

## Evangelism in the Modern Era: Viewed from the Perspective of Kiyai Sadrach

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**Abstract.** *Evangelism in the modern era faces unique challenges and opportunities, especially in the context of a pluralistic society and digital technology. This article looks at evangelism from the perspective of Kiyai Sadrach, a Javanese Christian figure known for his contextualised and inclusive approach. Through this analysis, it will look at how Kiyai Sadrach's principles can be applied in the modern context to promote relevant and effective evangelism.*

**Keywords :** *Evangelism, Kiyai Sadrach, Modern Era*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Evangelism has always been the main task of the church since the early days of Christianity. In the modern era, this task has become increasingly complex with social, cultural and technological changes. One sign of modernisation is the development of digitalisation. The digital age marks an important step in the evolution of a society influenced by digital information and communication technology. In this era, technological developments such as computers, the internet, and mobile devices play a crucial role in changing the pattern of daily life. The internet, as the main foundation of the digital era, facilitates quick access to global information, instant communication, and online co-operation (Sirait, Sukarna, and Dewi;2024). This can be seen from the many churches that are now actively using social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to spread gospel content. The content shared varies from articles, images, audio, to video. In addition, live streaming via YouTube and Zoom is used to conduct interactive worship and coaching, enabling real-time participation of congregants from various locations (123dok.com). Church leaders are encouraged to see online media as an effective modern mission field. Investments in digital equipment and human resource training are also a focus to improve the quality of digital ministry (Seminar 'Church and Mission in the Digital Age').

The problem arises, however, when church leaders begin to be busy only creating online evangelistic content without ever again thinking about the tangible in front of them today. the tendency to focus more on chasing followers in online media has now become like the fruit of simala kama. While digital media allows for rapid communication, it emphasises the need for physical experiences such as face-to-face meetings to build authentic relationships, especially

in a neighbourhood context (Sukarna,2021). Kiyai Sadrach, a Javanese Christian figure in the 19th century, provides an example of how evangelism can be done with respect for the local cultural context. Sadrach's inclusive and adaptive approach provides valuable lessons for evangelism in this digital era.

## **2. METHODS**

In this writing process, the author uses a literature review method approach by paying attention to the current context. The author pays attention to detail not only in articles, books, but also pays attention to social media that is being used by many people today. This is understood as a form of phenomenological observation, which pays attention to the conditions and context of the author's experience (Sirait, Nainggolan, and Novianti,2023).

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Evangelism in the Modern Era**

The modern era is marked by globalisation, technological advancement, and increasing religious pluralism. Evangelism in this era requires an approach that is not only based on theological dogma but also considers the existing cultural, social, and technological context. The biggest challenge is how to make the gospel message relevant without compromising its core.

### **Kiyai Sadrach: His History and Influence**

Kiyai Sadrach (1835-1924), a Javanese Christian figure, was known for his ability to convey the gospel in a way that was contextualised and appropriate to Javanese culture. He used local symbols, language, and practices familiar to Javanese people to convey the gospel message. This made the gospel acceptable to the people without being seen as an imposing foreign religion.( Ricklefs,2008, 230-232)

Sadrach was born in the region between Demak and Jepara with the small name Radin. He came from an abangan Islamic background, but had a great interest in studying religion. Before becoming a Christian, Radin travelled from one Islamic boarding school to another, determined to gain true and deep knowledge. In his quest, he met Pak Kurman, also known as Kanoman, a teacher who had been defeated by Kyai Tunggul Wulung. Radin was then taken to study with Kyai Tunggul Wulung. After some time, Kyai Ibrahim Tunggul Wulung advised Radin to go to Batavia and meet Mr F.L. Anthing. In Batavia, Radin Abas, his full name, was baptised by a Dutch Priest from the Indiche Kerk and received the baptismal name Sadrach. After learning from Mr. F.L. Anthing and being baptised, he returned to East and Central Java

to evangelise in the Bagelen area of Purworejo, assisting Mrs Philip Stevens (Sukarna,2024,80-81).

In 1870, Sadrah started and led a fellowship in Karangjoso, Bagelen Karesidenan. At that time, many Purworejo people were reluctant to live in the village because it was considered haunted. However, Sadrah settled there to prove that she did not possess magical knowledge. Sadrah's method was to discuss and debate with people who were thirsty for the truth, and he always won. Sadrah's fame as an authoritative teacher in Prince Diponegoro's former territory attracted many followers. His popularity made the Dutch East Indies Government worried, as they thought that Sadrah's popularity and the large number of Muslims who followed him could cause problems. Therefore, the government tried to dampen her popularity and services. (Sukarna,2024,80-81).

Many negative accusations were directed at her, especially from the GPI, Zending, Pastors, and the Dutch East Indies Government who were Christians. These accusations led to Sadrah being tried and imprisoned. However, Kyai Sadrah's courage and persistence in fighting for Christians as an independent people was extraordinary. He used the term 'merdeko Christian' to emphasise that they were not servants of the Dutch. Sadrah never wanted to bow before Westerners, including officials and Zending, which caused him to be called an arrogant dissident and rebel. In fact, she was once rumoured to claim to be Christ or Imam Mahdi, but she and her followers only surrendered to Christ whom she served. (Sukarna,2024,80-81).

A great loss in her life was the death of Mrs Philip Stevens, a female evangelist who became a teacher and parent to Sadrah, as well as the death of Father Wilham, a Zending from the NGZV whom she had considered a friend and son. Sadrah's life aspirations were to build a church of Christ that was merdeko and to become a merdeko Pastor. In his old age, F.L. Anthing, his teacher, ordained Sadrah as a Mardeko Pastor for the church of God in Karangyoso.

Kyai Sadrah leads Javanese Christianity, with church meetings held every Tuesday Kliwon and Friday Kliwon. Javanese customs are maintained, developed and adapted to Christianity. Another name he used was Suropranoto, which means daring to organise. He developed Javanese Christianity to distinguish it from Dutch Christianity and co-operated with the Zending NGZV only on Baptism and Holy Communion.

## **Principles of Evangelism According to Kiyai Sadrach**

### **Contextualisation**

Sadrach emphasises the importance of conveying the gospel in the language and symbols understood by the local community. Kiyai Sadrach understands the importance of contextualisation, which is adapting the delivery of Christian teachings to local culture and traditions. He combines Christian values with Javanese traditions so that the gospel message can be well received by the local community. Sadrach uses symbols and terms that are familiar to Javanese people, such as adapting mosque architecture for the church and using prayers similar to Javanese mantras. (Smith, 2010, 35). Sadrach's approach of not separating his followers from their home communities reflects the inclusiveness that is important in modern evangelism (Steenbrink, 1993, 94).

### **Education and Open Discussion**

Sadrach's teaching methods often involve open debate with other religious teachers. These discussions were conducted in a dignified manner, where the losing side of the debate would usually follow the teachings of the winning side. This approach not only increased the number of his followers but also cemented his position as a respected figure in the community (Winter, 2003, 176).

### **Life Testimony and Fame**

Sadrach is known as a highly respected figure, both because of his extensive knowledge in Islamic and Christian teachings and because of his charismatic personality. The integrity and piety of his life bear witness to the teachings he preached, making him a living example for his followers.

### **Personal and Community Approach**

In addition to organising debates, Sadrach also took a personal approach and formed small communities that later grew into large ones. He built close relationships with members of his communities, often visiting them in person to provide teaching and spiritual support. (Wawasan Sejarah. Kiai Sadrach dan Penyebaran Agama Kristen di Jawa - Wawasan Sejarah, 2024).

### **Collaboration with foreign missionaries**

Despite Sadrach's independent approach, he maintains good relations with foreign missionaries. This can be seen in his cooperation with Dutch pastors, which despite the eventual split, showed his efforts to remain within the broader framework of Christian missions. Sadrach managed to adapt Christian teaching to the social structure and values of

Javanese culture, an approach that is relevant to the needs of a pluralistic modern era. (Carey,2007,299).

### **Evangelism in the Digital Age**

Advances in information technology offer great opportunities for evangelism. Social media, blogs, podcasts, and other digital platforms make it possible to spread the gospel message widely and quickly. The principles applied by Kiyai Sadrach can be translated into the digital context by adjusting the gospel message to be relevant and easily understood by modern society (Budiman,1990,128). Examples of the Application of Sadrach's Principles in the Digital Context are;

#### **Contextualised Content**

Using everyday language and popular culture references in digital content to appeal to a wider audience (Woodward,2011,171). This principle emphasises the importance of understanding the cultural, social, and intellectual context of the audience being reached. Evangelists need to communicate the gospel message in a way that is relevant to the realities of modern society without compromising the essence of the gospel message itself.

A relational approach is also very important to note where, Kiyai Sadrach emphasises the importance of building good relationships with the people around us as a foundation for sharing faith. This is in line with the principle that evangelism is not just about conveying information, but also about building deep and supportive relationships.

#### **Digital Inclusivity**

Creating an inclusive and supportive online community, where people from different backgrounds can feel welcome and connected (Hefner, 2000,202; Federspiel, 2001,98). This can be done with a strong personal testimony, which Kiyai Sadrach also emphasises the importance of a consistent and authentic personal testimony as an effective way to bring others to Christ. In today's social media era, personal testimony can have a huge impact as it can reach many people quickly. However, it is also important for modern evangelists to demonstrate alignment between their beliefs and their daily behaviour. This includes a commitment to living out Christian moral and ethical principles in all aspects of life.

#### **Technology Adaptation**

Utilise the latest technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) to tell the gospel stories in an interactive and engaging way. This demands creativity in communication. The modern era demands creativity in the way we deliver spiritual messages.

Evangelists can utilise technology, art, and popular culture as means to convey spiritual truths in a way that is engaging and understandable to modern audiences.

These principles are not only relevant for evangelism in the modern era, but also build a strong foundation for bringing about spiritual transformation in today's communities and societies.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Evangelism in the modern era requires innovative and contextualised approaches. The principles espoused by Kiyai Sadrach offer valuable guidance for reaching modern society without losing the heart of the gospel message. By adapting Sadrach's approach to the digital context, churches can capitalise on the opportunities offered by technology to spread the gospel in a relevant and effective way.

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