

# Jesus *Sophia-Ina Pade* in the Light of the Prologue of John 1:1-18: Constructing Wisdom Christology from the Florenese Perspective

oleh Kristoforus Bala\* – Malang

---

## Abstract:

Warta iman tentang Yesus, Sabda Allah yang menjelma, seperti yang diwahyukan dalam prolog Injil Yohanes harus ditafsirkan, dimengerti dan dihayati oleh umat dalam konteks kebudayaannya. Selama ini tafsiran terhadap prolog Injil Yohanes lebih banyak menggunakan pemikiran filosofis Yunani. Penjelasan spekulatif-abstrak tentang "logos" atau "Sabda" tidak cocok dengan alam pemikiran orang Flores. Para ahli Kitab Suci juga berpendapat bahwa prolog Yohanes memiliki motif dan nuansa kebijaksanaan, karena itu harus ditafsirkan dalam terang kitab-kitab Kebijaksanaan. Dari perspektif ini Yesus disebut *Sophia* atau Kebijaksanaan. Dalam Kitab Suci Perjanjian Lama, *Sophia* selalu ditampilkan dalam *image* seorang perempuan. Sering kali *Sophia* digambarkan dengan simbol-simbol dari alam, karena tradisi kebijaksanaan terbentuk dalam kebudayaan agraris. *Image* Yesus sebagai *Sophia* lebih cocok dengan kebudayaan agraris dan pemikiran religius-kosmis orang Flores. Dalam konsep soteriologi-kosmis orang Flores, *Ina Pade* dipandang sebagai *liberatrix*. Ada paralelisme antara Yesus *Sophia* dan *Ina Pade* sebagai personifikasi kebijaksanaan. Dari proses dialog antara kebenaran Injil dan nilai kultural setempat diharapkan bisa dihasilkan sebuah *Wisdom Christology* yang kontekstual. Selain itu Kristologi Kebijaksanaan yang kontekstual dapat membantu mendewasakan iman, harapan dan kasih umat kepada Yesus, Sang *Sophia* Ilahi.

**Keywords:** Wisdom, Jesus Sophia, Florenese's cultural context, Ina Pade, contextual Wisdom Christology.

## 1. Introduction

Faith in Jesus was expressed by first disciples and especially by evangelists through many images or metaphors. In the prologue of John 1:1-18, the author employed the term 'logos' or 'word' to talk about Jesus. For the author, Jesus is the incarnate Word of God. Jesus reveals and conceals the mystery of God and His glory. In the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Word of

---

\* Penulis adalah anggota staf pembina di Seminari Tinggi SVD Surya Wacana, Malang; anggota staf Jurnal Perspektif.

God, people could encounter God. The image of Jesus as the Word of God emerged from the cultural context of the author of the Gospel. Many biblical scholars believe that the author of the prologue was influenced by Greek philosophy. The approach to the prologue of John has become more and more philosophical. It will become more problematic and difficult when the prologue of John has to be interpreted or understood by people from different cultural backgrounds who do not share the same philosophical understanding with that of Greek. Applying the philosophical approach to the prologue in different cultural settings will only create distance, alienation and misunderstanding for the readers or interpreters.

However, there is another lens that we can use to read and interpret the prologue, namely by using the Jewish Old Testament wisdom literature. The prologue must be read in the context of Jewish understanding of the word/wisdom of God and not in the context of Greek philosophy. Therefore, it is reasonable to ask the following questions. What is the prologue of the fourth Gospel? Where did it come from? Responding to the above questions, Rudolf Bultmann (1971:14) contends: "In its form the prologue of the fourth Gospel is a piece of cultic-liturgical poetry, oscillating between the language of revelation and confession." The prologue is a hymn used by Jewish Christians in their cultic or liturgical worship.

There have been many speculations on the origin of the prologue. Thomas H. Thobin (1990:253), for example, insists that the prologue is "rooted in the Jewish wisdom tradition or perhaps more accurately in the tradition of Jewish wisdom speculation." He concludes that Philo of Alexandria and the author of the prologue share the common tradition. James Dunn (1980:163-212) in his study contends that the prologue of John is influenced by wisdom literature of the Old Testament and particularly intertestamental literature (see also Brown, 1966:519-524). Alongside Dunn, Martin Scott (1992:37-43) insists that the development in speech about wisdom or *Sophia* is originated from the fertility cult prevalent in ancient Near East. For Scott, the agricultural context of the people at that time led people to image God as male and female who procreated humanity and bestowed blessing of fertility. Wisdom was portrayed as a lady or a goddess of agriculture who created the world and provided life. The image of wisdom then permeated the Jewish literature, particularly the Old Testament wisdom literature and the New Testament writings. Raymond Brown (1966:519-524) also contends that it is in the context of Semitic background of wisdom tradition, not in Greek philosophical framework, that the prologue of John should be understood and interpreted. For there is parallelism between the prologue of John and wisdom literature of the Old Testament in

terms of its poetic form and elements ascribed to both Wisdom and the Word (see also Witherington III, 1995:vii).

This paper goes through three main parts. In the first part, I will attempt to exegete the prologue of John by situating it in the context of the Old Testament wisdom literature. This approach to the prologue can open up new ways of talking about God and Jesus Christ. The images or symbols are not transported from outside the text, but already embedded in the text itself.

In the second part, I attempt to see how Florenese, people in East Indonesia, can interpret and understand the prologue in their own cultural context. The following questions need to be pondered and answered: Can Florenese interpret the prologue of John in their own cultural context? Should they interpret and understand the prologue employing Greek philosophical framework? Or, do they have the right to interpret, understand and believe in Jesus according to their own philosophical understanding and religious experiences? The prologue of John will remain alien to the local people if it is still preached or understood in Greek's philosophical framework.

In the third part, I propose a need for contextual Christology. Here, I take into account ideas of feminist theologians such as Elizabeth Johnson and some Asian feminist theologians. It is my hope that by situating and interpreting the prologue of John in the cultural context of the local people, they can understand and believe in Jesus as the incarnate Wisdom of God.

## **2. Exegesis of the Prologue of John 1:1-18**

### **2.1 The coexistence of the Word with God (John 1:1-2)**

*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God* (New American Bible, St. Joseph Edition).

The hymn begins with the words 'in the beginning.' These words allude to the beginning of creation in Genesis story. In the story of creation, the Word of God is an active and creative agent in the cosmos. In the context of the prologue of John, Craig A. Evens (1993:71-79) insists that even though the terms allude to Genesis story, they should be seen or understood in the context of wisdom literature. In wisdom literature it is said that Wisdom or Sophia was with God in the beginning of God's creation. We read: "The Lord begot me, the first born of his ways, the prodigies of long ago" (Prov 8:22). She was 'poured forth' as the first born before the earth (v. 23). The terms 'begot' and 'poured forth' evoke the feminine image of God. Proverbs portrays Sophia as a daughter whose divine origin is Yahweh. As the "Father and Mother of Wisdom,

Yahweh procreated her [Wisdom, sic.] as the first born of creation.” (Perdue, 1994:90).

The idea of the preexistence of Wisdom with God can also be found in the book of Sirach. We read: “Before all things else Wisdom was created” (Sir 1:4). In Solomon’s prayer it clearly reflects the notion of the preexistence of Wisdom. Solomon believes that Wisdom is with God, knows of God’s works, and was present with God when God created the world (Prov 9:9). The author of the book of Proverbs portrays Wisdom as co-architect or co-builder of the world (Prov 9:30). Unlike logos, Wisdom was God’s delight day by day, playing as a joyful daughter before Yahweh and in the surface of earth.

In the context of wisdom tradition, Wisdom was with God and was the daughter of God. However, Raymond Brown (1966:24) warns us that the prologue does not indicate the interest in the Trinitarian procession. What is important in the prologue, in his opinion, is not about the relationship in Godhead, but God’s relationship to us and the world.

In my opinion, the relationship in Godhead, especially between God and Wisdom, is very important and it serves as a good paradigm for human relationship. From all these parallelism between the prologue of John and the Old Testament wisdom literature, it can be said that Jesus is the Wisdom of God. The divinity of Jesus is expressed in metaphorical terms such as ‘begotten’ or ‘poured forth’. Jesus is the expression of God’s very self. He is the living wisdom, the incarnated Sophia of God.

## 2.2 The role of the Word (vv.3-5)

*All things came to be through him and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.*

The second strophe of the prologue has its parallelism with Proverbs 3:19-20. It says that Wisdom of God founded the earth and by understanding God established the heaven. Wisdom, like *logos*, has the power in “creating and ordering the world and in governing its life producing activities.” (Perdue, 1994:82). This creative energy and act of Wisdom is very essential and fundamental that without her, nothing can exist. She is portrayed as the *co-architect* with God. ‘Then I was beside Him as His Craftsman’ (Prov. 8:30). She is the mind of God through and with her God expresses God’s creative act. Wisdom, like logos, does not only create the world, but also gives life to humanity and creation. In Prov. 3:16-18 Wisdom is personified as a “*goddess*” who provides not only long life but honor and wealth as well. She is depicted as “tree of life”

for those who hold her; joy and happiness for those who embrace her. Proverbs 3:5 states that those who search for her will find true life. Sirach 4:12 says that one who loves Wisdom, loves life. The term 'life' here, should be understood in a broader sense of the word. It denotes not only physical life, but also eternal life (see Wisdom 8:13). Wisdom does not only provide life, but she shares her life with us as well. In the Gospel of John, life denotes some kind of "sharing in the being of God." (Kirk & Obach, 1981:15). Jesus, the incarnated Word of God, shares His own life with humanity. He refers to himself as the life (see Bread and Life Discourse in John 6:22-59; the Vine and Branches in John 15:1-17).

The term 'life' always comes together with the term 'light' in Jewish Scripture (Ps 36:9; 119:105). Like the Word, Wisdom is identified with light. 'She is the refulgent of eternal light' (Wis 7:26). In the following verses 7:29-30 it is said that compared to the sun and the constellation of stars, Wisdom/Sophia is far more superior. She is called the victorious one because she prevails over darkness or evil. Martin Scott (1992:99) contends: "The theme of light must be connected to the aforementioned tradition of Sophia as the first of God's creation, which according to Genesis story was light." In Genesis story, it is said that the primordial light overcomes darkness and evil. In the context of the prologue, the contrast between light and darkness alludes to Jesus' ministry. Jesus reveals goodness, love and life of God in the midst of human suffering and oppositions. His passion on the cross is already anticipated in the prologue vv.3-5. Jesus' suffering and death are seen as manifestation of His victory and glory (Senior, 1991:34-38).

*Vv.6-9 a man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through Him. He was not the light, but came to testify the light. The true light which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world (NAB)*

Many biblical scholars agree that these verses are transitional or parenthesis. They do not belong to the hymnic form. However, the author still indicates the continuation of the theme of light from the previous verses (vv. 4, 5). The role of John the Baptist is distinct, that is to testify to Jesus as the true light of the world. The goal of John's testimony is that all may believe in Jesus. The authority of John's mission is to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God.

### **2.3 The Word in the world (vv.10-12b)**

*He was in the world and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept*

*him. But those who accept him he gave power to become children of God to those who believe in his name.*

This part deals with the ministry of Jesus in the world (Brown, 1966:20-30). Jesus is depicted as the embodiment of light. He came to the world to enlighten the world and to reveal the invisible God to humanity. However, Jesus found rejection from his own people. The same description is ascribed to Sophia/Wisdom. Wisdom came down to world which was and still is her own creative works. Sophia/Wisdom was wandering and seeking for a resting place (Sir 24:6-7). And finally she found a resting place in Zion and Jerusalem (Sir 24:10). For Raymond Brown (1966:30), verse 10 reflects Johannine theology that regards Jesus as the 'personified Wisdom' or 'personified Sophia'.

Like logos, the presence of Wisdom in the world brings about two reactions from the people: rejection and acceptance. Proverbs 1:20-33 depicts rejection of Wisdom's invitations by her own people. She is wandering around the city and inviting people to come to learn about and from her. The author of Baruch clearly says that Israel has forsaken the fountain of Wisdom (Bar 3:12). The following chapter (Bar 4:1) contains an invitation for Jacob/Israel to come to receive Wisdom. For those who receive and believe in Wisdom will become friends of God (Wis 7:27). In the context of the prologue 1:12-13, the mission of logos or word is identical with the one of wisdom. Through Wisdom/Word, God "brings to pass an amelioration of relationship so that humanity attains an intimate and filial relationship with God (and in) the Godhead." (Ford, 1997:113). The filial relationship is based on love and faith in Jesus as the incarnate Sophia/ wisdom of God.

#### **2.4 The incarnation of the Word (vv. 14 & 16)**

*V 14: and the Word becomes flesh and made his dwelling among us and we saw his glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.*

*V 16: From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace (NAB).*

Verse 14 is the climax of the prologue, because it summarizes the history of salvation. For Raymond Brown (1966:30) these two verses give vital expression of becoming children of God and sharers in the fullness of God's only Son. The ultimate goal of the Jesus' coming to the world is to make us children of God and partakers in His divinity and glory. In Prov 9:1-6 Wisdom is personified as a goddess who builds up her temple and inaugurates it with a great banquet. All are invited to participate in the festival. Those who wish to have abundant life are invited to come and learn from her. Thus by building up her temple and dwelling among her own people Israel (Sir 24:8), Wisdom mani-

feats God's glory in the world. For Wisdom herself is the "pure effusion of God's glory" (Wis 7:25). She is the embodiment of God's glory. In Jewish tradition, Wisdom reveals and gives God's glory as well to those who follow her (Wis 10:14) and even guards them with her glory (Wis 9:11). In the prologue of John, Jesus is portrayed as the giver of glory and truth. The fullness of glory and truth is also characteristic of Wisdom. The author of the book of Sirach pictures Wisdom as the tree of life whose branches are branches of glory and grace (Sir 24:6).

The theological symbolism of tent or temple in Jewish tradition is nothing other than the place of God's revelation (Ex 33:9; 40:34). For John, the evangelist, the person of Jesus and his humanity is the new temple where people can encounter God. As the personified Wisdom of God, Jesus is the locus of encountering God and experiencing God's glory. God's glory is manifested in the person of Jesus especially in his life, ministry, death, resurrection and his ascension to God (Kirk & Obach, 1981:23).

John 1:15 is an insertion which presents the role of John the Baptist to testify to the preexistence of Jesus and his coming into the world. Here John is contrasted with Jesus. Jesus existed before John and is greater than John. John 1:16 emphasizes the sharing in God's glory and grace because of the coming and dwelling of Jesus among us. But again, the sharing in God's glory and grace is given only to those who really believe in Jesus. John 1:17 reemphasizes v 14 that Jesus Christ who became flesh is the One through whom God blesses us with grace and glory. Like Logos, Wisdom blesses her followers with life and favor (Prov 8:35). The author of the prologue mentions about law or Torah given to Moses. In Jewish literature, Torah is regarded as the dwelling place and embodiment of Wisdom. The author of the book of Baruch portrays Sophia/ Wisdom as the book of precepts of God; the law that endures forever (Bar 4:1). The embodiment of Wisdom in the book of Torah also can be found in its parallelism in Sirach 24:22.

The author of the prologue of John presents at least two significant elements: the polemic against Moses and Torah and the presentation of Jesus as wisdom or as the revealer of God (Carter, 1990:47). The synagogue tradition claims that Torah is the embodiment of the wisdom of God; on the contrary, Johannine community believes that Jesus is the true and the fullest embodiment of Wisdom. He is the fulfillment of God's grace and truth; He is the living Wisdom of God.

John 1:18 shows the superiority of Jesus to Moses by underlining the preexistence of Jesus in verses 1-2. In wisdom literature, Wisdom was beside God (Prov 8:30) and she was playing before God's throne. Wisdom reveals

God in the world. The author of the prologue emphasizes the preexistence of Jesus as the uncreated Wisdom and the role of Jesus as the revealer of God, the Highest Wisdom.

By reading and interpreting the prologue in the context of wisdom tradition of the Old Testament one can see the influence of wisdom tradition in formation of the prologue and the whole body of the fourth Gospel. It also offers us new images of Jesus or a new way of talking about Jesus. Looking at the parallelism that exists between the prologue and wisdom literature of the OT, one cannot but understand and conclude that "Jesus Christ is none other than Jesus Sophia incarnate." (Scott, 1992:170).

### **3. Cultural Context of Flores**

In this part I shortly describe the cultural context of Flores as the locus to interpret or to see Jesus through their own eyes. For that purpose I will present their religious and cosmic worldview, the myth of Ina Pade and then I will point out parallelism between the myth of Ina Pade and the image of Jesus as Sophia as embedded in the prologue.

#### **3.1 Religious and cosmic worldview**

Like other Asians, Florenese in East Indonesia believe that all created realities are relational because they were created by the same creator. In their religious imagination, they talk about and portray the creator of heaven and earth in the figure or image of divine Primordial Parents: Father and Mother. In my own local language God, the creator is invoked by the name *Ama Lera Wulan Ina Tana Ekan*. Etymologically it means the Father of the sun and moon and the Mother of earth and the world beyond. Their image of the Male-and-Female God or the Parental image of God is very inclusive. For them, the male and female image of God expresses the idea of equality, inclusivity, harmony and balance in the Godhead. The inclusive image of God does not mean that there is duality in the Godhead, but there is only one God. It is similar to the concept of *yin* and *yang* in Chinese philosophy that conveys the notion of totality or wholeness. Therefore, the image of God must be interpreted and understood in the light of the local people's religious symbolism and imagination.

The inclusive image of God permeates not only their religiosity, but also their understanding of humanity and cosmos. The local people believe that humanity is reflection of the divine Primordial Parent. Thus there are women

and men in the world. All created realities reflect the image and qualities of the creator. They use familial terms to name created realities. For example, there are some terms for stones: *wat inan* (mother stone), *wat aman* (father stone), *wat aneken* (child stone). Seeing the way they name created realities, one can see local people's notion of the cosmos as one living reality. The whole world is like a family. They believe that everything in the world is interrelated and interdependent. All creation should regard each other as brothers and sisters, for they are from the same origin, i.e., God, the Father and the Mother. As there is equality, inclusivity and harmony in the Godhead: father and mother; or male and female, so there must be equality, inclusivity and harmony in humanity, in the world, or in the whole cosmos. The inclusive image of God becomes the paradigm of all relationships.

### 3.2 Myth of *Ina Pade*

One way to enter into religious imagination of the local people is through myth. Myth is part of a culture. Through myth people give meaning to their lives, experiences, nature and God. Myth of *Ina Pade* tells about a virgin who is believed to be the origin of food and food plants. The myth emerged from agricultural context of the local people. It is believed that *Ina Pade* is the personification of God, the divine Primordial Parents. The myth is not just a story, but it is a living memory of the community that is enacted, retold and celebrated in the context of cultic worship (Kelen & Marang, 2001:94-98). There is no separation between everyday lives and worship. Thus cultic worship is, therefore, celebration of life.

There are many different versions and titles of the myth of *Ina Pade* according to the places where it is narrated. For example, some call it *Tonu Wuyo*, *Nogo Gunung*, *Ema Hingi*, *Limun Tapo Koleng Moda* (Kelen & Marang 2001:94). In spite of their differences, they maintain the same motif. The story is as the following. *In illo tempore*, *Ina Pade* came into the world. She was born as a human being and had seven brothers. She grew up normally like other human beings. She possessed wisdom and knowledge. During her life she taught people art and craft, moral values and agriculture. Once there was no rain in the world for a long period of time. All people and animals were dying because of a severe drought. No more seeds to be sown. The sun and moon darkened for a long time. Facing all these, *Ina Pade* took the initiative to offer herself as sacrifice to God, *Ama Lera Wulan Ina Tana Ekan*. Her body was cut into pieces by her own brothers. The pieces of her cut body were scattered throughout her brother's farm. A few days later, her body was transformed into various food plants, such as corn, paddy, etc. Rain began to come

down to water the earth and food plants. Sun and moon began to shine again. No more death on earth. The life in the world came back to normal again. People began to experience harmony in the cosmos. They had abundant food to sustain their lives.

The myth evokes the meaning of cosmic liberation brought by *Ina Pade*. The liberatrix was a woman who freely offered herself for the salvation of all people and the world. She was and is the principal of order or harmony and is the life provider. She was and is the embodiment of *Ama Lera Wulan Ina Tana Ekan*, God the Father and the Mother. She came into the world and offered herself so that the world may live. She was the teacher of wisdom and knowledge (art, craft, moral values and agriculture). The evil and darkness of the world could not overcome her. She had the power to change and transform death and suffering into a new life. Life, not death and suffering, will last. *Ina Pade* offered her body and wisdom as the food of life for humanity and the whole world. She was the reconciler of the whole cosmos.

### 3.3 Parallelism: Jesus Sophia and *Ina Pade*

There is parallelism between Jesus as the incarnate Wisdom of God in the prologue and *Ina Pade* in the myth of the local people. The prologue of John has been influenced by wisdom literature of the Old Testament. As indicated above that wisdom tradition was formed in and emerged out of the agricultural context of Jewish people. Both Israelites who lived in the period of formation of wisdom literature and Florenese who live in East Indonesia have similar agricultural context. Therefore, their religious practices and spiritual imagination are pretty much influenced by their agricultural background and way of life.

In the Bible, Wisdom is very often depicted as a lady or a woman. The feminine image of wisdom or Sophia resembles with that one of the local people, i.e., *Ina Pade*, the Lady Wisdom. She was the incarnated wisdom of God. Both the wisdom tradition and the local tradition employ images that are taken from natural world such as, tree of life, light, etc to depict wisdom. The way in which the wisdom literature uses natural symbolism in depicting Wisdom is very adequate and apt to the local people's religious imagination and experiences.

Both Jesus and *Ina Pade* have divine origin. Jesus has Yahweh, whom he called "Abba", "Father" as his origin. *Ina Pade* has *Ama Lera Wulan Ina Tana Ekan* (God the Father of the sun and moon and the God the Mother earth) as her divine origin. Like Jesus, *Ina Pade* came into the world and lived among her people. The ultimate mission of both Jesus and *Ina Pade* was to teach people how to live a good human life.

Both Jesus and *Ina Pade* had to face oppositions, suffering, evil and tragic death from their own people. They both offered themselves for liberation and salvation of the world. Like Jesus, *Ina Pade* is the life provider. Both of them are regarded as the food of life or the source of life. Those who eat the food of life have life in abundance.

#### 4. A Contextual Wisdom Christology

Modern theologians suggest that a good Theology or Christology must begin with human experiences that are pondered and reflected in the light of the Gospel and Christian tradition. The prevalent use of the Gospel as liberating power for the oppressed indicates the perennial truth of the Word of God. It evokes meaning, gives hope and inspiration for humanity, especially the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized.

In doing interpretation of the Gospel message one also must take into account the cultural context of the people. Dialogue between the Good News and the local culture is imperative and necessary. Many feminist theologians both in the U.S.A. and in Indonesia place the Gospel and culture in a mutual critique and dialogue. They use Bible, Christian tradition, their experiences and cultural values as sources of theologizing.

Modern biblical and theological scholars suggest that in doing hermeneutic and theologizing, one must seriously take into account the importance of local culture. Kwok Pui-lan (1995:12-16) contends that there must be a critical dialogue between Gospel and culture of the people. She coins the term “dialogical imagination”. Pui-lan goes on to say that in dialogue there should be freedom and openness between the biblical tradition and the cultural elements such as, myths, folklores, stories, history of the people. Pui-lan suggests that the norm in biblical interpretation in the context of Asia is the “dialogical model of truth”. It means that the truth of the Gospel and the truth of the culture should be mutually respected and shared. She writes:

In the so called non-Christian world, we tell our sisters and brothers the biblical story that gives us inspiration for hope and liberation. But it must be told with open invitation: What treasures have you to share? (Pui-lan, 1995:19).

##### 4.1 The need of an inclusive image of God

The emerging of feminist theology in the U.S.A., Europe and Asia has brought about great impacts on the understanding of God and Jesus, humanity and cosmos. Feminist theology has critically questioned unjust patriarchal struc-

tures and androcentric Theology and Christology. The androcentric image of God was created and introduced by western missionaries and scholars. Prior to the coming of Christianity, the local people already had an inclusive image of God. For a long time, they have lived in a double way of life, because on the one hand, they were taught that their cosmic religion was and is evil. On the other hand, they had to accept an exclusive image of God, i.e., male image of God which is not part of their religious symbolism and experiences. I think that it is imperative to retrieve and interpret cultural values of the people and put them into dialogue with biblical and Christian tradition.

The inclusive image of God proposed by the local people and feminist theologians has urged us to talk about an inclusive image of God. Elizabeth Johnson (1994:54-56) insists that we have to go beyond androcentrism and start talking about an "equivalent image of God Male and Female." The speech of equivalent image of God Male and Female is based on our belief that we human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. Thus it is an aberration when the image of God is exclusively manipulated and idolized by androcentric interpretation. The androcentric image of God has been regarded as the only true way of talking about God. Elizabeth Johnson (1994:56) poignantly writes:

The mystery of God transcends all images but can be spoken about equally well and poorly in concepts taken from male and female reality... Only if the full reality of women as well as men enters into the symbolization of God along with symbols from the natural world, can the idolatrous fixation on one image be broken and the truth of the mystery of God, in tandem with liberation of all human beings and the whole earth, emerge for our time.

Asian women theologians argue that androcentric theology and Christology do alienate people from their experiences and religious imagination. Marianne Katoppo (1994:247), an Indonesian feminist theologian, insists that Christian Trinitarian theology which is very androcentric does not fit into people's experiences. She writes:

*Forcing people to relate to an all-male trinity is oppression. In the context of Asian cosmic religion and meta-cosmic soteriologies, it is also ridiculous (1994:247).*

In the cosmic religious context like that of East Indonesia, the inclusive image of God, Male and Female, or Father and Mother counteracts with Christianity's androcentric image. If theology and Christology do not expand and retrieve images of God and Jesus Christ that are already embedded in the Bible and its tradition and do not take into account culture of the people, Chris-

tian faith will still become foreign practice for the local people. Christianity will not take root in the hearts of the local people. Moreover, Christianity will not have power to transform human life and society.

The social context of Indonesia which tends to be more communal oriented, an image of God that might be more proper is the image of God as community. Chung Hyun Kyung (1994:253) insists that Asian women theologians believe that the image of God as community will empower and liberate them from any manipulation of power and individualism. The model of God as community presupposes that in Godhead there must be an equal relationship. The image of God must become a paradigm of all human relationships. Both the cultural and religious values of the local people and biblical tradition of Christianity offer us possibility or new ways of talking and re-imagining God in a more equal and inclusive way.

The inclusive image of God is interrelated with the image of Jesus. In other words, a good Christology requires a good Theology. For me, the myth of *Ina Pade* provides a basis for understanding of Jesus as the incarnate Wisdom /Sophia of God. To portray Jesus as wisdom, Sophia or *Ina Pade* of God will really fit into the local people's religious imagination and experiences.

#### **4.2 Jesus Sophia/*Ina Pade*: the Suffering One and the Liberator**

An inclusive image of God leads us to construct an inclusive and contextual image of Jesus. One aspect of contextual Christology that is worth noting here is the image of Jesus as the suffering Sophia/*Ina Pade* and the liberator. The prologue of John already anticipates the passion of Jesus Sophia in the metaphor of darkness and light opposition. The rejection of his enemies culminates in Jesus' death on the cross. On this Elizabeth A. Johnson (1994:159) writes: "The cross in all its dimensions, violence, suffering, love, is the parable that enacts Sophia-God's participation in the suffering of the world." Sophia God is one with human beings. Sophia suffers with and for humanity and the whole cosmos.

The myth of *Ina Pade* also portrays the suffering of the innocent. It can be said that destruction of the body of *Ina Pade* is nothing other than her participation in the suffering of the people and the whole cosmos. She liberates human beings and the world by offering herself. Both narratives, however, can be abused to justify the unjust practices against women, the marginalized and the poor. Therefore, a true hermeneutic is needed for establishing a just and livable human community.

The image of the suffering Jesus and the suffering *Ina Pade* reflect the suffering people and the suffering cosmos. What really gives hope and power for liberation and equality is the fact that God really cares for human beings and the whole world. Both the prólogue and the myth of *Ina Pade* affirm this: that God is the God of life. God, in and through Jesus the incarnated Wisdom, suffers for and with the people; and that the same God will liberate all people from oppression, suffering and death. God empowers the powerless and the hopeless, the poor and the marginalized so that they are able to liberate and transform their society and the whole world. In the eyes of Florenese, Jesus plays the role of *Ina Pade*, the Liberatrix. In another words, *Ina Pade* serves as an *intrumentum* or a form of *preparatio evangelica* for a better understanding of Jesus, the incarnated Sophia of God.

#### 4.3 Jesus Sophia/*Ina Pade*: the food of life

Jesus Sophia gives life to those who believe in Him. He gives people his own body and blood as food and drink. Jesus says to His disciples: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you do not life within you" (John 6:53). Wisdom/Sophia invite her followers saying: "Come to me all you that yearn for me and be filled with my fruits" (Sir 24:18). Jesus identifies Himself with Sophia and with agricultural symbols such as, bread, wine, and delighted fruits. The wisdom tradition or wisdom motif that permeates the image of Jesus in the prologue of John is similar to the image of *Ina Pade*, the Lady Wisdom who gives herself as the food of life for the people. Corn and rice symbolize the body of *Ina Pade*, the *redemptrix*. To consume corn and rice communally and spiritually is attain true life.

For the local people, Jesus can be called *Ina Pade* / Lady Wisdom who liberates them from poverty, hunger and death. Jesus Sophia/*Ina Pade* continues offering himself as the food of life every time we celebrate the Eucharist. By consuming the body and the blood of Jesus one is united with and transformed by Jesus. The body and blood of Jesus has power to transform us from death to a new life.

### 5. Conclusion

The prologue of John was influenced by wisdom tradition both in its formation and its depiction of Jesus Christ. Sophia/Wisdom was with God before creation as a master builder. Sophia was co-creator with God; through and in Sophia all things were created. Sophia incarnated in the person of Jesus and

lived among his own people. Jesus Sophia's role was to reveal God and God's glory and to call all people to become children of God. In and through Jesus, the incarnate Sophia of God, new relationship between God and humanity was and is established. New life is always given to those who believe in Jesus, the incarnate Sophia of God.

The image of Jesus as the incarnate Sophia of God in the prologue of John finds its parallelism in the myth of *Ina Pade* and it fits in the cosmic, religious imagination of the local people. Jesus can be more easily accepted and understood by the local people, if we use images that are more familiar to their cultural and cosmic tradition, rather than employing foreign images or abstract philosophy.

Their myth and religiosity challenge the androcentric image of God and Jesus, and offer us possibility of talking and imaging Jesus and God in a more just, inclusive and equal way. A more just and equal images of Jesus and God can give rise to the possibility of renewal of life both at the level of individuals and community. Jesus Sophia and *Ina Pade* can become sources of inspiration for liberation of the oppressed and the marginalized. In the cultural context of Florenese in East Indonesia, Jesus can be called *Ina Pade* of life and liberation. A good contextual wisdom Christology can contribute to the betterment and development of people's faith. To achieve that goal there should be a genuine and constructive dialogue between Gospel and the local culture. A responsible hermeneutic of both traditions is also necessary and imperative.

\* \* \* \* \*

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brown, Raymond E. (1966), *the Gospel of John I-XII*, Abza, New York: Doubleday.
- Bultmann, Rudolf (1971), *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Carter, Warren (1990), "The Prologue and John's Gospel: Function, Symbol and Definitive Word," *JSNT*, p. 9 47.
- D.G., Dunn James (1980), *Christology in the Making a New Testament Inquiry Into the Origin of the Doctrine of Incarnation*, Philadelphia: Westminster.

- Evans, Craig A. (1993), *Word and Glory on the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue*, Sheffield, England: JSOT.
- Ford J., Massyngbaerde (1997), *Redeemer-Friend and Mother: Salvation in Antiquity and in the Gospel of John*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.
- Johnson, Elizabeth A. (1994), *She Who Is New*, New York: Crossroad.
- Katoppo, Marianne (1994), "The Concept of God and the Spirit from the Feminist Perspective" in Ursula King (ed.), *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, Maryknoll: Orbis, p. 247.
- Kelen, Sermada Donatus & Marang, Placidus Nuba (2011), "Tradisi Lisan Lamaholot" in Beny Phang & Valentinus (eds.), *Minum Dari Sumber Sendiri: Dari Alam Menuju Tuhan*, Malang: STFT Widya Sasana.
- Kirk, Albert & Obach, Robert E. (1981), *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Ramsey: Paulist.
- Kyung, Chung Hyun. (1994), "To be Human is to be Created in God's Image" in Ursula King (ed), *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, Maryknoll: Orbis, p. 253.
- Perdue, Leo G. (1994), *Wisdom and Creation Theology of Wisdom Literature*, Nashville: Abingdon.
- Puilan, Kwok (1995), *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Senior, Donald (1991), *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press.
- Tobin, Thomas H. (1990), "The Prologue of John and Hellenistic Jewish Speculation" *CBQ* 52, p. 253.
- Witherington III, Ben (1995), *John's Wisdom A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox.