 1576 and the Birth of Christianity in the Americas*. NYU Press.
10. Lukashenko, M., & Biletska, L. (2021). How Christians of the First Centuries Experienced Epidemics. *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, 41(1), 5.
11. Ummah, A. H. (2022, February). The Voices of Inter-Religious Harmony. *In International Symposium on Religious Literature and Heritage (ISLAGE 2021) (pp. 17-29)*. Atlantis Press.
12. Walsh, F. (2020). Loss and Resilience in the time of Covid-19: Meaning making, hope, and transcendence. *Family process*, 59(3), 898-911.
13. Wasito, H.R. & Hastari Wuryastuti. (2020). *Corona Virus*, Yogyakarta: Lily Publisher
14. Witt, J. F. (2020). *American Contagions: Epidemics and The Law from Smallpox to Covid-19*. Yale University Press.
15. Yewangoe, A.A., (2020). *Menakar Covid-19 secara Teologis*. Jakarta: BPK-GM
16. Zhou, X. (2020). Organizational Response to COVID-19 crisis: Reflections on the Chinese Bureaucracy and Its Resilience. *Management and Organization Review*, 16(3), 473-484.