



Pastoral Theology: A Methodological Approach to Analyzing Social Cases

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ABSTRACT

Religious life cannot be separated from society. As a religious institution, the church must impact society through concrete action. One of these approaches is through pastoral theology. This research aims to provide a methodological template for academics and churches, in particular, to use pastoral theology to analyze societal problems. This is necessary because some churches are still bound by dogmas that restrict the church's role to "spiritual" matters rather than matters of concrete social concern. So, churches often distance themselves from the social theory approach in dissecting society's problems. The analytical tool used in this paper is the pastoral cycle method. A pastoral theological approach focuses on cases that have occurred or are currently occurring in society. This paper uses the case of food scarcity, namely cooking oil, which has occurred in Indonesia. The research results show that the social theological approach, which has been shunned by evangelical theology, can be used in dissecting and mapping social cases in society to contribute to the church in determining anticipatory steps and responding with concern to these social problems. Through this research, it can be concluded that the social function of the church as light and salt of the world can be achieved by using pastoral theology. The implications of this research will encourage churches to position themselves as government partners in realizing the achievement of SDG targets on the one hand and the other hand, provide new insight that pastoral theology does not only deal with "spiritual" (i.e., intangible) matters. It can be seen that a Biblical approach can be intertwined with social analysis for the purpose of social welfare.

Keywords: food crisis, social theology, church, pastoral cycle, social analysis, pastoral theology, methodology.

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INTRODUCTION

This research proposes a comprehensive method to analyze empirical phenomena in society with a social theology approach. Although this approach is not new among Indonesian academics, studies on its methodology are minimal. Therefore, this paper can be used as a guide for initial steps so that other researchers can repeat it when analyzing empirical cases.

To begin with, researchers need to focus on a case that is happening and has happened in the past. In this research, cooking oil shortages that occurred in Indonesia some time ago became a case study because they are related to the government's responsibility in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) regarding food. In the Analytical Framework for the Integration of SDGs in Indonesia, it is emphasized that the fulfillment of food needs is a human right guaranteed by the state (Komnas HAM, 2017).

Pappas and O'Malley (2014) researched Ireland and Greece. They found that social unrest is rising in countries whose governments are making policies to cut spending in response to market concerns over rising debt. Furthermore, Darwis and Nurmanaf (2016) found that such cases worsened food security because it was difficult to obtain affordable needs. The potential for social unrest always overshadows economic inequality and neglected problems at the bottom of society. These financial problems include food prices, market availability, and distribution influenced by social media penetration (Barret & Chen, 2021).

Pappas and O'Malley (2014) observed food availability based on social turmoil, while Darwis and Nurmanaf (2016) relied on aspects of community food security. In contrast, this study aims to analyze food availability from a social perspective intertwined with theological elements. This approach was chosen for two reasons. First, it fills a gap in the literature as social issues always involve economic, political, or cultural approaches. An approach with a social-theological perspective complements the social analysis of the collective burden of a community, including religious institutions. Second, the church has a moral responsibility in the social transformation of society. Handling social problems is not just the responsibility of the government. Therefore, the social issues of society can be analyzed through social, economic, political, and theological approaches, where churches and Christians can play a role in supporting government programs through the SDGs.

Therefore, we will analyze the case study of cooking oil scarcity in Indonesia. This research will serve as a template for analyzing similar cases elsewhere and serve as a guide in approaching pastoral theology through the pastoral cycle scheme.

METHOD

This study elaborated on social and theological construction as an analytical framework. It also used the pastoral cycle scheme to investigate and map cooking oil

scarcity from social and theological perspectives. Referring to the framework of Banawiratma and Muller (2000, p. 7), the first step was to describe problems. The second step was a theological reflection on the issues topically from the narration according to the study topic. This step aims to present a biblical perspective toward the study context to build an insight inspiring an act. The third step was designing the church or institution practice action proposal to become part of the solution to social issues. According to Banawiratma (1988), the last result of social theology is real communal pastoral actions. The action must be seen as a working together of all involved parties, responding to God's calling to ensure communal discernment. The analysis phases were conducted descriptively-qualitatively. The primary resources for the study relied on the journalistic reports of newspapers and magazines, journal articles, and reference books.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Social Theological Construction

Theology generally speaks about how humans understand God and the faith to believe in Him. Badham (1996) defined theology as 'thinking about God,' which practically guides the Christians to use their belief sources, such as the Bible, creeds, and doctrines, to understand God and to live with faith. This definition refers to the classic formulation of St. Anselm that theology is faith seeking understanding (Davies & Evans, 1998). However, the definition is still personal and reflective for some theologians because they aim for their spiritual interests. Banawiratma and Muller (2000) stated that theology must be situated in real life. The Scriptures that Jesus Christ learned, believed in, and understood inevitably impacts concretely human lives. Therefore, theology should be developed and run in a communal framework. It requires the social or contextual characteristic to be understood clearly and function for the church and community, a phenomenon known as the social, theological concept.

Osmer (2011) stated that there are two paradigm levels. The first level is reflective social theology, where a certain context becomes the field for theologians, clergies, and academicians to perform a descriptive-empirical, interpretative, normative, and pragmatic task. The second level is meta-theoretical, where practical theologians must decide how they view the theory-praxis relationship. They must also decide how they regard the interdisciplinary occupation, the relative weight of the Holy Book, tradition, doctrine, dogma, reasons, experience, and theological reasons to justify their approach. From this perspective, a social theology is practical and reflected in legitimate action with faith or biblical accountability. This is differentiated from normal social action, though this theology is present in the public space and involves itself with the community's social issues (Banawiratma & Muller, 2000). Therefore, theology has vertical and horizontal meanings and correlates with the community's contextual situation. The theological

reflection on every concrete situation demands the presence of faith. Without faith, the church function and the believers considered the light and salt of the world should be questioned. Tse (2014) stated that theology does not exist at the discourse level because it would not realize real faith in the community. Real theology is grounded because it leads to individual spirituality implementation. This view touches the ground with the basic idea of social theology, demanding the concern of religious people toward their social environment. Only in this way is theology grounded and impacts the community.

According to Sigurdson (2010), moving theology to social action is a trend classified as post-secular theology. The study shows that theological instability appears in the contemporary community because social-religious realization disappears in modernity (Harrington, 2007). This becomes the biggest challenge that must be dealt with because the public role of religion has been questioned and narrowed by secularity. Habermas stated that religion would disappear in modern civilization as the community becomes more rational. This idea has become the epistemic basis contributing to the disappearance of the socio-religious role in the public space. The situation later turned around when Habermas produced new thinking on religion. He stated that religion has something important to be offered in the public space (Habermas, 2006). According to Dreyer and Peterse (2010), this view raises the main idea that religion transcends a normative morality and outdated cognitive content. The latest thinking of Habermas indicates that religious cognitive potential is important in formulating responses and its social role. It is necessary to adjust vocabulary to translate religious ideas based on faith and belief into secular vocabulary. This would ensure that religion participates more in the public space, including discussing and realizing concrete actions.

Social theology aims to bridge the Christian faith and the community in dealing with life problems (Zaluchu, 2021b). Therefore, the world is *locus theologicus* for the church to represent itself, as stated by Banawiratma and Muller (1993, p. 23). Presence is realized in various transformative actions encouraged by the philosophy of reflective Christian values (Aubrey, 1941). As a synthesis, social theology links theological ideas and reflection in responding to public issues. This response produces transformative thinking that encourages the birth of pastoral planning and action in responding to social situations as an accountability of Christian faith in the *locus theologicus*.

Pastoral Cycle Scheme

Problem Description

The Indonesian food market structure is the leading factor causing cooking scarcity because it is an oligopoly. For cooking oil alone, 40% of its production is mainly from four big companies. This shows the collusive behavior among producers to conquer the market and control the prices. The market model exists outside the reach of the

government, whose regulation to govern the range of the highest retail prices could not change the current market conditions. Cooking oil remained scarce in the market as the government could only make regulations on paper. After the government regulation on the highest retail prices was revoked, cooking oil was suddenly abundant in the market. However, the prices were determined only by the producers or the business people and market speculators (Angela, 2022). The government's bargaining power in arranging the regulations of this industry is weak because cooking oil is excluded from the commodity group governed by the Presidential Regulation of the National Food Agency. Presidential Regulation Number 66 of 2021 only mentions nine basic foods, excluding cooking oil. The food types that become the National Food Agency's task and function are rice, corn, soy beans, sugar, shallot and garlic, chicken eggs, ruminant and poultry meats, and chilies. Cooking oil is considered an industrial commodity concerning energy (Angela, 2022).

Further analysis shows that the issuance of various government regulations to control prices causes a crisis. The producers held back their products in the warehouse to avoid suffering losses because the prices determined by the government were considered low. The government regulation was inconsistent with the market interest and did not adequately consider consumers' interests. In the economic system controlled by such a market, the disparity and inequality become the direct impact felt by the community at the grassroots level. The social disparity is formed where the strong party survives, and the weak one is marginalized (Wacquant, 1999). Furthermore, the food crisis is a social issue directly correlated with social stability. The bigger crisis wave would happen when the government had not taken solutions and strategic steps, such as social riots. Media would then become the element to create a snowball effect (Barret & Chen, 2021). Bellemere (2015) found a connection between food prices and social riots. The study showed that high food prices escalate social unrest, triggering community riots when faced with low buying power.

The problem is that Indonesia has the largest oil palm plantation in the world, at 16.8 million hectares. The country supplies 32.23% of the world's 126.75 million tons of palm oil demand and consumes about 12 million tons of the commodity annually. Statistics show that cooking oil mills produce more than 40 million tons of crude palm oil (CPO) annually. A total of 49.12 million tons of CPO production in 2020 was expected to come from cooking oil mills. The main utilization of petroleum is 80% as food products and the rest for energy needs such as biodiesel and other chemical products. Statistical data shows that Indonesia has no problem with the availability of CPO or cooking oil as a food products (Rachman, 2022).

Food scarcity amidst the availability of all natural resources is a social problem. In this case, the government is considered to have lost control over natural resources and upstream-downstream market control, which has led to the failure to guarantee food

availability in the community. Irianto (2022) states that if this phenomenon is allowed to continue, it will trigger social unrest.

Theological Reflection

Theological reflection is an attempt to explain social phenomena by looking at the similarity of their narratives with biblical stories. Because it is reflective, contextual similarities are ignored because they do not aim to explore like exegesis. Theological reflection is more towards the typological form so that the alignment of meaning in its final form is developed. The case of cooking oil scarcity thus has a number of parallels with the biblical narrative, which rests only on a certain narrative.

In the Old Testament, the king of Israel experienced a crisis when Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram, surrounded Samaria. Food scarcity resulted in starvation in the whole city, reducing the people's purchasing power. All commodities appropriately consumed were highly priced, and the people were suffering endlessly. The text in 2 Kings 6:24-25 notes, 'Sometime later, Ben-Hadad king of Aram mobilized his entire army and marched up and laid siege to Samaria. There was a great famine in the city; the siege lasted so long that a donkey's head sold for eighty shekels of silver and a quarter of a cab of seed pods for five shekels.' The narration explains that the food crisis took effect nationally, and the government did not have a solution. The enemy was near the door, and the problem drove the inhabitants of Samaria into cannibalism, imitating the hideous practice of the original inhabitants of Canaan in the North (Walton, Matthews, & Chavalas, 2000, p. 141). However, at the end of the story, the text presents a resolution as God did not abandon His worshippers. God sent Elisha to deliver the prophetic message (Brueggemann, 2000). 'Hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says: about this time tomorrow, a seah of the finest flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria' (2 Kings 7:1). Amid the public despair, such as prophecy voice was a ray of light in the dark. The people's fading faith re-emerged with the spiritual awareness that this difficult situation would end through God's intervention.

A similar event was recorded in the Bible when several people followed Jesus to witness his teachings and miracles. They arrived in the most remote place far from the villages late in the afternoon. The disciples saw the potential problem because the multitude did not carry food, while Jesus brought them into the area of non-Jewish people far from the villages. Since food was hard to find (Keener, 2014), the disciples proposed to Jesus to ask the people to go home: 'Send the crowd away so that they could go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging because we are in a remote place here' (Luke 9:12). Surrendering in light of suffering is not a solution to a crisis because it shows indifference toward the situation and suffering of others. Therefore, Jesus reprimanded them: 'You give them something to eat.' They answered: 'We have only five loaves of bread and two fish – unless we go and buy food for all this

crowd' (Luke 9:13). The disciples stated they did not ask those people to come, but Jesus cared. The effort to realize concern is insufficient by only providing support through prayers and an abstract faith approach. It requires an obvious and measurable action. "You give them something to eat" is an important perspective regarding action rather than wasting time debating a discourse.

These two passages illustrate a social and theological perspective, showing that God selects to care rather than ignore suffering (Zaluchu, 2021a). Although external factors and not spiritual ones cause the crisis, these external factors must be overcome. There is also a spiritual demand for every believer to act in a crisis for people to experience deliverance and victory. In line with this, the cooking oil crisis in Indonesia is a laboratory for the church and religious institutions. It is also a space for Christians to pray and provide moral support to fellow humans. Participating in solving community problems is a real spiritual responsibility. As long as the state follows the free market economic system, the potential for a food crisis increases. '*You give them something to eat!*' is not a calling and a choice but an order from Jesus to the church as a religious institution. Christians must show faith in action toward social issues, such as poverty, disparity, and basic independence for humans and the environment. According to Banawiratma & Muller (2000), faith shows concern toward a social situation. Theological reflection leads to an act that changes social circumstances into new situations desired by religious people.

Action Plan

Social analysis does not stop at the description of problems, causes, and reflection of the Bible. The goal is concrete action in the community, which is called the action plan in this approach. Here is the description.

The Church is a Christian institution responsible for the broader social world. It is Christ's body in the world and institutionally an organizational apparatus and functional management. Its decisions impact the community similarly to functions owned by the government. These ideas could be traced in Taylor's (1899) classic thinking that the church's community mission is constructive.

The church has a more formative rather than merely reformatory function. The three social tasks of the constructive church are: First, to recognize the divine purpose of human individual or social life for oneself and all men; Second, to initiate movements and institutions to create a better world; Third, the church is a transmission of spiritual power for social regeneration. This thinking is still relevant today as a formative function of the church. The church acts for the benefit of all people. In the second part, it needs to be present in the world and realize itself concretely. The church does not just rely on itself in running the social function but also involves divine power. This supports the sociological approach of Berger and Luckmann (2018) on forming a communal social

reality. In this case, the church is the social change agent because it is part of an active organism. It may play an active role in helping the community deal with social issues.

The first step is for the church to proactively conduct public advocacy by being active in dealing with social issues. This power should become the moral movement in building social resistance, affecting government food policies, and guaranteeing availability.

The government oversees the state and is obliged to make the people prosperous. However, many variables influence government policies and decisions, making them lack momentum, purity, and objectivity. The community that should be the object of welfare and development is often marginalized and victimized. For instance, the community is helpless to face the fluctuating cooking oil market that only favors the capital owners' interest. These situations cause social disparity, continuous injustice, and poverty. Therefore, the church is a religious institution that builds public power by fighting for the community's social interest. Gibbs and Ajulu (1999) stated that the success of church advocacy in South and East Africa could become a model. The study found that one role of the church in the public space is to participate in basic social services, such as establishing schools, hospitals, pharmacies, and other services (Gibbs & Ajulu, 1999). These efforts result in positive responses from the community and the government. Subsequently, the church has a bargaining position economically and politically. The church should prioritize, respond to, criticize, and reconstruct government policies for the community's interest. In this case, the church's presence in the public space expresses the power of advocacy, fighting for the community's interests. Such presence is the prophetic voice similar to Elisha during the siege of Samaria or the disciples responsible for feeding many people. Through the social and theological approach, the church fights for the community socially, economically, and politically in its performative function.

The food crisis requires short and long-term actions. The short-term action is a temporary activity ensuring that social issues are acute and manageable to reduce social unrest. Social actions, cheap markets, and direct help are the options that need consideration.

The long-term solution could entail designing a poverty eradication and community empowerment program. This requires community involvement in the training facilitated by the church, providing work funding and guidance on poverty eradication. The result expected is the formation of community social and economic resistance to create independence. Economic resistance is one of the SDGs that becomes the joint responsibility of all stakeholders, including the church (UN, 2015). As a change agent in the public space, the church belongs to everyone regardless of social status, religion, belief, and ethnicity. It has a global social function, educating community members to survive independently without worrying about becoming crisis victims. The church needs to become resilient as the main goal of its performative function (Walsh, 2013). Therefore,

poverty alleviation divisions and departments specializing in managing social issues should be formed to accommodate social care programs.

CONCLUSION

The church should be involved in finding solutions to social problems with a pastoral approach. In this case, the church becomes the government's partner to realize the achievement of SDGs. Church social involvement is an expression of concrete faith in the world as a form of spiritual responsibility to act as salt and light in the world. The church's social role can also be a balance sheet that balances man's relationship with God through rites and rituals, with responsibility as salt and light of the world through service to his fellow man. The study concludes that social analysis can be accepted as an acting, tangible protocol of faith as opposed to the trap of merely staying in the prayer room to ask God to act to solve human problems in the world. Sermons on discipleship, faith, offerings, tithing, heaven, sin, and hell must be as important as concrete actions in helping society. Thus, the pastoral theology approach activates the social and spiritual functions of the church in complementing the exegesis of Scripture.

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