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The relevance of Early Church history in the implementation of the great commission in the present era and implications for Christian education in Indonesia

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Abstract

The history of the early church illustrates to the church today the spirit and courage of the early church and the apostles in carrying out the Great Commission. The purpose of this study is to discover the spirit and courage of the early church in carrying out the Great Commission and to invite the church today to carry out this task for the growth of the church. The method used in this research is the qualitative method. The result of this study is that the early church was more conspicuous in carrying out the Great Commission even though it faced heavy challenges but remained brave and resolute. Whereas the church today is still lacking in carrying out the Great Commission there are still many tribes who have not heard the gospel.

Keywords: Early Church History; Great Commission; Christian Religious Education

INTRUDUCTION

Church history is a very meaningful history for Christians, where the history of the early church tells how great it is to live as a Christian in the midst of environmental and governmental rejection. The church is a collection of believers whose entire life is to glorify God. The Acts of the Apostles is a book that tells the life and journey of the early church, where the life of the church at that time was united and full of joy (Berkhof & Enklaar, 2009; Ndyi, Ferderika Pertiwi & Susanto, 2019). The history of the early church told in the Acts of the Apostles is inseparable from the struggle of biblical figures and congregations who were so enthusiastic in building and maintaining their faith, besides that the enthusiasm of the early church in preaching the gospel was also very high. This can be seen from the firmness of their faith in the face of pressure and massacres by the government. Not a few Christian leaders and early believers were martyred for preaching the gospel and defending their faith in Jesus Christ (Nggebu, Sostenis.2022).

The early church has become an example for all Christians, the firmness of faith of the Apostles and the congregation has brought great changes and revival to Christians at that time. The firmness of faith of the Apostles and the church can be seen from the unity of heart in building houses of worship and preaching Jesus Christ as the Saviour. Through the firmness of faith and the work of the Holy Spirit that accompanied them in preaching the gospel, many souls came to know the gospel and experienced repentance (Baskoro, Paul Kunto. 2022).

Carrying out the Great Commission was a joy for the early church. The Great Commission was the command of the Lord Jesus when He was taken up to heaven (Matthew 28:19-22). The fulfillment of the Great Commission is a significant mandate for Christians. Implementing the Great Commission is also the task of all Christians, not just the task of pastors or missionaries (Haans, & Deak. 2022). Becoming a Christian means becoming a member of the family of Christ, when becoming a Christian the congregation must realize that salvation is obtained only because of the work of the Lord Jesus who died on the cross. For Christians, carrying out the Great Commission is not just making other people Christians, but making all nations disciples of Christ Jesus (Yeniretnowati & Angin. 2021).

Today's church is experiencing a lot of growth in the area of church development. Many churches have been built in various regions, especially in Indonesia. However, there

are still areas that reject the establishment of churches. Stevanus in his research explains that the church mission is the implementation of the Great Commission, engaged in preaching the Inji and social services, where these two things are one in mission Dei-Christi (Stevanus, Kalis. 2021). The preaching of the Gospel or the implementation of the Great Commission requires full discernment and requires the Holy Spirit to be able to do it.

Ministers, servants of God, and congregations need to realize the importance of carrying out the Great Commission. God still loves mankind, from the time of Adam until today, God is still waiting for the lost people to come back. Jesus Christ is God who came into the world and preached the good news to many people. However, until now there are still many people who have not heard the gospel, so the task of the Great Commission must continue by the church until the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (Widjaja, Ginting, Hutagalung. 2019). Therefore, this research was conducted with the aim of finding the relevance of early church history in the implementation of the great commission in the present era and the implications for Christian education in Indonesia. Through this discovery, it is hoped that it can make many people aware of the importance of history in making the growth of ecclesiastical services in Indonesia.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method by conducting a literature study approach through articles, books, and previous research that discusses the early church movement in carrying out the Great Commission. The researcher collected all previous studies related to the research topic, analyzed and provided findings on the research conducted. The goal of this research is to find the relevance of early church history in the implementation of the great commission in the present era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Early Church History

The early church occurred 40 days after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, also known as Pentecost (the descent of the Holy Spirit), estimated to be around 30-34 AD. Jesus Christ had promised to establish His church while in the area of Caesarea Philippi (Chan & Beuving. 2017; Matthew 16:18). The early church is described in the Acts of the Apostles by Paul when the Holy Spirit was poured out on a group of believers, where the church was officially formed (Acts 2:1-4).

The Jewish nation was the first to experience conversion, as the Old Testament describes the Jewish nation as God's beloved nation and this is also where the church began to grow. This is because the Jews were the first to hear the gospel. At the time of the birth of the church, Palestine was under Roman rule. The church was formed at the cost of the lives of the leaders and the early church and experienced a lot of pressure and rejection by the Roman government so at that time Christians worshipped in secret. Christians also hid their identity. However, their intention and enthusiasm for worshipping and carrying out the Great

Commission did not waver. Even though many had to lose their property, family, and lives, they continued to preach the good news to others.

The growth of the early church began with the ministry of the apostles, namely Peter, Paul, Luke, and others. thanks to the ministry of the apostles in preaching the good news, Emperor Constantine was converted, even though during that period Christians were experiencing persecution. In this situation, it is recorded that the early church was very diligent in fellowshiping and studying the word together which was done secretly (Patandean, Yohanes Enci & Iskandar. 2021).

Today, Christians know about the apostles who successfully wrote down teachings about the history of the early church and overcame distorted teachings. After Pentecost, the church became more open to people outside the Jews, where Philip and Peter preached the gospel to the Samaritans and in the preaching of the gospel Peter began to preach the gospel in homes and succeeded in making Cornelius, who was not a Jew, repent and receive the Holy Spirit in his life. After the year 70 Stephen was killed and the Christians at that time experienced persecution that made them flee to other areas. This event led to the gospel being preached throughout the nations. Followed by the apostle Paul, who initially hated Christianity became converted after experiencing an encounter with Jesus Christ who became the missionary in the New Testament, which was very influential on the development of Christianity, where Paul spread the gospel boldly.

By the destruction of Jerusalem, in the 70th year to be precise, the New Testament had been completed and spread in the churches, but over time Christians continued to be persecuted by the government and other religions. In addition to persecution, the church also experienced divisions due to group differences. The Acts of the Apostles shows that the apostles were mistreated by the religious Jews such as being oppressed and getting unfair trials. Like the story of Stephen, who became the first martyr, was killed by chopping stones to death (Swinto, Hermanto, Tanama. 2021). The early church experienced a lot of oppression, persecution, challenges and even murder by other parties, even though until now the gospel can still be heard throughout the world. This shows that the intention and persistence of the early church was not lost because of the trials experienced, but the gospel was increasingly spread throughout the world.

History records that after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the disciples were commissioned to preach the news of salvation throughout the world, which made the Roman government both hate and fear Christianity, which was open to all. During the reign of Emperor Nero and other emperors, actions such as persecuting, killing, imprisoning, and torturing Christians (it was even recorded that Christians were used as lion bait in the Clossium), slandering by burning the city of Rome and accusing Christians of being radicals (Kriswanto, 2022). In the history of the early church, many apostles were martyred, including Stephen and Ignatius of Antioch, at that time, both Jews and Romans were not in a safe condition but experienced great unrest where rebellions occurred and wars could not be avoided, since the beginning of Christian development has indeed experienced difficulties because it was rejected by the government and several parties such as Jews and other religions.

In the middle of the second century, a Christian named Justin proved that his faith was true and reasonable so he defended his opinion or was dubbed the first apologetic, along with Origenes and Tertulianus interpreted Christianity so that it was easily known to educated Greeks and Romans. However, in the course of preaching his faith, Justin was slandered, which led to his arrest, torture, and beheading, along with other people who were also Christians.

Along with the times, the church continued to grow, although many apostles received unfair trials by the Roman government and other parties and the early church who also experienced oppression because of their faith. through oppression, hunger, murder and war felt by the early church and the apostles have made their determination in preaching the gospel to remain firm in their faith, so that in their suffering they are increasingly enthusiastic. This is inversely proportional to the current state of the church where the church plays a lesser role in preaching the gospel to the regions.

Execution of the Great Commission

The Great Commission is a command to preach the gospel and make disciples of all nations and it is said that in addition to preaching the gospel of Christ Jesus, but also has the task of making disciples so that every soul has spiritual quality in growing and experiencing spiritual maturity (Nugroho, et al. 2020). During the implementation of evangelism and discipleship, many impacts are felt by the church, especially in the spiritual quality of the congregation who are not mentally weak, but have a strong spirituality, firmly hold on to Jesus Christ, and hope that will not waver; closely related to the faith they have.

The Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:19-20 speaks of "Go, make disciples, baptize, teach, and the presence of the Lord". When the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven this message was delivered especially to a group of believers who witnessed the Lord Jesus being taken up to heaven including none other than the 11 disciples and relatives of the Lord Jesus (Sikettang, Sonta. 2021). The growth of Christians after Pentecost began to be seen as the apostles began to preach the gospel. One of the things that the Bible describes is Peter's ministry which led to the conversion of three thousand souls. Apart from receiving Repentance they also persevered in the apostle's teaching and fellowship. Acts 2:41-47 shows that they became united in praising God and some of them always sold their possessions to be distributed to others according to need so that through this attitude the Lord increased their numbers day by day, and was favored by many people.

The implementation of the Great Commission by the apostles and the early church was done by relying on the power of the Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit in enabling them to preach the good news was very impactful, where the words that came out brought many souls to repentance and unity of heart (Simon. 2020). Without the Holy Spirit, the apostles and the early church would not have had the courage to preach the good news amidst the rejection of the Roman and Jewish governments. Many Christians experienced oppression for their faith. Their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour has put their lives at risk, been rejected, judged, oppressed, and even experienced severe persecution (Siagian, Rustam. 2020). However, this persecution did not make their spirit give up and become traitors to Jesus Christ, but they gave their lives for the glory of God.

The implementation of the Great Commission is not as easy as talking, as broad, and as free as conveying material or knowledge to others. Proclaiming the Great Commission has its own challenges. The many Christian martyrs who have lost their lives for the sake of carrying out the Great Commission have made many believers today understand the consequences of such actions. Since the early church Christianity has been challenged by both Jews and Gentiles. History illustrates how difficult it is for Christianity to flourish among Jews and Gentiles. Peter and Stephen were tasked with preaching to the Jews, while Paul preached to the Athenian philosophers, to the Roman authorities, and to everyone he met. Peter, Paul, and Polycarp were under governmental pressure and persecution when they carried out their great commission, but they continued to preach the gospel with great courage. Even the famous bishop Polycarp who converted to Christianity was arrested and brought before the Roman governor, who ordered him to blaspheme Jesus Christ, saying that "For eighty-six years I have served Christ and He has never harmed me. How can I revile the King who saved me?" Because of his bold words in the presence of the Roman governor, Polycarp was condemned to be burned alive. Witnesses to his death recounted an impossible miracle in which Polycarp's body did not burn but was like bread kept in a roaster. In the process of freezing it gave off a very fragrant aroma. The incident did not make the spirit of the congregation and the other apostles retreat but rather persisted and grew stronger in their faith because they realized that suffering in preaching the gospel was a great honor from God.

If the apostles and the early church stopped preaching the good news because they were afraid of the Roman government and other parties then today it is likely that the world does not know Salvation. The importance of every believer taking part and being burdened in preaching the gospel is why the early church set an example for believers throughout history. Preaching the good news requires unity, surrender, trust, and growing faith. Every problem that occurs, such as experiencing conflict with fellow Christians, should not cause division but rather serve as a reminder of how valuable unity is. The strength in unity has a great impact on spirituality. Persecution for preaching the Great Commission was not only experienced by the early church and the apostles. Nokseng, a man from the Garo tribe in Assam, the first family to accept Jesus through the ministry of a missionary, was judged by the chief who was disturbed by his faith. The chief ordered Nokseng to renounce his faith. However, Nokseng refused the order.

The impact of preaching the gospel to people all over the world is immense. God's favor and grace are received by many. Basically, everyone longs for certainty of faith and only faith in Jesus Christ can provide certainty for everyone. All people in the world need salvation. Every believer has a responsibility to preach the gospel until everyone hears the gospel. Whatever the challenge, all believers must continue to live in Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to play a role in preaching the gospel.

The Great Commission is a very important command to be carried out. The implementation of the Great Commission is a manifestation of the responsibility of believers which is part of the lifestyle. The mission of Jesus who came to the world to save all human beings must be continued by all believers so that everyone in the world believes in Jesus Christ and acknowledges that He is the Lord and Saviour of the world (Dwiharjo, Susanto, 2019).

The Great Commission for the Early Church and Christian Education

The Great Commission is a very important commandment in Christianity. Today's church and Christian education need to implement it to directly protect the growth of faith. The church and Christian education exist today because there are people who preach the gospel like the apostles, early congregations, and all contemporary congregations who take part in every age (Silitonga. 2018). The church and Christian education are the pillars of continuing the preaching of the Gospel. Church and Christian education do not only talk about buildings or institutions but individuals who have been called out of the dark to the light of Christ. Every church and educational institution must be burdened and comply with the order to make all nations become disciples of Christ (carrying out the Great Commission). The early church was formed by experiencing a lot of rejection, persecution, persecution, and even loss of life. However, to this day modern humans can still look at the Bible, become Christians, and even listen to the good news. This is the fruit of the struggle of the early church, contemporary congregations, and individuals who have a heart and are led by the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel.

Church and Christian education will grow if it focuses its goals on preaching the Gospel (Laia. 2019). Evangelism is the breath of the church and Christian education. However, currently the church and Christian education are still lacking in evangelizing. These institutions tend to carry out tasks to protect congregations or students, preach the Word of God to provide spiritual nourishment, with the aim that the congregation will grow and be rooted in God. Churches and Christian education must keep in mind Matthew 28:19-20 which says that to make disciples of Christ, which means that the task of followers of Christ is not only to run church organizations, preach, visit congregations, bless weddings, pray for each congregation and others, but convey the Gospel to all nations. In the original text, the word nation denotes tribe (Gea. 2021). Therefore the gospel must continue to be preached because it has not yet been conveyed to all corners of the world, where the church sees that there are still tribes who do not hear and know Jesus Christ. One of them is the tribes in Indonesia. Indonesia consists of 1,340 ethnic groups. The 2010 BPS census stated that of the many ethnic groups in Indonesia, there are still many tribes that have not been reached by the Bible or have never heard the Bible. This is the duty of churches and educational institutions, where these institutions must have a heart to reach out to tribes who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ.

In fact, the Church experienced growth through several things which included: migration from other churches, descent, marriage to other religions, conversions, changes of residence, and evangelism (Wulandari. 2022). It is noted that evangelism contributes only 1.7% to church growth, but the goal of evangelism is not only to focus on numbers but also to deliver to people who have not yet heard the gospel. This situation should be a very important concern for the church today. If the church only focuses on internal matters, but has no movement in carrying out the Great Commission, then the true church will fail to become a real church.

Carrying out the Great Commission indeed faces many challenges but every believer can learn from the early church in making ethnic groups become disciples of the Lord Jesus. Faith, courage, enthusiasm, and a life that is completely dependent on God have actually been

real in their lives. Apart from that, the early church was also led by the Holy Spirit in carrying out its duties, even though they faced very tough situations and challenges. In essence, they are humans who can, just like humans today, have fear, feel pain, be sad, and have heartache. However, because of their faith and love for the Lord Jesus, the early church became a very enthusiastic person in preaching the gospel to non-Jewish and non-Jewish nations.

The church should be ready to equip itself to preach the good news to tribes who have not heard the Gospel and really need certainty in life safety (Simon & Angkouw. 2021). When carrying out outreach to tribes, the church often feels that the work is not easy, considering the risks it faces can result in loss of life. Even though the church in this era has received acceptance by the government, there are still some people who are very anti-Christian. This situation has a very bad impact when someone knows about evangelism activities. Even so, the church does not need to be afraid because if someone is already living in Christ, they will have the spirit and courage that the apostles had, namely Paul. Paul already had the view that even when facing death, the Holy Spirit continues to give joy because dying by the Gospel is a great honor, rewarded in heaven, and can be a testimony to everyone (Daud. 2021).

Until now there are still a number of churches and Christian education that prepare generations to be equipped so that they can be sent to carry out the Great Commission to all corners of the world. Churches and educational institutions are not enough just to concentrate on acts of being diligent in worship, diligent in praying, reading the word, and giving offerings. Every church and educational institution must have a heart that produces divine love by sharing the good news with people who have not heard the gospel like Paul who preached to people outside of Judaism (Andi, et al. 2020). Every church and educational institution should have love like Paul who longs to share the good news with everyone that has an impact on growth.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

This research is very relevant if it is developed by knowing how much influence the preaching of the gospel is carried out by mission agencies, churches, and education. The researcher hopes that this article can be a source of reference for future researchers, who will research this topic. We also hope that this article will contribute to the advancement of science in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The history of the early church exemplifies the activities of the church today in carrying out its duties as people who have been called out of darkness into light. The church and Christian education must take an important role in fulfilling the Great Commission in order to carry out Jesus' command. The life of the early church in carrying out the Great Commission should be able to influence the performance of the church today, where the church today does not live in great rejection, although it cannot be denied that carrying out the Great Commission also carries a great risk, namely experiencing rejection and being killed by certain individuals. However, the church today is still tolerated by the government and other religions. The

lifestyle of the early church in maintaining faith and carrying out the Great Commission is very relevant to be applied to today's church and Christian education, considering that it is still very necessary to have the heart to live together for the common good and enthusiasm in carrying out the Great Commission without fear and doubt. The Holy Spirit must be realized in every life activity to remain steadfast in the face of obstacles.

BIODATA



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