



## The Areopagus Approach as a Contextual Framework for Religious and Cultural Engagement among the Malay Community of West Kalimantan

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### ABSTRACT

The ethnic identity and religious affiliation of the Malay community in West Kalimantan form an inseparable unity, rendering this context one of the most complex mission fields in Indonesia. Contextual missiological studies addressing this community remain largely dominated by confrontational approaches that give insufficient attention to the ethno-religious identity dimension, while dialogical yet kerygmatic models of evangelism have not been systematically developed within Indonesian missiological literature. This study aims to formulate a conceptual framework for contextual evangelism by adopting the Apostle Paul's missionary strategy at the Areopagus (Acts 17) as a missiologically relevant foundation for the West Kalimantan Malay context. The research employs a qualitative method through a library research approach, drawing from three primary literature clusters: Pauline theological hermeneutics, socio-cultural ethnography of the West Kalimantan Malay community, and contemporary contextual missiology theory. Analysis was conducted through a thematic-hermeneutical approach to identify points of convergence between biblical mission strategy and local cultural realities. The findings yield a three-stage framework: (1) appreciative cultural observation to identify theological "contact points" within Malay values; (2) the utilization of local cultural narratives and symbols as contextual bridges for Gospel communication; and (3) the proclamation of Christ as the fulfillment of culture's spiritual longings without reducing or eliminating ethnic identity. This study contributes to the development of a three-stage contextual missiological model grounded in cultural hermeneutics, one that can be operationalized by mission practitioners within the context of Malay Muslim ethno-religious communities in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Contextual Missiology; Areopagus Approach; Ethno-Religious Identity; West Kalimantan Malay; Cross-Cultural Mission.

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### INTRODUCTION

West Kalimantan is one of Indonesia's provinces distinguished by a unique and complex socio-cultural landscape. Within this region, the Malay community occupies a strategic position as the dominant ethnic group whose identity is inseparable from its affiliation with Islam. The phenomenon encapsulated in the expression "*To become Malay is to become Muslim*" has taken deep root historically, sociologically, and psychologically in the life of this community (Yusriadi, 2015). This dual identity construction in which ethnicity and religion form an

indissoluble unity generates a distinctive dynamic that mission practitioners seeking to engage this community must understand with considerable depth.

An understanding of the relationship between ethnicity and religiosity in the West Kalimantan Malay context cannot be constructed in a piecemeal fashion. Prasojo et al. (2019) demonstrate that the social construction of multi-ethnic communities in the interior of West Kalimantan is profoundly shaped by Islamic moderation, which functions simultaneously as social cohesion and as a marker of identity. This is reinforced by Kurniawan's (2018) research, which found that Islamic tradition and religiosity among the West Kalimantan Malay people have undergone such a deep process of assimilation that they have produced a holistic worldview one in which customary values, the arts, language, and spirituality are interwoven within a single, coherent system of meaning.

This reality poses a particular challenge to missiological practice in the region. Confrontational or extractive approaches to mission those that openly pit Gospel truth against local cultural values, or those that require a new convert to abandon their entire cultural identity are not only strategically counterproductive but also ethically and theologically problematic. Bosch (2006) asserts unequivocally that authentic Christian missionary transformation has never proceeded by destroying human culture, but rather by integrating Gospel truth into the existing cultural matrix. An approach that uproots individuals from their cultural foundations constitutes a form of de-culturalization that stands in contradiction to the spirit of Christ's own incarnation.

A review of contextual missiological literature in Indonesia reveals that most existing works have contributed to a general understanding of contextualization (Mawikere, 2022; Indarsih et al., 2024); however, these studies rarely develop, in a specific and systematic manner, a contextual evangelism model for the West Kalimantan Malay community. Several available studies tend to focus on the normative theological aspects of contextualization without providing concrete operationalization for the Malay ethno-religious context. On the other hand, scholarship on the Areopagus as a missiological paradigm (Buli, 2023; Setiawan & Banea, 2024; Tampubolon et al., 2023) has generally remained broad in scope and has not yet specifically connected its hermeneutical findings to the West Kalimantan Malay context.

The research gap that has been identified is the absence of a systematic and comprehensive formulation of an evangelism model that is simultaneously dialogical one that respects and appreciates the richness of Malay culture as the starting point for communication and kerygmatic one that proclaims the Gospel truth concerning Christ clearly and without compromise. Such a model is urgently needed not only by mission agencies but also by local churches in West Kalimantan that live in daily proximity to Muslim Malay communities.

This article argues that the Apostle Paul's missionary strategy at the Areopagus, as recorded in Acts 17:16–34, provides the most fitting and comprehensive theological foundation for responding to this challenge. The Areopagus paradigm presents a model that brings together cultural appreciation (dialogical) and the proclamation of truth (kerygmatic) within a single, harmonious approach. By adopting and adapting this model to the West Kalimantan Malay context, this study aims to propose an operational three-stage conceptual framework for contextual evangelism in that region.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design. According to Sugiyono (as cited in Mawikere, 2022), library research is a form of research that collects data and information through various materials available in libraries and digital repositories, such as books, scholarly journals, and other relevant

documents. This design was selected because the purpose of the study is to formulate a new conceptual framework through the hermeneutical synthesis of literary sources, rather than to test empirical hypotheses in the field.

This library research is analytical and synthetic in nature. The researcher does not merely collect and summarize existing materials, but rather subjects them to critical analysis in order to identify patterns, gaps, and possibilities for new synthesis. This process is consistent with the qualitative research paradigm, which positions the researcher as the primary instrument in constructing interpretation and meaning from data (Hesselgrave, 1991).

The data sources in this study are organized into three main clusters that are mutually complementary and in dialogue with one another. The first cluster consists of literature on Pauline hermeneutics and theology, focusing on the interpretation and theology of Acts 17. Primary sources in this cluster include standard biblical commentaries (Stott, 2002), studies on contextualization in the New Testament (Flemming, 2005), research on early Christian mission (Schnabel, 2004), and journal articles that specifically examine the Areopagus passage from a missiological perspective (Buli, 2023; Setiawan & Banea, 2024; Tampubolon et al., 2023; Sirait, 2022; Sugiono, 2020; Bolung et al., 2024).

The second cluster encompasses contemporary contextual missiology theory, which provides the conceptual framework for articulating points of contact and bridges for cross-cultural communication. Sources in this cluster include landmark works in the fields of missiology and cross-cultural communication (Bosch, 2006; Bevans, 2002; Hiebert, 1985; Hesselgrave, 1991; Tennent, 2007; Kraft, 1996; Newbigin, 1989; Niebuhr, 1951), as well as journal articles on contextualization in Indonesia (Mawikere, 2022; Indarsih et al., 2024; Andi et al., 2020).

The third cluster comprises socio-cultural ethnographic literature on the West Kalimantan Malay community. This cluster is essential to ensure that the missiological framework being formulated is genuinely grounded in a thorough understanding of its intended subject. Sources within this cluster include research on Malay ethno-religious identity (Yusriadi, 2015), studies on the Islamic religious traditions of the West Kalimantan Malay people (Kurniawan, 2018), research on multi-ethnic social construction (Prasojo et al., 2019), and studies on Malay arts and culture (Aditya & Ramadhan, 2024).

The data analysis in this study employs a thematic-hermeneutical approach. This approach represents a synthesis of thematic analysis which seeks to identify dominant patterns and themes across the literature and hermeneutics, which endeavors to understand the meaning of a text within its context of production and to bring it into dialogue with a new and relevant context (Flemming, 2005).

Operationally, the analysis proceeds through three steps. First, the identification of key themes in the text of Acts 17 that are relevant to contextual missiology theory. Second, the mapping of socio-cultural values among the West Kalimantan Malay community that resonate with those biblical themes. Third, a hermeneutical synthesis of the two in order to produce a new and contextual mission model framework. This process reflects what Flemming (2005) describes as "*contextual theology in the making*" theology that is born from the encounter between the biblical text and cultural context.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Ethno-Religious Construction of the West Kalimantan Malay Community**

#### ***The Historical Ties of the Sultanate and the Spread of Islam in West Kalimantan***

To understand the complexity of West Kalimantan Malay identity, one must first trace its deep historical roots. The spread of Islam across West Kalimantan did not occur in a cultural vacuum; rather, it proceeded through

channels intimately bound up with political power and culture. Efendi (2021) documents that the process of Islamization in the Indonesia-Malaysia border region including the area of Pontianak and its surroundings took place through the medium of sultanates that politically anchored the legitimacy of their authority in Islamic affiliation. This pattern forged a powerful synchronization among political authority (the sultanate), cultural identity (Malayness), and religious conviction (Islam).

The Pontianak Sultanate, founded in the eighteenth century by Al-Qadrie, became one of the gravitational centers that reinforced the fusion of Malay identity and Islam in the western part of West Kalimantan. Through the mechanism of expanding sultanate influence, village after village adopted not only a system of governance, but also the Malay language, customary practices, and Islamic belief as a single package of identity. Consequently, "becoming Malay" historically meant "becoming Muslim," and vice versa. Kersten (2015), in his sociological study of Islam in Indonesia, notes that this pattern whereby Islam functions as an ethnic identity marker rather than merely a personal theological choice is a widespread phenomenon across various Muslim communities throughout the Indonesian archipelago, including in West Kalimantan.

### ***Dual Identity as a Socio-Cultural Fortress***

Yusriadi (2015), in his study of Dayak and Malay identity in West Kalimantan, reveals that the polarization of ethno-religious identity in this region is sharply pronounced. While the Dayak people are culturally affiliated with Christianity (both Catholic and Protestant), the Malay community is culturally affiliated with Islam. This polarization is not merely a difference in religion; it constitutes a complex and multi-layered construction of social identity, in which religion functions as a social boundary marker separating "us" (Malay-Muslim) from "them" (non-Malay or non-Muslim).

The consequences of this identity construction are highly significant in the context of mission. A person born into a Malay family who subsequently embraces the Christian faith faces not only religious pressure but also a far deeper pressure upon their ethnic identity. Religious conversion is perceived not merely as a change in personal belief, but as a betrayal of the extended family, the community, customary traditions, and the entire ancestral heritage. Kraft (1996) asserts that a missiological approach that fails to account for the worldview dimension that is, the deepest system of beliefs that frames how a person understands identity, relationships, and existence will always reach a dead end, because what is at stake is not merely a set of theological propositions, but an entire holistic network of meaning.

A number of studies on religion and identity among the Malay communities of West Kalimantan have found that the phrase "Masuk Melayu" ("to become Malay") is consistently understood by the community as a process of fully embracing Islam, rather than merely adopting certain cultural elements in a partial sense. Yusriadi (2015), in his study on the etymology and phenomenon of *masuk Melayu* in the interior regions of West Kalimantan, demonstrates that conversion to Islam and becoming Malay are treated as one identical and inseparable process. This finding is reinforced by Saripaini (2018), who studied the community of Sri Wangi Village in Kapuas Hulu and found that the community's Malay identity is entirely derived from its Islamic identity entering Islam means entering Malayness.

This indicates that, for the Malay communities of West Kalimantan, Islam is not merely a vertical dimension of life (one's relationship with God), but rather the central axis of identity that permeates every dimension

of existence: the way people dress, speak, build social relationships, commemorate important moments, and even understand death (Ibrahim, 2018; Saripaini, 2018).

### ***The Psychological and Sociological Challenges of Evangelism***

Kurniawan (2018), in his study of Islamic tradition and religiosity among the West Kalimantan Malay people, found that Malay religiosity has a distinctive character that blends the normative elements of Islam (sharia, fiqh) with local elements that are Sufi and customary in nature. Traditions such as the *selamatan* (communal feast of thanksgiving), communal prayer, and the rites of the life cycle (birth, marriage, death) are religious expressions that simultaneously function as mechanisms of social cohesion. A person who leaves Islam effectively cuts themselves off from this entire network of social relationships and communal rituals which in turn means the loss of community, social protection, and even livelihood.

Aditya and Ramadhan (2024), in their study of Malay performing arts in West Kalimantan, found that traditional Malay performing arts including dance, music, and oral literature constitute an important medium for reinforcing ethnic identity and social bonds. This finding carries missiological significance, as it demonstrates that Malay culture possesses an aesthetic and narrative richness that can serve as a vehicle for communicating universal values, including spiritual ones. For the Gospel communicator, this is not an obstacle but an opportunity.

### **The Areopagus Missiological Paradigm: A Thematic Analysis of Acts 17:16–34**

#### ***Context and Significance of the Areopagus Narrative***

Acts 17:16–34 records one of the most dramatic moments in the apostle Paul's missionary ministry. Its narrative context places Paul in Athens—a city that Stott (2002) describes as the intellectual and spiritual center of the Hellenistic world in the first century. Paul was not merely passing through; he was there waiting for his companions, and in that interval he had time to observe, respond, and ultimately speak at the Areopagus, the most prestigious assembly in the city.

Flemming (2005) refers to the Areopagus episode as "the most culturally sensitive evangelistic sermon in the New Testament." This is no exaggeration. Throughout this passage, readers can observe a missionary methodology that consciously accounts for the audience's context, selects relevant points of entry, employs familiar communicative forms, and directs everything toward an explicit proclamation of Christ.

#### ***Empathic Observation: Seeing Before Speaking***

The first distinctive feature of Paul's approach is his posture of observation. Acts 17:16 and 23 record that Paul carefully surveyed the city of Athens before speaking. Furthermore, when he began to address the Areopagus, he did not open with a condemnation of the idolatry he had witnessed; instead, he acknowledged and respected the religiosity of the Athenians: "*Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious*" (17:22).

Sirait (2022) emphasizes that this posture reflects a genuine commitment to understanding the audience before communicating the message. This is not merely a rhetorical strategy but an expression of deep empathy—the capacity to enter another person's world and perceive things from their perspective. Hiebert (1985), in his work on anthropological insights for missionaries, affirms that the greatest failure in cross-cultural missionary practice is the

inability to understand the worldview of the host culture, which in turn produces communication that is either irrelevant or offensive.

Bolung et al. (2024), in their analysis of transcultural mission based on Acts 17, identify this observational stage as an indispensable foundation. Before a gospel communicator can identify effective points of contact, he or she must first become a careful listener and observer of the cultural context at hand.

### ***Theological Points of Contact: Drawing Upon Spiritual Longing***

The second crucial dimension is the identification and use of points of contact. In the Areopagus narrative, Paul discovers an altar inscribed with the words *"To an Unknown God"* (17:23). Hermeneutically, this altar represents the deepest spiritual longing of the Athenians—an awareness of a Divine Reality that transcends the gods they knew, yet whose identity remained hidden from them. Paul does not exploit this longing; rather, he employs it as a theological bridge to introduce the living God.

Sugiono (2020), in his exegetical analysis, affirms that Paul's use of the altar "To an Unknown God" serves as a paradigmatic example of what missiological theory would later call a *"redemptive analogy"*—elements within a local culture that, though incomplete in themselves, point toward the truth of the gospel and can serve as entry points for communication. Tennent (2007) extends this concept by demonstrating that every culture contains a *praeparatio evangelica*—a preparation or readiness to receive the gospel—embedded within its values, narratives, and spiritual yearnings.

Bevans (2002), in his typology of contextual theology models, situates this kind of approach within the *"translation model"* and *"synthetic model"*—approaches that acknowledge the presence of positive values within local culture and employ them as vehicles for communicating gospel truth, without sliding into syncretism. Newbigin (1989) adds a vital theological dimension: the ability to identify points of contact does not reduce the uniqueness of the gospel, but rather demonstrates that the gospel possesses a universal capacity to answer the deepest longings of every human culture.

### ***Narrative Inculturation: Speaking in the Language of Culture***

The third prominent feature of the Areopagus approach is Paul's use of local cultural sources within his argumentation. Acts 17:28 records that Paul quotes two Greek poets—Epimenides of Crete (*"for in him we live and move and have our being"*) and Aratus of Cilicia (*"for we are indeed his offspring"*)—in support of his theological argument concerning the relationship between humanity and God. This is an act of bold inculturation: using "texts" from the audience's own cultural tradition to convey biblical truth.

Tampubolon et al. (2023) observe that Paul's quotation of Greek poets does not imply his endorsement of their entire teaching; rather, he identifies the partial truths embedded within their writings and uses them as a bridge toward a fuller understanding of the truth. This exemplifies what Niebuhr (1951) described as the paradigm of *"Christ the Transformer of Culture"*—Christ not as a destroyer of culture, but as the fulfillment and transformer of its deepest aspirations.

Flemming (2005) affirms that this approach reflects a profound theological conviction: that the Holy Spirit has been at work in human history and culture long before missionaries arrive, planting seeds of truth that can be discovered and used as bridges toward Christ. This is a theology that honors the integrity of human culture without collapsing into relativism.

### ***Kerygmatic Proclamation: From Dialogue to Declaration***

The fourth dimension and what distinguishes the Areopagus approach from mere cross-cultural dialogue is the transition from inculturation to proclamation. Acts 17:29–31 records how Paul moves from cultural appreciation to a call for repentance and the announcement of the risen Christ. This proclamation is neither veiled nor negotiable; Paul explicitly declares that "*God commands all people everywhere to repent.*"

Setiawan and Banea (2024) highlight that it is precisely this balance between inculturation and proclamation that makes the Areopagus approach distinctive. Excessive inculturation without proclamation produces cultural dialogue that never arrives at the heart of the gospel—a drift toward syncretism. Conversely, proclamation without inculturation produces confrontation that is neither relevant nor effective. Paul demonstrates that both dimensions must be held together simultaneously within a single, coherent, and harmonious approach.

Bosch (2006), in his analysis of the transformation of Christian mission, affirms that authentic mission always carries a kerygmatic dimension—the proclamation of good news about a specific, historical Christ—which cannot be compromised without forfeiting the very essence of mission itself. A dialogical approach that rejects the kerygmatic dimension is not mission; it is merely interfaith dialogue. Conversely, authentic kerygma must always be communicated in language and cultural contexts that are relevant to its recipients.

### **Contextual Missiological Framework for the Malay People of West Kalimantan**

#### ***Appreciative Cultural Observation—Discovering "Points of Contact"***

The first stage of the proposed contextual missiological framework is *appreciative cultural observation*. This stage is directly inspired by Paul's posture before and at the opening of his address at the Areopagus, and its aim is to identify theological points of contact embedded within the local wisdom of the Malay people of West Kalimantan.

In this context, appreciative observation should focus on at least four primary domains of local wisdom. First, the tradition of *silaturahmi* and the value of connectivity. Malay society places an exceptionally high value on harmonious interpersonal relationships, expressed through various traditions of *silaturahmi* (visiting and maintaining social bonds), *gotong royong* (communal cooperation), and *musyawarah mufakat* (deliberative consensus). These values resonate deeply with the concept of *koinonia* (fellowship) in Christian theology and with Jesus' teaching on love for one's neighbor. A gospel communicator who genuinely participates in *silaturahmi* will be far more readily received than one who arrives as a critic.

Second, the oral literary tradition of *pantun*, *gurindam*, *seloka*, and *syair*. Zainuddin A. (2020) notes that in Pontianak Malay wedding customs, *pantun* and *syair* play a central role as vehicles for communicating moral and spiritual values. This rich oral literary heritage demonstrates that the Malay community possesses a deep tradition of conveying truth through metaphor, allegory, and poetry—a compelling point of contact with the ways in which Jesus communicated truth through parables.

Third, the Sufi dimension within Malay religiosity. Kurniawan (2018) finds that the Islamic religious tradition of the Malay people of West Kalimantan carries strong Sufi elements—a profound longing for closeness with God, mystical experience, and the pursuit of transcendent spiritual meaning. This longing represents, in the Malay context, the equivalent of the "altar to an Unknown God"—an authentic spiritual yearning that points toward a personal encounter with the living God in Christ.

Fourth, the value of justice and human dignity (*marwah*). In Malay tradition, the concept of *marwah* dignity and honor is deeply central. A missionary approach that honors a person's *marwah*, one that never insults, demeans, or shames its audience, is not only more ethical but also far more communicatively effective. Kraft (1996) affirms that respect for the worldview and values of the audience is an absolute prerequisite for transformative cross-cultural communication.

Hiebert (1985) offers the concept of "*critical contextualization*" as a methodology for this observational stage: a missionary must first gather and understand local cultural practices empathically and non-judgmentally, before proceeding to theological evaluation and the identification of both points of contact and points of divergence with gospel truth.

### ***Utilizing Narrative and Symbol as Bridges for Communication***

The second stage involves the active utilization of Malay cultural narratives and symbols as bridges for communicating gospel truth. This stage is inspired by Paul's practice of quoting Greek poets and employing the altar "to an Unknown God" as a bridge for theological argumentation.

Within the West Kalimantan Malay context, gospel communicators may draw upon several specific media. First, the literary forms of *pantun* and *gurindam* can be used to frame gospel messages in a format that is both familiar and aesthetically meaningful to the Malay community. This is not distortion or manipulation, but legitimate inculturation using pre-existing "cultural vessels" to carry new theological content. Aditya and Ramadhan (2024) demonstrate that the art and literary traditions of West Kalimantan's Malay community remain alive and relevant as media for social communication, indicating that these forms carry broad potential reach.

Second, oral narratives from the Malay tradition that deal with themes of seeking truth, meaningful suffering, or forgiveness can serve as entry points for discussing the central themes of the gospel. Hesselgrave (1991), in his cross-cultural communication framework, underscores the importance of a "*narrative bridge*" one that connects local stories with the meta-narrative of the gospel. Every culture contains narratives of origin, fall, redemption, and hope that can resonate with the grand narrative of Scripture.

Third, the symbolism of water, light, and bread universal symbols in the teachings of Jesus are also present in Malay tradition. This symbolic affinity can serve as a natural bridge. A gospel communicator can begin a conversation from familiar symbols, then gradually explain how Christ himself identifies as "*the living water*" (John 4:14), "*the light of the world*" (John 8:12), and "*the bread of life*" (John 6:35).

Nevertheless, both Bosch (2006) and Bevans (2002) caution that the use of cultural symbols and narratives must be undertaken with great care, so as not to fall into two equally dangerous extremes: syncretism in which the uniqueness of Christ is dissolved into local culture or cultural imperialism in which a foreign culture is imposed as the sole vehicle for communicating the gospel. Maintaining this balance demands a high degree of both theological and cultural sensitivity from the communicator.

Andi et al. (2020), in their study of cross-cultural mission strategy based on 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, find that Paul's principle of "becoming all things to all people" represents a commitment to radical contextual flexibility one that does not sacrifice the core of the message, but courageously adapts its mode of delivery to the context of the audience. This is the spirit that must undergird the second stage of this framework.

***Proclaiming Christ as the Fulfillment of the Culture's Deepest Spiritual Longings***

The third and climactic stage of this framework is the explicit proclamation of Christ as the fulfillment of the deepest spiritual longings of the Malay people. This stage is inspired by the concluding portion of the Areopagus address, in which Paul moves from inculturation to the proclamation of the resurrection of Christ.

Theologically, this stage must be grounded in a crucial paradigmatic reorientation: the gospel does not arrive as a destroyer of Malay identity, but as the *fulfillment* of the deepest longings present within Malay culture and the Malay soul. Tennent (2007) develops this concept extensively in his work on theology in the context of world Christianity: every culture possesses a *praeparatio evangelica* a preparation for the gospel which, when illuminated by biblical truth, finds its completion and fullness in Christ.

In the Malay context, the Sufi longing for personal closeness with God finds its most profound answer in the incarnation of Jesus Christ God who became human, who is present in a personal and relational way in the midst of human life. The longing for forgiveness and holiness evident in various purification rituals within Malay tradition finds its fulfillment in the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. And the longing for a meaningful and eternal life finds its answer in the resurrection of Christ and the promise of eternal life.

The most sensitive dimension of this stage concerns the question of ethnic identity following conversion. Traditional confrontational models of evangelism have often implicitly or even explicitly required a Malay convert to abandon their Malay ethnic identity along with all of its cultural expressions. This is a serious theological error and must be corrected. Niebuhr (1951), in his taxonomy of the relationship between Christ and culture, demonstrates that the paradigm of "*Christ the Transformer of Culture*" enables a person to retain their cultural identity while experiencing a transformation of values and life orientation from the inside out.

Accordingly, the proposed framework offers the paradigm that a Malay person from West Kalimantan who follows Christ need not cease to be Malay. They need not abandon the Malay language, the literary arts of their tradition, the social relational customs, or even their Malay name. What undergoes transformation is the deepest value and orientation of their life: from the worship of other things toward the worship of God the Father through Christ. This is the distinction between "*extraction*" uprooting a person from their cultural context and "*transformation*" changing from within while remaining rooted in that context.

Mawikere (2022) supports this perspective by affirming that genuine contextualization must be "*empowering to the culture that receives the gospel,*" not a replacement of it. Indarsih et al. (2024) add that in an era of pluralism, the dissemination of gospel truth in contextual missiology must be capable of honoring diverse identities while preserving both the uniqueness and the universality of Christ's claims. Woodberry (1989), in his study of Christian-Muslim relations on the road to Emmaus, observes that the most effective witness to Muslim communities is often not the most rhetorically forceful, but rather the most relationally profound and the most authentically lived.

Suwandi (2021) affirms that impactful evangelistic mission is that which integrates verbal proclamation with the concrete demonstration of love in daily life. In the West Kalimantan Malay context, this means that a gospel communicator must first be present as part of the community as a neighbor, a friend, a business partner, or a collaborator in social activities before they can be heard as a bearer of good news.

## CONCLUSION

This study has successfully formulated a three-stage conceptual framework for contextual evangelism among the Malay people of West Kalimantan, by adopting and adapting the missionary paradigm of the Apostle Paul at the Areopagus (Acts 17:16–34) as its theological and missiological foundation. The proposed framework comprising the stages of Appreciative Cultural Observation, the Utilization of Narrative and Symbol as Bridges for Communication, and the Proclamation of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Culture's Deepest Spiritual Longings directly addresses the research gap identified at the outset of this study: namely, the absence of a model that is simultaneously dialogical and kerygmatic within the West Kalimantan Malay context.

The findings of this study contribute to the development of Indonesian contextual missiology in several respects. First, this study reinforces the argument that the Areopagus approach is not merely historically relevant, but constitutes a paradigm of transhistorical and cross-cultural quality that can be operationalized across a wide range of contemporary missionary contexts. Second, this study offers a significant theological reorientation: the gospel must be presented not as a threat to Malay cultural identity, but as the fulfillment of the deepest spiritual longings already present within it. Third, this study provides concrete operationalization of the otherwise abstract principles of contextualization, making it serviceable as a practical guide for missionary practitioners.

The practical implications of this study for mission practitioners, evangelistic organizations, and local churches in West Kalimantan are considerable. Those engaged in mission work need to develop adequate cross-cultural competency particularly a deep understanding of Malay ethno-religious identity and the richness of its literary and cultural heritage. Mission agencies need to revise their training curricula to incorporate modules on contextualization grounded in cultural hermeneutics. Local churches need to develop long-term, relationally oriented strategies of communal presence, rather than temporary, event-driven approaches.

This study carries certain limitations that must be honestly acknowledged. As a conceptual study grounded in library research, its findings remain theoretical and have not yet been empirically tested in the field. The proposed three-stage framework, while theologically and missiologically coherent, may not translate smoothly into every concrete situation on the ground, given that the complexity and variability of local contexts far exceed what any conceptual model can fully anticipate.

This study therefore recommends a series of follow-up field studies aimed at empirically testing the effectiveness of this three-stage framework. Qualitative research grounded in ethnography and in-depth interviews conducted with mission practitioners, members of the Malay community who have come to faith in Christ, and Malay community leaders would prove highly valuable in further refining and contextualizing the proposed framework. In addition, comparative studies with analogous contexts in other regions of Indonesia such as the Malay communities of Riau, Aceh, or South Kalimantan would also contribute to the development of a more comprehensive and broadly generalizable theory of contextual missiology.

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