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The Challenge Of Gospel Work Among The Sundanese People, 1863-1930, With A Particular Focus On Hendrik Kraemer

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ABSTRACT

The Sundanese people are a majority Muslim ethnic group whose homeland is in West Java, Indonesia. The vast majority of the roughly 40 million Sundanese people still live in West Java, with relatively few leaving their province to seek fortune and adventure elsewhere, unlike several other ethnic groups in Indonesia. The Sundanese are known for their friendly attitudes and gentleness, as well as for their strong religious identity. Although they have lived near external influence for centuries (West Java is the province surrounding the Indonesian capital city of Jakarta), there has been relatively little in the way of movements of faith towards Jesus. Even today, the percentage of Sundanese people identifying as Christians is below 0.5% according to the Joshua Project,[1] and that includes many who identify as Christian because of family or locality rather than only those who are active followers of Jesus. There have been centuries of Christian missionary work in West Java but with relatively little success. Over the years, several missiologists and practicians have contemplated the possible reasons for this, which we will examine in this paper, such as tight community bonds and adaptability of religious expression while remaining within Islam. These issues remain relevant for work among the Sundanese today.

Keywords: *Gospel, Missionary, Sundanese people.*

[1]"Sunda in Indonesia," Joshua Project, accessed 19 March 2024, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/15121/ID

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Indonesia has a complex history of religious change, including in the Sundanese area of West Java (sometimes referred to by one if its local names, *Pasundan*). Similar to the rest of the country, there were indigenous beliefs referred to as *Sunda Wiwitan,*[2] or *Jati Sunda*, which persists today in some small communities. Due to international trade around the Indian Ocean, as well as the expansion and contraction of various kingdoms in East Asia, Hinduism and Buddhism arrived in various stages, starting from about the 5th Century,[3] and were successful in supplanting the indigenous beliefs. However, it is doubtful whether the underlying commitment to the traditional cultural-religious viewpoint ever changed significantly. As an example, on the neighbouring island of Bali, where Hinduism remains the majority faith in terms of officially registered adherents, anthropologists doubt that the underlying worldview has truly been changed from the previous traditions.[4] Hinduism may be only a formal veneer over the much more deeply-rooted foundational beliefs and culture.

This situation is also arguably similar for the Sundanese, the majority of whom have converted to Islam since its entrance to the island of Java around the 1500s (with the exception of a few pockets in places like Kampung Naga and the Baduy region who retain older pre-Islamic beliefs, as well as other small groups sprinkled around Pasundan). However, in the case of the Sundanese, the traditional beliefs and worldview that remain are mixed with Hinduism and Buddhism before being subsumed into Islam. This gives Islam in Indonesia, and Pasundan as a primary example, a distinctive flavour that is different from Islam that may be found in other parts of the world.[5] It may be that this is because the people are not deeply Islamic in their underlying worldview, at least in the sense of following a stereotypically Middle Eastern model of Islam.

When Islam entered Java, the early missionaries of the new faith actively engaged with the previous faith and cultural traditions to spread their message.[6] This included adopting Hindu stories, claiming Hindu kings and heroes as Islamic, and using existing cultural forms such as

[2]Ira Indrawardana, "Berketuhanan Dalam Perspektif Kepercayaan Sunda Wiwitan," *MELINTAS* 30, no. 1 (April 1, 2014): 106.

[3]Deni Miharja, "Sistem Kepercayaan Awal Masyarakat Sunda," *Al-Adyan: Jurnal Studi Lintas Agama* 10, no. 1 (2015): 22–23.

[4]Wayan I. Geriya, "The Impact of Tourism in Three Tourist Villages in Bali," in *Globalization in Southeast Asia: Local, National, and Transnational Perspectives.*, ed. Shinji Yamashita and J. S. Eades (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 81–82.

[5]This could be said for any form of Islam, or any other religion for that matter, as all expressions of it are localized. For a perspective on the changing dynamics of Indonesian Islam and the (perhaps lessening) friendliness, see Martin M van Bruinessen, "What Happened to the Smiling Face of Indonesian Islam? Muslim Intellectualism and the Conservative Turn in Post-Suharto Indonesia.," RSIS Working Papers, No. 222 (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2011). For a closer focus on Sundanese Islam and its local dynamics, see Lynda Newland, "Under the Banner of Islam: Mobilising Religious Identities in West Java," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (2000): 199–222.

[6]Wawan Hernawan and Ading Kusdiana, *Biografi Sunan Gunung Djati: Sang Penata Agama Di Tanah Sunda* (LP2M UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, 2020). See also George Quinn, *Bandit Saints of Java: How Java's Eccentric Saints Are Challenging Fundamentalist Islam in Modern Indonesia* (Burrough on the Hill, Leics.: Monsoon Books, 2018) for an engaging overview of the various Muslim saints around the island of Java and their use of existing traditions to spread their message.

puppet shows to spread the new faith. There was seemingly no desire to erase the existing beliefs and replace them with Islam: instead, Islam was adapted to fit the existing beliefs. Down to the present day, syncretism is the norm. This presents a problem to many Muslim missionaries who would like to see a more "authentic" Islam in Pasundan, but up to now they have largely been unsuccessful in persuading Sundanese people to part from their traditions and take up a more Middle Eastern outlook.

Despite this, or maybe because of it, Sundanese people consider their culture to be uniquely suited to Islam (as they understand it). The phrase *"Islam teh Sunda, Sunda teh Islam"*[7] (Islam is Sunda, Sunda is Islam) is widely known and prized as a sign of how suitable Sundanese culture is with the Islamic faith. At least one author believes that the Sundanese were relieved to return to a monotheistic faith after the aberration of Hinduism: "if, in the Hindu and Buddhist time, Sundanese people were 'forced' to believe in so many imported gods originating from India, then when Islam came, the belief in the Lord of the Universe re-emerged and converged on one point, namely the worship of one God (monotheism)."[8] This misses the important point that Sunda Wiwitan beliefs are not properly monotheistic, being partly animistic in nature and having a place for honouring other spirits and ancestors. It is highly likely that one of the main reasons for perceptions like this is that the version of Islam known in Pasundan today is an Islam that was formed in contact with Sundanese society so that they altered each other until it is difficult to separate them. However, you are unlikely to find such a view expressed from Sundanese Muslim writers. Furthermore, Islam in other parts of the world that has not become entwined with Sundanese sensibilities (*Nyunda*: become Sundanese, as they say in West Java) would be harder to claim as perfectly fit for Sundanese societal preferences.

This background of beliefs and thick culture presents a difficult hurdle for Christian ministry among the Sundanese. The belief that Islam is so perfectly fitted to Sundanese identity makes it extremely difficult for a Sundanese person to even begin to consider the possibility of believing anything else. It would be a betrayal of their most basic identity. This is of course in addition to the community pressure and regulated daily Islamic activities that pervade Sundanese life, so that a break with Islam would be a terribly jarring experience without anything to replace the thick community embrace.

The close identity of Sundanese culture with the local understanding of Islam also makes it difficult to change beliefs in other ways. As a contrasting example, many Muslims in Iran are leaving Islam partly because it is seen as an intruder that stands in contrast with the rich history of Persian culture.[9] Islam there retained its Arabic origins so that leaving Islam does not mean leaving one's Persian identity but can even be seen as strengthening it. Islam is identified with unwelcome

[7]Abdurrahman, "Rekonstruksi 'Islam Teh Sunda, Sunda Teh Islam,'" *Asy-Syari'ah* 17, no. 2 (2015): 19–28.

[8]Original: "[j]ika pada masa Hindu dan Budha masyarakat Sunda "dipaksa" untuk meyakini begitu banyak dewa impor yang berasal dari India, maka ketika Islam datang, keyakinan adanya Sang Penguasa Alam Raya kembali muncul dan bertemu pada satu titik yaitu penyembahan terhadap satu Tuhan (monoteisme)." Abdurrahman, 20.

[9]Ladan Boroumand, "Iranians Turn Away from the Islamic Republic," *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 1 (2020): 176.

domination and suppression, both politically and culturally. If Islam had adapted itself to Persian culture as much as it did to Sundanese culture, it might be a different story in Iran today.

Christian ministers in Pasundan have come up against difficulties spreading their faith for other reasons too. Some of the first Christians encountered by the Sundanese people were European colonisers, not peaceful traders. While the Dutch government and the Dutch East Indies Company were generally hesitant to allow evangelisation in their colonies (being more interested in maintaining social order and subservience, and thus profit, than in making Christian converts), there were still evangelisation efforts and Christianity was inevitably identified with the colonial oppressors.[10] Added to this, unlike among many African traditional religions which Christianity replaced under colonialism, Islam has built-in resistance to Christianity, explicitly denying many of its core tenets.[11] Thus it was difficult for Christian evangelistic work to make much progress. There were Sundanese churches established, but they remained the exception, and today are largely made up of Christian people from other ethnic groups who have moved into West Java and wish to attend a local church.

In the early 20th century the modern missionary movement (which for the purposes of this definition can be considered to be the time following the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh), more focussed work began among many people groups around the world, including among the Sundanese. One of the major figures involved in work in Indonesia in the decades following that conference was Hendrik Kraemer, who did not exclusively focus on the Sundanese but whose writings touch on them. We will now turn to Kraemer's work to examine his perspective on mission to the Sundanese and the difficulties encountered there.

Hendrik Kraemer on Sundanese mission

Hendrik Kraemer surveyed the church and mission situation in West Java in the 1930s. At that time the total population and the proportion of people living in cities was very different than it is today: according to the 1930 census quoted by Kraemer, just over 11 million people lived in West Java, including Batavia (now known as Jakarta), 97% of whom were indigenous. The total population in cities was very small, with only 8.5% (less than 1 million) living in all the cities combined.[12] The original census further clarifies that among the indigenous population, 8,275,140 were Sundanese.[13] The census assumes that almost all the Sundanese people are Muslims and does not question them further on their religion.[14]

[10]Maryse Kruithof, "Shouting in a Desert: Dutch Missionary Encounters with Javanese Islam, 1850-1910" (PhD, Rotterdam, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2014), 55.

[11]Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, 2nd ed., The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys (Edinburgh: Edinburgh university press, 2020), 24–25.

[12]Hendrik Kraemer, *From Missionfield to Independent Church: Report on a Decisive Decade in the Growth of Indigenous Churches in Indonesia* (London: SCM Press, 1958), 96–97.

[13]Department Van Landbouw, Nijverheid En Handel, "Volkstelling 1930: Deel 1. Inheemsche Bevolking van West-Java" (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1933), 96, https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/1085284.

[14]Department Van Landbouw, Nijverheid En Handel, 95.

Kraemer begins with a history of the evangelistic efforts of the NZV (*Nederlandsche Zendingsvereeniging*: Netherlands Missionary Union) in West Java. He writes that there was no formal effort to reach the Sundanese until 1863, centuries after the Dutch had first entered West Java.[15] It seems incredible that the Sundanese could be ignored in mission for so long, but that is an indication of the priorities of the Dutch administration. Kraemer writes that they had no interest in an "ethical policy" in colonial government which would prioritise policies based on humanity and justice.[16] There had long been churches in Batavia (Jakarta) but they had very little interest in reaching out beyond their own flock: "When the Indische Kerk was formed its main task was to maintain the VOC legacy congregations so that they did not try to spread Christianity to local people."[17] This attitude of restricting gospel proclamation to those who are from the same ethnic or social group is still sadly widespread in Indonesia and contributes to the imbalance of Christian adherents across cultures.

When the pioneering mission workers were sent in 1863 they were conscious of a debt owed by the Dutch to the Sundanese, who had long provided a large part of the riches enjoyed by the Netherlands.[18] Even then, the colonial government was hesitant about the idea of sending mission workers to Muslims, having had bad experiences of mission efforts to the Muslim Javanese in the past, so they delayed the permissions necessary for the missionaries to the Sundanese.[19] Even when the missionaries finally gained entrance to Pasundan after several years, they were bitterly disappointed by the rejection and indifference of the Sundanese towards their message, so much so that the mission society considered withdrawing, although they found a much better reception from other ethnic groups like the Chinese and Ambonese.[20] Having said that, Sukamto writes that Albers, one of the three pioneers, did baptise some Sundanese converts[21] - this would be considered an outstanding success by many modern missionaries facing the continuing difficulty of ministry in Pasundan.

Why did the early efforts fail?

Kraemer offers some suggestions as to why it was so difficult in those early days of the late 19th Century. Significantly, he does not lay any blame at the feet of the missionaries but reminds readers that they were faithful servants whose effects in the spiritual world may be invisible but not insignificant.[22] Having said that, he suggests that there was inadequate research into the

[15]Kraemer, *Missionfield*, 97.

[16]Kraemer, 116. Interestingly, Kraemer writes that this ethical policy started to gain advocates in the 1900s, not coincidentally the century in which empires began to give up or lose their old colonies. It is hard to consistently claim to be ethical in your government if you are still occupying another country to exploit it.

[17]Original: "Ketika Indische Kerk dibentuk pada tugas utamanya adalah memelihara jemaat warisan VOC sehingga mereka tidak berusaha untuk menyebarkan kekristenan kepada orang-orang lokal." Amos Sukamto, "Negosiasi Antara Budaya Barat Dengan Budaya Lokal Dalam Usaha Penyebaran Kristen Protestan Di Kalangan Orang Sunda Pada Abad Ke-19," in *Prosiding Balai Arkeologi Jawa Barat*, 2020, 177.

[18]Kraemer, *Missionfield*, 97.

[19]Kraemer, 98.

[20]Kraemer, 98.

[21]Sukamto, "Negosiasi," 176.

[22]Kraemer, *Missionfield*, 99.

Sundanese people's culture, mindset, and spirituality, although it was not a common to do such research in those days.[23] It may be that we owe much in the way of modern mission research methods to the failed experiments of those days in Pasundan and elsewhere. Kraemer also writes that the despair of those early workers may have compounded to such an extent that they became silent and ineffective.[24] This is perhaps the most devastating possibility: that the unexpected rejection shook them so much that they were unable to continue.

This possibility of poor research into the Sundanese as a focus for mission work is interesting in light of modern emphasis on detailed understanding of a focus people group before serious effort is made to reach them. There are some possibilities as to why it may have been so in those days, broadly, hubris or inexperience. Hubris could be one possibility, because the Dutch believed they already knew the Indonesian people after centuries of living among and exploiting them, so that they did not need to do any further research into their character or the most appropriate methods of communicating with them. There is also an attractive simplicity in believing that there is one way of proclaiming the gospel that should be effective in all cultures at all times. If it works for the Chinese, it should work for the Sundanese. But the Bible itself is full of different approaches depending on the culture or personality of the person being addressed with the gospel. There is also a possible element of racism and lack of respect for the complexity and attraction of Islam that could lead some people to think that it should be easy to replace primitivism with Christianity. Another assumption is that people lower in the social order should accept what those with more prestige tell them, forgetting the resentment and rejection that can build up after centuries of oppression.

That connects with the second possibility: inexperience. The lack of attempt to reach the Sundanese in the past could have led to an assumption that they would be the same as other people who had been successfully evangelised before. But today we are more aware, often through bitter experience like this, that different people groups and cultures have significant differences that have to be explored and understood in order to connect the unchanging gospel message with them (this is often called contextualisation today).[25]

Other research into failures of NZV efforts in Pasundan in those early days can be found in Sofianto et al., where the argument is made that "the arrival of Europeans, especially Dutch people…contributed very little to the spread of Christianity."[26] Instead there was more impact from the Chinese Christian community on the Sundanese,[27] at least in the city of Garut, where that research focuses. The motivation for the Dutch to reach the Sundanese was not strong: "instead of

[23]Kraemer, 98–99.

[24]Kraemer, 99.

[25]For a helpful overview and evaluation of the mature contextualization debate informed through experience in an Indonesian context, see Derek Brotherson, *Contextualization or Syncretism? The Use of Other-Faith Worship Forms in the Bible and in Insider Movements* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021).

[26]Kunto Sofianto et al., "The Struggle of NZV in Spreading the Gospel in Garut, West Java, Indonesia, in the Early 20th Century," *Transformation* 38, no. 4 (October 1, 2021): 331.

[27]Sofianto et al., 334.

running a Gospel mission, the *Indische Kerk* aimed to maintain the existing congregations."[28] That may have been the case in Garut in the late 19th Century, but it was not universal—European missionaries were actively reaching out to the Sundanese in other parts of West Java, albeit with resistance from the colonial government.

Progress Or Compromise

In parallel with the disappointing start for the NZV missionaries, there were successes. Kraemer and others attribute a lot of this improvement to the work and missiological emphases of F. L. Anthing, a lawyer formerly stationed in Semarang.[29] For his contributions, Kraemer calls him "one of the most original and most remarkable men in the entire history of missions in West Java."[30] He had gained useful insights into the character and desires of local peoples' hearts from interaction with Kiai Ibrahim Toenggoel Woeloeng (a Javanese Christian leader who tried to connect Christianity with local Javanese mystical thought and practices[31]), such as the attraction of a secret knowledge (ilmu) that could be shared.[32] There are many existing formulaic aspects of Christian scripture and recitation, like the prayers and confessions of faith, that can be taught to Indonesians and which are acceptable in a culture that prizes mystery and communal conformity to received wisdom. He also downplayed the connection between Christianity and the Dutch,[33] which is something that seems obvious to modern missionaries but was perhaps less so in those days. He believed that "to preach the Gospel, natives must be evangelized by natives,"[34] a principle which has survived and been used by many generations since. If people believe that Christianity is for another people group but not for their own culture, there is no reason to give it any attention, but if it is for all people everywhere and does not prioritise or depend on one culture over another, or come inextricably wrapped in foreign cultural forms, then it is far more acceptable. Sukamto comments that "religious rituals can be part of customs and culture, which cannot be separated from the customs and culture of an ethnic group,"[35] so Anthing was wise to understand the need to preserve something of the culture and religious forms in order for the gospel to be received rather than rejected outright as something foreign.

However, Anthing's approach was not entirely praiseworthy or effective in terms of gospel fruit. Kraemer writes that his "*strength* was at the same time his *weakness*"[36] (emphasis original). What might be called his contextualising approach compromised the gospel. Anthing had been so successful in understanding the Sundanese mindset that he had failed to communicate the reality of the gospel:

[28]Sofianto et al., 334.

[29]Sukamto, "Negosiasi," 177.

[30]Kraemer, *Missionfield*, 99.

[31]Fredi Purwanto, "Sorotan Yohanes 17:20-23 Tentang Kesatuan Allah Dan Manusia Terhadap Mistik Toenggoel Woeloeng," *Missio Ecclesiae* 7, no. 1 (April 29, 2018): 1.

[32]Sukamto, "Negosiasi," 177.

[33]Kraemer, *Missionfield*, 99.

[34]Original: "untuk memberitakan Injil, pribumi harus diinjili oleh pribumi." Sukamto, "Negosiasi," 177.

[35]Original: "ritual agama bisa menjadi bagian adat, kebudayaan, yang tidak bisa dipisahkan dengan adat dan kebudayaan sebuah suku bangsa." Sukamto, 178.

[36]Kraemer, *Missionfield*, 100.

> *he stopped at this initial stage of presenting the Gospel and did not deliberately lead them on to the revelation of the Gospel as the radical transformation of all thought, feeling and will. However, he had to fall a victim to this weakness for the simple reason that he could not escape it. For his helpers were themselves insufficiently initiated into Christianity, and their minds were steeped in an atmosphere of ilmu and magic. They had never been led beyond this.*[37]

Often the Christian message is reduced to a culturally acceptable formulae that can be appropriated to deal with people's felt needs and spiritual fears rather than lead them to Jesus. Some contemporaries, like Sierk Coolsma, wrote that it would almost be preferable for them not to believe than for them to believe in such a compromised gospel,[38] and the NZV opposed Anthing's accommodation to cultural elements like circumcision and superstition.[39] Despite this seemingly fatal problem, Kraemer still considers Anthing to have been a significant asset to the cause of Sundanese Christianity by laying the groundwork for communities that would be receptive to a more complete presentation of the gospel. At that time several churches and communities of Sundanese people took on the name *Anthing* and continued for some time.[40]

Drawn by the positive response, more workers, like J. Verhoeven, came to Pasundan to help the young churches. He had other beneficial insights into the needs of ministry among the Sundanese, such as how the reality of their close communities meant that European-style evangelism would not work, and that any newly converted Christians would be expelled from their communities. Therefore, new villages of Christians were needed to create a parallel society in which Sundanese converts could live without being excluded.[41] To this day there are still places in Pasundan which feel the effect of these movements over 100 years ago.

There were other barriers to the gospel that these pioneers saw, including the strong connection between religion and the state, including the political power of many religious leaders, resulting in a practical barrier to freedom of religion. Verhoeven petitioned the government to undo or weaken some of the laws establishing this connection with an intention to allowing easier spread of the gospel. Kraemer praises his foresight and strategic thinking in this matter.[42] This was an unusual method for the time in that Verhoeven actively considered the wider political and cultural trends that would be either a help or a hindrance, rather than simply proclaiming the gospel without giving attention to the wider context.

[37]Kraemer, 100.
[38]Sukamto, "Negosiasi," 180.
[39]Sukamto, 181.
[40]Sukamto, 178.
[41]Kraemer, *Missionfield*, 101.
[42]Kraemer, 102.

Ongoing Struggles

Having briefly examined the history of some mission efforts in Pasundan, we still face the challenge of establishing a significant Christian presence among the Sundanese. Kraemer begins to address this question by reminding readers that there can easily be despair over the Sundanese situation because it is compared to that of the neighbouring Javanese, who are "unique phenomenon indeed in world-wide missions among Mohammedans. No other Mohammedan country can show several tens of thousands of Christians, comparatively flourishing congregations, and constant, though slow, progress."[43] In this sense, the Sundanese are more usual among Muslim-majority people groups in their resistance to the gospel.

Following this clarification, Kraemer offers some suggestions as to why mission efforts have been so unfruitful. First, he identifies weaknesses in the missionaries: they are too foreign, and they fail to fully enter into the Sundanese way of life to understand the Sundanese people or communicate in a suitably Sundanese way.[44] Some people, such as Verhoeven, started to address this problem and cross the gap between cultures and mindsets, but not fully and not effectively. The training of missionaries in the Sundanese language is commendable but has neglected a deep understanding of culture which could help to enter the Sundanese worldview much more effectively.[45] Part of that is about learning to "see the individual in relation to his people,"[46] which is fundamental to Sundanese society.

Secondly, missionaries, especially Western missionaries in developing countries, are almost all proud and unable to put aside feelings of superiority.[47] This is fatal because it keeps missionaries from fully loving and serving the people, and it is noticed by those to whom they intend to interact.

Moving on from the failures of missionaries to the Sundanese themselves, Kraemer notes the often-remarked cheerfulness and collectivist nature of the Sundanese people. He believes this is linked to their history of far fewer and smaller kingdoms when compared to the neighbouring Javanese, resulting in a more open and carefree lifestyle without the discipline and sternness of royal court culture. This allowed greater cultural penetration by Islam which did not have to compete with an established strict hierarchy, but could provide a new strong social foundation and source of unity and resistance against the Dutch.[48] This interpretation connects with the previously discussed view on the unique compatibility of Sundanese culture and Islam (*Sunda teh Islam, Islam teh Sunda*), suggesting that the reason they are so closely interlinked is because the pre-Islamic culture was comparatively weak and easily overwritten. There may be some true and useful insights in that interpretation, but although the culture of Javanese-style kingdoms was lacking we must be careful not to naively consider old Sundanese society to be a blank slate. It had its own

[43]Kraemer, 103.
[44]Kraemer, 103–6.
[45]Kraemer, 306–8.
[46]Kraemer, 308.
[47]Kraemer, 111.
[48]Kraemer, 112–13.

distinctive features which may not have been a barrier to Islam but have nevertheless remained as strong cultural tendencies that present a barrier to the gospel.

Kraemer goes on to comment that the Sundanese have a tendency, though seemingly illogical to foreign observers, to be at the same time highly religious and yet irreligious: claiming complete adherence to Islam while refusing to allow religion to dictate and trouble their content lives.[49] This, in conjunction with cultural identity and family bonds being so tight, militates against the effectiveness of Christian missionaries among the Sundanese.

Changing The Future

As ministry among the Sundanese has been struggling for so long, repeating the same mistakes and running into the same obstacles as ever, what lessons should the modern church and missionary movement in Pasundan learn from the past?

Kraemer first advises realism.[50] The aim at an extraordinary spiritual breakthrough and a mature Sundanese church is not a wrong desire, but it is not wise because it is unlikely to be attained in the way that is hoped and is more likely to lead to yet another generation of frustrated missionaries who leave the field. To be a Sundanese believer in Christ is incredibly difficult and their churches face great challenges, including stagnation.

Secondly, the Sundanese church should be allowed and encouraged to develop in its own way, not directed or dictated by the more "knowledgeable" missionaries.[51] Today this point may come under such terms as self-theologising and self-governance, but the goal is the same: to see faithful local expressions of the church grow and develop in maturity without feeling dependent on or directed by foreign superiors. This includes foreign missionaries learning from the leadership of local workers, who are often able to approach evangelistic conversations in a much more contextually appropriate and effective way.[52] This is a remarkably humble perspective that has become widely admired, if not fully emulated, in modern mission work. There is much more humility needed to fully realise this vision of indigenous pioneering leadership.

Thirdly, we must identify where concepts that are often used in evangelism are not shared with the same understanding by our hearers. For example, the idea of sin and forgiveness is very different among the Muslim Sundanese than it might be among Europeans,[53] so a direct translation of preaching on sin and repentance cannot be received as it is intended. A conscious exploration of local understanding must be sought out first so that concepts are not misapplied.

[49]Kraemer, 115.
[50]Kraemer, 118–20.
[51]Kraemer, 120.
[52]Kraemer, 121.
[53]Kraemer, 134.

Having explored concepts, there are some strategies that have been recommended: education (Sundanese people desire good education for their children)[54] and health services[55] (Kraemer also says these two were good ways to serve the Sundanese).[56] Kraemer talks about education as a way of breaking the hold of *adat* (tradition or custom) over Sundanese society: they "must first go through a stage of loosening their bonds before the work of preaching a different religion can gain a wider scope."[57] While understanding this motivation, we must be careful not to conclude that Sundanese *adat* is something unredeemable and must be removed from Sundanese life in order to get a good hearing for the gospel. To do that would run into one of the risks that Kraemer is aware of: that of pride in Western culture and denigrating Sundanese culture. Rather it would be better to take the good advice we have received from Kraemer to deeply investigate and understand Sundanese culture, appreciate it, recognise where it has been damaged by Islam, and seek to use it for good in education while demonstrating how the gospel more faithfully fulfils Sundanese cultural desires than Islam does.[58] We cannot say that Western education and values are inherently better, as Kraemer well knows, and in fact there are many aspects of Sundanese *adat* that Western people would do well to adopt, such as the community bonds that are so important in Pasundan. Western education may be attractive to Sundanese people because of its association with power and economic prosperity, but it undermines much of what is good in Sundanese traditions. A more strategic approach for missionary educators could be to explore appropriately combining the strengths of Western and Sundanese values in an education system that reinforces the good in Sundanese society while accepting the benefits of wider exposure. Then students would have a more solid, well-informed basis from which to make judgments about truth and validity, thus fulfilling Kraemer's intentions, while the wider society would have less reason to accuse educators of imperialism or undermining their cherished traditions. In fact, there are some ways this is happening in the present time with Sundanese Christians preserving traditional Sundanese arts and music which are being neglected by the majority of their Muslim neighbours in preference for more "prestigious" Middle Eastern or Western arts. Sundanese Christians have an opportunity to show respect for their cultural heritage and use it as a means to promote the gospel by demonstrating that they are *more* committed to being authentically Sundanese, not less.

CONCLUSION

The obstacles to Christianity that were observed by this earlier generation of missionaries remain today: fear of reproach,[59] stigmatisation as *kafir* and Muslim leaders warning against associating with Christians.[60] It has been nearly 100 years since Hendrik Kraemer wrote his report on the state of Sundanese Christianity, and still the situation is much the same. He knew that

[54]Sofianto et al., "Struggle of NZV," 336.
[55]Sofianto et al., 338.
[56]Kraemer, *Missionfield*, 102.
[57]Kraemer, 137.
[58]Christopher Robert Flint, "How Does Christianity 'Subversively Fulfil' Islam?," *St Francis Magazine* 8, no. 6 (December 2012): 776–822.
[59]Sofianto et al., "Struggle of NZV," 337.
[60]Sofianto et al., 339.

progress would be slow. It will not be easy, but these difficulties may be overcome with careful research and understanding of the Sundanese culture, and prayer for humility and patience.

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