

Social Theology from a National Perspective in the Context of Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

Dr. Ratna Saragih, M.Sc ^a, Meditatio Situmorang,Th.M ^b Marlinawati Situmorang,Ed.M^c

^a Lecturer at The Faculty of Theology. Tarutung State Christian Institute. ^b Lecturer at The Faculty of Theology. Tarutung State Christian Institute

^c Administratif Staff at Research Institutes at Tarutung State Christian Institute

Abstrak

Although the social theology practiced by religious institutions in Indonesia is still practiced at the internal level in this ongoing Covid-19 pandemic period, yet it has not touched lives or brought people together as one nation. Social theology practices in multi-religious countries like Indonesia are not only done at the internal level, but they go beyond the religious groups. Therefore, in line with this reality, it is necessary to renew the concept of social theology. This renewal of social theology is very important because current social theology is still oriented towards the lives of religious groups and has not yet led to a multi-religious nation living together. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, religious institutions are obligated to pay attention to fellow human beings without differentiating between faith, race, and ethnicity. Thus, this study aims to renew social theology in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. This research uses qualitative research with phenomenological methods, which show that social theology can only be social theology from a national perspective that is new and relevant in the ongoing Covid-19 era in Indonesia. Social theology practices are demonstrated with an attitude of living in solidarity with fellow humans without differentiating between religion, ethnicity, and race. It showed that interfaith solidarity is a practiced social theology (doing theology). Interfaith solidarity dreams of a life full of help in an effort to overcome national disasters and strengthen national unity.

Keywords : Covid-19, Indonesia, Nationality, Perspective, Social, Theology

Introduction

The global pandemic known as corona virus disease, which erupted towards the end of 2019 has since spread throughout the whole world, and humans are helpless because they were unprepared for it. The rapid spread of the virus has caused tens of thousands of people to become infected and several others to die. The Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia started spreading in February 2020, and has spread to all corners of the archipelago so far. This reality made the Indonesian government to take preventive measures, such as campaigning for a clean lifestyle, physical distancing, publishing prevention protocols, and limiting working hours (working from home/WfH). (Litaay:2020). It also brought

about the use of online learning and the cutting down of the numbers of crowd-causing events, such as closing down places of worship, shopping malls, markets, tourist resorts, and cinema centers. The government also imposed large-scale social restrictions by closing down domestic flights, and tightening entry permits for passengers from certain countries.

The Covid-19 pandemic has generated too many problems for human beings. One of them is economic problem. **Green Laughlin (2020)** stated that physical distancing causes economic problems, especially for the poor who are no longer free to earn a living. Physical distancing is a problem for many low-income families in the society regardless of race. Many multi-generational families are living together to offset the cost of housing. This condition adds to the problems of the community. To overcome the economic problems of the poor, the government strives to provide social assistance by giving basic necessities and cash to the poor. This assistance has limitations that cannot solve all of the issues that exist in the community such as unemployment, reduced job opportunities, and reduced optimization of the teaching and learning process, lack of community socialization in the community and the inability to carry out the day-to-day activities. Due to government's limitations in overcoming these problems, the wheels of the economy must start to spin again, so that the government can apply a new normal (**Yewanggoe, 2020**).

The Covid-19 pandemic encourages humans to care for each other in this new normal life. It has been proven that religious communities care for others from the social actions carried out in Indonesia by religious institutions. However, these social actions are still at the internal level. In other words, it has not touched the people outside their religious institutions. It has not touched the external level. Though there are religious institutions that care beyond their communities, such as churches, the numbers still seem very small. The social concern of the church is a social theology that needs to develop. The church has not fully socialized theology, like the research conducted by Rudy Harold at the Protestant Church in Gorontalo. The church already has a theological understanding in responding to poverty and social injustice, but it has not been maximally utilized for implementing the church's duties and vocation (**Harold, 2017**).

The church's presence concerning the above social theology is a contextual mission, namely Mission Dei. The church should not only think about itself, as suggested by Gerrit Singgih that the church realizes its mission by its presence. This means that the church is present and contributes to solving society's problems and the state's (**Singgih, 1997**). This Mission Dei should be one without distinction of religion. According to John Titaley, Indonesia is not a Christian, Islam, Buddhist, or Confucian country. Indonesia is a country with its civilization (**Gaspersz Steve and Tedi Kholiludin, 2014**). Thus, the responsibility of the church or the people in Indonesia goes beyond the community itself. This effort must begin with an understanding of the relevant theology that is mastered by **Amtiran, Abdon A (2020)** that there is a new theological effort in the midst of the new normal, because theology itself is the "answer" to problems that occur in the midst of the world. In this reality, it is essential to conduct a research on social theology concerning religious pluralism in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. This study aims to renew social theology in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia

Literature Review

1. Social Theology

Social theology is the orientation of the whole theology, which involves many parties, beyond ethnicity and religion. According to **B.F Drewes and Julianus Mojau (2016)**: Social theology has a broad role, namely to think of the theological foundation of the church's vocation in the society and to study the plan and implementation of the programs related to poverty and injustice reduction.

Social theology highlighted that actualization of faith is the engagement of people in solving community problems. Thus, social theology has a social character in dealing with the struggles that arose in the contemporary context. Social theology shows the expression of human's faith in God. Social theology stressed theological interpretations of how God works in the society as a whole (**Watts, 2015**). In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, social theology has shown an expression of faith that presents concern and is willing to share with others in building the whole community. This kind of life becomes a significant point in social theology because it emphasizes just and civilized humanity. Human value is higher than the existing identity differences.

The Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia's theological struggle is a new context, amidst the five general contexts: religious diversity, severe poverty, suffering, injustice, including gender and ecological damage (**Singgih, 2005**). Social theology also emphasizes the involvement of the congregations in solving social problems through the actualization of faith. Thus, Social theology has a social character in dealing with the struggles that arise in the contemporary context.

Indonesia is a large nation that is made up of various ethnicities, faiths, and beliefs that live as one nation. Several years ago (28 October, 1928) and long before the Independence Day (17 August, 1945), the Indonesian people had agreed to become one homeland, one nation, and one language, namely Indonesia. It means that we decided to unite with becoming Indonesia. The people have worked together to attain independence, to determine the same fate or future, to make mutual progress, and care for each other, as **John Titaley (2020)** stated, that "Walking together" is Indonesia.

From the Indonesian perspective, social theology that involves all parties in a pluralistic context is a necessity that combines two contexts, namely the Covid-19 pandemic and interfaith cooperation. Religion, including the church, is present in the struggle of the Indonesian nation today. This contextual mission causes the church to become a "friend" to the Indonesian citizens (**Artanto, 2015**). Due to this friendly attitude, Solidarity developed.

In a pandemic context, social theology seeks to unravel or unlock the ventilation of darkness, clogged taps, and fear, so that everyone can enjoy the warmth of humanity together in a peaceful atmosphere. With the right kind of health protocols being put to play in the health sector, the need for human beings to work will be reaffirmed. Therefore, creative work grows and produces human civilization in its diversity. Having a social theology in a pluralistic society builds strength for harmony in diversity, and herein is the greatness of the Indonesian nation. The greatness of a country is the greatness of its people. Large communities are people who care about other people around them. Since we are in a pluralistic society, this concern is not just for people of the same ethnicity or religion. Respect and Solidarity are practiced theology (doing theology). Doing theology is a part of theology that practices religious teachings by instilling goodness, peace, sharing, and loyalty to others. From this perspective, social theology or faith expression revives the brotherhood.

2. Social Theology presents Solidarity

Living in this Covid-19 pandemic period has brought a serious anomaly into peoples' lives that must be corrected with a systemic and holistic approach, in order to avoid chaos in life and to reach peace. Social theology plays a significant role in gaining a lot of attention, namely, Solidarity. Christian Solidarity begins with Christ Jesus who though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men in the context of human salvation (Philippians 2:5-7). This is the ultimate solidarity from a Christian perspective that can inspire anyone. Solidarity is a human action that expresses empathy and solidarity, especially when seeing each other experiencing problems/calamities. Loyalty and friendship are attributes that can generate social activities among others. Solidarity, as Emile Durkheim said, is a state of relationship between individuals and /or groups based on feelings and moral beliefs retained and reinforced by shared emotional experiences (**Apolo, 2018**).

In addition, Durkheim also stated that differences unite a society characterized by solidarity among people because they have different tasks (**Ritzer, 2012**). This theory is very relevant to the plurality of the Indonesian people's life in facing the pandemic. The differences are understood as a force for complementarity and solidarity. Plural society is God's gift to the Indonesian nation (**Hakh, 2017**). As a pluralistic nation, Indonesia has the same objectives in the preamble to the 1945 Constitution, one of which is the welfare of all Indonesians.

In the postmodern era of social theory, it is said that postmodern morality is dominated by the needs and responsibilities of others (**Ritzer, 2010**). The other person (lyan) is viewed with dignity as a fellow and is entitled to a decent or human life, even though he is considered different. Fellow citizens have the right to access health, education, work, clothing, food, housing, and so on. Everyone in a pluralistic society can accept each other's differences and shy away from heterophobia that arises from a lack of contact and connection/touch. Therefore, according to Mery Kolimon, the duties of religion in Indonesia today are: (1) to open communication barriers; (2) to create religious meeting rooms (**Mellisa and Mubarok, 2015**).

Methods

This is a qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology studies assume that every individual experiences phenomenon with all of their awareness. In other words, phenomenological studies aim to explore the subject's most in-depth understanding of the experiences in an event (**Hasbiansyah, 2008**).

Phenomenologists tend to oppose or doubt things that are received without going through any prior study or observation. They tend to justify views or perceptions (in some cases, also evaluations and actions), which refer to what Husserl says is *evident*, namely the existence of an awareness of truth itself. Also, phenomenologists tend to question truth and untruth of what Husserl calls the transcendental phenomenological epoche (**Salim: 2006**).

By using the phenomenological method, which emphasizes the study and observation of the social theological life between religious believers, research and observation on the object of research (social theology between religious believers) will lead to a renewal of the social theology between religious believers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Phenomenology also helps in finding correct perceptions by

evaluating the social theology between religious believers so far and how interfaith actions acted in the social life during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the way of social theology between believers can be found with the phenomenological method of truth and untruth in the context of a pandemic. This helped the researchers to understand the reality of existing social theology, so that this research can achieve its goals or objectives.

The phenomenological approach is very appropriate to be the right tool in achieving the objectives of this research. With this approach, this study used observations on events that included social relationships, social situations, events, roles, and groups that occur in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and how to socialize in a pluralistic society. The phenomenon described is a social, theological phenomenon of religious institutions that reveals how theology lives in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Results

Since all religions teach people to care for others, this shows that social theology is present in every religion. Thus, every Indonesian has solidarity across religions.

Discussion

Indonesia is facing a new context in the field of theological struggles, a non-human disaster, namely a pandemic, in addition to the five contexts mentioned by **Gerrit Singgih (2005)** - religious diversity, extreme poverty, suffering, inequality, including gender injustice, and ecological damage. Although Indonesia is a great nation, if it is not open to solidarity or a sense of acceptance as expressed by Durkheim, it won't be easy for it to face the problematic issues brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. As a pluralistic nation, the community must prioritize the urgency of cooperation in overcoming this national disaster. Thus, it becomes clear what **Hakh (2017)** emphasized that a pluralistic society is a gift from God to complement one another for the Indonesian people. Amid differences in relationships between humans, what Durkheim said becomes relevant that in the context of pluralism, solidarity strengthens emotional relationships between individuals and /or groups based on feelings and moral beliefs (**Ritzer, 2012**).

Even though disasters are non-human in nature, humans become the intermediaries that speed up the transmission. Conversely, humans can also break the pandemic chain. For this reason, What **Ritzer (2010)** said is relevant to the fact that morality is governed by the needs and responsibilities of others in the postmodern era. This social theory is a concern for preserving the welfare of others by taking care of one's health in compliance with the health protocols recommended by the government.

The government has also attempted to provide a vaccine to counter the corona virus as a form of responsibility for other parties as Ritzer said, although it is still in the due diligence process. The government hopes that by strengthening the Indonesian unity, the community will respond to the government's efforts. It is being united to face national disasters and overcome a heterophobic mentality. Solidarity must remove the fear of those who are different. For this reason, Mery Kolimon said that it is important to start opening up communication barriers again and establish interfaith meetings in the public sphere (**Mellisa and Mubarok, 2015**).

Since they are an inseparable part of national life, religious institutions have social duties and responsibilities to play as a type of solidarity with national religious institutions. These institutions are those involved in overcoming national problems. Solidarity breaks through the barriers of primordialism so that it becomes solidarity across religions, and an expression of faith in social, theological endeavors. Social problems become a meeting place for religious people to care for each other and work together. Interfaith solidarity encourages a sensitive, friendly attitude and is actively involved in addressing social issues, such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

The church must also carry out a social interfaith diaconia, as God exists in society (**Watts, 2015**). According to **Drewes and Mojau (2016)**, this social care action is programmed as closely as possible to be implemented with a budget. Social diaconia is a type of faith expression that is relevant to the modern context. Expressions of faith in the midst of differences can strengthen life together.

Durkheim's theory helps to understand that the life of solidarity still takes place at the level of groups with the same identity, such as religion and ethnicity. Mutual trust, unity, friendship, and mutual respect have not been fully created, as evidenced by the recent turbulent intolerance. As a country, the Indonesian nation has not yet achieved the level of solidarity because many, regardless of other people or different religions, move or walk independently. **Titaley (2020)** stated that agreeing to become Indonesia means to be willing to walk together in the nation's joys and sorrows.

Fundamentally, theology is not a mere thought or discourse but it includes caring alongside continuous analysis and reflection. This act of caring is a form of human social life. Having a social theology that is aware of the contemporary context is an attempt to justify faith. Accountability is also an expression of friendly, contributive, and hopeful communication of faith. Social theology is an effort to provide a wise attitude towards Indonesia's social context, particularly non-human disasters (the Covid-19 pandemic).

Conclusions

Social theology in Indonesia is a way of expressing religion in a pluralistic life. Theology is not just a concept, but a real work that has sided with humanity without distinguishing ethnicity, culture, and religion. With regard to solidarity, siding with a poor economic class is manifested amid the Covid-19 pandemic. As a plural society, togetherness needs to be developed, so that interfaith solidarity can be created because of the sense of togetherness as fellow nations in life's challenges. Solidarity will strengthen unity in the efforts to overcome national disasters. Without togetherness among people of different ethnicities and religions, common problems will be prolonged. Therefore, building brotherhood is an integral part of the nation's identity. In the final analysis and with the limitation of this research, there is a need for further studies to be conducted on social theology efforts from a national perspective. We are hopeful that due to pluralism in the Indonesian nation, this research would emphasize solidarity across all religions.

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