



Missionary Communion of God in the Midst of Diversity: Insights for the Church's Mission in Indonesia

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Abstract: This study discussed the theological theme of the Trinity as a missionary Communion of God, departing from the pluralistic context of Indonesia and addressing the concern that the mystery of the Triune God is often perceived as lacking real-life implications. The research employed a qualitative approach, utilizing the literature review method. In exploring the theology of God's communion, the study referenced the ideas of Leonardo Boff and the Trinity Icon by Andre Rublev. The study contributed to understanding how the theology of God's communion impacts the Church's mission within Indonesia's pluralistic context. It found that the mystery of the Trinity as a missionary God of communion is realized through the Church's mission. The three distinct persons of God are always united in mission for the world's salvation and open to all people. Drawing from Leonardo Boff and Rublev's Trinity Icon, the communion of God was understood within the framework of *perichoresis*. The values of love, equality, communion, and mission within the mystery of *perichoresis* can be applied to a Church with a mission amid Indonesia's ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. The Church's mission was manifested in two ways: *ad intra* (internal) and *ad extra* (external). Internally, the idea of God's communion mission laid the foundation for fostering unity within families, communities, and ecumenical dialogue. Externally, it inspired the Church to advocate for justice, creation care, and interreligious dialogue. Ultimately, the theme of God's communion extended beyond theological dogma, holding concrete implications for the Church's life in Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

People always seek to understand the mystery of the Trinity in their daily lives (Mensah, 2020). Farelly (2005) wrote that, for some, the teaching on the Trinity feels like something kept in a museum – stored away in a special place but with no real impact on life. Similarly, Immanuel Kant (1789) said that the doctrine of the Trinity offers nothing practical for everyday life, even if people claim to understand it. Kant's writing points out that, for most people, the theology of the Trinity is like a logical puzzle (*mysterium logicum*) rather than a mystery of salvation (*mysterium salutis*) that affects their lives.

This study asks two main questions: 1) How can the mystery of the Trinity be understood as a missionary communion of God? 2) What are the concrete implications of this communion for the Church's mission in Indonesia?

Previous studies have explored the practical relevance of the Trinity. Eugenius Ervan Sardono (2021) discussed how Leonardo Boff's concept of *perichoresis* (the relationship within the Trinity) can influence social and political life today. Another study by Noh Ruku

(2021) emphasized the importance of the Trinity's communion for human relationships, especially in the Church, where the Holy Spirit acts as the bond of unity. Kristoforus Bala (2020) wrote about the Trinity as a model of friendship, offering hope for a world divided by issues like racism and religious extremism. Based on these studies, this research focuses on the Trinity as a missionary communion and its implications for the Church's mission in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research method. The discussion was carried out using a literature review approach, focusing on previous research studies related to the topic. Data collection involved gathering digital literature through Google Scholar, which served as the primary search engine for finding relevant sources.

The literature review process was conducted in several stages. First, literature was searched based on the main topic using specific keywords. After collecting the relevant articles, the next step was grouping them according to their relevance to the study's focus. The articles were then organized to form a structured explanation, ensuring clarity in presenting the findings.

Finally, a comparison of the gathered data was conducted to identify relationships and similarities between the studies. This comparison helped to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic, highlighting key insights and connections from the literature. Through these steps, the study was able to discuss the topic thoroughly, based on existing research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The theology of the Triune God is reflected upon as a *communio*, a community in which the Persons manifest communion with one another. There is a personal, relational, and social aspect to God's existence, and there is significance to God's existence for humanity. In the first chapter of the book "God: Communion," Boff explains that the Trinity has made itself present in human life throughout history. Whenever a person encounters the mystery of the Divine and absolute meaning, they are actually meeting the true God. This true God always appears as the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and He manifests this communion in His mission.

A well-known idea regarding the theme of the Triune God is the concept of *perichoresis*. Leonardo Boff (1988, 2004) explains that the Triune God can only be understood as the God of Communion. According to him, the main reason for the fragmentation of Trinitarian experience is the loss of memory regarding the core perspective of the mystery of the Trinity: the memory of communion between the Divine Persons. This communion can only exist between Persons, because by nature they are open to one another, co-exist together, and mutually indwell one another. To express this unity, Boff uses the Greek term *perichoresis*, which means one is contained within the other, dwells in, and exists within the other. The Latin language translates this term as *circumincessio* (from *sedere/sessio*), which literally means "sitting around" (Stamatović, 2016). When the term *perichoresis* is applied to the communion

of the Triune God, it refers to the eternal and reciprocal relationship within the communion where one Person exists within the other, and each Person occupies the same space and mutually fills the other with their presence. Thus, this communion aims to depict equality, so that no one Person is higher or superior to the others. Although the Persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct, they remain united in communion.

In addition to Leonardo Boff, this study also references Andre Rublev (1360–1427), a Russian Orthodox artist and monk who “depicted” the Triune God in the form of an icon. Andre Rublev strongly reflects the concept of *perichoresis* in his Trinity icon. The uniqueness of this icon is that Rublev transformed the icon of Abraham's hospitality into the Trinity icon (Strezova, 2014). This icon “depicts” the Triune God as a communion between Persons, God's mission to the world, and the equality of each Person within the Trinity (Bunge, 2007). In this way, Rublev intended to illustrate the communion of *perichoresis* that exists among the Persons of the Trinity.

The *perichoresis* relationship emphasizes the concept of unity, equality, and the shared essence of the three Divine Persons, so that the Son, who is born of the Father, returns to the Father and abides in the Father's embrace, while the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and/or through the Son, returns to both and dwells within them (Dister, 2015). The Father, with His shoulders, arms, and lifted knees, receives the movement initiated by the Holy Spirit, through the Son, until it returns to Him. Everything culminates in the Father's embrace, where both hands are joined together. The Father is the origin of everything and the source of all things. However, if one follows the rhythm of the three staffs, one will see a circular movement in the opposite direction: from the Father, through the Son, toward the Spirit. The Father's gaze, directed toward the Holy Spirit, supports this movement. The Father sends the Holy Spirit to conform us to the Son so that Christ in humanity may offer Himself in love to the Father (Kaseke, 2021).

In the *perichoretic* communion, the relationship emphasized is not the aspect of begetting or proceeding, but rather the aspect of mutual participation. Each Person reveals the other, and one Person is the condition for the revelation of the other. This mutual participation has existed for eternity among the Divine Persons. A Person becomes a Person not because they are “begotten” or “proceed,” but because of their internal communion. Being a Person means acting within a network of reciprocal relationships (Hunt, 2005). This communion is not the result of the Persons, meaning there were not initially three separate Persons existing independently and then forming a perichoretic communion; rather, they have existed as one from the very beginning, as they are eternal and co-exist.

Everything within the Trinity—such as unity, love, and hypostatic relations—is perichoretic. This perichoretic communion not only forms a relationship for itself but also invites every human being to participate in the relationship of divine love. This is in line with Jesus' words, “That they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. And I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one” (John 17:21-22).

The perichoretic communion not only forms a relationship within itself but also invites every human being to take part in the relationship of divine love. The Father is the source and goal of all liberation, the Son is the mediator of integral freedom, and the Holy Spirit is the force that drives the realization of complete freedom. Within this communion, a model of human society is portrayed, one based on cooperation rooted in the equality and uniqueness of each person, creating a society that is fraternal, open, just, and equal.

The concept of the communal God has two meanings: first, the communion of God within Himself. In this concept, the three Persons are equal and manifest perichoretic communion. In the second concept, the three Persons manifest communion with humanity, creation, and the world. In His infinite mercy, God invites humanity to enter into His divine communion. This is God's mission (*missio Dei*). The purpose of God's mission is to save humanity and invite them to live with Him. God's mission is marked by the covenant, beginning with Adam. Since humanity's fall into sin, God has promised redemption. He continually preserves humankind and grants them salvation, starting from the call of Abraham, the formation of nations through the prophets, to the coming of Jesus Christ. This mission of God is universal and not limited to a particular people or nation.

In the Old Testament, God's mission begins with creation. God created the world with His Word and in the power of His Spirit. With His power, He created humanity, the world, and everything in it. At this point, God directly intervenes in the world. He not only creates but also reveals His glory, reflecting His goodness in the form of creatures. God “speaks,” He also “forms man with His hands,” and He “breathes His spirit” so that humanity gains life. He created humans in His image (cf. Gen 1:27) to live in a complete relationship with Him.

God's mission in the Old Testament continues in the New Testament through the activity of Jesus Christ. God does not merely pay attention to the world by acting and sending prophets; He also sends His own Son. God's mission in the New Testament is Jesus. This distinguishes the concept of God's mission in the Old Testament from that in the New Testament. While in the Old Testament God's activity is the character of His mission, in the New Testament, the activity of Jesus is the mission itself. The purpose of Jesus' coming is to restore the relationship between God and humanity as it was at the beginning of creation (cf. John 20:21). God became human in Jesus to free humanity from the bonds of sin and elevate them to become children of God.

Mission is God's own work, and the Church participates in this mission. God's mission is not limited to the Church alone. In mission, the Church does not only concern itself but also the outside world because God's mission is greater than the Church's mission. God's mission is an anticipation of the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. God works in various ways to draw people into His communion of love. In other words, God is not only understood as *communio Dei* but also *mission Dei*. God's mission to the world always involves all three Persons of the Trinity together. Ultimately, God's mission also invites humanity to salvation, that is, to enter into divine life communion with God.

The idea of a missionary Communion God contributes to the Church's missionary work. God is by nature both communion and missionary. Therefore, the Church is a communion rooted in the Holy Trinity, and by nature, the Church is missionary (*Ad Gentes* 2). The Church participates in the divine life of the Holy Trinity. This idea can be applied to both the Church's internal mission (*ad intra*) and its external mission (*ad extra*).

In the mission within (*ad intra*), the missionary values of communion from the Holy Trinity are applied to the mission of maintaining fellowship in Christian families, empowering Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) in parishes, and fostering ecumenical dialogue.

Fellowship within families is a communion among images of God. In realizing their fellowship, they emulate the Holy Trinity. The fellowship they build within families aims to experience deep love and happiness. However, the desire for unity is often difficult to achieve within families due to conflicts and sin. Conflicts often arise in families, resulting in divisions. There is a loss of awareness that husbands, wives, and children are life companions viewed as images of God.

The Church has a responsibility to maintain unity within Christian families. In other words, families are part of the Church. The Church gives birth to Christian families and channels God's graces to them through the sacraments. The Church encourages and guides families to live out their calling to live in love. This mission can be carried out by the Church through marriage courses, community support for family communities, counseling, retreats, family recollections, and various other forms.

The communion of love among the persons of the Trinity can serve as a model for family communion (Ryu, 2018). In the concept of the Holy Trinity as a missionary communion, the three Divine Persons constantly embody fellowship. God lives in a communion of love, that is, the communion of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The three Divine Persons complement each other in relationship and mission, despite their differences. By God's design, humans have a responsibility to love and to live in a communion of love.

As the Holy Trinity is on a mission within communion, so too must the Church's mission be manifested in community fellowship (Melburan, 2022). Since the time of the early Church, Christians have first embodied God's mission in community. Community serves as a space for them to persist in prayer, to grow together in faith, and to prepare for testimony. The early Church communities were expressions of true communion.

Basic Ecclesial Communities serve as schools to combat individualism. The Trinity, as a communion, can be experienced within these communities where members can know one another, do not feel alienated within their environment, encourage and strengthen one another, love one another, respect each other, and acknowledge the rights and responsibilities of each member while fostering deep relationships. The joy of each member becomes a shared joy, and the sorrow of each member becomes a shared sorrow. Solidarity, fraternity, and concern, especially for the marginalized, can easily be actualized in small communities.

nyWhen the Church takes the form of a base community, what becomes visible is the involvement of laypeople in the community for joint missions. The Church is no longer pastor-

centric. Laypeople are involved in leadership within these small communities. When the Church appears as small communities, every member is called to greet one another, embrace each other, move together, take turns leading meetings, proclaim the word of God, process life and faith together, determine evangelical commitments, and carry them out together. Pastors become network connectors, umbrellas for BECs, moral and faith advisors, and organizers of the Eucharist as a source of faith. Empowering basic communities is an urgent need, especially as the ratio of priests to laity grows larger. In BECs, the Church realizes its role as a sign and means of salvation for humanity in society.

The division of the Church is a reality that contradicts the will of Christ (cf. John 17:21). For the disciples of Christ, the effort for ecumenism is not a choice but an obligation, as the same Lord Jesus they believe in and worship desires all His disciples to be united. The unity of the disciples is a witness to the world, as Jesus said: “that the world may believe that you sent me” (John 17:21, 23).

The spirit of ecumenism is expressed in various ways. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, art. 821, outlines this, among other things: 1) continuous renewal of the Church and conversion of heart to pursue a pure life according to the Gospel; 2) shared prayer as the soul of the entire ecumenical movement; 3) mutual recognition of brothers; 4) nurturing the spirit of ecumenism among the faithful, especially priests; 5) dialogue between theologians and meetings among Christians from different churches and communities; 6) cooperation among Christians in various fields of service to humanity.

A question arises: should all churches merge into one in the name of Jesus and eliminate their distinctiveness? The answer is certainly no. The merging of churches into one would pose significant issues: what foundation would be used for this unity? What kind of adjustments would be made? Ecumenism does not mean that churches must become the same and uniform. When the faithful discuss fundamental differences that can be reconciled, there will still be principled differences. Ecumenism is better understood as an awareness for churches of their mission and function in this world.

In the Church's outward mission (*ad extra*), the idea of the mission of the communion of God becomes the spirit of the Church in advocating for justice and equality in society and seeking interreligious dialogue. The Church's mission in light of the communion of the Holy Trinity begins with advocating for the rights of the marginalized and suffering so they can enjoy the same joy as children of God. Many people do not receive justice before the law. There are many poor individuals who do not have access to healthcare due to administrative costs. Many workers receive unjust wages. In today's age, the task of proclaiming the Gospel cannot be separated from the task of realizing justice, as achieving justice is a core aspect of the Gospel message. There is no proclamation of good news without advocating for justice (Pope Francis, 2020). Every Christian is an actor and a champion of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

Jesus' mission is closely related to liberation, vision, joy, and the realization of justice (cf. Luke 4:18-19). Being faithful to Jesus' mission means caring for and actively participating

in the realization of liberation, justice, joy, and peace. This mission is challenging, and the Church must collaborate with all parties to proclaim this message of joy. The Church's role is primarily to inspire and raise awareness among many about the need to advocate for the rights of the many. Thus, more people will want to participate in the fight for equal rights.

One example of a means to proclaim the message of joy in the Church is JPIC (Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation). The Church always provides help and resources to assist victims of natural disasters. When disasters strike, many parishes and JPIC organizations from various dioceses and religious orders are called to help disaster victims. The Church must also provide Legal Aid Institutions for the small and weak members of society who can be exploited by the law.

The Catholic Church is part of the multicultural nation of Indonesia. How can the Church realize its mission of salvation in this multicultural context? Dialogue is one key to realizing its mission amidst a multicultural society. In the icon of the Trinity, Andrei Rublev depicts God as Persons who dialogue with one another (Derdziuk, 2016). In the Gospel, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit always engage in dialogue (Pasi, 2020). In the Gospel, the existence of each Person is seen through dialogue. Through dialogue, each Person's existence is acknowledged. Therefore, interreligious dialogue is not merely a discussion at the conceptual level, but a practice of religious life (Riyanto, 2014).

The Catholic Church is tasked with promoting dialogue in accordance with the direction of the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, especially to foster mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation between Catholics and other communities. The spirit of cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue should be cultivated from an early age. The path to nurturing this attitude can be achieved through education in Catholic schools. This fellowship invites everyone to see the Church as a people united by the Son sent by the Father, so that the Church, in the spirit of the Holy Spirit, is involved in advancing the Kingdom of God. As a fellowship of believers, the Son and the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, continually support and enliven the congregation, making the Church the body of Christ. Fellowship in Christ and the Holy Spirit, as well as among the believers themselves, forms one Church.

The Catholic Church can carry out its mission through education to instill an appreciation for multiculturalism (Pasi, 2017). Through early education, individuals can form attitudes and worldviews that are open to dialogue and uphold differences. One example is allowing children of other religions in Catholic schools to receive religious education according to their beliefs, rather than forcing them to learn Catholicism. In this way, children can explore deeper into their own religions, even while being in a Catholic institution. They do not feel 'forced' to learn Catholicism. They will feel that the Catholic institution greatly respects their rights. The Church's thoughts on carrying out its mission through educational dialogue still need to be developed, discussed, and reflected upon in terms of its application according to the contexts of schools in their respective regions (Edison & Meo, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The idea of the Trinity is understood through the concept of *perichoresis*, which comes from the Greek word meaning *mutual indwelling* or *being in each other*. This concept is supported by Leonardo Boff and Andre Rublev. They explain that in the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each Person lives within the other, sharing the same space and presence. This relationship shows equality—no Person is higher or more important than the others. Even though the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are different, they are still united in communion.

Perichoresis is not just about the relationship within God, but it also invites humans to join in this Divine love and communion. God's generosity opens the way for people to share in His Divine life, which is part of God's mission, or *Missio Dei*. From the beginning, God's mission has been to save humanity and invite people to live with Him forever. The Church participates in this mission, but it's important to remember that God's mission goes beyond the Church itself. God works in many ways to bring people into His love, and His mission is about preparing for the coming of God's Kingdom on earth.

God is not only seen as a God of communion but also as a God of mission. The Trinity, as a missionary communion, inspires the Church to carry out its mission in Indonesia. This mission is both internal (*ad intra*), focusing on building unity within Christian families, parish communities, and ecumenical dialogue, and external (*ad extra*), inspiring work for justice, environmental care, and education in Catholic schools.

In conclusion, the theology of the Trinity is both a mystery and a sacrament. As a sacrament, it reveals God to us, but as a mystery, it remains something beyond full human understanding. Even after nearly 2,000 years of reflection, the mystery of the Trinity will continue to require further contemplation, and we can respond with simple faith by saying, "Amen."

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