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Melikise Against the Pandemic: Revealing Spirituality in the Tradition of the Manalu-Lesabe Society, Tabukan Selatan District, Sangihe Islands Regency

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Abstract

Melikise is one of the traditions that exist in the Manalu-Lesabe indigenous people. Melikise is a tradition that is believed to be able to ward off evil, such as a disease outbreak. Covid 19 is a form of disease outbreak that appeared in Indonesia in early 2020. The emergence of the Covid 19 pandemic caused the Manalu-Lesabe indigenous people to carry out the Melikise traditional ritual with the aim of rejecting the outbreak through prayer to I Ghenggona Langi. This study aims to describe the ritual form of the Melikise tradition, the encounter between the Melikise and Christian traditions, and the relevance of the spiritual values of the Melikise tradition by the Manalu-Lesabe village community in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with data analysis techniques using the Miles and Huberman model, namely (1) data reduction (data reduction); (2) data display (data display); and (3) verification and conclusion drawing (conclusion drawing and verification). Based on the research, the results obtained are (1) the Melikise tradition was carried out during a disease outbreak or was last carried out in the 1970s, when

dysentery was epidemic in the Manalu-Lesabe community. This tradition was carried out again in 2020 during the Covid 19 pandemic. In the ritual process, all religious leaders were included as prayer leaders. (2) The Melikise tradition is not well documented because it is only passed down orally, so there is no clarity regarding the encounter process between the Melikise tradition and Christianity. However, in the Melikise ritual, Christian songs are used, such as the Halelluyah, Psalms, Two Old Friends, and Song of the Congregation. (3) The relevance of the Melikise tradition in the actual context of society is contained in the concept of a harmonious God and a harmonious pattern of social life.

Keywords

Melikise, Spiritual Values, Covid 19

Introduction

Humans and culture are two parts that are connected and bound together. It can be said that humans and culture are an inseparable unit. Humans as social beings cannot be separated from culture, because they live in a certain ethnic environment. In the Big Indonesian Dictionary, culture is the result of activities and the creation of the human mind (mind) such as belief, art, and customs. In line with that, Koentjaraningrat (2009) also argues that culture is the whole system of ideas, actions and human creations in the context of community life which is made human property by learning. According to Koentjaraningrat (2009), the element of culture has three forms, first, as an idea, ideas, values, norms, rules and so on, second, as an activity of patterned behavior from humans in a community, third, objects of work. man. Selo Soemardjan and Soeleman Soemardi (2006), also have almost the same opinion as Koentjaraningrat. According to them, culture as all the work, taste and creativity of society. Community works produce technology and material culture or physical culture that are needed by humans to control the surrounding nature so that their strengths and results can be immortalized for the needs of society. The various understandings above strengthen the opinion regarding the relationship between humans and culture. Culture is a form of embodiment of human work.

Just as humans have a close relationship with culture, the same is true in the relationship between humans and religion. This illustrates the relationship between religion and culture. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary, religion is a teaching, a system that regulates the system of faith (belief) and worship of God Almighty as well as a system of rules relating to the association of humans and humans as well as humans and their environment. The relationship between religion and culture lies with humans as the perpetrators. Religion and culture are two different elements, but they are interconnected and cannot be separated.

Humans, religion and culture are inseparable parts. Humans as cultural beings make religion as a means to achieve life goals. However, often aspects of cultural traditions are seen as incompatible with religion. Religion and cultural

traditions are often separated. It is no exaggeration if cultural and religious traditions are often assumed to be like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is a wealth with certain characteristics, but on the other hand it is a triggering factor for conflict. "Religion" in the political-administrative sense of the government of the Republic of Indonesia is the official religion recognized by the government, namely Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism, and recently Confucianism has also been included (Marzali, 2021). Fanaticism towards religion often excludes the existence of tradition and culture. Culture is often seen as something that is contrary to religious teachings. Traditional rituals in culture are often identified with something mystical. This fact creates a dividing wall for the relationship of tradition, culture and religion. Basically, the dividing wall stems from a theological attitude that departs from assumptions about the relationship between something sacred and profane. In the end, this raises concerns that can basically be dismissed by understanding that divinity in the context of religion directs humans to the ultimate goal so that it can bring up the actualization of awareness of the existence of God. This understanding can lead to the idea that culture and tradition are gifts from God. Culture is a form of configuration of the spirit of understanding the existence of God. At this point, religion has actually 'pervaded' culture, and vice versa.

Religion can be manifested in various forms of cultural traditions that exist in Indonesia. Aspects of religiosity can be found in various cultural treasures. This can be explored to get an idea of the cultural patterns that each ethnic group has. In the end, we can find universal elements in the realm of encounter in the form of a mutual dialogue between particular local culture and religion.

The encounter between religion and culture is a necessity. This can be seen and associated with cultural rites in almost all cultural rituals in Indonesia. Among them, the Melikise tradition is also reflected in the village of Manalu-Lesabe, South Tabukan sub-district, which is in the Sangihe archipelago. The Manalu Lesabe community, which is mostly Christian, is part of the Sangihe indigenous community. In the context of the Melikise tradition, there is an encounter between elements of culture and religion, especially Christianity. This is reflected in the ritual. There is a stage in the Melikise ritual which shows religious leaders from various groups praying to God Almighty together.

The Melikise tradition is a local wisdom that has existed since ancient times. Initially, the ancestors of the Sangihe held Melikise to *I Ghenggona Langi* to ward off evil spirits in Lesabe Village. *I Ghenggona Langi* is the name of God by the ancestors of the Sangihe people because they are believed to be an almighty figure who can dispel all forms of evil things. After the gospel entered the land of Sangihe, there had been inculturation between the Melikise tradition and Christian culture, so that in conducting rituals in the Melikise tradition there were Christian prayers, Hallelujah songs and songs taken from Christian hymnbooks such as Kidung Jemaat, Dua Sahabat Old and Psalms. Basically there is no clear information regarding the etymology of the word Melikise. But in general, the term Melikise

refers to ritual activities to ward off plagues and other threats that disturb the peaceful life of rural communities communally.

Covid 19 is a virus outbreak that threatens human life. Since appearing at the end of 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on humans. This was also experienced by the Indonesian people. Since March 2020, Covid 19 has become a national disaster. Many people have suffered from the Covid 19 pandemic and not a few have lost their lives due to the corona virus. Every human being, even a group of people in their own way or based on certain traditions and rituals, tries to prevent the entry of Covid 19. This effort was also carried out by the Manalu-Lesabe community, South Tabukan sub-district. The Melikise ritual, which has been in suspended animation for almost decades, has come back to its senses due to the covid 19 pandemic. The Melikise tradition as a ritual to expel and dispel the plague is carried out as an effort to repel and stop the covid-19 pandemic. The people in Manalu-Lesabe village understand that the Melikise tradition is so relevant to the spiritual aspect, because it is believed to be able to maintain the comfort of the residents when there is a threat, either from outside the village or from within the village, such as the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Manalu-Lesabe community believes that the implementation of the Melikise ritual can prevent them from the Covid 19 virus outbreak. The tradition that has existed for a long time gives people strong belief that the process of worshiping the Creator will help them ward off various disasters and diseases. In the Melikise ritual, the stage of dispelling reinforcements by offering a prayer to God Almighty illustrates that the theological aspect has merged with the cultural aspect. Based on the description of the reality above, the researcher is interested in knowing and exploring the relationship between the Melikise tradition and Christianity, the process of assimilation of the Melikise tradition with Christianity, Christian values that are reflected in the Melikise tradition, which are in line or contradictory, and the role of the Melikise tradition as a ritual to reject evil in the community. in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. The descriptive approach aims to examine the condition of the natural object, the researcher becomes the key instrument, the data collection technique is done by triangulation, the analysis is inductive and the results of qualitative research emphasize meaning rather than generalization (Sugiono, 2007). A similar opinion is also expressed by Semi (1993), where qualitative research is carried out not prioritizing numbers, but the depth of appreciation of the interactions between concepts that are being studied empirically. Sources of data in this study in the form of documents and interviews related to the problems studied. In the process of collecting data using observation and interview techniques, as well as documentation. The steps taken in analyzing the data using the Miles and Huberman model, namely (1) data reduction (*data reduction*); (2) *data display*

(*data display*); and (3) *conclusion drawing and verification* (Sugiono, 2012). In addition, in this study the researchers applied triangulation techniques in an effort to check the validity of the data.

Results and Discussion

The Melikise

Melikise tradition is a tradition that exists in indigenous peoples A special sanger in Manalu-Lesabe village, South Tabukan sub-district. Melikise has the meaning of expelling the plague. Expelling the plague is defined as an effort to expel everything that can threaten the comfort of the residents who live in the countryside (*kampung*) in the form of a prayer to God. To expel evil spirits, outbreaks of infectious diseases, including the covid-19 pandemic. People in Manalu-Lesabe village, this Melikise tradition is so relevant, because it is believed to be able to maintain the comfort of the residents in times of threats, either threats from outside the village or from within the village.

Before holding Melikise, the person who would be the leader of Melikise had prepared himself first in a few days such as fasting and prayer. Then after that, the community leaders who became the pillars of Melikise came to visit and invited all the religious leaders living in the village of Lesabe, from Christians, Catholics, Pentecostals, Adventists, and Muslims, while discussing that there would be a prayer together at every point. rural road points to be traversed. The points are the places to pray, namely at every crossroads. According to a community leader who was the initiator of the implementation of the Melikise traditional ritual at the beginning of the covid 19 pandemic, in April 2020, the last time the Melikise ritual was carried out was around the 1970s, when dysentery was spreading in the village of Manalu-Lesabe. In the rituals held in 2020, all religious leaders are involved. Next, the villagers who are part of the Melikise ritual will hold a prayer together. The people who participate in the Melikese ritual are adults. The implementation of the Melikise ritual is carried out at midnight, starting at 11 pm. It was carried out at midnight, because they understood that the situation and condition at that time was quiet, calm, unobstructed by vehicles, and evil spirits wandering around. At midnight, it will be easier for them to hold a Melikise ritual to *I Ghenggona Langi* who is the owner and controller of life. The mention of *I Ghenggona Langi* is found in the words of prayer requests, which are revealed in the execution of rituals.

In addition, the ritual participants are asked by the leader who will run Melikise to be serious. According to their understanding, the Melikise tradition is related to their faith which is manifested in the form of action, so it must be carefully prepared. Ritual participants are prohibited from consuming alcohol and are prohibited from leaving the line. If during the Melikise ritual it rains, the participants are not allowed to leave the line, but continue to walk because the rain that falls is considered a test of faith, and if someone who has left the line will then re-enter the line when the rain stops, then that person forbidden to participate in

continuing Melikise. In addition, they also believe that if there are participants who consume alcohol, the Melikise ritual will not be carried out smoothly. This means that there will be obstacles encountered, for example it will rain. That also happened during the Melikise ritual in 2020. On the first night the ritual was carried out, it rained. They also looked for the cause and it turned out that there were several ritual participants who had consumed alcohol prior to the Melikise ritual. However, on the second and third nights, the ritual was carried out smoothly, because all the participants followed the ritual with full sincerity. On the second and third nights, there were no participants who consumed alcohol.

At the time of Melikise, each of them had prepared a torch, then they walked together while saying prayers at the points that had been determined by the person in charge, namely at every crossroads. At these road points, prayers are offered to God through religious leaders. In prayer, they use the term *I Ghenggona Langi* which refers to God. The Melikise tradition is always carried out when the Manalu-Lesabe indigenous people feel a threat.

Melikise Tradition Encounter with Christianity in Manalu-Lesabe Village

Tradition is part of the ancestral heritage. Tradition as ancestral heritage is passed down from generation to generation through various ways, one of which is verbally. However, this method resulted in the tradition being not well documented. Many indigenous peoples have lost their identity and historical traces of their traditions due to the process of oral tradition inheritance, including indigenous peoples in Manalu-Lesabe village. One of the traditions of the Manalu-Lesabe indigenous people which is difficult to trace historically, is the Melikise tradition. Until now, the origin of the Melikise tradition in Manalu-Lesabe village is not known for certain. In contrast to the Tulude tradition which essentially contains thanksgiving and asking God's blessing to live the new year, it is carried out regularly every year so that its existence is recognized, the Melikise tradition is not carried out routinely because its essence is a tradition of repelling reinforcements which is only carried out when an epidemic or disaster occurs so that it does not carried out regularly every year. In addition, the locus is only limited to indigenous peoples in the South Tabukan area so that this tradition is less well known to the general public. According to one indigenous community who still maintains the tradition, the Melikise tradition was carried out when he was seven or eight years old, and the Melikise tradition is not only held by the Manalu-Lesabe community but also by people in surrounding villages such as Channelg, Pintareng, and Basau. , circa 1970's.

The Melikise tradition, apparently, is a local wisdom that has existed long before Christianity entered the Manalu-Lesabe area and the surrounding villages. Initially, the ancestors in the area held the Melikise tradition focused on *I Ghenggona Langi*, but at the same time they established relationships with the spirits of the dead while praying at a waterfall in Bentung village. This element of belief understands

that there is a power that goes beyond the physical human being communicating between humans and that power (Tjahyadi, Wafa, and Zamroni, 2019).

After the gospel entered the area, there had been inculturation between the Melikise tradition and the Christian tradition, so that in holding the Melikise tradition there were Christian prayers, Hallelujah songs, Two Old Friends, and Psalms (Tjahyadi, Wafa, and Zamroni, 2019). One of the values contained in the Melikise tradition that is maintained is that it does not look at the differences between religious adherents, but one and respects the beliefs of other religions who participated when the Melikise tradition was held in the village of Manalu-Lesabe. Therefore, the Melikise tradition actually existed prior to acculturation with the Christian tradition in the region.

Previously, the village of Manalu-Lesabe was the main area of travel that was often traversed by the surrounding community who wanted to go to their destination. It could be because the geographical location of the village is so strategic and fertile; in the North there is an ocean, in the South, West, and East are filled with vegetation. Because it is the main area for people to travel from the surrounding villages, the term *Lesabeng appears*, which is interpreted by local people as an area that is often passed by the community, as a result of this term it presents a name from the village of Lesabe. In connection with the emergence of the term, the term *oi kumene*, which means a greeting from the community to gather together to praise the glory of God. From here the forerunner of the GMIST Oikumene Manalu-Lesabe church which at that time was still known as the *Gaheda Geguwa* (Big Church). Thus, it can be said that the Christian tradition has encountered the local community and its traditions since the formation of a congregation that worships at *Gaheda Geguwa*.

The connection with the encounter of the Melikise tradition with Christianity in the village of Manalu-Lesabe is realized through the diffusion of tradition. Diffusion of tradition is the development and dissemination of elements of a tradition by a person or community to another area (Tjahyadi, Wafa, and Zamroni, 2019).

This diffusion creates a link between foreign traditions and local traditions, for example the Christian belief tradition and local belief in Manalu-Lesabe village. This can be seen from the entry of Christian traditions through the VOC company in the Sangihe archipelago, before a decade the Dutch government took over this area in 1882 (van den End, Th and Weitjens, 2015). The document of the GMIST Oikemene Manalu-Lesabe church supports this reality, that the presence of the Bible in the South Tabukan area, specifically in the village of Manalu-Lesabe coincided with the presence of merchant ships from Portugal and the Netherlands that had passed the village coast (etc) since 1860.

In subsequent developments up to now, only the people in Manalu-Leabe village hold the Melikise tradition, which was spearheaded by a local community leader. Through these developments, the meaning of the word Melikise underwent interpretation after an encounter with the Christian generation in Manalu-Lesabe village in the 1970s. This generation refers to Melikise's term as *Mehale* because it

refers to the Hallelujah song. However, the term Melikise has not changed its substance which means it is an antidote / repellent to plague. Thus, Melikise is an effort to ward off / drive away everything that can threaten the comfort of residents who live in the countryside (kampung), which is in the form of a prayer to *I Ghenggona Langi*. The contents of the prayer are to ward off evil spirits, infectious diseases, or ward off the spread of the covid-19 pandemic (etc).

Spirituality values in the Melikise

Spirituality tradition refer to the expression of one's religiosity, both individually and collectively, to the Supreme Belief which is embodied in daily life. Spirituality exists by values and values have their essence when spirituality is not only at the level of ideas-cognition but manifests in behavior and diction in one's daily life.

The Supreme Belief or Adi-Duniawi power manifests itself in human empirical history, which is then internalized and realized as a value system that lives and sustains the patterns and forms of human life. This appreciation of the existence of Adi-Duniawi is then carried out through rituals which are then established as a tradition. Basically, in a tradition from local culture, it has the same type of divine belief, namely deism as well as theistic. In an understanding that is characterized by deism, it is believed that God is the Creator of the universe but who is far from humans. After creating everything that exists in the universe, then God resigned. Everything has to be taken care of by the lower gods who reside in certain places in this universe. But even so the resignation of God, did not make God off the hook. He is still actively taking care of his creation. Therefore, the ritual in a tradition of indigenous peoples is intended to reject reinforcements and ask for protection only. Likewise in the Melikise tradition. The Melikise tradition reveals the relationship between the human-world and the divine-super-earthly. Through the rituals performed, people believe that the divine will ward off evil and help their lives. However, the Melikise Tradition is not only present as a ritual to appreciate the divine, but also contains a number of social values that are the foundation of community, church and congregational life. Below are some values or meanings that can be presented from the implementation of the Melikise Tradition.

Belief in the Creator

One of the main requirements in the series of rituals for the implementation of the Melikise traditional event is the belief that *I Genghona langi* will listen to the prayers offered by the tradition participants. This belief has consequences, namely the demand to be serious and earnest in participating in every series of events in the Melikise traditional ritual. In the Melikise traditional prayer pilgrimage, one of the things that is held is that everyone who has participated in the Melikise ritual from the beginning has a responsibility to continue to participate until the completion of the ritual.

Throughout the implementation of the Melikise Tradition, participants are required to ask in prayer and song to the divine-superworldly. In the tradition of Melikise, the Divine-Super-World which in the development of encounters with religions is given the title God-Allah. This Lord Allah is the Creator of the entire universe. The whole universe is subject to its dominion, so it is proper and appropriate for the Creator to be a place to seek help.

In the Melikise Tradition, all elements of religion are involved. The involvement of religions in the Melikise tradition is shaded by a shared awareness that the divine of all religions is One. This departs from the style of deism that characterizes the tribal religious understanding of the divine as ONE but is lived in an Existence which is called differently by religions.

On the one hand, this understanding of divinity will become a bridge for dialogue and encounter, but on the other hand it obscures the existence and authenticity of faith in the Divine in each religion. However, it must be realized that the orientation of the concept of divinity does not refer to the debate about the uniqueness of the concept of divinity in each religion but to Togetherness; The existence of the ONE Adi Duniawi is what unites

Conclusion

to give a special place to pluralism. This tradition is carried out through the barriers of humanity that are often built and maintained by humans. In the Melikise tradition, religious and class boundaries are transcended. All community entities from various backgrounds are struggling together over the calamity that is happening.

In the Melikise procession the whole community is invited as a unit. There are no restrictions and groupings of layers of society. Everyone joins in the Melikise procession. All elements of society who come from different social and religious backgrounds are present based on the same goal, which is to hope that reinforcements will come from their beloved village.

In the midst of the threat of religious segregation, the Melikise tradition becomes a social force that can glue the life of a pluralistic society together. The Melikise tradition is a pendulum that balances the life of a pluralistic village community so that it is always harmonious despite facing the dynamics of complicated issues such as the Covid 19 Pandemic. The Covid 19 pandemic, consciously or not, builds boundaries and divides society. Fear of the dangers of the Covid 19 Virus, makes people withdraw from social life and feel more comfortable and safe when alone. Not only religious segregation but also social segregation is a challenge. The Melikise tradition is a preventive effort so that social segregation does not widen. Whereas in a pandemic situation the community must be able to adapt new habits; keep their distance without being strangers to each other. In the Melikise tradition, the community realizes that there are the same problems, which need to be faced together and dealt with together as well. This tradition allows the social strength of the community to be maintained and preserved

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