



Coenrad Laurens Coolen: Pioneer of Contextual Mission among Javanese *Abangans*

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ABSTRACT: This historiographical article aims to describe Coolen as a pioneer of the indigenous church among the *abangans* in Ngoro, East Java in the 19th century, where he pioneered the ministry of indigenizing the gospel as an exciting new breakthrough. The discussion was conducted in stages of collecting historical data about Coolen, evaluating the obtained data, interpreting relevant data, and presenting the findings. The results show that Coolen was the initiator of the establishment of the ‘*ngelmu*’ Christian congregation among the *abangans* in Ngoro Village in the interior of East Java. He explained the secrets of *ngelmu Kristen* (lit., learning the Christianity) and appreciated Javanese culture as a new breakthrough in the ministry of preaching the gospel, compared to the Indische Kerk missionaries. However, some of his followers were more interested in joining Emde’s ministry pattern, so the outputs of his ministry were finally adopted into the Indische Kerk churches. Since then, the harvest of the *abangans* had stopped.

Key words: Coolen; the *abangans*; contextual; *ngelmu Injil*

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INTRODUCTION

The independent evangelist, Coenrad Laurens Coolen, was a magnet for the *abangans* in Ngoro, East Java in the mid-19th century. The neglected were quick to respond to Coolen’s preaching of the teachings of *ngelmu Kristen* (lit., learning the Christianity; he is known as a Christian teacher who teaches a new ‘science’, namely the gospel). This event marked the beginning of the establishment of indigenous-style churches in Java. Coolen’s ministry pattern was considered positive and unique by Soekotjo that Coolen taught Lord Jesus’s *ngelmu* as the highest form of *ngelmu*. According to him, Coolen classified his followers as *Ngelmu Christians* (Javanese Christians), not *Landa Christians* (Dutch Christians) (Soekotjo, 2009, p. 101). This is in line with Putranto who stated that Coolen approached his followers with the concepts of *kejawan* to introduce the gospel (Compare to Putranto, 2020, pp. 27–28, 39–40). Coolen

appreciates Javanese culture, and his culture-adopting approach has captivated the hearts of his listeners.

Meanwhile, Western Christians were suspicious of the culture of the *inlanders*. Hutabarat (2020, pp. 190–191) defined *inlanders* as indigenous people. Meanwhile, Wardana and Suhita (2018, pp. 253–254) explained that this word refers to a satire against indigenous people whose position is considered lower. Akkeren (1995, p. 97) also criticized that missionaries distanced themselves from Javanese culture and despised on this culture as they assumed that it contained elements of disbelief. Even worse, the Javanese who became Christians were assimilated to follow Western culture which was considered ‘Christian’ or to give up their original culture as Johannes Emde did.

When opening an agricultural field in Ngoro, however, Coolen began to teach the secrets of *ngelmu Kristen* to a number of *abangans* who

were then attracted by his teachings because it suited their worldview. Therefore, Coolen held worship services at his house. Over time, the number of his followers grew, so he built a hut next to his house for his communal worships. According to Akkeren (1995), Coolen was the first to establish a church for the *abangans* in Ngoro, leading to the emergence of the congregation in Ngoro which Coolen did not think about. Coolen's style of service is later known as the contextualization service approach among Javanese *abangans*. Akkeren (1995) also explained that Westerners rejected Javanese culture, as did Emde and his friends from the Surabaya Saleh People's Association (*Perkumpulan Orang Saleh Surabaya*), without reaping the rewards. On the other hand, Coolen used culture as a means of grounding the gospel to win souls and build congregations (Merisa, 2006, pp. 20–21). Kruitof (2014, p. 134) confirmed that Coolen reaped a harvest of souls since he used culture as a bridge to communicate the gospel. This means that without realizing it, Coolen has established himself as a pioneer who introduced a new approach to the *abangans* in Java – which inspired the next movers and shakers to apply a relevant approach to the *inlanders*.

The Coolen phenomenon was put forward by Mr. Nugroho Sismon, an elder of the Mojowarno congregation as the fourth generation of his grandparents served by Coolen, who now lives in Bandung. He expressed that Coolen is known until today as a figure who inspired the Javanese *abangan* community to meet Jesus Christ (Cited from the Ms. PowerPoint Slide Presentation of Nugroho Sismon on June 17, 2017). In addition, Mr. Nugroho stated that Christians were not the only ones who made Coolen their spiritual ancestor; people of other religions from various villages in Ngoro, Jombang, and surrounding areas also often make pilgrimages to Coolen's grave in Ngoro, or visit the grave during religious tours (See Figure 3, Coolen's grave has become a religious tourist attraction for the Ngoro community and its surroundings). People idolize Coolen as an important figure in their life history

because he has contributed to preserving their heritage with the concept of rice cultivation in Ngoro Village. Najib (2015, p. 243) argued that religious sites in Ngoro and Mojowarno attract tourists from various religions. This proves that Coolen's influence is still felt by his spiritual descendants to this day.

The above description shows an interesting phenomenon about Coolen's missionary work in indigenizing the gospel among Javanese *abangans* which has an impact, compared to the approaches of other missionaries. Therefore, the focus of this study is the figure and strategy of Coolen, the pioneer of contextual missions who has won the hearts of the Javanese *abangans*. The purpose of this article is to explain Coolen's figure and his approach to grounding the gospel to win over the Javanese *abangans* in Ngoro and at the same time establishing an indigenous church with a Christian style of *ngelmu*.

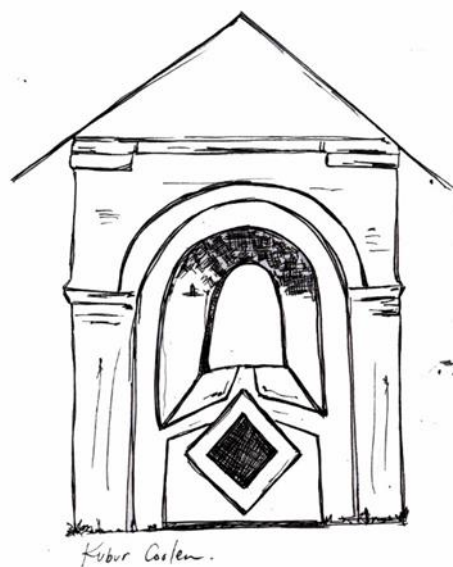


Figure 1. Coolant's grave in Ngoro, re-sketch by Doules Palmarya Nggebu.

According to a statement from a respected figure in GKJW Mojowarno congregation, people from various religions often come on spiritual tours to Ngoro and go to the grave of Mr. Coolen—remembering his services in building a church with a Christian style of *ngelmu* and bringing prosperity to the people in Ngoro, East Java.

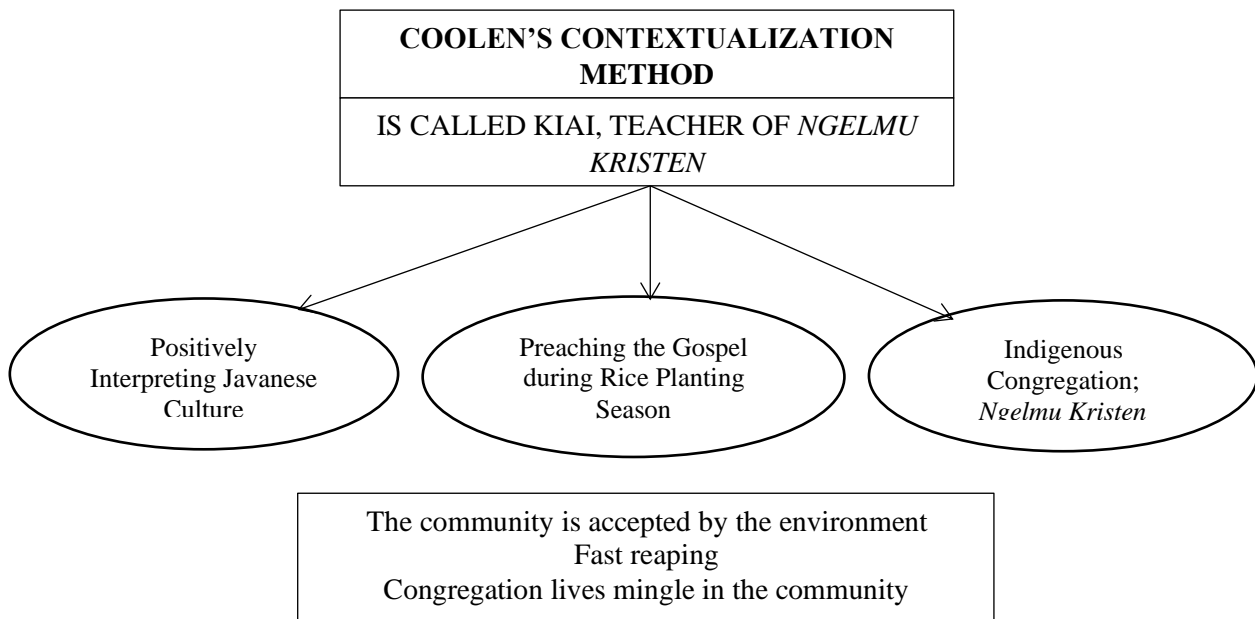


Figure 2. Coolen's contextualization model

METHODS

Historiographical method was applied for the discussion of this article. Technically, the method comprises of four steps, namely: 1) collecting historical data about Coolen; 2) evaluating the obtained data; 3) reinterpreting the data so that they are relevant to the topic of this study; and 4) presenting the findings about Coolen's role as a pioneer of the indigenous church in Java in the 19th century. To make it clearer, Coolen's contextualization model was described in Figure 2. The main focus in the discussion is Coolen, who is known as an elder and teacher of *ngelmu Kristen* in Ngoro, East Java. Coolen has adopted Javanese culture positively to explain the gospel (*Ngelmu Kristen*) to the *abangans* in Ngoro through experiments in clearing forests to be used as agricultural land (the concept of rice planting). By applying this approach, he succeeded in establishing the first Christian congregation in the interior of Java – which stirred the history of pioneering missions in the archipelago.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study was based on the hypothesis that if evangelists use local culture as a bridge in communicating the gospel, their preaching will be

welcomed by their listeners. The results of this study found that Coolen succeeded in building a contextual congregation in Ngoro because he adopted Javanese culture in serving the *abangans* in Ngoro, East Java in the mid-19th century. Furthermore, this study resulted in two important conclusions, namely: 1) Coolen served according to the context he faced by clearing the forests in Ngoro for settlements and agricultural fields and preaching *ngelmu Injil* (lit., learning the gospel) which adopted Javanese culture; and 2) Coolen presented himself as a guiding teacher for his people and as a prophet for the Javanese because he succeeded in indigenizing the gospel as *ngelmu Kristen* and educating people in the truth of God's words.

Context Faced by Coolen

Early days in Surabaya

Coolen is known as a half-Russian half-Javanese figure; his father is a businessman from Russia and his mother is an aristocrat from Solo. For both the *inlanders* and the colonists, Coolen is a respected individual. According to Najib, Coolen had served in the army during the Daendels era and had also been a forestry *opzichter* (supervisor) in Mojokerto, which is an important position he has

held (Najib, 2015). While Coolen's religious life during his childhood and teenage years is unknown, at least he adheres to Christianity in a traditional way. In his adulthood, he presented himself as a charismatic person who studied Christian culture and religion (See Coolen's profile shown in Figure 3 which depicts him as an educated and charismatic person).

While in Surabaya, Coolen lived in the midst of Western '*totok*' society (pure-blooded colonists). The Western world's lifestyle is firmly embedded in the people of the Indische Kerk (Protestant Church). According to Soekotjo, Indische Kerk is known as the "Gereja Landa" (Dutch Church) – a church specifically built for the Dutch or foreigners in Surabaya (Soekotjo, 2009). This underlies the statement of Culver (2014) that there were almost no Javanese Christians in Surabaya in the early 19th century. Furthermore, the Indische Kerk people don't care about the indigenous people. However, an evangelistic movement emerged by Johannes Emde through the Surabaya Saleh People's Association. This German was active in serving a limited number of Javanese, namely the helpers of the Europeans in Surabaya as stated by Culver (2014). Emde pioneered a type of ministry of Biblical study with several Javanese, but his approach was quite extreme. Those who believe were baptized in the Indische Kerk Congregation and at the same time were sucked into the congregation of Gereja Landa (Merisa, 2006). These Javanese automatically wore European-style clothes and were prohibited from watching *wayang* (shadow puppet show). In addition, they were also forced to let go of their Javanese customs and cultural values such as wearing *jarik* cloth and sarongs. Culver (2014) continued by stating that Emde forbade his students from watching *wayang* as well as told them to have the same haircut and wear the same European clothes as his. Obviously, after becoming Emde's followers, these Javanese were baptized and embraced Western culture. As a former soldier during the Daendels era, Coolen knew the problems and the characteristics of the

colonists very well, especially their perspective on the indigenous people. After leaving the military, he met Emde, who was active in serving the Javanese in Surabaya and had the same mentality as the colonists. It seems that Coolen, who is half-Javanese, is less interested in Emde's style of service.

Clearing the Forest in Ngoro for Residential and Agricultural Lands

During this era, Coolen asked permission from the governor in Surabaya to rent a parcel of land in the area of Ngoro, East Java (Akkeren, 1995). On the basis of this official permit, Coolen and his family (his second wife, children, and his assistants) moved to the hinterland to pioneer a new settlement. When he arrived at the new land, Coolen cleared the forest and opened a new plot of rice fields. This occurred in 1827. After that, people began to come to Coolen's land and work on the field together with a profit-sharing system. In this parcel of land, Coolen has the autonomy over the area.

Coolen, who was born in Ungaran on July 2, 1873, eventually became known as a pioneer of settlements in the interior of Java. Merisa calls him a landlord in Ngoro (Merisa, 2006). Meanwhile, Najib (2015) sees Coolen as a founder of a village. This is in line with a statement of Akkeren who argued that Coolen could occupy an important position as the head of Ngoro Village (Akkeren, 1995). It can be said that Coolen was the first Christian village head in the interior of Java. Coolen's work got the attention of many people who came to Ngoro. The immigrants in Ngoro who cooperated with Coolen were classified as the *abangans*. As described by Subagya, the *abangans* derived from the word '*aba*' which means "apathetic"; this definition of the word *abangan* is related to the behavior of lowly people who do not care about the formal teachings that apply in the community, which are embraced by the *mutihans* – meaning the clergy or *priyayi* who are religiously obedient and have noble morals (Subagya, 1981; this source is borrowed from a third party). These

abangans were looked down upon by the Javanese elite. They live in tradition according to their practical mindset. Geertz (1981, p. 8) defined the *abangans* as animistic; they are considered sinners and live as they please. However, Coolen welcomes and accepts them as they are. This man, who is an expert in drawing, has his own perception that the hearts of these *abangans* can be ‘whitened’. Susanto (2019) declared that the beginning of a mission is to love one’s neighbors and build them up to repentance.



Figure 3. Coolen’s profile, re-sketch: Relita Pandie.

Coenrad Laurens Coolen, who was a former state official from the Netherlands, carried the burden of pioneering the first Indigenous Church in Java with a secret approach of *ngelmu Injil*. His followers then metamorphosed into the Eastern Javanese Christian Church (Gereja Kristen Jawi Wetan; GKJW) based in Mojowarno, East Java.

Coolen’s Contribution and His Missionary Work

Contextual Mission Experiment

During this time, Coolen was known by his followers as the teacher of ‘*ngelmu*’. Culver (2014)

argued that Coolen was known as a “Christian teacher”; meaning that he has the secret teachings found in the gospel. The concept of *ngelmu* was used as a bridge to teach about sin and the work of Jesus Christ to the *abangans*. Coolen’s title as the teacher of *ngelmu* sounded more comfortable to his followers than his title as a missionary. For his people, Coolen is like an intermediary between them and God. Coolen got the inspiration from the Almighty. The Christian teachings he delivered were Javanese; he explained the virtues of life for the *abangans*. The residents who surrounded him were nurtured in the Word of God as he protected them with a good governance (Akkeren, 1995). Coolen had actually become the leader of the *abangans* in Ngoro and also nurtured the small community spiritually and physically. He fostered and maintained their image as a genuine Wong Jowo (Javanese).

For Coolen, anyone who has become a Christian can still wear the richness of one’s original culture. Coolen’s proposition is that the Javanese are still genuinely Javanese even though they have embraced the teachings of *ngelmu Kristen*. According to Pramusinta (2016, p. 933), numerous Javanese people are interested in the teachings of *ngelmu Kristen*. One of them is Kiai Dasimah, whose heart was moved by the teachings, thus embracing *ngelmu Kristen*. This means that Coolen adheres to the open concept that Christians from the Javanese ethnic are expected to maintain their culture. This concept has never been thought of by the church leaders of Coolen’s time. Merisa (2006) said that until the mid-19th century, there was no Zending movement specifically serving the Javanese. At that time, Coolen was starting to establish an indigenous church with a Javanese culture. In this regard, Pramusinta (2016) concluded that the forerunner of Coolen’s pioneering ministry gave rise to Javanese Christian congregations in East Java; these Javanese Christians still use all the cultural richness inherent in them. Yuwono (2018, p. 296) emphasized that Coolen’s teachings on *ngelmu Kristen* were dominant in adopting Javanese

culture. Furthermore, Salindri (2020, p. 115) also said that Coolen strongly adhered to Javanese culture. If the Javanese are required to give up their culture, they will be uprooted from their social context. It is obvious that Emde's ministry pattern is different from Coolen's because his has a European style, so that the poor Javanese were usurped into Western culture.

Discipling and Equipping

Coolen set several rules for his community; all residents could only work for six days and they were prohibited from working on Sundays. Christians worshiped in Coolen's pavilion and other residents could relax in their homes. In the middle of the week, i.e., on Thursday, Christians learned to recite and memorize the Ten Commandments and recited the Lord's Prayer. All villagers were obliged to follow the teachings of ethics, household orders, and agricultural science (Nggebu, 2022a). It can be said that Coolen controlled the village of Ngoro as an orderly and safe settlement from the disturbances of *kamtibmas* (public order and security). From this point of view, Coolen has moved the *alit* (poor people) one step further in structuring their personality into virtuous human beings. Before, these people were often criticized for being unruly and living as they please. However, Akkeren (1995) stated that Coolen was forming a new moral foundation for his people; they discussed God's word regularly to apply it in their lives. Coolen's ministry pattern is a form of discipleship adapted to the existing context to nurture and mature the spiritual life of his congregation (Compare to a study by Nggebu, 2021, p. 40).

After explaining about *ngelmu Kristen*, a congregation was formed that worshiped regularly in Coolen's pavilion, which also functioned as a church. The leaders of the Ngoro congregation included Singotrano, Paul Tosari, Mr. Kunto, and Ditotrano (these figures later became church leaders in Mojowarno Village, with Ditotrano being the village head). Sondopen sees that multiplication of workers is important for church building

(Sondopen, 2019, p. 104). Apparently, Coolen had been aware of the potential successor from the very beginning. Those people became Coolen's assistants and taught the congregation both their family members and others who were interested in the teachings of *ngelmu Kristen*. Occasionally, Mr. Dasimah, the leader of the Wiyung congregation which is 25 km from Ngoro, visited this village to be mentored by Coolen. According to historical facts, Wiyung's group was served by Coolen, not by Emde as said by Putranto (2020, pp. 31–32; the author considers the errors in citing these historical facts needed to be corrected). Mr. Dasimah was actually evangelized and nurtured by Coolen. It is clear that, five years before Mr. Dasimah met Emde, he was first trained by Coolen (Akkeren, 1995). Therefore, Putranto's view that Emde was the one who pioneered a church in Wiyung was refuted.

Camerling and Wijaya (2019, p. 70) said that pioneering missions should bring spiritual renewal to the people. Coolen has done that noble mission. Further, Arifianto (2021, p. 56) considered the spirit of preaching the gospel as the main motivation of believers. Such motivation was so alive in Coolen in preaching the gospel to Javanese *abangans*. Coolen became a figure who brought updates to these people; he was the initiator of the formation of a new village as a field for contextual mission experiments in Ngoro, which later became famous site in Java. According to Setiawan (2020, pp. 177–178), the contextualization method was incredibly effective in introducing the gospel to Javanese *abangans*. In addition, Tampubolon (2019, p. 25) also believed that by using contextual methods, it is possible to streamline the efforts of preaching the gospel to the laity.

Applying the Protestant Ethic

As the leader of a traditional and agrarian village, Coolen was also responsible for the economy of his people. He encouraged them to farm in order to have their own income. Everyone was prohibited from standing still or folding hands. Coolen adopted this Protestant work ethic proposed

by Johannes Verkuyl. All residents of Ngoro needed to be active in cultivating the new fields. As a former forestry supervisor in Wonosobo, Coolen knew very well that the loose area in Ngoro is great for agricultural land since there is abundant water available. In addition, he instilled in the farmers the concept of Christian ethics that before carrying out any activities in the fields, they first carried out Christian rituals. Coolen led his people to ask for help from Lord Jesus in every activity. The research team of the Eastern Javanese Christian Church (Gereja Kristen Jawi Wetan; GKJW) explained that the tradition of prayer taught by Coolen, known as *bebetan*, in which they prayed to God before starting their work, was still practiced today (Triamon, 2006, p. 101). In other words, before farmers in Ngoro carry out plowing, planting, or harvesting activities, they first pray to Lord Jesus Christ. Manurung (2020, p. 232) expressed that in missionary planting, social activities can be used to convey the truths of the gospel. This model has been carried out by Coolen. Regarding this matter, Sariman (2019, p. 17) also argued that mission approach through culture will have a huge impact. The author believes that Coolen's strength is to win people's hearts to be ready to accept the gospel. This is in line with Seo (2013, pp. 71–89) who emphasized the importance of ministers to pay attention to social relations with the community in the effort of preaching and witnessing the gospel.

In the Javanese tradition, the village head has full authority in setting policies to advance his territory. The village head determines village activities and manages available resources; all local potentials are mobilized for the welfare and prosperity of his people. Hasanah and Pamungkas (2020, pp. 53–54) identified the role of the village head as a motivator for the progress of the villagers. As the head of Ngoro Village, Coolen has the authority to develop and advance his village by implementing regulations so that everyone is active in cultivating their fields to obtain food for their welfare.

Building Prosperity Together

This Europeesche Lagere School graduate from Semarang opened fields and grew rice traditionally. The field produced abundant food. Coolen's leadership has an impact on the welfare of the people in his village. Akkeren (1995) correctly judged that the people of Ngoro live ideally as they are prosperous. It is proven that the figure of the village leader (*ummah*) greatly determines the quality and stability of the villagers. In this regard, Sipayung et al. (2021, p. 113) stated that visionary servants will have an effective approach in serving the people. Coolen is a visionary figure who builds a congregation of *ngelmu* Christians from the grass roots of the Javanese *abangans*. In addition, he also allowed non-Christians to join and farm in Ngoro. Coolen adheres to a concept that is open to everyone.

Culturally, it was actually Coolen who was known as the landowner of Ngoro (Merisa, 2006) who also succeeded in realizing the hopes of the people of Negeri Daha (in Javanese *wayang* stories) who expected their village to become a prosperous, fertile, and well-fed area. People will sit in the pavilions of their homes happily. Coolen has proven himself to be a leader who is able to ensure a prosperous life for his people.

Having a Blind Spot

As a pioneer of agricultural land, landlord, village head, and church leader, facts show that Coolen is also trapped in the pattern of past life that a village official can play with his power. Wahjono (2006, p. 142) argued that Coolen, an Indo-European in Ngoro, was seen as having violated Church rules since he was polygamous. This weak point is seen by the Indische Kerk group as a crucial side in Coolen. In addition, Coolen did not taught baptism and Holy Communion to his people, which became a problem in his ministry (Nggebu, 2022b). He once suggested Kiai Dasimah to meet Emde's wife in Surabaya so that he would be further disciplined in God's word (Akkeren, 1995). Apparently, Mr. Dasimah was taught about the

sacraments as a condition to become a Christian there. What Coolen did not teach or had not taught was exposed before the missionaries. The chronicle of baptism that was the subject of debate in Coolen's ministry came to the fore—which Coolen had not previously anticipated—and this was a heavy blow to him. In fact, he did not reject the sacrament at all, because he himself was eventually baptized with his children, his second wife, and a number of his followers, in an agreement with the Indische Kerk that they would continue to adhere to Javanese culture.

The unity of the Christian *ngelmu* community in Ngoro was finally shattered; there was a shift of views which led to conflicts. This is as stated by Damayanto (2005, pp. 87–88) that the loosening of solidarity between the early *ngelmu* Christian groups in Ngoro caused them to choose to mingle with Western-style Christians. They separated themselves and with the help of the Indische Kerk, they opened a new settlement, namely the village of Mojowarno. It is an undeniable fact that the spiritual descendants of Coolen had been transformed into the Mojowarno congregation led by Paul Tosari, who was a disciple of Coolen himself. Likewise, the members of Wiyung Congregation who were students of Coolen, had already sucked themselves under the influence of the Indische Kerk Surabaya.

Attitudes of the Missionaries and Indische Kerk towards Coolen

Coolen has inherited the concept of culture he got from his mother. His mother played a big role in instilling Javanese culture in him (Merisa, 2006). Akkeren (1995) explained that Coolen had a very strong love for Javanese culture. Meanwhile, Aritonang and Steenbrink (2008) argued that Coolen prioritized Javanese culture in his life. This background helped to set Coolen's view in building a Christian community that was different from Emde's. According to Akkeren (1995), the colonists considered Javanese culture to contain elements of disbelief. This became a blind spot of the colonists,

which Coolen did not accept. Coolen thought that the Javanese Christians he formed were of genuine Christianity for the Javanese, because he adopted Javanese culture to be fostered in his community. The Javanese who adhered to the Christian faith were not baptized and were not served Holy Communion as usual (in the eyes of the colonists, baptizing meant assimilation into Western culture, which Coolen did not approve of). They also continued to wear Javanese clothes, did not change their names, continued to do *dhikr* in a Christian way (recite the teachings of *ngelmu Kristen* repeatedly), and watched *wayang* performances. Therefore, various attitudes and comments emerged against Coolen's approach. Missionaries like Emde, the priest of A.W. Meijer, pastor Baron van Howell, pastor L.J. van Rhijn, and others sharply criticized Coolen's contextualization model. As stated by Akkeren (1995), they quickly reacted without understanding Coolen's motivation in doing so. Even today, the criticism persists. Himan (2018, p. 47) argued that the congregation led by Coolen was syncretistic by mixing Javanese culture with Christian teachings. It appears that Christianity in Java in the 19th century gave rise to two groups of Christian in rural Java, namely the Western Christians (Emde school) and Javanese Christians (Coolen school). It is extremely clear that there have been various responses and criticisms against Coolen over time. Coolen spread the gospel in Ngoro by taking advantages of the Javanese culture that has colored their entire existence.

As a researcher, the author sees that Coolen's style is similar to that of Tunggul Wulung, who adhered to the concept of horizon expectation. This term can be translated as 'the horizon of hope' or 'the scope of thought' introduced by the German writer, Hans Robert Jauss. The point is that a person may construct a set of assumptions to create a certain hope for the future of the group. In this context, it appears that the teachings of *ngelmu Kristen* developed by Coolen is meaningful for the community (in-group) that is in accordance with the scope of his thinking. Sugiano (2020, p. 100)

expressed that contextual ministry must instill the gospel into the local cultural context so that it is accepted by the locals according to their understanding. People may be free to experiment with ideas as encouraged by the French Revolution on freedom of opinion and belief. So did Coolen; he feels he has the freedom to teach the truths of contextual gospel and the insights for progress for his people. His teachings of *ngelmu Kristen* were suitable and accepted by his community. This aligns with a statement of Siswanto (2017) that in an effort to spread the gospel to other cultures, it is appropriate to respect the local culture.

Coolen in the Eyes of His Followers

As a Guiding Teacher

Speaking of the influential teacher of *ngelmu Kristen* in Ngoro in the mid-19th century, Coolen was the pioneering figure. He also taught his followers on the slopes of Mount Kelud (the parcel of Ngoro in 1830) that Jesus had power over the universe and everything in it. Soekotjo (2009) stated that Coolen cleared forests by relying on the inclusion of the Eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ. Before clearing the forest, they hold a ritual by reading a prayer to ask for protection from the Lord Jesus Christ. For them, as a teacher of *ngelmu Kristen*, Coolen understands Javanese culture related to resisting reinforcements and asks for the protection of the Creator. According to Najib (2015), Coolen did not force the farmers in Ngoro to embrace the Christian faith. Coolen's approach is to have a dialogue with them and explain the secret of the supernatural powers he relies on in clearing the forest. This secret is in the Eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, who by all His grace can enable His followers to triumph over this world.

Coolen's followers saw that Coolen had succeeded in clearing a large area of agricultural land as well as proving that the power of the guardian of the forest (i.e., the Devil in Javanese tradition) had been conquered by *Ngelmu Sejati* (the true *ngelmu*). Neither of them had an accident

during the process. They also admitted that the teachings of *ngelmu Kristen* are superior and great. Even, the *abangans* were willing to surrender their lives to Lord Jesus. This fact allowed Coolen to build a Christian village and evangelize the *abangans*. Wahjono (2006) explained that for the people of Ngoro, Coolen is a teacher who guides them to know the true truth by the leadership of the Holy Spirit so that they become new men in Christ. Furthermore, Harmanto (2020, pp. 61–62) stated that contextualization utilizes culture as a bridge in communicating the gospel. Despite the controversy surrounding Coolen's teachings that were seen as syncretistic, his followers were able to gradually shift the direction of Coolen's theology to be in line with God's word after they were willing to be further disciplined by the missionaries. Most of his followers then built a new Christian village, in the parcel of Mojowarno (the forerunner of GKJW). From Mojowarno, the gospel spread widely to various remote areas of Java.

Spiritual King and Prophet for the Javanese

According to Merisa (2006), Coolen is one of the most respected people in his life since he is known as a Javanese with Western powers. Coolen was called as spiritual king and prophet to the Javanese. This title makes sense, and not an exaggeration as Coolen's contribution to Javanese Christians is undeniable. His fame was not inferior to the Dutch missionaries. On the contrary, it surpassed the fame of the missionaries who were petty and blind to the culture of the *inlanders*. Coolen led his people towards a more advanced life. Widayat (2021, p. 292) stated that in the world view of the Javanese, the king was the owner of the land. This explains why the people of Ngoro viewed Coolen as their king whose decisions should be obeyed and followed.

Coolen deserves to be called a visionary leader for his people, as well as a pioneer in starting services that have an impact on Christians in Java to this day. On the report of Merisa (2006) in accordance with the acknowledgment of the Eastern

Javanese Christian Church, Coolen is their spiritual ancestor and also a prophet to the Javanese; Coolen is regarded as a figure who initiated rice cultivation as a source of livelihood for their ancestors. Furthermore, Wijaya (2007, p. 2) argued that Coolen is the originator of preaching the gospel through an agrarian culture. This interesting fact about Coolen's influence is unquenchable by the ages. As stated by the research team of GKJW, the spiritual pilgrims understood that Mr. Coolen had taught their ancestors to farm by relying on Lord Jesus (Triamon, 2006). Merisa (2006) explained that Coolen was incredibly close to the *abangans*, namely the farmers who worked with him in Ngoro Village. He guided and taught them about *ngelmu Kristen*. This concept remains attached to the next generation – which makes them continue to preserve the Javanese-style church.

Attitudes of the Wider Community towards Coolen

The Javanese are basically tolerant. Responding to the emergence of a new community, i.e., the *kejawen*-style *ngelmu* Christians, Islamic religious leaders accepted the presence of this community in accordance with the Javanese worldview to maintain harmony in society. Their worldview emphasizes and maintains the cosmic harmony and balance of all existence. The existence of an open attitude towards other religions can foster an attitude of tolerance and religious coexistence as stated by Mamahit (2021, pp. 31–45). In his study, Kruithof explained the influence of the presence of Christians in Java; he discovered that the process of adapting Christianity into Javanese culture had allowed Christianity to flourish in new lands among the Javanese in the 19th century (Kruithof, 2018, pp. 117–134). The acceptance of the Javanese style of Christianity has shown that the pattern of adaptation to Christianity among the Javanese has found a flexible and deeply rooted place. Kruithof assessed that Western missionaries had continued this process and at the same time benefited from it. This means that the formal missionaries (*zending*) also took part in the adaptation pattern of the laity's

ministry, namely Coolen and his friends as church pioneers among the lower classes of the Javanese society.

Evaluation and Assessment of Coolen

Heaven's Light Shines on Ngoro

In reality, the existence of new believers among farmers in the interior of Ngoro Village was initially doubted. They were ridiculed and humiliated, and their Christianity was questioned. Kruithof (2018) considered that the missionaries tended to disagree with the syncretic *kejawen*-style Christian movement (similar to Javanese tradition) in Ngoro. They questioned the religion being developed in that remote village. They criticized and condemned that Coolen's movement was a bit syncretic and distorted (indeed, Coolen's experiment was not finished; the process was still ongoing). However, it is clear now that the seeds that Coolen sowed have blossomed and produced spiritual fruits that have an impact on the Javanese community at large. The transformation in the gospel of Christ has filled a dull face with a heavenly light that brings peace and serenity. Merisa (2006) viewed that the Javanese society in the mid-19th century was still in darkness, but then a sparkling Light descended from heaven and was brought to the Javanese in Ngoro and Mojowarno so that they experienced renewal. These believers among the Javanese can be seen as equal to the puritanical Christians of Europe; Europeans began to glance at their presence. They can sit together before God and hear the same messages in Jesus Christ. As explained by Marisi et al. (2021, pp. 72–73), when the gospel messages are contextualized to enculturation, Christian ethics will emerge as a superior standard of living, meaning that the gospel has the power to illuminate culture. In this context, Coolen's contribution has a real impact on the mental and spirituality renewal of his spiritual descendants.

Winning the Hearts of His Followers with Natural Friendship

Coolen worked and started a church according to the life context of the villagers of Ngoro. Anjarwati (2020, p. 143) stated that in Javanese culture, agricultural activities are associated with rituals that reflect the human relationship with God. Furthermore, Firmansyah (2017, p. 237) viewed rituals as a form of behavior of religious people. In this context, Coolen points out that the teachings of *ngelmu Kristen* that he introduces are related to the life context of the *abangans* by carrying out Christian rituals. As stated by Mustofa (2022, p. 162), friendship is a key in social relations with others, especially with people of other religions. It seemed that Coolen had a harmonious relationship with the people of Ngoro. This is in accordance with Sukamto (2022) who emphasized the importance of dynamic dialogue at the grassroots level to build relationships. Witoro (2021, pp. 3–12) also argued that a personal mission approach with listeners is relevant and effective. As stated previously above, Coolen involved the villagers to ask for the protection of Lord Jesus Christ as the Lord of the universe before they cleared the forest and opened rice fields. His approach was applauded as it was relevant to the needs of the people. Coolen's teachings and lifestyle are in line with Javanese culture, so it is easy for the Javanese to understand. This melted the hearts of the *abangans* to accept the secrets of *ngelmu Kristen*.

Adhering to the Vision of Peace

The influence of spirituality becomes a bridge for contextual communication with the people of Ngoro. Coolen is the figure expected to protect the *abangan* residents of Ngoro Village. He introduced a contextual mission approach that won the hearts of the *abangans* because it is in accordance with their cultural values and life philosophy. This is in line with Baskoro (2022, p. 433) who explained that missionary services can be achieved by utilizing social relations with listeners.

For them, this is not a foreign ministry movement but a pattern of planting the truth of *ngelmu Kristen* that is relevant and compatible with their worldview as Javanese – who in fact also hope for peace in the present and in the future. Mr. Coolen has introduced *ngelmu Injil* whose power is unmatched in the world. *Ngelmu Injil* can be relied on to guarantee their personal salvation (experience forgiveness of sins and new life) and they are guaranteed to have eternal life in the future, living with Lord Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of Heaven. It is clear that Coolen had indigenized the identity of Jesus for the Javanese *abangans*. In his leadership, the villagers who were protected from the evil power could live a happy life. They accepted the teachings of *ngelmu Injil* that later morphed into an independent congregation in Mojowarno, which is legendary to this day.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study proved that Coolen was the first person in the history of the church in Java to pioneer an impactful ministry. The secret of his success is that he approached the *abangans* by taking advantages of the richness of Javanese culture, thus indigenizing the gospel into the context of their lives. This pattern has warmed the hearts of his listeners and answered their spiritual needs. Therefore, the church in Indonesia today needs to learn from Coolen to find new breakthroughs in reaching out to others. Moreover, the church in this country is surrounded by various cultures attached to the community. The pattern of cultural adaptation to ground the gospel for contemporary listeners as initiated by Coolen is still relevant to find its entry point. Creativity to find the way in requires responsiveness of today's church members.

CONCLUSION

From the discussions, it can be concluded that Coolen indigenized the Christian faith to the *abangans* in Ngoro village, East Java with a new and relevant pattern known as *ngelmu Kristen*. In this teaching, people who accept *ngelmu Kristen* get

deliverance and forgiveness of sins from Jesus Christ. Coolen is skilled at weaving the gospel stories using cultural patterns that are easily understood by the *abangans*, thereby attracting new Javanese souls. This is the secret of *ngelmu Kristen* he taught to his followers. According to Coolen, Javanese Christians should not undergo the assimilation process; they can continue to live as genuine Javanese even though they are Christians. Despite the shortcomings and limitations of his theological understanding, Coolen's approach is an outreach strategy that breaks the deadlock of the contextual mission for the Javanese that has never been considered by Christians from the Indische Kerk group or by other mission agencies. However, a number of his students decided to work with the

Indische Kerk in Surabaya. While this seems to be a good progress, the approach of his successors can actually be seen as a dead end for a bigger harvest among the Javanese *abangans* in East Java. If Coolen's movement had not been disturbed by the Indische Kerk, the Kejawen-style Church pioneered by Coolen would continue to reap souls. The harvest of new souls will certainly be more thrilling. History may not repeat itself. Regardless, what Coolen did has been recorded as a unique achievement in the movement of contextual mission in Java since it has started a new era in cross-cultural service. Coolen's strategy can be classified as a contextual methodology by using cultural phenomena as a link to convey the gospel in order to establish an Indigenous Church in Java.

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