



## Mission in the Reformation Era: Literature Review of Church Strategy Models in the Mission Movement

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**Abstract.** *In this article, literature research is discussed on the dynamics and strategic models of the church in the mission movement during the Reformation era. The theological understanding of the church's practice of mission underwent a major shift during the Protestant Reformation. This included the shift in authority from the ecclesiastical hierarchy to the authority of Scripture and the emergence of new methods to spread the gospel. This study investigates how Reformation figures such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other reformers influenced the missions paradigm through their writings, teachings, and church structures. In addition, it investigates models of various mission strategies that originated from the Reformation movement; these include Bible translation, local congregation-based evangelism, and education as a means of mission. This literature review shows that the Reformation era created new theologies and church mission strategies that are relevant for today.*

**Keywords** *Reformation Era, Church Strategy Models, Mission Movement*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Christian mission has been at the heart of the church's calling since the beginning, a divine mandate to spread the good news of salvation. The word "mission" itself is rooted in the Latin word *missio* meaning "to send," reflecting its essence as "God's mission" (God's mission) carried by His people (our mission). This concept is inseparable from evangelism and church growth, all of which are rooted in the will of the One God. However, the journey of Christian mission, especially in historical contexts such as the Reformation Era, exhibits profound complexity and dynamics. (P, 2012)

The 16th century Reformation, spearheaded by Martin Luther, became a significant turning point in the history of Christianity. Emerging in response to aberrations within the Roman Catholic Church, the movement not only brought about theological purification but also reshaped understandings of the church, authority and salvation. In this fragile and turbulent context, the church began to revisit its role, including in its relationship with the state and society. This shift also affected the way mission was conceived and conducted, moving from a more centralized and hierarchical approach to an emphasis on the Bible, personal faith, and local community engagement.

Over time, the mission movement has continued to face various challenges, ranging from truth relativism and religious pluralism to cultural and political boundaries, as well as issues of financial dependency and the development of digital technology. Global crises such as the

COVID-19 pandemic also demand adaptation and flexibility in mission strategies. However, the legacy of the Reformation remains relevant, with its emphasis on the sovereignty of God, the authority of the Bible, and the role of the local church as a mission operator. A deep understanding of "Christian mission" and how it has evolved through various eras, especially the Reformation Era, is crucial to deal with the complexity of mission today.

## 2. METHODS

The research method is the author's way of how to make the stages of research with various procedures and approaches. Currently, researchers will discuss missions related to the church in the fermentation era using the *library research* method. Library study is an attempt at research conducted by the researcher himself to obtain appropriate and relevant data related to the theme of discussion in the research itself obtained through scientific books and research journals. (Mahasiswa PGSD C, 2024)

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Definition of Christian Missions

In English, German and Dutch, mission is called *Missie* which is used by church circles, but usually also uses the term *zending*. *Mission* itself comes from the word *missio* (Latin) which is taken from the word *mittere* which means *to send*. Mission is a singular form that means "God's work" (God's Mission) or in other words this is our duty that has been mandated to us as His people (*our mission*) but the plural form, *missions*, shows the practical reality or carrying out a job. Mission is closely related to evangelism and cannot be separated because it is interconnected, other than that, mission is also related to church growth because church growth is part of God's will and also comes from God and this is a mission mandate from the One God. (P, 2012). David Bosch in his understanding he wrote in his book quoting the writings of Martin Kähler, namely, Mission is the "Mother of Theology". (Bosch, 2011)

### The Church Context in the Reformation Era

The 16th-century Reformation spearheaded by Martin Luther emerged as a reaction to various deviations that occurred within the Roman Catholic Church, especially in terms of teachings, papal authority, and religious practices such as the sale of indulgences. Luther considered that many of the teachings and actions of the Church at that time were contrary to the content and spirit of Scripture. Luther's courageous act of nailing 95 propositions to the door of the Wittenberg Church on October 31, 1517 marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation movement that spread rapidly thanks to public support, the printing press, and a socio-political situation that was experiencing a crisis of confidence in ecclesiastical

institutions. The Reformation not only criticized aberrations, but also encouraged the purification of the Christian faith based on the Bible, emphasized the importance of true repentance, and challenged the spiritual monopoly held by the Church hierarchy. (Raioan, 2023)

The Church at that time was in a fragile state, characterized by anti-clerical sentiment and a crisis of authority, which paved the way for new ideas to be widely accepted. As a result, the Reformation brought about profound changes in the landscape of Christianity in Europe, giving rise to new denominations and reshaping the understanding of the church, authority and salvation as such, the church context in the Reformation era was a time of great transition that marked a shift away from centralized ecclesiastical authority towards a more personalized and biblical approach to faith, and opened up space for greater theological freedom and spiritual renewal.

During the current reformation period, it appears that the church has begun to try to form a new pattern of relationship with the state, although the changes have not been too great. However, compared to the pre-reform era, there has been a shift, where the church is now more willing to take a critical role towards the state. This shows a new awareness in the relationship between church and state. A.A. Yewangoe said that churches in Indonesia need to review their theological heritage and adjust it to the context of the relationship between church, state and market. The market itself is understood as part of social dynamics, not an independent entity. Churches now not only perform religious functions, but also actively defend the oppressed and provide legal assistance based on Christian faith. Abraham Kuyper's thought confirms that true Christian faith must be realized in all aspects of life, including in efforts to improve the social conditions of society. (Harold, 2017)

### **The Development of Missions in the Church in the Reformation Era**

One of the main characteristics of the Reformed approach to mission is the emphasis that the center of attention is not people, but God and Christ. Mission is not simply a matter of efficient methods of delivering the gospel, but rather a form of obedience to God's sovereign will in saving people. Christ Himself is the centerpiece of the message of salvation; without Him, there is no hope. On the other hand, mission is also directed towards God (Theocentric), for it is He who sends, chooses, and opens human hearts to believe. The church does not determine the outcome of the mission, but rather becomes an instrument in the hands of God who carries out His will. (Tari, 2021). This is in accordance with the doctrine of divine election (predestination), which states that God has eternally determined who will be saved. Therefore, the preaching of the gospel becomes the means for God to call His chosen people out of darkness into the light of salvation.

Within this framework, the local church has an important position as the executor of God's mission in the world. The church not only maintains the truth of the teachings, but is also called to be actively present in the world as the sent body of Christ (*missio ecclesiae*). Mission is not the responsibility of individuals or mission organizations alone, but is the common task of all God's people. Thus, the formation of churches that are theologically sound, strong in leadership, and living in the truth of the gospel is the core of mission work according to the Reformed view, not just a complement, but the main part of the church's missionary vocation.

Since the time of the apostles, church missions have played a central role in the course of Christianity's history. During the Middle Ages (5th-15th centuries), the practice of missions underwent a transformation, becoming a tool not only to spread Christianity but also to extend European political and cultural influence. In this period, missions were often carried out through cooperation between ecclesiastical institutions and state power, with a top-down approach that sometimes involved pressure on non-Christian communities. The hierarchically structured Catholic Church, along with the support of orders such as the Benedictines, Dominicans and Franciscans, played an important role in the spread of missions. Figures such as St. Boniface and St. Patrick show how missionary activity not only had a religious impact but also brought about social and cultural transformations ranging from education to the adoption of legal norms aligned with Christian values. (P, 2012)

However, the mission's authoritarian approach and lack of respect for local culture led to criticism, which sparked the Reformation movement in the early 16th century. The Reformation not only changed the face of Christian theology, but also introduced an approach to missions that focused more on delivering the Gospel message based on Scripture, the importance of personal faith, and access to education for all.

### **Challenges and Limitations in the Mission Movement**

Since its inception, the Christian mission movement has been an important component of the church's call to spread the gospel throughout the world. However, the movement faces many issues that hinder its effectiveness and viability in an increasingly complex world. Truth relativism and religious pluralism are major problems. The idea that there is only one perceived truth does not fit the spirit of the times in many contexts of modern society, especially in urban and multicultural areas. Christian missions are often perceived as arrogant or even harmful to others for claiming the exclusive truth of the gospel. (Wati, 2017). In such situations, evangelistic efforts can easily be perceived as a form of coercion or a newly emerging type of spiritual colonialism, leading to resistance from local communities.

Cultural and political aspects also pose significant challenges. Religious missions,

particularly Christian missions, are often legally restricted in many countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Local governments set strict regulations against religious conversions and activities deemed as "spreading foreign religions". Countries such as India, Pakistan, China and Saudi Arabia also enact anti-conversion laws or censor religious materials, which has a direct impact on missionaries' room to maneuver. (Samuel, 2019). In addition, it is not uncommon for the Westernized gospel message to be rejected by local communities as socially or spiritually irrelevant. This shows the importance of a contextual theology that is rooted in the local culture and understands the principles and language of the people. (Bevans, 2016)

In addition, the problem of high financial dependency, especially in developing countries, poses a challenge to the mission movement. Many ministry missions are financed by Western organizations or churches, which indirectly creates structural independence and increases the freedom of the local church. In the long run, this pattern of relationship can lead to unfavorable "giver-receiver" conflicts, especially in cases where local churches cannot manage ministries and funds independently. (Situmorang, 2018). In addition, advances in digital technology bring challenges. These advances, on the one hand, open up new opportunities for bold evangelism, but also raise issues about the authenticity of relationships, limited access to censorship in countries with strict regulations, and lack of time for face-to-face missionary relationships. (Yusup, 2021)

In addition, international crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts, and climate change have significantly altered mission prospects. A more flexible and community-based mission model is needed due to heightened political tensions, acts of travel, and a growing need for humanitarian aid. Missionaries should take the initiative of working together, not only focusing on verbal evangelism, but also on social service, health, education, and justice advocacy. (Tennent, 2016) This suggests that missions today should be conducted in a holistic manner taking into account all physical, social, and spiritual human needs while maintaining a spiritual orientation. Missions are no longer carried out by "foreign missionaries" alone now they must involve the local church as the main subject of service. The mission movement can become more relevant, inclusive, and sustainable amidst the ever-evolving global challenges with this kind of method.

### **Mission Strategy in the Reformation Era Church**

The Church Reformation of the 16th century was not only a theological movement against the aberrations of the Roman Catholic Church, but also a turning point in the understanding and practice of mission. Although Reformation figures such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli did not develop a theology of mission in the same sense that

those in modern times do, their thoughts and practices formed a significant basis for the future direction of Protestant church mission. In this situation, the approach to mission used during the Reformation era was more internal and emphasized the purification of doctrine, the spread of the gospel through Bible translation, and the strengthening of congregations through education and liturgy based on the word of God. (Ngelow, 2017)

The translation of the Bible into local languages was a key strategy of Reformation missions. This allowed people to read and understand God's word without the intermediary of priests or Latin. For example, Luther took the revolutionary act of translating the Bible into German in 1522, which not only strengthened personal faith but also helped lay people know the gospel. (Bosch, 2011) This strategy was later used as a model for Protestant movements in different parts of Europe. Subsequently, contemporary Protestant mission approaches place Scripture translation as the primary evangelistic tool.

Theological education, local preaching, and Bible translation were important components of the Reformation's mission plan. To spread the teachings of the Reformation to France, Scotland, the Netherlands, and even to new world territories, John Calvin established an academy in Geneva. Churches no longer relied on a hierarchical mission system like the one in the Catholic Church. Instead, they formed networks of local communities and churches that were independent but still adhered to the doctrines of the reformation. (McGrath, 2015) This method allowed missions to flourish without relying on political expansion or colonial powers.

However, it should be noted that the Reformation movement did not put much emphasis on missions outside Europe. This was largely due to the limitations of political conditions and church structures that were still grappling with internal reforms. Nevertheless, Reformation thinking on the common priesthood of believers, the authority of the Bible, and salvation by faith, became the seeds that later grew into a global Protestant mission strategy. (Park, 2017) In this sense, the legacy of the Reformation lies not in direct geographical expansion, but in the establishment of theological and strategic foundations that continue to the present day.

### **The Relevance of the Mission Strategy Model in the Reform Era**

The Reformation Era that began in 1998 in Indonesia brought many fundamental changes in various aspects of life-political, economic, social, cultural, and also in religious life. In the context of Christianity, these changes demanded a renewal of the church's ministry approach and mission strategy. Mission strategy models that were previously top-down, exclusive, and centered on institutional structures now need to be reviewed in order to remain relevant and impactful in an increasingly complex and pluralistic situation. A relevant

mission strategy model in the reformation era must pay attention to several important aspects below, namely:

### **Contextualization.**

In an increasingly open and pluralistic society, mission cannot be done with a universal and uniform approach, therefore, the church must do contextual mission. Contextual mission is an effort to approach missionaries to preach the good news / Gospel and on the same side also missionaries learn to understand the local culture they will evangelize and then see which culture can be contextualized, because in the process of preaching the Gospel, the times are also changing. The church must be able to adapt to the socio-cultural context of the local community, including paying attention to local values, language, cultural symbols, and the real needs of the people. This contextualization will make the mission more grounded and touch the hearts of the people. (Lie., 2023)

### **People's Participation.**

The reformation encouraged the spirit of democratization and community empowerment. Thus, in mission strategy, the people are no longer just objects of service, but active subjects who participate in designing, implementing and evaluating the mission itself. Ministry is no longer hierarchical or clericalistic, but community-based and collaborative. The church needs to build a ministry network that involves the laity, marginalized groups, women, and the younger generation in every mission movement. (Tiara, 2022) Therefore, the participation of the people is very important in the relevance of the reformation era mission strategy model, because it is not only the leaders or religious leaders who only participate, but also all Christians.

### **Interfaith Dialogue**

In an atmosphere of reformation that demands openness and respect for differences, the church needs to develop a mission strategy that is not confrontational or exclusive, but a mission that dialogues. Hans Kung's perspective on interfaith dialog is that the most important thing is openness between religions in order to prevent division, dialog must be built not only by one religion but between religions. (Lattu., 2020). The mission model must be contextualized with today's many religions in one country, especially Indonesia. A relevant mission model is one that builds bridges with communities across religions and cultures, fosters mutual respect, and contributes to peace and social justice. Mission is not just about increasing the number of members, but also about presenting the values of the Kingdom of God in society.

### **Strengthening the Identity and Prophetic Role of the Church.**

Christians as the Church in the reformation era are called to be a prophetic voice that speaks truth, justice, and sides with the oppressed or arguably the poor. In the mission strategy, the church must be present in society as a moral force and agent of social transformation. The church must not dissolve in the current of pragmatism or power politics, but instead must be a pioneer in fighting for ethical and spiritual values that ennoble life. (Suryadi., 2016)

Finally, mission strategies in the reformation era must be **inclusive, transformative, and relevant** to the challenges of the times. The church is called not only to maintain its existence, but to be light and salt in the midst of the changing dynamics of society. The relevance of mission lies in its ability to answer the real needs of people today, bridge the tension between tradition and change, and bring hope amidst the uncertainty of the world.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

During the Reformation period, the church experienced a major shift in its perspective and way of looking at Christian mission. By reading this literature, it can be concluded that the Reformation movement did not only bring about theological changes; it also incorporated a more contextualized and biblical model of mission strategy. The spirit of mission at that time focused on empowering local congregations such as evangelism through preaching, education, Bible translation, and direct congregational participation in mission service. By emphasizing that the gospel should be accessible to all people, reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin encouraged the missions movement indirectly. As a result, the legacy of the Reformation in the field of missions greatly helped develop the church's strategy for reaching the world with the gospel and continues to be an inspiration for the missions movement.

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