DISCIPLESHIP IN INDONESIA: THE FIRST DECADE OF ADVENTIST MESSAGE (1899-1909)

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Abstract

The first Adventist missionary came to Indonesia at the end of 1899. The first decade of the Adventist work met many challenges and hardships. However, in 1909, the Adventist membership percentage increased sharply if it is compared with the previous and later years. This paper attempts to discover what was the main factor of the successful evangelism from 1899 to 1909. After surveying the information gathered in various periodicals during the first decade of Adventist work in Indonesia, the finding is that discipleship was a significant factor that made the evangelism in Indonesia was successful. Discipleship, including training, needed much time and efforts before it reaped the bountiful harvest. This research also recommends some strengths that can be cultivated and weaknesses that may be avoided to gain better outcomes today.

Keywords: Adventist message, adventist missionary, discipleship, evangelism, Indonesia

There is an idea that "discipleship is a training in a tradition." Even though it may be reasonable but in Christianity it should be more than passing an understanding or a doctrine. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says that Christian "discipleship means adherence to Christ, and, because Christ is the object of that adherence Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ." Discipleship should be more than passing a doctrine or tradition but how to lead others connect to Christ and having Christ-like character.

It is interesting that few decades before Bonhoeffer wrote his idea on the discipleship, Seventh-day Adventist has come to the similar idea. This church emphasized that how discipleship should be manifested in Christian's daily life. The concept of discipleship in the beginning of 20th century in the Adventist Church, especially in the Southeast Asia, could be found in the periodicals which were published in Australia Union Conference since this organization had responsibility to oversee the mission in this territory.³

¹ Medi Ann Volpe, *Rethinking Christian Identity: Doctrine and Discipleship* (Chichester, WS: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), i.

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Macmillian, 1963), 63-64.

³ R. W. Munson, "Greetings From Sumatra," *Union Conference Record [UCR]*, October 15, 1903, 3.

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Discipleship Concept in the First Decade of 20th Century in Australia⁴

Ellen G. White, after her ministry for almost a decade in Australia, wrote for the readers of *Union Conference Record* that "fruit bearing, then, is the condition of discipleship. What is the fruit that is to be borne? – Purify of character, unselfish deeds, Christlike words. Those who do not bear this fruit, those whose lives do not reveal the tenderness of Christ, are not accepted as representatives of God." She emphasized discipleship as a process of the development of Christlike character in every child of God. W. R. Patterson had a similar idea as he said, "Evidences of discipleship, is that our loving merciful, Heavenly Father will not heed our selfish cries for deliverance from pain and suffering, but permits us to be subjected to severe buffetings and fiery trials, in order that the beautiful graces of patience, submission, and trust may be developed in our characters."

One of the important things that should be developed to have Christ-like character through discipleship is self denial. A writer of the *Australasian Signs of the Times* stated that "without the willingness to lay down the life, without the entire renunciation of self, there can be no discipleship." W. L. Taylor believed that "in self-denying discipleship, they shall find the Bread which endureth unto eternal life." Ellen G. White accepted this self-denial idea and connected it to the service of Christ. She wrote, "Self denial is one of the conditions not only of admission into the service of Christ, but of continuance therein. Christ himself declared, in unmistakable language, the conditions of discipleship: 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Thus, developing Christ-like character including self-denial will prepare a Christian to a further

For Seventh-day Adventists in this period, discipleship was not just a result of personal character development but also it equipped Christians to doing His service. A. T. Jones suggested that discipleship means "consecration of person and means" to doing God's service. Ellen G. White agreed with this concept and pointed out that discipleship and service could be

step of discipleship that is doing His service.

⁴ Union in Australia was supervising the missional work in Indonesia most of the first decade of 20th century.

⁵ Ellen G. White, "Words of Counsel," UCR, November 15, 1903, 1.

⁶ W. R. Patterson, "Learning by Suffering," *Australasian Signs of the Times* [STAUS], April 29, 1907, 265.

⁷ J. G., "The Cross," *STAUS*, July 11, 1904, 339.

⁸ W. L. Taylor, "A Contended Mind," STAUS, June 8, 1908, 362.

⁹ Ellen G. White, "To Every Man His Work," STAUS, February 1, 1909, 70.

¹⁰ A. T. Jones, "Consecrations of our Means to Service," UCR, May 15, 1903, 6.

bound together.¹¹ Therefore, the discipleship should not just be related to internal growth that is character development but also it could be seen in the external performance when the children of God ministers others by their service.

The foundation of discipleship, according to the Adventists in the first decade of twentieth century, is love. Ellen G. White articulated love was an "essential qualification" for the discipleship and service. She plainly wrote, "Knowledge, benevolence, eloquence, gratitude, and zeal are all aids in the good work; but without the love of Jesus in the heart, the work of the Christian minister is a failure." She also connected the bearing fruit of Christian character to love as she stated, "In order for us to bear the fruit that glorifies God, our heart must be filled with the love of Christ." O. A. Olsen suggested the same idea that "Christ has set forth love among the brethren as a test of discipleship." L. R. Conradi was in harmony with his colleagues as he thought that "the great sign of discipleship in Christ is that we love one another." Hence, love of Christ and love to one another is a crucial ingredient of discipleship. Adventists understanding about discipleship in this period (1899-1909) was love as its basis. Having Christ-like character and doing service to others were manifestations of discipleship. How did the missionaries who come to Indonesia implement Adventist's idea about discipleship? In terms of application, what were the strengths and challenges that they faced? the following parts will show the facts of discipleship in Indonesia from 1899 to 1909.

The Beginning and its Challenges

The first official missionary came to Indonesia was Ralph Waldo Munson. He came on Sabbath, December 30, 1899, after 49 days travelled from New York. ¹⁶ He arrived at Padang, one of the strictest Muslim areas in Indonesia. Together with his family, they attempted to penetrate this area with Adventist message. It did not take long time for their family to identify that there were two majorities groups of people at Padang. They were Chinese and Malay. Malay group's religion was Islam in majority. ¹⁷

¹¹ Ellen G. White, "The Restoration of Peter," STAUS, August 23, 1909, 537.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ellen G. White, *UCR*, November 15, 1903, 1.

 $^{^{14}}$ His idea is taken from John 13:35. O. A. Olsen, "New Zealand," UCR, February 24, 1908. 8.

¹⁵ L. R. Conradi, "God's mystery to be Quickly Finished," UCR, April 15, 1907, 6.

¹⁶ R. W. Munson, "Netherlands Indies," *Review and Herald [RH]*, May 8, 1900, 299. See also R. W. Munson, "The Work in Malaysia," *RH*, September 2, 1902, 15; "The Island of Sumatera," *RH*, December 1, 1900, 5.

¹⁷ R. W. Munson, *RH*, September 2, 1902, 15, 16; R. W. Munson, "The Island of Sumatera," *UCR*, December 1, 1900, 5.

The problem to evangelize the Chinese was that the Munsons could not speak Chinese. Later Munson met his former Chinese student at Singapore, Tay Hong Siang. However, this person could not speak Chinese. That was why, then, this man was sent to China for about a year to learn Hokien, one of the Chinese languages. He sailed to China on February 18, 1904. However, there is no account of his back to Padang while Munson went to Australia in 1905.

Even though Munson could speak Malay fluently, however, he could not reach them verbally since there was a restriction from the Dutch government at that time that "the colonial government knew that any attempt to Christianize Muslim areas would probably be provocative and destabilizing" political situation and caused of rebellion. ¹⁹ Fortunately, on the other side, the government permitted spreading literature to the Muslims. However, another problem occurred as Munson identified the Malay Muslim only could read in Arabic letters, ²⁰ a language that he did not anticipate.

Development of the Church Membership 1900-1909

The statistic of the Adventist membership indicates that initially, the growing was very slow. There were some fluctuations of membership until it reached the highest growing at the first decade of Adventist message. It happened in 1909.

Munson went back to Australia in July 1905.²¹ After his leaving, there was no missionary until December 1, 1906 when G. A. Wantzlick family came to Padang. ²² It explains why the membership of the church decline during this vacancy. Fortunately, at the same year, the work in Java Island was started and contributed to the addition of the church membership.

¹⁸ Idem, "Our Work in Sumatra," RH, April 28, 1904, 13-14.

¹⁹ Robert Pringle, *Understanding Islam in Indonesia: Politics and Diversity* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii, 2010), 49.

²⁰ R. W. Munson, "Padang, West Coast Sumatra, East Indies," RH, May 19, 1903, 17.

²¹ R. W. Munson, "Brother Immanuel, the Battak," *UCR*, September 15, 1905, 6; see also Idem, "Sumatra," *RH*, November 16, 1905, 15.

²² G. A. Wantzlick, "Sumatra," UCR, September 7, 1908, 23.

Year	Place	Companies	Membership	Total Membership
1900	Sumatera	-	-	-
1901	Sumatera	1	10	10
1902	Sumatera	1	12	12
1903	Sumatera	1	10	10
1904	Sumatera	1	20	20
1905	Sumatera	1	10	10
1906	Sumatera	-	2	8
	Java	1	6	
1907	Sumatera	1	4	10
	Java	1	6	
1908	Sumatera	1	4	8
	Java	1	4	
1909	Sumatera	1	5	45
	Java	3	40	

Table of Membership of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Indonesia 1900-1909²³

For about two years at Padang, Wantzlick went back to his country, Germany, and the ministry was continued by Bernard Judge in 1909.²⁴ The two last missionaries, was not like Munson, they could not speak in Malay, thus, they needed much time to learn the local language and their custom. However, the work in Java was growing especially in 1909 since the first missionaries, who came to Java, has learned Malay since 1906²⁵ and then a new missionary came in February 1908 and she could communicate in Malay and two Chinese dialects.²⁶

Discipleship in Indonesia 1900-1909

The Adventist message came to Indonesia by two directions. The first was through R. W. Munson at Padang, Sumatera from 1899 to 1905; and was continued by Wantzlick in December 1906. The second entrance was on November 1906, when several missionaries came from

²³ The statistics from 1900 to 1909 could be found in the annual statistic of Seventh-day Adventist in

http://docs.adventistarchives.org/documents.asp?CatID=11&SortBy=2&ShowDateOrder=True accessed June 9, 2015.

²⁴ L. R. Conradi, "The Dutch General Meeting," *RH*, September 23, 1909, 13. See also G. F. Jones, "In Sumatra," *RH*, October 31, 1912, 13.

²⁵ "Notes and Personal," *UCR*, December 3, 1906, 7. Petra Tunheim, "Java Mission," *UCR*, September 7, 1908, 24.

²⁶ P. Tunheim, "House-to-House Work in Java," *UCR*, June 1, 1908, 3-4. See also Idem, "Java Mission," *UCR*, September 7, 1908, 24.

Australia arrived at Surabaya, Java. The following sections provide how the discipleship was implemented in these two areas.

Discipleship in Sumatera

When the Munsons arrived at Padang on December 30,1899, few weeks later, he met his former student of his prior missionary post in Singapore.²⁷ However, even though Tay Hong Siang, the name of his student, has accepted the Adventist message, he was not immediately baptized in that year but in the following year in 1901.²⁸ It did not just happen with Tay Hong Siang, Munson's last Bible student at Padang in 1905, Immanuel Siregar, the man that he met a month before his departure, did not immediately get baptized after his acceptance about the Sabbath.²⁹ Few years later, apparently, he was baptized, at least 1908 or later, when he was at Singapore to continue studying the Bible.³⁰

The first baptism of the local people was after a series of studying the Bible for a year by the effort of Immanuel. He has given them lesson since 1907. Before the baptismal ceremony, these people have kept the Sabbath.³¹ Nevertheless, Immanuel did not satisfy with that, he wrote a letter to Munson who connected him to E. H. Gates, the one who was in charge in the mission headquarter at Singapore. Gates finally brought them to Singapore for studying the Bible.³² In 1908, some of them were baptized. Nettie Mills, a teacher in Singapore Adventist school, testify about the baptism that "we have every reason to believe that all these individuals are sincere in the step which they have taken, and it did our hearts good to see them go forward in this ordinance."³³It meant that when the two first indigenous Indonesian were baptized they have been studying the truth for years and experienced Christ in their lives.

While Tay Hong Siang was still learning about the Adventist message in 1900, he has involved in the evangelism effort. Tay brought Munson to his uncle and finally he was baptized together with Tay Hong Siang as the first baptisms of Munson in Indonesia.³⁴ Tay did not just involve in personal evangelism but he was active in educational work in which he helped

²⁷ R. W. Munson, "The Work in Malaysia," RH, September 2, 1902, 16.

²⁸ E. H. Gates, "Malaysia Mission," UCR, October 1, 1901, 3.

²⁹ R. W. Munson, *UCR*, September 15, 1905, 6; see also Idem, *RH*, November 16, 1905, 15.

³⁰ Nettie Mills, "An Interesting Occasion in Singapore," UCR, August 24, 1908, 4.

³¹ E. H. Gates, *RH*, March 26, 1908, 15. R. W. Munson, *UCR*, June 24, 1907, 3-4.

³² G. A. Wantzlick, "Sumatra," *RH*, June 25, 1908, 17. E. H. Gates, "Our Work in Sumatra," *RH*, March 26, 1908, 15.

³³ Mills, *UCR*, August 24, 1908, 4.

³⁴ Gates, *UCR*, October 1, 1901, 3; Munson, *RH*, September 2, 1902, 16.

Munson family to operate a small school at Padang.³⁵ In addition of this effort, Tay involved in medical work when Marcelia Parker, a new medical missionary, came to help the Munsons. It seems, Parker taught him how to do a simple treatment to the sick as she said that in a day she handled thirteen patients and Tay did five.³⁶ Timothius, another name of Tay Hong Siang, has accepted Christ and learned how to evangelize others from Munson and Parker. He was trained not just in delivering the Bible lessons but also as teacher and medical missionary.

Ezekiel, one of the first Bataks baptisms, as the result of Immanuel's effort, in 1908 wrote his testimony about his experience once he returned to his homeland to continue the work that has been laid by Immanuel. He said that many of his relatives and friends offered him tobacco but he refused because it was not good for health. He attempted to share the truth and needed some more books to be given because the ones that he brought were not enough. He said "They want to look too, and to read, and keep that book." ³⁷ Through the literature, he desired to share the teaching and lifestyle of Adventist to them, the thing that he has learned from Adventist school at Singapore.

The local people in Sumatera have been trained to love the truth and how it should be manifested in their daily life. Hence, even though they were not baptized yet but they have been involved in the service of God. It needed some time before baptism in order the seed of the gospel grew in their lives. Immanuel, even though he has not been baptized yet but he did not look for upgrading himself but he asked his friends to join him going to Singapore in order there would be more people, in addition of himself, became disciples of Christ and as medium to win many people.

Discipleship in Java

Discipleship in Java actually had more challenges than in Sumatera. There was no outstanding local person like Tay Hong Siang and Immanuel Siregar in Java. However, the work was working well since the coming of more missionaries. These missionaries had to train the local members personally. It can be seen by the work of Petra Tunheim and Anna Nordstrom, two women workers at Surabaya, Java. Tunheim taught several families, one of them has received the truth. Nordstrom said, "We have had prayer with them a few times, and had the privilege of seeing them kneel for the first time in their lives before the throne of grace." In this meeting, there were six other persons who had received the truth, they were as the result of the personal contact of those who has accepted the message. As the result of their discipleship, Tunheim reported that a young Chinese man was willing to study more about the Gospel in Adventist school at Singapore "where he may become an efficient worker in this great cause" while the other Chinese young widow "has given up her tea, coffea, tobacco, meat, and some other things, and is trying to live as we do."

³⁵ R. W. Munson, *RH*, September 2, 1902, 16.

³⁶ Marcelia A. Walker, "Sumatra," RH, June 2, 1903, 17.

³⁷ "Letter from Ezekiel Of Batakland," UCR, August 30, 1909, 3.

³⁸ A. Nordstrom, "A letter from Java," UCR, March 23, 1908, 4-5.

³⁹ Petra Tunheim, "Java Mission," UCR, September 7, 1908, 24-25.

While it was hard to get local people to be a disciple of Christ, there was an invitation to come to Central Java in 1908. Miss Jansz, the one who invited Adventist missionaries to her small community, wanted to know more about the Advent message. At her place, there were twenty five to thirty persons who have been keeping the Sabbath. Tunheim was in Central Java for four months and she "had opportunity to place some present truth to them." Initially, the church was hesitating to take over the work of Miss Jansz because "she was not in harmony with some of our points of doctrine, it was thought best not to take it over." However, a decision was made in the workers meeting in October 1908 to send Tunheim at the colony of Jansz. After several month Tunheim was working in her place, Jansz said to Tunheim after a dinner, "you are in charge now; I have told the people that this is the last day I have charge." This submitting was as the result of the fervent discipleship of Tunheim to Jansz.

The discipleship in Java was more on the foreigners especially on Chinese and Dutch. However, there was a discipleship to the Javanese. This effort was done to a group at Jansz colony where she has acquainted with the local people for years. Apparently, the most baptisms in 1909 of Java field came from her colony.

Conclusion

Even though Indonesia is known as a country with largest Muslim population in the world, the first Adventist message came in Sumatera and Java. These two areas were in two of strictest Muslim cities, Padang and Surabaya. Since there was a regulation to prohibit evangelical effort to the majority, it was hard for missionaries to evangelize the native, however, the local people after they were trained such as Tay, Immanuel and Ezekiel; showing their effectiveness to share the adventist message to their tribes and relatives.

There were few challenges that they faced while doing the discipleship. First of all, most of all new believers depended heavily on missionaries for discipleship. At this stage, the growing was so slow and if the missionary returned, the discipleship process in the church almost ceased. The other challenge that the church faced in doing discipleship was culture and language. The first missionaries came from abroad. Except Munson, all missionaries spent much time to learn the local language and culture. It made the process of discipleship did not go efficiently, especially, when they taught the message.

The other challenge in doing discipleship was social circumstances. Often time, family, relative, friends and government regulations prohibited the foreign missionaries to evangelize the local people, these missionaries only could share printed material. Most of these people only could read Arabic letters.

In spite of facing many difficulties, the missionaries found their way to win some people to Christ, especially in 1909. The overall membership in Indonesia increased five hundred

⁴⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² J. E. Fulton, "Java Council Meeting," UCR, January 4, 1909, 2.

⁴³ P. Tunheim, "Back to Pagoengsen," UCR, February 15, 1909, 3.

percent and especially in Java was more than ten times compared with the previous year. Discipleship was one of the crucial factors for this success. The first strength element in the discipleship was the persistent and consistent support of organization in delivering missionaries even though for several years both mission fields did not show any promising number of baptism. Especially in Java, during 1909, Australia Union Conference consistently sent missionaries. There were 10 laborers in Indonesia⁴⁴ even though since the first missionary came in 1906, the membership was only about 4 to 6. Second aspect of discipleship's strength in Indonesia was patience in waiting for the growth. The missionaries did not urge the local people to be baptized only because of their acceptance of Sabbath. Cases of Tay Hong Siang, Immanuel Siregar, Ezekiel and Jansz' colony showed that the missionaries could wait until they were ready to be baptized. It meant that as addition of the acceptance of the Adventist message, "bearing fruit" was important before the candidate was baptized.

The third strength element in the discipleship was eagerness and unceasing effort at the part of the evangelists. This was character that missionaries showed while they were doing discipleship to the locals through giving Bible lessons and training on how to be a witness for others. They were not idle or passive in doing the discipleship. The fourth strength element of the discipleship during the first decade of adventist message in Indonesia was that the discipleship process did not stop while the candidates of baptism were baptized. This effort still continued by studying the Bible while the new baptisms actively involved to reach the non-believers.

Seventh-day Adventist Church in Indonesia nowadays may learn from the weaknesses and the strengths of the missionaries and the early pioneers. The church should not share the same failure and need to avoid the similar mistakes. Instead, cultivating the strengths will give this denomination better result to fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

⁴⁴ H. E. Rogers, *Statistical Report of Seventh-day Adventist Conferences, Missions, and Institutions* (Takoma Park, Washington D. C: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, 1909), 8.

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