

A REALLY Long View: God's Work among the Javanese from 1815-1977

Contextualization Among Nineteenth Century Muslims in East Java, Indonesia¹

History can be used as a laboratory to test our theories, including contextual approaches. The dream of every missionary is spontaneous, exponential growth. After very promising beginnings among Muslims in 19th Century Java, why didn't this kind of growth happen?

Excerpted from "**Our Homeland**" by Jon Culver, Ph.D.²

The sowing of Christianity among the Javanese

[Prior to 1815], Christianity had already been planted on the island of Java, especially in Jakarta, Semarang, and Surabaya. However, the proclamation of the gospel was limited to Europeans or Indonesian immigrants from the eastern islands. Then, starting around the year 1815, four types of ministry emerged in Java under the leadership of the four pioneers, Emde, Coolen, Jellesma, and Sadrach.

1. Johannes Emde (1815-1830's)

Emde was a watch repairman by trade who came to Surabaya in 1815. After he married a Javanese woman, he started a small fellowship which was successful in bringing several Javanese to repentance. Unfortunately, **Emde's method of ministry was very western/foreign.** New Javanese converts were required to wear European-style clothing when they came to worship services, were forbidden to participate in any Javanese cultural ceremonies such as *kenduri* (a ritual meal to mark someone's death), *pewayangan* (traditional shadow puppet shows), and others.

2. Conrad Coolen (1820-1840's)

Conrad Coolen's methods were completely different. His father came from Russia but his mother was a *ningrat* from the Javanese nobility in Solo. Coolen inherited his knowledge of and appreciation for traditional Javanese culture from his mother, which enabled him to use Javanese shadow puppet shows, dances, and Javanese-style poetry (*tembang*) in his ministry. In 1827, Coolen cleared a tract of land in Ngoro, Central Java and established a Christian village. **Unfortunately, his methods were somewhat syncretistic.** For example, Coolen taught the gospel, but rejected baptism. Moreover, he and his followers prayed to *Dewi Sri* (goddess of the rice harvest) and Jesus Christ during special ceremonies.

3. J.E. Jellesma (1850-1890's)

¹ Excerpted from "Pioneers of Contextualization Among Muslims in 19th Century Java," by Jon Culver, Ph.D.

² From *Blessed to Be a Blessing*, Chapter 6, pp. 4-5.

Jellesma chose a middle path between the two extremes pioneered by Emde and Coolen. Jellesma was a Dutch missionary sent by the *Niederlandische Zendingen Geselschaft (NZG)*. In Mojowarno, Jellesma started a fellowship which looked far more Javanese than Emde's group. Emde's attitudes regarding Javanese culture were always negative, while Coolen's were always positive. **Jellesma's attitude towards Javanese culture was selective.** Whatever did not contradict Biblical teachings was allowed for Jellesma's followers. Jellesma's ministry methods became the foundation for the East Javanese Christian Church (*Gereja Kristen Jawi Wetan*).

4. Kiyai Sadrach(1855-1890's)

The history of evangelism in Central Java would not be complete without mention of the name Kiyai Sadrach. Around the year 1855, Kiyai Sadrach entered an Islamic boarding school in East Java. While there, he had an opportunity to meet Jellesma, and this meeting aroused his interest in the gospel. Not long afterwards, Sadrach was baptized in Batavia (Jakarta) and began to evangelize itinerantly. He finally settled down in Karangjoso, but he did the lion's share of his evangelism and church planting in Tegal, Pekalongan, Yogyakarta, and other places. He was so successful that his number of converts reached around 3,000 baptized converts in 1889. This group grew until it reached 6,000 followers. It is critical to note that all of these people were won from a Muslim background. If we compare Sadrach to all other Christian evangelists in the Muslim world, no one else had achieved his level of success [up until quite recently].

Sadrach's method of evangelism was very effective. He would often go to a public place and debate with other Islamic leaders and heads of Islamic schools (*kiyai*). Because he was so good at debating, many of these Islamic leaders became his disciples along with all of their followers. Unfortunately, some of his methods and teachings provoked a sharp critical response from other missionaries.

As a result they censured Sadrach and accused him of syncretism because of his describing the gospel as *Ngelmu* (mystical knowledge), and for calling Jesus by titles such as *Nabi Ngisa Rohullah* (Prophet Jesus Spirit of God) and *Ratu Adil* (King of Justice). However, according to Dr. Sutarman Partonadi, although Kiyai Sadrach's understanding of Christology [study of Christ] and Soteriology [study of salvation] was indeed influenced by his background in folk Islam, Sadrach never attempted to articulate a comprehensive theology. Rather he was a simple evangelist who had a passion for evangelizing his countrymen in a way that was easy for them to receive. (See Sutarman Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community and its Contextual Roots*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1988.)

Unfortunately Kiyai Sadrach was tried and disciplined by a council of Dutch missionaries. **They stripped him of his formal status as an evangelist for the Dutch mission and they ordered that his converts leaves his "mosques" (the term Sadrach used for his churches) and join mission approved churches.** In the case of Kiyai Sadrach we can see the tension which exists in the Indonesian church up to the present: the new wine from new approaches doesn't fit into the old wineskins of traditional church structures. So Christianity among the Javanese has already been going on for a long time and a large number of Javanese have been won for Christ, especially in Central Java.

Lessons from the History of Evangelism in East Java in the 19th Century: The Ministries of Emde, Coolen, and Jellesma³

Johanes Emde (1774-1859) and the “Pious People of Surabaya”

Emde married a Javanese woman, and around 1815 he started to evangelize the Javanese. The Indonesian church in Surabaya (GPI) opposed Emde’s initiative, and as a result he was imprisoned. The Javanese also opposed him. But Emde didn’t give up, and in the end he was successful in pioneering Javanese evangelism and in establishing a small Javanese Christian community.

The members of this community by and large were servants and laborers who worked for European families in Java. These Javanese had already been influenced by western culture through their day to day contact with Europeans. Emde, who was neither ordained nor educated theologically, thought that western culture was Christian culture and certainly superior to other cultures. Because of this, when his Javanese disciples were baptized, they were required to adopt western cultural practices. This community was mocked by the Javanese who called the Javanese believers “Dutch Negros.”

Some of the characteristics of Emde’s group:

- forbidden to watch traditional Javanese puppet shows
- not allowed to wear traditional Javanese clothing, turban, or ceremonial knife
- required to wear western clothing; Dutch style pants and a top hat

Conclusions:

- Emde was helped greatly by his wife and children
- He was genuinely burdened for the salvation of the Javanese and he didn’t give up
- He didn’t have much impact because of his lack of cultural understanding
- As a result, **Emde-style Christianity was too foreign/too western** and wasn’t able to develop into a spontaneous people movement

Conrad Coolen (1775-1873), Christian Pioneer in East Java

At the same time that Emde was refusing to incorporate elements of Javanese culture, Conrad Coolen was using them widely. Coolen was a fluent Javanese speaker, was fond of Javanese poetry and puppet shows, and was very interested in Javanese mysticism. He used Javanese dance, music, and traditional stories to convey the Christian message. Coolen actually met and was evangelized by Emde before he was a believer. Later, he moved to Mojoagung and began

³ From *Blessed to Be a Blessing*, Chapter 6, pp. 8-12. Compiled by Daud Kurniawan from:

- “Tugas Yang Belum Selesai: Tinjauan Sekilas atau Perluasan Injil di Indonesia” by Jon Culver, Ph.D. 2006
- “Pola Pendekatan PI C.L. Coolen di Jawa Timur (Ngoro)” unpublished manuscript by Johansi Johanis Julius, 2006.
- “Clash of Contextualization: The Emde-Coolen Story and Its Implications for Indonesia Today”, unpublished manuscript by Larry West, 2006.

work there as a plantation manager. In 1827, he cleared some virgin forest land and established a new community in Ngoro.

Coolen's wife refused to move to such an isolated area, so he married a second wife. This second marriage was officiated in a mosque. Coolen served as the mayor of the community and was very respected by the inhabitants because he was very rich and influential. Because of this great influence, everything that happened in the community originated from or was managed by Coolen alone. He was very effective with community development projects and became a blessing to many through his leadership both in his own community and outside.

Because Coolen had cleared the forest and harvested successfully there without bother or interference from local deities, the inhabitants believed that Coolen possessed mystical power and was stronger than their gods. This fact was a kind of "power encounter" which attracted many people. Opening up this settlement was a real blessing because it gave people an opportunity to own land and work there.

Coolen and the Javanese Community in Ngoro

Coolen was greatly loved and admired because he joined his people in the fields cutting down trees and plowing the soil, in addition to his fondness for Javanese entertainment. If someone wanted to clear a new tract of land for a farm, they called Coolen first to offer a prayer of blessing which was chanted Javanese style.

In 1835 (8 years after work had started in Ngoro) Coolen began to introduce Christianity to the inhabitants. Coolen's role was that of a mystical guru. This mysticism was actually a form of Christianity concocted by Coolen himself through mixing traditional Javanese beliefs and Christian teachings. It is reported that Coolen was extremely effective as a *dalang*, the narrator of the Javanese shadow puppet shows, and that he could mesmerize his audience with Bible stories told in this way. On Sundays, he taught Christianity through shadow puppet stories, and on other days he taught principles of agriculture and family life.

Coolen instructed his followers through a progression of faith creeds in the form of poetry. These creeds were chanted or sung repeatedly in unison for worship and accompanied by Javanese gamelan music. Coolen used approaches that were suitable for the Javanese way of thinking. These approaches were bridges that carried the gospel message to them using their own cultural context.

Sometimes Coolen was challenged to debate by Islamic teachers (*kiyai*) and so the gospel was announced through the dialogue between them and the presentation of their arguments. Coolen was always superior to his opponents and was able to persuade them to become believers also. He was also able to touch people emotionally because he was so skilled at playing with words and saying things poetically.

Coolen's way of teaching while wearing Javanese clothes was very effective at attracting people. He was also very skilled at using Javanese traditions, culture, and beliefs, but he mixed too much of these with Christianity. One example of this is a prayer which was chanted during a ceremonial blessing at the beginning of the agricultural cycle.

“O, Mt. Semeru, bless the work of our hands, bless the plow that cuts the soil, bless the harrow that levels the land which makes glad the heart of Dewi Sri (the rice goddess). Over all of this we ask for the grace and strength from Jesus Christ whose power is unequalled.”

Note that this prayer conveys praise for the power of a mountain (Mt. Semeru), a false goddess (*Dewi Sri*), and Jesus at the same time. In this example, we see how Coolen’s contextualization added to and deviated from the Word of God.

Characteristics of the Ngoro Church

In 1841, a church had already been established in Ngoro. Coolen was assisted by Pak Dasimah who served in Wiung, a neighboring village. The gospel also spread from Wiung. Several characteristics of the Ngoro church are as follows:

- Taught that Jesus is Savior and Spirit of God who washes away sins
- Christianity was conveyed as mysticism
- Coolen refused baptism and the Lord’s Supper because they were considered “western culture.”

In 1843, Pak Dasimah met with Johannes Emde in Surabaya. Pak Dasimah heard about baptism from Emde and he wanted to be baptized. Coolen however, refused. Pak Dasimah went ahead and was baptized anyway because he wanted to follow a Christianity that was true and complete.

Conclusions about the Role of Coolen

- Coolen was not a Javanese Muslim “insider,” but he became like the Javanese in many ways. He could socialize and witness to them without any hindrances.
- An important part of Coolen’s message was that Christianity was not “Uncle Tom’s religion/white man’s religion.”
- The church in Ngoro grew without any outside assistance or funding
- Coolen went too far in “Javanizing” Christian teachings
- He suffered some harm and loss because he was separated from the official Indonesian church. When his followers heard a more complete version of Christianity (baptism for example), they left Coolen’s teachings and were expelled from his community.
- The fruit of Coolen’s ministry did not endure.

J.E. Jellesma, Pioneer in East Java

In 1848, Jellesma began evangelizing in East Java. He faced the two small Christian communities which had already been pioneered by Emde and Coolen. What was his strategy? Did he want to emulate Emde’s negative stance toward Javanese culture or Coolen’s accommodating embrace of it? Jellesma was very wise. **He adopted a selective strategy.** He used whatever elements of the culture did not contradict the teachings of the Bible.

Jellesma accepted habits and routines of Javanese culture which were considered not forbidden by God’s Word. For example, he allowed long hair for Javanese men, which was the cultural norm at the time. However, he didn’t allow Javanese cultural elements which were clearly forbidden by the Word of God such as drunken partying with erotic dancers. Jellesma printed a hymn book in Javanese. Together with local partners he taught his followers to care for the poor.

Jellesma's philosophy of ministry became the foundation for the Javanese church (*Gereja Kristen Jawi Wetan*). In Mojowarno, he formed a new kind of Christianity that was not too western like Emde's and not too syncretistic like Coolen's. There were some who disagreed with Jellesma's approach.

But there were others who saw his approach as Biblical; to preserve and make useful the cultural elements not forbidden by Scripture. One of these men was Paulus Tosari, a Javanese preacher and teacher, who used the Javanese culture and worldview to convey Christian teachings. He also used Javanese poetry and gamelan music in his church services, and used Javanese shadow puppet shows to teach and tell Bible stories.

Jellesma believed that evangelism needed to be done by the Javanese themselves, not by foreign missionaries. In order to accomplish this, he founded schools to train evangelists, the first one in Mojowarno. Most historians believe that the most important thing Jellesma did was to unify the two kinds of Christianity pioneered by Emde and Coolen. Jellesma worked well together with national workers such as Paulus Tosari. Jellesma didn't take the leadership away from Tosari, and thus he ensured that the church he pioneered truly became Javanese, rather than Western. In this way, the Javanese church has become the world's largest synod with members from a Muslim background [as of the time of this writing - 2006].

Conclusions about the Ministries of Emde, Coolen, and Jellesma

From these three historical examples, we can see two approaches that were lacking in effectiveness and one that we should imitate for reaching UPGs. It could be said that Emde represented evangelism without thinking deeply enough about the role of culture. By assuming that the patterns found in our own church and culture are the only right way for people to follow Jesus, some Christians launch ministries that are only able to reach a few people, and will always be considered "foreign." This method is less than effective for reaching UPGs.

Coolen represented evangelism which used many elements from the focus culture, but didn't always agree with Scripture. By neglecting several things commanded by Jesus and adding elements from other religions, he formed a method that in the beginning looked very successful but failed to endure, and in the end was absorbed by a method closer to Biblical teachings.

From Jellesma's ministry we can learn several principles for effective ministry to UPGs:

- Don't teach or force adherence to foreign cultural elements or traditions from your church of origin.
- Use cultural elements from the focus culture which don't contradict Biblical teachings.
- Don't use cultural elements which do contradict Biblical teachings
- Empower and develop local leadership by cultural "insiders." Don't make your ministry dependent on yourself as a cultural "outsider."

Kiyai Sadrach Surapranata (1835-1924) and His Contextual Community in Central Java⁴

Kiyai Sadrach was an “insider” to Javanese Culture. He won many Muslims, and a spontaneous movement began. Why did it fail?

Here is the story: Sadrach was born to a Javanese Muslim family. He attended an Islamic boarding school in East Java. In 1857 he was evangelized by Jellesma. In 1870 he joined Ms. Philips team. In the 1880’s he partnered with Pastor Wilhelm, then had a conflict with the Dutch missionaries over contextualization.

It was obvious that Sadrach was a gifted evangelist. Ms. Philips, his sponsor, had won 29 Javanese after 10 years of labor. Sadrach, in three years, brought 612 to Ms. Philips for baptism! Sadrach was extremely bold; he sought out Muslim religious leaders (*kiyai*) and invited them to debate. Reports indicate that Sadrach won these debates. He brought several *kiyai* and their followers to Ms. Phillips to be baptized.



Sadrach sekitar 1885

Taken from C. Guilot, Kiyai Sadrach

The Growth of Sadrach’s Community

The high point of Kiyai Sadrach’s success came when he teamed up with Pastor Wilhelm under the umbrella of the NGZV mission society in the 1880’s. Wilhelm and Sadrach respected one another, and they became a good team. Sadrach evangelized and Wilhelm disciplined the new converts. In a few years the total number evangelized by Sadrach and his team of evangelists reached 6000 Javanese from Muslim backgrounds!

The End of Sadrach’s Contextual Community

Sadrach called his churches *mesjid* [a place of prostration or worship; a typical name for a mosque] led by “imams.” Like Coolen, he described Christianity as *ngelmu* – a mystical path. He referred to Jesus as “Nabi Isa Ruhu’llah.” “Sadrach was an outstanding community leader who blended Christianity with Javanese culture and Islamic practices. He had visited the Christian congregations in East Java and patterned worship after the style which Coolen proposed. For example, he altered the Islamic *shahādah* to make it Christian. “*Lha illah lha illolah, Jesus Kristus ya Roh Allah*” [There is no god but Allah and Jesus Christ is the Spirit of Allah] (Partonadi 1988:135).”⁵ But unlike Coolen he chose to baptize, celebrate communion, and work with the Dutch missionaries like Phillips and Wilhelm.

⁴ Edited from a PowerPoint by Jon Culver, Ph.D.

⁵ These three sentences excerpted from “The Major Model of Muslim Ministry,” by Roger L. Dixon. *Missiology: An International Review*, Volume XXX, Number 4, October 2002, pp. 443-454. The question has been raised: “In light of the fact that Sadrach called Jesus *Nabi Isa*, did Sadrach also use the Dutch *Jesus Kristus* in his *shahādah*? Or is this a contemporary Christian (Partonadi)’s contextualization for the modern Indonesian church of what Sadrach actually did?” At this point we don’t know the answer.

“Sadrach incorporated many aspects of Islam as well as those of Javanese *adat* (customary law).”⁶ “One of the Dutch Residents considered it a Christian sect influenced by Islam while the Muslims thought it was a new sect of Islam with a Christian color.”⁷ Sadrach “was able to read the Malay and Javanese Bibles and he taught from them concerning the trinity, salvation by grace through faith in the Son of God and all the biblical tenets. He could not baptize or administer the communion because he had not been ordained in any church. Therefore, he invited Dutch pastors and missionaries to perform these ceremonies.”⁸ “Sadrach created a Christian marriage ceremony to replace the Islamic one.”⁹ In effect, this changed the believers’ worldview concerning marriage. In ways like this, these early leaders embedded an entirely new set of ideas and truth in the culture.¹⁰

But other Dutch missionaries felt that Sadrach’s practices were pagan. They said, “You must choose between Baal and Yahweh!” Sadrach was condemned by the NGZV Dutch mission. He was dismissed as an evangelist and his followers were ordered to join other churches under NGZV control. His followers resisted, but in the end most complied, while some returned to Islam. But a few Sadrach churches still exist.

Conclusions

The NGZV decision abruptly ended a promising spontaneous movement which had great potential. The Dutch missionaries condemned Sadrach from a very narrow perspective. Unlike Wilhelm they were impatient and quick to judge. Sadrach was not attempting to build a comprehensive theology, he was offering Christianity in a way that was attractive and understandable for Javanese Muslims.

Some Lessons From 19th Century Java

Coolen and Sadrach instinctively drew from mystical *Kejawen* Islam mixed with *pesantren*/quranic terms to evangelize and disciple Muslims. *Kejawen*, as a pre-Islamic indigenous mystical world view was not anti-scriptural in every respect. It contains many true and lovely concepts. Sadrach was also influenced by Pastor Wilhelm and Bible teaching for many important issues such as his view of women and marriage. Sadrach’s community distinguished themselves from the Dutch by identifying themselves as “Javanese followers of Isa Rohu ‘llah” but not as “Muslim followers of Isa Al Masih.”

What happened after the 19th Century? Four Key Churches Created the Most Productive Model

“The foundation of the Javanese work [in the twentieth century] can be traced to four churches which established ministry among the Javanese in the nineteenth century. Some of them were not

⁶ “The Javanese Muslim Church Experience: An Example of Contextualization,” by Roger Dixon, submitted to the Evangelical Missiological Society, 2012, page 6.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., page 9 (with footnoted citation from Sutarman S. Partonadi, *Sadrach’s Community And Its Contextual Roots*, 145).

¹⁰ Ibid.

started by mission agencies, but mission groups soon became dominant factors.”¹¹ The presence of this Javanese church that included many cultural elements contributed to a general sense that Christianity could be considered a viable option for Javanese.

“For most of the churches, major growth began about 1930 and explosive expansion occurred in the late 1960’s. The number of baptized Javanese in the churches in 1930 was about 30,425¹².... In 1973, baptisms had reached an “official” number of 245,532. Due to political pressure, the churches were no longer reporting true growth. However, hundreds of thousands of Muslim Javanese came to Christ in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s.¹³ This growth has not ceased so that today [2002] unofficial estimates of Javanese Christians who were formerly Muslim run to over 12 million. Even if these estimates are skewed, there is no doubt that Javanese are now present in staggering numbers in thousands of various churches in East and Central Java.”¹⁴

“The Blending of the Two Models Creates Strength

As the twentieth century advanced, the mission organizations in both East and Central Java strengthened their model against the Javanese style. In Central Java, they worked more in the cities where they could promote a Dutch style Christianity. Still, many of the churches in Central Java continued to maintain distinct Javanese traits. The church in East Java also had missionary supervision from 1864 until 1942, which introduced many European characteristics. Despite this influence, the East Java Church continued to express its faith in a Javanese way. Even today, the two models continue to function in juxtaposition to one another.”¹⁵

“Major Principles of the Javanese Church Model”¹⁶

The introduction of the gospel into Java created a clash not only between the gospel and the Javanese culture but also between the European model of Christianity and an emerging Javanese view of Christianity. The blending of these factors created a model which appealed to the Javanese heart. There are numerous principles which can be deduced from this model. In this section, we will look at some of the more important ones.

“The Gospel is Seen in Context

As the Westerners shared the gospel with Javanese, it was viewed from several contexts. Many of the messengers could not separate the gospel from a Western perspective. But some were willing to allow the Javanese to interpret it from an Eastern viewpoint....The key to this process was the attitude of many Westerners which allowed the Javanese to lead in the contextualization process. Some of the foreigners wanted to control this process with their own imported models. But many of them understood that the Javanese had to make the ultimate choices. The missionary agencies, in particular, had difficulty adjusting to Javanese preferences. The struggle was momentous for over six decades. In the end, a true Javanese church emerged. If the

¹¹ Dixon, “The Major Model of Muslim Ministry,” *ibid.*

¹² Parenthetical note in Dixon’s text: “Sumartana 1991:103; *Benih Yang Tumbuh* 7, 1976:191.”

¹³ Parenthetical note in Dixon’s text: “Willis 1977”

¹⁴ Dixon, *ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ The following 8 principles are excerpts from Dixon, “The Major Model of Muslim Ministry,” *ibid.*

missionaries had been more successful in importing their own model and forcing it on the Javanese, it is unlikely that millions would have come to Christ.”¹⁷

“A Clear Identity as a Javanese The early pioneers of the Javanese churches were determined to establish the identity of Javanese Christians as truly Javanese. They continually fought against anything that would reduce or take away Javanese characteristics from the new converts. Although the conflict of the European and Javanese models caused many serious ruptures in fellowship, the stronger leaders prevailed on the side of an indigenous Javanese identity (Cooley 1968:88; Sumartana 1991:146).

Many of the city churches among the indigenous peoples in the Dutch East Indies used the Malay language or even the Dutch language as a medium of preaching and teaching. The churches among the Javanese clung to their own language. They saw it as the way they could most easily and clearly communicate the gospel to the people. For example, Javanese language became the foundation of homiletics and the translation of scripture. The Javanese language was used to help the common people understand the meaning of the Church and the gospel it proclaimed (*Benih Yang Tumbuh 7* 1976:242).”¹⁸

“A Clear Identity as a Christian

A third principle we see in this Javanese church model is that each believer is encouraged to have a well-defined Christian identity. Even though the process of shifting from non-Christian belief systems to a biblical one may take considerable time, in the end the believer must understand that he/she is no longer a Muslim or *kejawen* follower. In the past, some of the churches continued practices such as circumcision, which are considered Islamic. However, converts to Christ were clearly taught that they were no longer Muslims. In the Javanese Church tradition, converts may continue in Islamic practices up to the time of baptism. At that time, they must be ready to relinquish all such activities which either identify them as Muslim or undermine their status as Christians.”¹⁹

“A Clear Identity of the Church

The Javanese church model emphasizes that the Church, as well as individual Christians, has a high profile identity. There is no confusion as to the character and work of the Church. The Church does not seek to be confrontational but it demands its place on the stage of Javanese culture. This principle complements the identity of the believer. The underground Church has not existed in Javanese history. Despite the fiery trials through which it has passed, the Church has never disguised its existence or retreated from threats. Because of this, both friends and foes have been able to identify Christians (and the Church) in Javanese society.

From a negative viewpoint, these two principles of clear identity have resulted in terrible persecution of converts. Fortunately for the Church, administrations of both the Dutch Colonial Government and the Republic of Indonesia have protected it from militant forces which would

¹⁷ Dixon, “The Major Model...” pp. 446-447

¹⁸ Dixon, “The Major Model...” p. 447

¹⁹ Dixon, “The Major Model...” p. 447, with footnote here citing Dixon, Roger L. 2000 (August). Interview with the Rev. Widodo Kasmu, Surabaya.

annihilate it. On the positive side, these principles of high profile identity have enabled the gospel to go into the community with such power that millions have come to believe.”²⁰

A Clear Gospel Proclaimed - Jesus as Son of God and Savior

“Despite the complicated process of trial and error in contextualizing the gospel to a culture which was previously influenced by both *kejawan* and Islamic religious systems, the Javanese Christians never blurred the unique status of Jesus as Son of God and Savior....

The clear differentiation of the gospel from their other belief systems has allowed Javanese to make a choice between worldviews. The gospel is not considered the completion or the apex of other systems. It stands alone as the revelation of God. It is a choice, not an echo. At certain periods of the church’s development, it depicted Jesus as the ‘*Ratu Adil*’ (the Just King) who was to appear for the Javanese (Yoder 1987:85). At other times, Jesus was presented as the ‘*Imam Mahdi*’ who completes the Muslim faith and delivers the people from spiritual bondage. Eventually, however, the dominant view of Jesus Christ became that of the Savior God who delivers from sin and demands total obedience from all people. This uncompromising message has produced good fruit in Java’s soil.”²¹

“Participation in Society

Another important principle of the Javanese churches has been the desire to become active participants in their local society. From the inception of the Javanese church in Ngoro, Coolen urged his people to prepare themselves to function as leaders in their local society. This teaching carried over into the succeeding generations. The churches in both East and Central Java understand God’s cultural mandate which calls them to function as God’s vice regent in caring for the world he has created. At the same time, Javanese Christians understand that the Church functions as a means by which God extends the Kingdom of God on earth. Because of this, there has never been a ghetto mentality among Javanese Christians. They have not felt that the Bible calls them to withdraw from society and live in isolation....

Because they want to be active in Javanese society, converts do not change their names at baptism (Dixon 2000). They may add a biblical name but they retain their Javanese name as well. Christians run for public office and hold important positions in hundreds of villages and cities throughout Java. In the nineteenth century, the Javanese church people came from a low social and economic level of society. But the advent of the twentieth century brought urbanization in Java and expanded educational opportunities for Christian youth in the mission schools. Christian people now function at high levels of leadership in society.”²²

“Extensive Evangelism

One of the major keys to the growth of the Church has been extensive evangelism. Javanese Christians have generally been active in sharing their faith with their neighbors. Leaders in both the *kejawan* and Islamic circles exhibit *sakti* (elements of supernatural power which bring blessings). It is because of this they can pray for the sick and help in many other ways. Because the Javanese seek personal spiritual power, they are interested in experiences whereby others have achieved such power in their lives. When ordinary Christians testify to this kind of

²⁰ Dixon, “The Major Model...” p. 448

²¹ Dixon, “The Major Model...” p. 448

²² Dixon, “The Major Model...” p. 448-9

experience with Jesus, it commands attention. Because the faith of Javanese believers is high profile in their lives, all the community learns about it.²³ The East Java Christian Church history says that the ‘growth of Javanese Christianity, in the villages as well as in the cities, did not occur from deliberate efforts to spread it. To the contrary, it was due to the natural and open initiative of lay people, without an official and organized program’²⁴

“Mostly the gospel was shared through the family web. This remains true today. Since the extended family of the Javanese is widespread both in numbers and in geographical locations, many people can be reached by a Christian witness. Similarly, many more people are converted through teaching ministries than through evangelistic services. In an extensive survey, Avery Willis (1977:124) reports that 84.7% of the respondents affirmed that their families were influential in their decisions to become Christians. The percentage was higher for those becoming Christians before 1960 over those who became Christians after 1960. The rate of those having Christian friends was also high.”²⁵

“Work for Recognition by Javanese Community

A final principle of the Javanese Church model which we will consider is its concentrated effort to be recognized by the Javanese community as a legitimate Javanese entity. Javanese Christians have always fought against descriptions of themselves such as *Kristen Londo* (Dutch Christians) or Black Christians because these terms relegate them to a place outside of Javanese society. From the very beginning of the Church among the Javanese, there was a concerted effort to be accepted as Javanese. This was extremely difficult because the Javanese were all Muslim, at least nominally.”²⁶

A Major Movement Between 1965-1977: Why Two Million Came to Christ²⁷

By the time Indonesia gained its freedom [1948], all four of these denominations had become truly Javanese. (34) These churches today use many of the same methods that the Javanese Christian pioneers used to spread the gospel. In general, the shadow play, the *gamelan* orchestra, and in some cases, the *slametan* have become instruments for witness. Javanese ceremonies which take place at each change in the life cycle are used as points of contact to spread the gospel. Although foreign elements are still present, the Javanese churches at least have identified themselves enough with the Javanese people to be known as “*Kristen-Jawa*.” It is this identification with the culture that allowed Javanese who were seeking a religion after 1965 to associate with Christianity. (34) Christianity had been identified with Javanese culture enough to make it a viable alternative when the opportunity presented itself. (194)

²³ Parenthetical note in Dixon’s text: “van Akkeren, Philip, 1970,” referencing *Sri And Christ: A Study of the Indigenous Church in East Java*. Lutterworth Press, Great Britain.

²⁴ Dixon, “The Major Model...” p. 449; Parenthetical note in Dixon’s text at this point: “*Benih Yang Tumbuh 7*, 1976:102 [my translation].”

²⁵ Dixon, “The Major Model...” p. 449.

²⁶ Dixon, “The Major Model...” p. 450

²⁷ The following section is excerpted from *Indonesian Revival: Why Two Million Came to Christ*, by Avery Willis, Jr. William Carey Library (selected 987 words). Used with permission by William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA

Members of the Javanese churches comprise the largest group of people ever to become Christians out of a Moslem background. (4) From 1965 through 1969 the churches experienced unprecedented growth during instability caused by the attempted communist coup, the establishment of the New Order, and the threat from Islamic leaders who tried to curtail evangelistic outreach. (5)

Churches had been involved in a ministry of witness and service among the Javanese long before the cataclysmic events of 1965. They had contact with large numbers of Javanese through their witness in day-to-day activities, at religious and community observances, in their schools, clinics, hospitals, and other service ministries. (16) Frequency and fervency of prayer increased during the difficult period prior to 1965. Leaders of three of the five Javanese denominations said that the acceleration of their denominations' growth rate actually began in 1964, prior to the attempted coup. Two of these credited it primarily to spiritual experiences. (17)

The church as the community of love holds particular significance for the Javanese, who seldom think of religion as an individual faith to be practiced in solitude. The communal nature of Indonesian society, and the Moslem emphasis on the oneness of believers, were spectacles through which the Javanese viewed Christianity as the community of love and faith. (19) The head of the synod for the North Central Java Christian Church credits their growth to a new emphasis on evangelism as the responsibility of every member. (20) All the denominations began to emphasize training the laity. (21) The heart of church growth among the Javanese lay even more in multiplying congregations than in adding members to existing ones. (21)

Recent years have seen extraordinary response to the gospel among the Javanese. But it was not always so. Had it not been for acculturation of Christianity in the Javanese context long before revival broke out, the gospel would have been as unpalatable to the Javanese as it was during the first two hundred years of Dutch colonization. Although it had not been obvious, God had been preparing the soil for over 100 years. By the 1960's, the Javanese churches had fortunately become rooted in the culture, and therefore Javanese could become Christians without being separated from their race. (28)

The majority of converts to Christianity have come from this syncretistic, Javanistic Islam rather than the orthodox...variant....The reasons these interviewees gave for their dissatisfaction with Islam varied....A key reason that led many Javanese to become Christians was the fact that Islam did not answer their heart-hunger. (48) Islam also failed to communicate its beliefs in the language of the people. (49) [Additional reasons are listed by Willis.]

A random sampling of non-Christians who were generally sympathetic to Christianity revealed that 93.4 percent said lack of acculturation by the Churches was a hindrance to their becoming Christians. This fact, in addition to the sizeable minority of 30 percent who felt that the lack of acculturation was a hindrance even though they had become Christians in spite of it, should cause the Churches to rethink their relationship to Javanese culture. (195)

The most effective methods used to capitalize on church growth opportunities in 1960-1971 were: an emphasis on the responsibility of every Christian to be a witness; establishing new congregations, including small groups of all kinds; widespread initiative and use of the laity in

evangelism and nurture; training leaders to meet the Opportunity; active evangelistic programs such as prison service, evangelistic campaigns, and new members' classes (in which many "converts" actually became Christians); and service institutions which helped prepare the soil but did not play a determinative role in the increase of members. (195)

Methodology that Helped Church Growth (196)

- (1) Acculturation that allowed Christians to remain Javanese.
- (2) Evangelical theology
- (3) Effective Christian presence as the Community of Love.
- (4) Spiritual renewal in many churches.
- (5) Spontaneous witness of Christians.
- (6) Prophetic call of the Churches for justice.
- (7) Demonstration of love.
- (8) Receptivity to seekers.
- (9) Emphasis on responsive groups.
- (10) Extensive use of the laity.
- (11) Effective use of the catechism and new members' classes.
- (12) Nurturing of people movements.
- (13) Planting of hundreds of new congregations.
- (14) Use of small groups for Bible study prayer, and nurture.
- (15) Training programs for the laity.
- (16) Special evangelistic emphases.
- (17) Missionary spirit.

Methodology that Hindered Church Growth (197)

- (1) Neglect of proper identification with, and use of, Javanese culture.
- (2) Lack of trained leadership.
- (3) Inability to nurture, assimilate and train new converts.
- (4) Inadequate discernment of converts' motives, resulting in an indiscriminate reception of some members and an overcautious rejection of others.
- (5) Slackening of evangelistic thrust—due to spiritual fatigue, doubts about the sincerity of converts, emphasis on quality, and involvement with mundane duties.
- (6) Failure to evangelize "to the fringes" (McGavran's term for evangelizing all those related to a tribe, clan, class, or segment of society in a people movement).
- (7) Insufficient perception of embryonic people movements, trends, and causes of conversion.
- (8) Restriction of spontaneous expansion.
- (9) Lack of physical and spiritual resources to meet needs.
- (10) Miscalculation of opportunities.