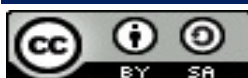


KEY DATA-BASED CHURCH GROWTH IN INDONESIA FROM EVANGELICAL PERSPECTIVE AND CRITICAL REVIEW OF THEM

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: March, 26th 2022 Revised: April, 16th 2022 Approved: April, 17th 2022	<i>The datas which is contained in the books of church growth are mostly non-empirical research, on the other hand only raises subject of motivational, hope & promises and apologetic figures. Empirical research approach on the theme or theology of church growth produces data with factual figures. Bilangan Research Center (BRC) is an empirical research institute that provides relevant, valid and current reference data on Christian spirituality and church growth. Spirituality and church growth are discussed using a national-level empirical research database. This paper examines the BRC from an evangelical perspective and critiques its findings from an ecumenical perspective.</i>
KEYWORDS	Great Commission, Evangelism, Discipleship, Church Growth



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INTRODUCTION

In 1994, an anthology of church growth was born. There are twelve authors in the book and four of them are well known in church growth literature (Hufnagel, 2021). The first two writers, namely Petrus Octavianus and Chris Marantika, we know as pioneers of church growth in Indonesia (Atasoge, 2018). Meanwhile, the next two authors, namely Bambang Budijanto and Gideon I. Tanbunaan, have been recognized as pioneers of church growth based on empirical research data at the national level (Gokok & Atasoge, 2021). However, in this 1994 book, Bambang and Gideon have not discussed church growth based on empirical research data. Bambang wrote about "the role of village services in church growth", while Gideon wrote about "a local cultural approach". Even though they discuss

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different issues, both of them talk about a cultural approach that is understood as contextualization and both of them do not base their presentation on data based on empirical research results. Both, like the other authors in the book, are concerned with what the church should do in order to grow according to the Bible (Payne, 2020).

Talking about church growth without a database of scientific research results is a feature of writing in the 1990s until before 2017 (Cowen & Shenton, 2017). Even translated books on church growth do not provide empirical research data. If there is a mention of numbers in it, those numbers have no reference to the results of empirical research (Baker, 2019). Just mention the numbers. For example, we can see this when Peter Wagner says that in Latin America, during the twentieth century, there was the most dramatic growth of the Protestant church: in 1900 there were only about 50,000 congregations, in the 1930s more than 1 million, in 1950- over 5 million in the 1960s more than 10 million, in the 1970s more than 20 million and the late 1980s more than 50 and will reach 137 million in 2000. Growth over 80 years, from 50 thousand to 50 million is not based on scientific research data (Davies et al., 2020). These are motivational figures, numbers of hope or even numbers of apologetic towards Catholicism that give the impression of extraordinary Protestant success (Atasoge, 2020). From the Pew Research Center we get a figure that in 2014, the population of Latin America was 425 million with a share of Catholics 69% (293.25 million) and Protestants 19% (80.75 million or about 81 million). Peter Wagner's prediction of 137 million is quite far from 81 million. Apart from that, we can also ask, within the framework of the ecumenical movement, can it be called "growth" if there is only a "movement" from Catholicism to Protestantism? Aren't they both "Christians"?

As Christians, we may enjoy exploding motivational numbers (Behrmann, Vicol, Wang, Grosse, & Jacobsen, 2021). Moreover, it is said that the growth of the church is the result of the church's evangelism program (Olusegun, 2020). Then, we will be more motivated to do evangelism. We would love to read church growth books that evangelism produces. But, is that the fact? Apparently not (Wilson, 2019). Bambang Budijanto, with his scientific research institute Bilan Research Center (BRC), found data that evangelism contributed only 1.7% to church growth. This figure is much smaller than biological growth (having children) which accounts for 23.8% of church growth (Rotering & Bras, 2019). And surprisingly again, the largest number of church growth is due to moving from another church, which is 45.7%. Can this be called "growth"? In this paper, we will analyze these and other questions related to the main findings of the BRC (Pinheiro, Hodges, Gan, Ferreira, & Andrade, 2022).

The title of this journal "The Key to Church Growth in Indonesia from an Evangelical Perspective" is partly taken from a book published by BRC, The Key to Church Growth in Indonesia. However, in the title of the paper there is an addition "from an Evangelical Perspective. (Vaca, 2019)" Such additions are given so that readers can better understand the book The Key to Church Growth in Indonesia and the questions raised in its scientific research. The easiest critique we can give is from its opposite "the evangelical perspective", namely the "ecumenical perspective".

RESEARCH METHOD

This type of research uses a qualitative, literal and contextual hermeneutic (interpretation) approach from the original Greek *textus Receptus* (TR) text for the New Testament. Insights from cultural anthropology are an important part of this research apart from the biblical text that needs to be studied for spiritual purposes it's not just the literal meaning.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Perspektif Evangelikal

Richard Siwu included Petrus Octavianus and Chris Marantika in the evangelical group.¹ In the context of the 1974 Lausanne congress, Octavianus gave a presentation on the importance of a biblical basis for seeking cultural identity in Asia. The Bible is seen as the only theological foundation that has absolute universal truths or "supercultural truths" that transcend all cultural truths. The Bible can be preached in any situation.² Its truths "can be applied to any culture and to any situation in history"³. Here, "contextualization" is understood more as the actualization, translation or application of Christian faith into concrete situations. The procedure is "from text to context". In the context of the 1989 Lausanne II congress, Chris Marantika testified about the growth of the church in Indonesia.⁴ *Lausanne II* himself was concerned with "the task of proclaiming the full Gospel to the whole world".⁵ And this is a sign of the faithfulness of evangelicals to the Great Commission. Mission is "church centered" or moving from "the church and every born-again Christian" to the non-Christian world. It is this person who has been born again who is mandated to carry out the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.⁶

The Lausanne movement led by Billy Graham was a continuation of the evangelical discussions in Berlin in 1966 sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and by the evangelical journal Christianity Today. The Berlin Congress was themed "One race, One Gospel, One task" and formulated a biblical basis for a Biblical world evangelization theology and discovered a new method of evangelization. Missions are pressured on the basis of personal faith that does not depend on church institutions⁷.

If Billy Graham became the pioneer of the worldwide evangelization movement, then Donald A. McGavran became the pioneer of the church growth movement.⁸ McGavran changed the three inappropriate traditional mission approaches, namely the individualistic approach, the "mission station" approach (founding churches) and "conquest of culture" (imposing Western culture), into a program of church growth in every sector of society so that it became a "people's movement".⁹ There are five biblical reasons that the church growth program is a "command of God", namely (1) Matthew 9:37-38, the world is a mission field to reap souls; (2) Romans 1:5, the task of the church is "to lead all the nations, that they may believe and obey Him"; (3) Matthew 28:18-19, the church guides people on a world scale to make disciples of "all peoples and all classes of society everywhere"; (4) I Corinthians 10:33 - 11:1, win over as many unbelievers as possible; (5) Mark 14:9, carries out worldwide evangelization (Atasoge & Beding, 2021).

In addition to these five biblical reasons, McGavran gives seven theological steps

¹ Richard A.D. Siwu. (1996) *Misi dalam Pandangan Ekumenikal dan Evangelikal Asia 1910-1961-1991*. Jakarta: Gunung Mulia. 264-265, 270.

² Ibid. 265.

³ Ibid. 286.

⁴ Ibid. 270. Besides Octavianus and Marantika, Stephen Tong's name is also mentioned. He gave a lecture at the plenary session with a paper entitled "Sin and Loss".

⁵ Ibid. 269.

⁶ Ibid. 304.

⁷ Ibid. 120-122.

⁸ Ibid. 126.

⁹ Or "movement in society". see Bambang dan Handi, Op. Cit. 2.

for the development of a church growth program, namely: (1) encouragement to evangelize; (2) multiplying the number of churches among unreached people; (3) make all nations or layers of society disciples of Jesus; (4) close relationship with people who have become Christians; (5) financial responsibility and unceasing prayer; (6) accurate information to local congregations and denominations; (7) the spirit of evangelization in the laity. So, from these seven steps, we see that there are three main cores of the church growth program, namely multiplying the number of local congregations, making disciples of ethnic groups and even all mankind, and seeking the lost.

McGavran founded the Institute of Church Growth in 1961. Then changed its name to the School of World Mission and then joined the Fuller Theological Seminary in 1965. Finally, McGavran's church growth movement joined hands with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) which is now known as World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).¹⁰ It is in this worldwide evangelical forum that the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia (EFA) was founded in 1983. And, in 2008, EFA changed its name to the Asian Evangelical Alliance (AEA).¹¹ Currently, Bambang Budijanto is the general secretary of AEA.¹²

Bambang Budijanto, chairman of the BRC board of directors, is one of the authors of the book *The Key to Church Growth in Indonesia*. Another writer is Handi Irawan, who currently serves as chairman of BRC¹³ and vice chairman of the STT SAAT Malang foundation.¹⁴ On March 28 2018, at STT SAAT, a seminar was held by BRC. In this event, a cooperation agreement was signed between STT SAAT and BRC.¹⁵ Previously, both of them were also writers in the book *Dynamics of Spirituality of the Young Generation of Indonesian Christians*¹⁶, edited by Bambang and published by BRC.

B. Key to Church Growth in Data-Based Indonesia

Before discussing the data-based book *Key to Church Growth in Indonesia*, it is better if we put the thoughts of this book in an empirical approach that examines a problem with scientific research methodology. Gitowiratmo, in his book *Basic Data-Based Pastoral Ideas*,¹⁷ introduces four pastoral models or approaches that we can use to approach church growth. The four approaches are:

1. Pilot Approach. Aims for *plantatio ecclesiae* or church planting, which means forming and developing ecclesiastical communities. The procedure is top-down with the pattern of a leader-subordinate or teacher-student relationship. At the top position there is a central figure who teaches (pastor centric) and in the down position there are students who learn about the doctrine of faith.

¹⁰ Or in Indonesian abbreviated as: World Evangelical Fellowship (PED).

¹¹ Dibin Samuel, "Evangelical Fellowship of Asia Renamed", <https://www.christianpost.com/news/evangelical-fellowship-of-asia-renamed-new-general-secretary-installed.html> (diakses 14/1/2022, 13:55)

¹² "Executive Council 2020 – 2024", <https://asiaevangelicals.org/who-we-are/structure/> (diakses 14/1/2022, 13:46).

¹³ <https://bilanganresearch.com/tentang-brc.html> (diakses 14/1/2022, 17:30).

¹⁴ Bambang dan Handi, op.cit., h. 123. Atau di <https://seabs.ac.id/siapa-kami/yayasan/> (diakses 14/1/2022, 14:19).

¹⁵ "Seminar Bilangan Research," <https://seabs.ac.id/news/seminar-bilangan-research/> (diakses 14/1/2022, 14:20).

¹⁶ Bambang Budijanto, ed. *Dinamika Spiritualitas Generasi Muda Kristen Indonesia* (Jakarta: Bilangan Research Center, 2018).

¹⁷ St. S. Gitowiratmo. (2017) *Gagasan Dasar Pastoral Berbasis Data*. Yogyakarta: Kanisius. 38-46.

2. The Canonical Applied Approach. Aims to implement canonical provisions. This canonical contains principles that are universal and do not look at the specifics (context) of concrete congregational life. The procedure is top-down, where the top lowers the rules and the down ones do it.
3. Participatory Approach. The church is the fellowship of the faithful with Christ as its center. The image of the church is not a top-down pyramid, but a circle. The whole community of faith participates in pastoral work and gets a place according to their respective gifts, competencies and knowledge. Here, the participatory approach is interdisciplinary and even interfaith.
4. Empirical Approach. It is cross-disciplinary and prioritizes data that is organized and measurable. It is called "empirical" because it pays attention to the reality of the life of the congregation that is experienced and captured (calculated, seen, analyzed etc.) as "empirical phenomena". The estuary of an empirical approach is a pastoral work that is contextual, relevant and significant.

The word "contextual" in the empirical approach is closer to the ecumenical perspective than the evangelical perspective because the ecumenical "departs from the context"¹⁸, while the evangelical ones "depart from the text" to apply to context. In the research methodology, it is explained that the research respondents are Christian church leaders whose majority have duties, positions, and service responsibilities as church pastors or pastors. This selection of leaders demonstrates the "pastor centric" nature of the pilot approach. So, here, from an evangelical perspective, a top-down applied and pilot approach is mixed with an empirical approach with an emphasis on the importance of relevant and significant data; or, to use the language of BRC, "relevant, valid and current data". By understanding the evangelical spirit and the importance of empirical research that produces "relevant, valid and up-to-date data", we can better understand what the book *Keys to Church Growth in Indonesia* presents.

In the "Foreword" it is stated that according to its vision, BRC is a service institution that provides current, valid, and relevant data for churches and ecclesiastical institutions.¹⁹ The focus on "churches and ecclesiastical institutions" is a church-centered evangelical mission. This is emphasized many times in its mission statement as found on its official website,²⁰ for example, "Assist the church in developing effective church growth strategies and programs". BRC hopes that he and the church will faithfully carry out the mission of the Great Commission. The fourth research of BRC focuses on discipleship and church involvement in obeying the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus.²¹ Church growth is planned according to the theological vision of the Great Commission.²²

In "Introduction", McGavran's opinion is expressed about the relationship between church growth and the vision of the Great Commission. McGavran argues that evangelism is input, that is, lost people must be won to Christ, baptized, and then members of the church. While the output is church growth. Church growth is influenced by obedience in carrying out the vision of the Great Commission. At the heart of church growth is successful evangelism. McGavran conducts church growth research using observational and

¹⁸ Ibid., bdk with the pastoral method described in Chapter II. It is a contextual, cross-disciplinary method of social theology that draws inspiration from Latin American liberation theology. Look, Siwu. Op. cit. 194. The Latin American theology of liberation voiced by Gustavo Gutierrez is cited as an example of contextual theology. In Indonesia, we cannot simply apply this liberation theology because the Indonesian context is more religiously diverse.

¹⁹ Bambang and Handi. Op. Cit. ix.

²⁰ <https://bilanganresearch.com/tentang-brc.html> (diakses 14/1/2022, 21:55).

²¹ Bambang and Handi. Op. Cit. 125.

²² Bambang and Handi. Op. Cit. 1.

investigative methods in which he records which churches are growing and compares them to those that are not. The combination of research methodology and theological doctrine makes church growth interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary in order to carry out the Great Commission to effectively make disciples of all nations. BRC itself combines statistical research and sociological research because it involves different cultures in Indonesia. In research, the data and information obtained are very dependent on the question. It is because of this "depending" nature that it is necessary to first explain the "evangelical perspective". In the book *The Key to Church Growth in Indonesia*, the question is out of evangelical theological doctrine.²³

Evangelical theological doctrine, as described in the section on "evangelical perspectives" is very much centered on evangelism in the vision of the Great Commission with the resulting increase in church membership, discipleship and personal faith. Therefore, in the book *Keys to Church Growth in Indonesia*, we read survey questions related to evangelism, discipleship and personal faith. For example, in "respondent profiles"²⁴ what was asked was the question of when to be born again or when to make a decision to follow Jesus, who brought him to Jesus, and had made disciples or not. In "research instruments"²⁵, They were asked about "how do the respondents of God's servants know Christ", the growth in the quantity of people in the church, the involvement of the congregation in the discipleship process, the growth in the quantity of new churches being started and questions related to vocations, motivations, and challenges faced by God's servants. Evangelical theological doctrine has little to say about social service. Therefore, in "research instruments" and in "dynamics of a healthy church in Indonesia"²⁶, although it is written about social service, it has not received sufficient attention in BRC's research on church growth. BRC finds leadership and strategy factors as the key to church growth in Indonesia.²⁷

BRC calculates the growth of the "average number of devotees worshipping every Sunday at the church"²⁸. BRC groups the congregations into three categories, namely the adult congregation of 25 years and over, the youth congregation of 15-24 years and the congregation of children 1-14 years. In the context of adult congregations worshipping on Sundays, BRC grouped church respondents into three size categories, namely: first, small churches of 1-50 people; second, the church is 51-200 people; and third, a large church of more than 200 devotees. In the context of congregations of youth and children who worship on Sundays, BRC groups church respondents into three size categories, namely: small congregations of 1-50 people, medium congregations of 51-100 people and large congregations of more than 100 people. This paper focuses more on the adult congregation and discusses the congregation of youth and children in moderation.

Is the church in Indonesia growing? Nationally, 58% of adult congregations are growing, while 42% are not growing.²⁹ Categorically above, the church that grew the most was the medium church. What is the cause of this growth? There are seven causes, namely:

²³ Later, in the next section on the "Criticism" section, we will see that often what is important to evangelicals is not important to ecumenicals. And what is considered "spirituality" by evangelicals, is not necessarily considered "spirituality" by ecumenicals, and vice versa.

²⁴ Bambang and Handi. Op. Cit. 9-13.

²⁵ Bambang and Handi. Op. Cit. 7.

²⁶ Bambang and Handi. Op. Cit. 53.

²⁷ Bambang and Handi. Op. Cit. 4.

²⁸ Bambang and Handi. Op. Cit. 15. The BRC does not count the number of people who have been baptized or registered in the church administration.

²⁹ Bambang and Handi. Op. Cit. 16-18.

1. Moving from another church 45.7%
2. Biological growth (having children) 23.8%
3. Marriage with another religion 11.7%
4. Conversion (moving from another religion) 8.7%
5. Change of residence 2.2%
6. Evangelism 1.7%
7. Others 8.2%

The main cause of adult congregation growth is “moving from another church” (45.7%). The next cause (46.4%) is related to having a family, namely having children (“biological growth”) and marrying followers of other religions, and moving places of residence. “Others” 8.2% and, surprisingly, 1.7% evangelism. According to the BRC, “1.7 percent evangelism” means that only 1.7% of churches in Indonesia are the main cause of the growth in the number of people who come from evangelism.³⁰ This is very small compared to the causes of “moving from another church”, “having a family” and “changing residence” which all reached 92.1%. So, from the BRC findings above, the current church growth is not the result of a deliberate effort from an evangelistic program but a natural growth of moving and family activities.

Does church growth in Indonesia meet the criteria for a healthy church? BRC has ten criteria for a healthy church, which I grouped³¹ as follows:

A. Quantity

1. The number of adult congregations is increasing (growing in quantity)
2. The number of children's congregations is increasing (growing in quantity)
3. The number of youth congregations is increasing (growing in quantity)
4. Planting more than one new church

B. Investment

5. Invest in leadership development
6. Invest in building the next generation
7. Invest in missions and evangelism

C. Quality

8. Spirituality, engage in the discipleship process
9. Involvement, involved in routine service
10. The church has a social service program for the surrounding community

With these criteria, the BRC set three measures: unhealthy (1-4), less healthy (5-6) and healthy (7-10). The number in brackets is the number of criteria that must be met and at least one of the quantity and quality is met. The BRC found that churches were 55.6% unhealthy, 25.8% less healthy and 18.6% healthy. This means that only 18.6% meet the minimum seven criteria for a healthy church. If this finding is related to the finding of the natural growth of moving and family activities which totaled 92.1%, then the current church growth is still in numbers that are far from healthy or unhealthy church growth.

In order for healthy church growth to occur as a result of church program efforts such as evangelism, BRC describes the keys to church growth in Indonesia which include leadership and strategy factors:

1. Leadership Factor

- Synod Support

A total of 40.2% of respondents stated that they received little support from the synod leadership. Around 38.2% of respondents received moderate support while the

³⁰ Bambang and Handi. Op. Cit. 27.

³¹ Slightly different from the order BRC made.

Wahyoe Rita Wulandari

remaining 21.6% of respondents stated that the synod leadership gave great support. There were 54.6% of churches that grew from respondents who stated that they received little support from the synod leadership. In contrast, there were 68.2% of churches that grew from respondents who stated that they received great support from the synod leadership.

- Calls and Motivation

Around 63.5% of churches that are experiencing growth are churches led by servants of God who use the percentage level of people who serve God as a measure of their success. The servant of God who views the involvement of the people in ministry as a measure of success seems to give priority to investing in equipping, supporting, and giving space to his congregation to be involved in routine services in the church. These efforts did make the church grow.

- Servant of God Education

The education level of God's servants is an important variable for church growth. Consistently, servants of God who received Masters and Doctoral Theology education showed much better church growth performance than servants of God who completed Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral education.

Theology, Bachelor of Theology, or those who have only completed education up to High School (SMA) level. The superior performance of God's servants with Masters and Doctoral Theology education levels is consistently seen in the growth of adult congregations (67.7%), youth congregations (67.4%), and children's congregations (72.1%).

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2. Strategy Factor³²

- Discipleship Process and Congregational Participation

38.5% includes “discipling churches” because more than 10% of the congregation are involved in discipleship. 61.5% does not include “not making disciples” because only 0-10% are involved in discipleship. The “discipling church” grew 67.5%, higher than the non-discipling church which grew (also) 52.4%. Categorically, medium churches have the highest growth (74.5%) compared to large and small churches.

- Congregational Engagement Serving

The percentage of parishioners' participation in routine services is 52.7%, of which more than 10% of the congregations are involved in routine services (we'll call them “serving congregations”). 47.3% where 0-10% of the congregation are involved in routine services. “Church serving” grew 65.5% higher than the less engaged congregation (only grew 50.4%). Categorically, medium churches have the highest growth (72.9%) compared to large and small churches.

- Investing in the Evangelism Fund

35.9% of churches invest more than 10% of church revenues in mission and evangelism programs. 64.1% churches invest 0-10% only. Churches that invested more than 10% experienced 68.5% growth. This is higher than the church that invested 0-10% which grew only 52.7%. Categorically, medium churches have the highest growth (76%) compared to large and small churches.

- Investment/Allocation of Funds for Child and Adolescent Services

35.4% of churches invest more than 10% of church revenues in children and youth ministries. 64.6% churches invest 0-10% only. Churches that invested more than 10% experienced 68.3% growth. This is higher than the church that invested 0-10% which grew only 55%. Categorically, medium-sized churches have the highest growth (74.6%) compared to large and small churches.

³² Compare with 10 criteria for a healthy church. In this strategic factor, 6 criteria for a healthy church are the key to church growth.

- Investment in Leadership Capacity Development³³

48.4% of churches invest more than twice a year in developing leadership capacity. 51.6% church 0-2 times only. Churches that invest more than twice a year experienced 66.3% growth. This is higher than the church that invested 0-2 times which grew only 55.4%. Categorically, medium churches have the highest growth (76.6%) compared to large and small churches.

- Church Planting

65.8% of churches that started two or more new congregations were recorded as churches with a much larger number of people than churches with only 0-1 new congregations. Categorically, medium churches have the highest growth (77%) compared to large and small churches. 58.7% of large churches that did not start new congregations did not experience growth in the number of people.

In the strategy factor, there are 6 criteria for a healthy church that are significantly related to church growth. The other three criteria relate to quantity, while one criterion that was not researched is social services. "Social services" is only one hidden variable that is included in the "support of the synod leadership". It is called "hidden" because it is not clear how much the synod supports for social services. Again, this emphasizes how from an evangelical perspective, social service is not receiving adequate attention.

The most striking thing is that the "medium church", with the number of people between 51 to 200, becomes the most ideal context or land for church growth. The six strategy factors show a strong relationship between "medium churches" and the highest growth.

C. Criticism from the Ecumenical Perspective of the Key Book for Church Growth in Indonesia

BRC's findings can be said to be extraordinary. Because, apart from covering the national level throughout Indonesia, BRC's research has provided a breakthrough in the field of church growth. The growth of the church into a multidisciplinary field that is taken seriously according to existing scientific research standards. Thus, we get empirical phenomena in factual figures, not "guessed" numbers, whether motivational, hopeful or apologetic. Data-driven church growth provides enormous benefits for churches in Indonesia. However, we have seen that this empirical research is guided by theological questions from an evangelical perspective, with all its strengths and weaknesses. Here, the author will give a little criticism from an ecumenical perspective on the Key to Church Growth in Indonesia.

The orientation of evangelical theology is church-centered. Of the ten criteria for a healthy church, nine of them are related to the church, while one criterion, namely social services, only relates to society or the world. In the description of the factors that are key to church growth, social service is not the key. In the leadership factor, there is "synodal leadership support" for social services but it is not written explicitly how much this support is. "Social services" are just hidden factors that are simply lumped together with other factors. This lack of attention to social services can be overcome if the BRC takes into account a world-centred ecumenical perspective³⁴. The world, society with all its injustices and sufferings, becomes the context for the growth of the church.

³³ In the book *Key to Church Growth in Indonesia* there are findings about "Investment in Leadership Capacity Development", but the author does not include it. In our opinion, this is important to be included in accordance with the criteria for a healthy church.

³⁴ Siwu. Op. Cit. 84.

From the context will emerge the most basic methodological questions. Who, from whose perspective and for whose interests a scientific research is carried out?³⁵ For the church or for the people in general? If the interest is only for the church, then the research will not benefit the people in general and will be suspected of being a form of Christianization. In Indonesia, people live in various religions, with Islam as the most widely practiced religion. Social services are nonsense if they do not touch the people who are Muslim. Since Christians are small in number, it is arrogance to want to change society with its social services. Christians need to cooperate with Islam. Thus, its social services have a transformative power.

Cooperation with Islam will raise fundamental theological questions. Is God's truth as authentic in Islam as it is in Christianity? Answering this question from a Christian perspective would certainly benefit the Christian position. Except, we answer it with a good presupposition and in an inter-being pro-existence paradigm. To be religious today is to be inter-religious.³⁶ And thankfully, there have been many Christians who have good ideas and have a pro-existence paradigm in answering this question. Asian theologians, including contextual-ecumenical Indonesian theologians, assert that God's truth or revelation is authentically manifest in non-Christian Asian religions. For example, Aloysius Pieris speaks of the great presence of non-Christian soteriology.³⁷ Pieris said, "learn the language of the people. Attend Asian folk ceremonies and rituals; listen to their singing...catch their myths, you will find that the language they use connects them with the basic truths with which every religion grapples with". Only with such an understanding of revelation, salvation and truth can we live an open church life that welcomes the people or people of other religions in the church. People of other religions are our brothers and sisters and don't call them infidels.³⁸

Such an open church, which is interfaith, cannot be imagined from an evangelical perspective. From an evangelical perspective, the church is for only one religion, namely Christianity. From an ecumenical perspective, interfaith church is not a possibility but has been practiced in the Contextual Basis Community (KBK)³⁹ or the Humane Base Community (KBM). Here, all interfaith people sit together, have a dialogue together to deal with humanitarian problems from the perspective or eyes of who is the victim. The church in this basic community is indeed more suitable if it is examined with participatory research where observation and participation takes place⁴⁰. Here, the researcher observes the daily life of the congregations by being directly involved in the lives of the people being studied. Such research is certainly different from the BRC research as we have discussed above. Perhaps up to this point, the reader begins to feel that the main issue for ecumenicalists is not church growth but building an interfaith contextual church rooted in local culture by making human issues the main thing. Here, the church is no longer a "foreigner" but a

³⁵ John M. Prior. (1997) *Meneliti Jemaat: Pedoman Riset Partisipatoris*. Jakarta: Gramedia. 7, 15.

³⁶ J.B. Banawiratma. (2002) *10 Agenda Pastoral Transformatif: Menuju Pemberdayaan Kaum Miskin dengan Perspektif Adil Gender, HAM, dan Lingkungan Hidup*. Yogyakarta: Kanisius. 35.

³⁷ Aloysius Pieris. *Berteologi dalam Konteks Asia*, Terj. A.M. Hardjana. Yogyakarta: Kanisius, tanpa tahun. 122.

³⁸ Ebenhaizer I. Nuban Timo. (2017) *Meng-Hari-Ini-Kan Injil di Bumi Pancasila: Bergereja dengan Cita Rasa Indonesia*. Jakarta: Gunung Mulia. 235.

³⁹ Banawiratma. Op. Cit. 11-13.

⁴⁰ John M. Prior. Op. Cit. 21

comrade-in-arms of the local people. What does it mean if the church growth rate increases while our friends of other faiths remain in poverty, injustice and oppression?⁴¹

Perhaps one thing that worries evangelicals is how do evangelism, the Great Commission and discipleship stand? Evangelism is not converting people from other religions to Christianity but generating the “content of the Bible” or the liberating power of salvation from other religions⁴² so that there is a common vision towards full humanity. Evangelism aims to convert people, not from other religions to Christianity, but from a selfish attitude of disbelieving others to an attitude of love and respect for people of other religions. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 is not understood separately from the entire Gospel of Matthew.⁴³ The Sermon on the Mount, a summary of the Torah (law of love) and the Last Judgment are the contents of what discipleship is. Thus, making disciples is not Christianizing, but witnessing God's love as the Lord Jesus declared. Social service is not an evangelistic tool, but the essence of evangelism itself, where we as disciples of Jesus practice the love He taught that “everything you did for one of the least of these my brethren, you did it for me” (Matthew 25:40).

Does being a disciple mean one has to be a member of the church? Or, can a person be a disciple, but remain in his own religion? The answer is, it can. Mahatma Gandhi is a disciple of Jesus who consistently carries out the values of the Sermon on the Mount but still adheres to Hinduism.⁴⁴ With this last answer, the research needed for an interfaith contextual church will be very different from the research conducted by BRC. From different theology or ecclesiology, a research will be guided by different questions which ultimately produce different empirical data.

CONCLUSION

The main problems of Christianity in Asia, including in Indonesia, are viewed differently from an evangelical and ecumenical perspective. The evangelicals see the problem as a small number of Christians, while the ecumenicals see that Christians are not rooted in Asian soil. Because it is "little", the solution evangelicals seek is to multiply; while the "not rooted" solutions are sought by ecumenicals to take root. Church growth is the main issue for evangelicals, while building an interfaith contextual church or Contextual Basis Community (KBK) is the main issue for ecumenicals. What is interesting is that both of them, in 2017, saw the importance of empirical data from scientific research results as a starting point for building the church they dreamed of. The evangelicals publish the book *Key to Church Growth in Indonesia*, while the ecumenical ones publish the book *Basic Data-Based Pastoral Ideas*.

Church growth requires empirical data, as well as contextual church building. However, what the BRC does as a representative of evangelicals is more complete and nationally-level than that of ecumenical which only provides local case examples and the importance of empirical data in pastoral care, including contextual church building. Therefore, this paper prefers what is produced by BRC as study material. The critique from

⁴¹ We can also ask, “what is the meaning of church growth if what happens is a transfer from another church?” The ambition of "growth" makes us not understand what "transfer from another church" is. Physically-locally, it looks like "growth". But, theologically and the church as “catholic”, it doesn't grow anything.

⁴² Pieris uses the term “Christian apocalypse of the non-Christian experience of freedom”, see Aloysius Pieris.

⁴³ E.G. Singgih. (2000) *Berteologi dalam Konteks: Pemikiran-Pemikiran Mengenai Kontekstualisasi Teologi di Indonesia*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia; Yogyakarta: Kanisius. 93.

⁴⁴ Ebenhaizer. Op. Cit. 243.

an ecumenical perspective on BRC's findings aims to further develop the empirical data research conducted by BRC so that it is beneficial for church growth or contextual church development. Of course, ecumenicals also have much to learn from the achievements of the BRC as a representative evangelical research institute.

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