

Thanksgiving Religion Of Minahasan Christian In Manado: A Lived Religion Perspective

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Abstract

This article explores how Minahasan Christians live in Manado on a daily basis. This paper employed an approach from the sociology of religion, particularly the perspective of lived religion. Our research focuses on the tradition of thanksgiving in Minahasa. Using the perspective of lived religion this article concluded that thanksgiving as the living religion of Minahasan Christian in Manado because almost everything in the life of Minahasan Christian is depicted from the framework of gratitude. This research uses qualitative method with literature study and observation to the life of Minahasan Christian in Manado, especially to the thanksgiving tradition. At the end part, this article analyse the opportunities on doing theology with the perspective of lived religion.

Keywords: Lived Religion, Thanksgiving Religion, Eating, Minahasan Christian in Manado

I. INTRODUCTION

One approach to understanding society as a whole is to incorporate theology and sociology, thus giving rise to the term sociology of religion. Early in the development of the sociology of religion, we have witnessed that most research to find out about religion starts from institutions but recently there has been a change. Previously, it was more about understanding religion from the institutional authority's perspective or the religious leaders' understanding. Now it is more to understand from the perspective of ordinary people. This perspective is popular and well known as "lived religion", or it can also be referred to by other terms such as "living religion" (Gregg, 11) or also mentioned as "everyday religion" (Ammerman, 5).

Manado or Minahasa, two terms that are often used interchangeably, is one of the regions in Indonesia where the population is famous for its religious life. Christianity is the majority religion here so this city is famous for the city of thousands of churches. If in the US or Europe religion begins to disappear even though there are traces of religion everywhere, according to Ammerman (Ammerman, 7), in Manado, religious elements are everywhere. In addition to having many churches (as well as places of worship for other religions), there are many prominent Christian religious symbols such as Jesus' blessing, a giant cross, a prayer monument, and others. There are various other things such as religious attributes in every house that

symbolizes religion and stickers such as the Jesus Inside sticker, we love Christ and sort of, on the car/motorcycle everywhere.

Apart from their famous religious life, people in Manado are also famous for their consumptive lifestyle, so people in Manado are considered/accused of practicing conspicuous consumption, to use Veblen's term (Veblen, 53). This conspicuous consumption can be seen when they shop, dress up, party, or while eating. Usually, this, explained by certain people, is caused by a well-known motto in Manado: *biar kalah nasi mar jang kalah aksi* (let there be no rice, but do not lose in style). A term that has expanded from its previous meaning, according to Ivan Kaunang (Kaunang, 14), but is often used by people outside Manado to describe the consumptive phenomenon in Manado.

To understand the consumptive phenomenon in Manado where the religious level is high, this article tries to describe it through the perspective of the sociology of religion with a lived religion approach. If you look at the phenomenon in terms of the largest institution in Manado, namely GMIM (Gereja Masehi Injili di Minahasa), then GMIM also seems to agree with the assumption/accusation from outsiders of Manado, that Manado people are consumptive. This can be seen for example in MTPJ (MTPJ is abbreviation of Menjabarkan Trilogi Pembangunan Jemaat/Outlining the Congregational Building Trilogy that is monthly sermon handbook for pastors and church members issued by Sinode GMIM) which emphasizes being frugal and not consumptive by using a biblical basis. In MTPJ, it is impressive that Christian teachings do not teach to be extravagant but to be frugal. In this case, it can be seen that the religious Manadonese do not seem to practice Christian teachings. To describe this phenomenon, it is necessary to approach the daily life of the Minahasan Christians in Manado.

This article explores what the Minahasa Christians in Manado live daily, to observe what is the main thing in their religious life. This article begins by discussing the lived religion approach and then it is used to analyze religious phenomena in the daily life of the Minahasa Christians in Manado, in this case consumptive. Based on the lived religion approach, it can be concluded that in Manado everything is seen as an expression of gratitude because it can also be said that the religion that is lived daily is the Religion of Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving which is usually marked by worship always ends with eating. Therefore, thanksgiving means eating too. Thus, eating can also be referred to as the religion of the Minahasa Christians.

II. METHODOLOGY

The method used in this research is descriptive with a qualitative approach. This study involved a Minahasan Christian who lived in Kota Manado, North Sulawesi. Data were collected by observing, and reviewing documents that complement each other and strengthen. Lived religion perspective of Sociology Religion as the entry point to the analysis of the daily live basis of Minahasa Christians in Manado.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Lived Religion

Lived religion is one of the perspectives for encountering religion from the perspective of the sociology of religion. According to Ammerman, lived religion from the term started with David Hall in 1994 at a conference hosted by Harvard University (Ammerman, 9). To understand the differences between ways of encountering religion, according to Stephen E. Gregg, there are three different terms of religion:

Reported religion (traditional textbook commentaries on religious tradition), represented religion (how religious people and organizations present themselves, and their tradition) and living religion (what people believe and do) (Gregg, 18). In other words, lived religion is what everyone does, prioritizes, and lives by on a daily basis.

Lived religion departs from the failure of sociology of religion as a discipline to understand religion that only analyses institutions or general. Previous studies of the sociology of religion were concerned with the emergence of modernity and secularization. Rationality to judge everything, including religion. A religion that is full of myths has begun to be judged with rationality, so there is an assumption that belief in religion will lose its grip or even disappear. With modernity, the truth of religion began to be doubted, having previously claimed to be the only truth.

The assessment of religion is only at the institutional level because it looks at how the religious institution is in terms of the number of followers and the belief system of an institution. Therefore, McGuire proposes an approach by looking at the practice of the individual. "Rather than deduce an image of individuals' beliefs and practices from abstractions about religion in general or even about particular religions, I have grappled with how to comprehend individuals' religion-as-practiced, in all their complexity and dynamism" (McGuire, 5). Why should it be individual? "At the level of the individual, religion is not fixed, unitary, or even coherent. We should expect that all persons' religious practices and the stories with which they make sense of their lives are always changing, adapting, and growing" (McGuire, 12). However, according to Ammerman, the approach to individuals is more suitable in countries with less institutional influence, such as in the western context (Ammerman, 10).

The individual approach to understanding religion, although not in an unsuitable context, is not entirely inaccurate, because focusing on the individual will emphasize practice in everyday life. Lived religion focuses on what individuals in a community do daily. "Religion is not lived in the textbook; it is performed, experienced, and developed by living individuals and communities" (Gregg, 9). Religion that is performed, experienced, and developed appears in the various practices of each individual.

Sociology of religion should start approaching religion from a new perspective. "Scholars of religion, especially sociologists, must re-examine their assumption about individuals' religious lives" (McGuire, 4). According to Ammerman, this discipline should take a new turn (Ammerman, 2), to investigate everyday life from the perspective of ordinary people (mundane). Even though they are not members of a particular religious institution, people still show their beliefs in everyday life. The religious institutions may seem non-existent, but the people who practice the faith still exist. Grace Davie called as "vicarious religion" (Davie, 22). These people as representatives of the belief of the institution or other people.

As a result of the interaction of modernity and religion in general, Europe became more secular and America became pluralist, but this is not the case in the rest of the world. Latin America was not secular or pluralist such as Europe and America, as studied by Morello. Morello argued that there is an interaction between modernity and religion, but the result has not been a diminishing of religiosity, but its transformation" (Morello 21). He called it "enchanted modernity". This led to the emergence of the terms by sociologists. Spiritual but not religious, free riders, bricolage, creeping secularization, patchwork religion, believing without belonging, religion blending, mix, and hybrid. That's why McGuire concluded, "All religions are necessarily syncretic and continually changing, as people try to make sense of their

changing social worlds, including other cultures with which they come in contact” (McGuire, 102).

The study of Lived religion has so far been more focused on some parts of the world. Surveyed by Ammerman, the study of lived religion is already in a wide range of disciplines but is still limited to a geographic perspective. Only focused on North America, Europe, Latin America, Africa, and South Asia (Ammerman, 23). Ammerman proposed four ideal types to understand lived religious practice: religion can be entangled, established, institutional, or interstitial, with postcolonial context as a hybrid formed from the encounter between established forms and entangled ones (Ammerman, 24). The United States seems to be entangled but also interstitial. Europe is mostly interstitial.

3.2 *Pengucapan Syukur* (thanksgiving) di Minahasa

Pengucapan syukur consists of two words, namely *pengucapan*, and *syukur*. *Pengucapan* from the original word *ucap* in English is saying and *syukur* in English translated give thanks/gratitude. Although it consists of two words, it is usually called short by the Minahasa/Manado people with *pengucapan*. In English western or US tradition, it is translated or equivalent to the word thanksgiving. Thanksgiving in Indonesia and western depart from the tradition of giving thanks at the harvest.

Currently, thanksgiving in Minahasa has become a Christian tradition organized by the church and regulated by the government (of Indonesia). However, the tradition of giving thanks in Minahasa began long before Christianity came and the Indonesian government existed. This tradition has long existed in the old tradition of Minahasa religion. In this religion, the thanksgiving tradition is called *foso* (ritual *rummage* which is taken from the word *rages* (which means to make offerings). Thus, *foso rummages* is a ritual carried out by the old Minahasa community in the form of a ritual of giving offerings to *Empung Wailan Wangko* (the Almighty God).

The ritual of *foso rummages* or commonly known as *foso rummages um banua* (thanksgiving for the harvest) is a ritual of thanksgiving for the harvest by presenting several forms of offerings. The farmers (the majority of the occupations at that time) would bring their offerings which were agricultural products as thanksgiving for the harvest and prayers for the next cropping cycle. According to Rinto Taroreh, a Minahasa cultural practitioner, as quoted by Aprilia Zelika, various forms of offerings that are usually given in the ritual of *foso rummages* are in the form of rice from the first harvest, and the best animals such as chicken cooked in bamboo. The results of these dishes are first dedicated to God (*rerumetaan*) and partly offered to the ancestors as a form of respect for the ancestors (*ja se weteng*).

The culmination of the thanksgiving ritual is made before sunrise. The goal is as a symbol so that all the work and efforts that will be carried out in the future can get a new spirit. Taroreh also explained that after the peak ritual, at sunrise, the ancestors invited other people from outside the *wanua* or *roong* (village) to share the blessings together. This ritual of *foso rummages* is carried out according to the rice harvest season which is regulated by *tonaas*. The determination of implementation of *foso rummages* has been regulated and determined since the beginning of the planting season.

This thanksgiving ritual has been a tradition to this day. However, according to cultural expert and historian Ivan Kaunang, the thanksgiving ritual practiced by the Minahasa people in the past has undergone many changes and according to Kaunang this transformation of the *rummages* tradition occurred after Christianity entered the Minahasa land (Kaunang, 15). This tradition of *rummages* is referred to

as a celebration of thanksgiving. Currently, the thanksgiving celebration is held once a year between the months of July-August and its implementation is regulated by the government and the church.

When Christianity entered the Minahasa land in the 15th or 16th century the tradition of thanksgiving was taken over by the church as a tradition of giving thanks to God. The old religious rituals were replaced by worshiping in the church. Farmers would bring agricultural produce as offerings to the church. Along with the development of the times and the work of the community being increasingly diverse, the offerings are not only limited to agricultural products but whatever is produced by the community. In subsequent developments, offerings are not only or even no longer in the form of goods, but in the form of money. Thanksgiving traditions that are growing increasingly need to be arranged so that they are more organized. The government intervened in the name of order by setting the date for the implementation of the thanksgiving in various Minahasa areas.

3.3 Thanksgiving Religion as Minahasan Christian Religion

Foso rummages is a ritual of the old Minahasa community that is still alive today as the tradition of giving thanks. Even if we look at the life of the Minahasa community, this tradition of giving thanks is no longer an annual tradition, thanksgiving has become the religion of the Minahasa Christians. The transformation of the Minahasa people's thanksgiving ritual is not only a change in the focus or subject of worship and a change in the material of the offering. The intensity of the practice of giving thanks also changes. The celebration of thanksgiving for the old Minahasa community is held only once a year or post-harvest, now Minahasa Christians currently perform a thanksgiving ritual at every phase of their life. For Minahasan Christians, thanksgiving has become their daily life. In every stage of life (both happy and sad times) worship is always performed (if in the old religion it was called a ritual). Every worship is always called gratitude worship, such as thanksgiving for birthdays, thanksgiving for wedding anniversaries, thanksgiving for occupying a new house, and thanksgiving for promotions in work. In fact, this thanksgiving service is not only carried out during moments of joy but also in events of sorrow, such as a one-week thanksgiving service for the death of a family member or a one-year thanksgiving service for the death of a family member. For Minahasa Christians, in joy and sorrow, they must always be grateful. With a very large number of thanksgiving worship then this becomes conspicuous gratitude.

This worship of Minahasa Christians is also carried out with a ritual of worship together, giving offerings in the form of thanksgiving covers (containing money) for the church and God's servants or pastors and a meal together. Every individual or family life event is carried out with worship rituals and after worship, it is always followed by a banquet. In addition to providing shared meals, Minahasa Christians always provide food to be wrapped and taken home by every guest present. For Minahasan Christians, being able to provide sufficient and even abundant food for the guests present is an overflow of gratitude and family joy. Especially when the existing food can also be wrapped and brought home by the guests. Thanksgiving is a tradition that is identical with so many foods. The cost for the food and drink spent on this celebration reaches 262 billion rupiah (data for Minahasa district/one district in July 2017) (Alpen). So many worships that are synonymous with eating a lot, especially at the time of Thanksgiving, make food consumption very conspicuous.

Basically, the Minahasa religion is filled with various rituals. Each ritual ends with eating together, therefore a ritual is considered a feast. According to Pinontoan, a

life filled with feasts is actually a continuation of the life of the ancestral era which is also filled with rituals (Pinontoan, 145). With the arrival of Christianity in the land of Minahasa, this ritual was transformed into worship of God. This is what causes there to be many various worships in every phase of the life of the Minahasa people. Since the ritual always ends with eating, then when the ritual turns into worship, the habit of eating remains.

3.4 Lived Religion: A New Perspective on Doing Theology in Indonesia

Trying to understand religion from the perspective of a lived religion means that we try to dig deeper into the experience of faith or religion from the people or society. Looking at traditions or rituals of thanksgiving from the perspective of a lived religion can provide a new perspective on the experience of the people or society. Thanksgiving is generally seen as debauchery, the practice of hedonism, spree, and just the pursuit of prestige (Zelika, 4-5). This view can be seen as an outsider view or "outsider".

Interestingly the church, in this case, the Evangelical Christian Church in Minahasa (GMIM) as a Minahasa ethnic church, also has the same view as the outsiders. We can see the church's view on the practice of giving thanks through sermon notes or meditations published by the GMIM Synod. An example can be seen in MTPJ, regularly published as a teaching guide or reference source for sermons to all church members. In the MTPJ, we can find the church's advice so that the congregation does not waste time during any thanksgiving or celebration of thanksgiving (MTPJ 2016). Ironically, even though GMIM has said not to be wasteful, the congregation continues to practice the ritual and the church is often involved in it.

From the current perspective or if we see this phenomenon as an outsider, the thanksgiving tradition/ritual is seen just as a celebration that is tied to the values of hedonism and just a party. The practice of eating together in the Thanksgiving tradition is seen as a consumptive and wasteful practice. What is seen is conspicuous consumption, but what people missed is that before the eating ritual there is conspicuous gratitude. All are grateful and grateful for food. This tradition has symbols that have meaning:

First, understanding the creator is willing to give blessings. The abundant food is a symbol of God's goodness. Second, food is a form of joy, not just a physical need but also a picture of solidarity and hospitality (this tradition not only provides food on the table but also provides food for guests to take home). Third, is the symbol of mutual gratitude for working together (*mapalus*). Fourth, it is also a moment of family meeting/gathering as a means of witnessing God's grace to personal, family, and community.

The living religion of Minahasan Christian in Manado is thanksgiving because almost everything in the life of Minahasan Christian is depicted from the framework of gratitude. This thanksgiving is likewise marked by worship together which ends with eating. Therefore, thanksgiving also means eating. Thus, eating is not only something that is performed for a living but is something that Minahasa Christians live by. Eating is the main marker of culture and identity according to Weichart (Weichart, 66), so eating is one of the most conspicuous aspects of Minahasan Christian life. Accordingly, it is not only food consumption that is conspicuous here, but conspicuous gratitude and conspicuous religion, because all three are one package for Minahasan Christian in Manado.

Perceiving a phenomenon from the perspective of a lived religion can bring us to a new and deep perspective. We do not just see a phenomenon from the surface

or what is visible, but we can see the meaning behind visible habitual practices. Since everything performed by humans will produce stories from the practices of individuals or communities. The phenomenon that we try to show from this research is that food consumption and the tradition of Thanksgiving can also show theological meaning.

In food, although eating is a basic activity for survival in all parts of the world, it does not mean that it has the same religious meaning. Religious meaning is different depending on the particular context of culture. There is something called “arrays of human activity” and “shared practical understanding” according to Ammerman (Ammerman, 15). Arrays of human activity: It is a cluster of actions that is socially recognizable in ways that allow others to know how to respond. Eating in one place has a certain religious meaning, but it can mean something else in another place. But people in that cultural context know what it means and what to do about their eating practices.

Doing theology through daily activities such as food can be an entry point for a new approach to doing theology. To seek people's understanding of religion, does not start with belief or the Bible text but requires a deconstruction of the text (according to Lattu-the religious scholar that has concerned with folklore studies). Deconstruction of theological texts is to accept that theological efforts not only depart from the scriptural texts and the writings of classical and modern theologians but also in people's narratives as living texts (Lattu, 91). Indonesian society is generally based on oral traditions, therefore it is important to explore oral traditions in society not through text but from what is performed in daily activities. Minahasa is an oral society because it is difficult to find written sources, in the form of books or scripts, of Minahasa culture. They depend heavily on custom, tradition, and storytelling. In this kind of society, according to Erickson, knowledge is transmitted from mouth to ear, and the inhabitants are forced to train their memory (Erickson, 55). This means that to extract knowledge, about theology for example, is to dig up stories that are in their memory which usually appear in everyday experiences such as eating.

Religion cannot be understood by looking at one place only, i.e., the institution. To think differently about religion, we now need to start again elsewhere according to Harvey (Harvey, 11). Religion is what people do, not what is defined by institutions. Religion is what people live on every day, what matters to them. This is in accordance with the opinion of Ruard Ganzevoort and Johan H. Roeland that the concepts of praxis and lived religion focus on what people do rather than on ‘official’ religion, its sacred sources, its institutes, and its doctrines (Ganzevoort, 93). In live religion stories, narrative analysis is an important part. The daily activities of ordinary people occur in a narrative, not in the dogma of a religious institution. Therefore, from the narrative, we can understand everyday problems that occur in people's lives which can happen anywhere and anytime. “Stories from one social arena are often transposed into another, so religious narratives may appear in setting outside officially religious bound (and vice versa)” (Ammerman, 9). In other words, to get a narrative of everyday religion, we do not only limit it to experiences that occur in the institutional environment, but also to what happens in people's daily lives. Therefore, according to Ganzevoort religion is defined as the transcending patterns of action and meaning embedded in and contributing to the relation with the sacred (Ganzevoort, 3).

Ammerman emphasized that "Understanding religion will require attention both to the "micro" world of everyday interaction and to the "macro" world of large social structure" (Ammerman 234). Thus, doing theology with lived religious perspective tries to build a theological perspective from below. The bottom-up approach complements the previous top-down macro approach. Understanding a

cultural-religious phenomenon in a context must be macro and micro. The macro approach is usually the official view of an institution or a legacy from the previous power, which does not necessarily have the same view as at the grass-root level. So, we hope with this perspective (live religion perspective) that we try to introduce, can give us various approaches to doing theology.

IV. CONCLUSION

Employing lived religion approach, which observes what is lived in the daily life of Minahasa Christian in Manado, the living religion of Minahasan Christian in Manado is thanksgiving. Since almost everything in the life of Minahasan Christian is depicted from the framework of gratitude. This thanksgiving is likewise marked by worship together which ends with eating. Accordingly, it is not only food consumption that is conspicuous here, but conspicuous gratitude and conspicuous religion. Thus, lived religion is then proposed as a new perspective on doing theology in Indonesia to understand the daily life of ordinary people as we describe the thanksgiving phenomena in Manado.

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