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INTERSECTING SHALAWAT AND CHURCH MUSIC ON SPIRITUAL SWEETNESS AND POP CULTURE

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Abstract:

This article examines the tradition of prayer/Shalawat as a way to get closer to the Prophet Muhammad and Allah. Over time, this prayer practice developed alongside the use of traditional musical instruments like terbang, jidor, teplak and kricik. The article also looks at how Christians incorporate various songs into their worship services as a form of prayer and connection with God. The research aims to understand how music deepens the meaning and impact of prayer for worshippers seeking closeness with the divine. It also wants to explore the spiritual significance of praying with or without instruments and how pop culture elements factor in. The qualitative study utilizes an exploratory-descriptive approach through a comparative theology lens. Key findings are twofold. First, for Muslims, prayer with Muhammad and Allah is a means for drawing nearer to them, obtaining help and healing. For Christians, music is viewed as a gift from God, an expression of thankfulness for life's joys, and

encouragement and comfort during difficulties. Second, Islamic shalawat and Christian church music intersect with pop culture by blending traditional instruments like the terbang, jidor, teplak and kerikik with contemporary tone and rhythm variations like dangdut. Here, pop culture represents a positive change because it strengthens the spiritual experience for worshippers while adding entertainment value.

Abstrak:

Artikel ini membahas tentang tradisi shalawat sebagai wujud pendekatan diri kepada Nabi dan Tuhannya yang pada perkembangannya diiringi dengan alat musik tradisional berupa terbang, jidor, teplak dan kerikik. Di samping itu, artikel ini juga akan mengurai tradisi umat Kristiani yang memiliki berbagai macam lagu yang biasa digunakan sebagai sarana dalam berdoa di dalam gereja. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui sejauh mana makna gema shalawat dan musik bagi para jemaah dalam usahanya untuk mendekatkan diri kepada Tuhan, menginvestigasi spiritual sweetness dalam konteks bershalawat yang diiringi maupun yang tidak diiringi dengan alat musik, serta menguak sisi-sisi pop culture. Jenis penelitian ini adalah kualitatif dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif-eksploratif-deskriptif melalui perspektif comparative theology. Temuan dari penelitian ini menyatakan dua hal; Pertama, bagi umat Islam, shalawat dipandang sebagai sarana mendekatkan diri pada Nabi Muhammad SAW dan Allah, penolong dan obat dari segala penyakit. Sementara bagi umat Kristiani, musik dipandang sebagai anugerah Tuhan, wujud rasa syukur akan kenikmatan hidup, penyemangat serta penghibur saat dalam kondisi sulit. Kedua, shalawat dan musik gereja menjumpai sisi pop culture melalui perpaduan alat musik tradisional (seperti terbang, jidor, teplak, dan kerikik) serta variasi nada dan ritme yang kekinian (seperti nada dangdut). Dalam hal ini, pop culture dimaknai sebagai transformasi yang positif karena dapat menguatkan spiritual sweetness bagi para jemaah yang diselingi juga dengan nuansa menghibur (entertaining).

Keywords: *shalawat, church music, pop culture, spirituality*

A. Introduction

Indonesia's religious diversity has led to various interfaith interactions. The mingling of Islam and Christianity attracts the most attention. This blending appears in large celebrations like Christmas, public readings, and other religious ceremonies. Some Muslims accept invitations to events at Christian churches.

Additionally, some chant Islamic prayers in Christian places of worship.¹ Indonesia's religious pluralism produces interfaith exchanges, especially between Muslims and Christians. This manifests in joint holiday festivities, communal scripture recitals, and comparable rituals. Certain Muslims partake in Christian church activities when invited. Moreover, some recite Islamic chants inside Christian houses of prayer. The rewording maintains the original meaning and flow. Some recite it using the melodies of church hymns.² This phenomenon works both ways. There are also non-Muslims, specifically Christians, who sing *Shalawat* at certain events.³

In Islamic custom, there is a trend where the reverberation of Shalawat prayers is invigorated by introducing tambourine groups, both local and regional. This tradition is typically joined by conventional melodic instruments played by beating, like tambourines, teplaks, kecriks, tamburs etc. The role of social media as a means for Islamic preaching has made this custom significantly more common and sought-after by a more extensive range of audiences. Thus, it is not unexpected that this phenomenon is picking up force and has started to spread in rural and global networks. Put differently, the act spreading among Muslims today takes the form of a community ritual. The melodic accompaniment of Shalawat at grand recitations demonstrates how the community glorifies the climate considered religious because of the motivation to expand individual and community devotion.

¹ Recorded videos on these phenomenon can be watched at YouTube: Yakobis TV | Kongregasi Misi (CM), "Hadroh, Dengan Gembira. Koor OMK Paroki Kristus Raja Surabaya," YouTube, 2019. Lihat juga: Inisial Zar, "Tari Sufi & Shalawat Syiir Tanpo Waton Iringi Misa Natal di Malang," YouTube, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UAvLl_Dhzc.

² Emha Ainun Nadjib adapted the Shalawat Badr prayer by chanting it using a certain melody of church music. He took the traditional Islamic prayer and gave it a new musical arrangement typically heard in Christian worship services. Nadjib reworked the Shalawat Badr, staying true to the words and meaning, but presenting it with a different musical style, see: Ayo Ngaji, "Cak Nun Kiai Kanjeng Shalawat Gereja," YouTube, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKeam_tt4IM. Also, Shalawat *Salatu min Allah wa Alfa as-Salam*, see: Siger, "Lirik Sholawat Nada Gereja Cak Nun," YouTube, 2019.

³ Sigit Balunk, "Sholawat Oleh Paduan Suara Gereja ALFA OMEGA Raja Ampat Di Pembukaan MTQ Ke VIII," YouTube, 2020.

One solid model of the tradition of Shalawat reverberation is the Ahbabul Musthofa Shalawat expert group driven by Habib Syech bin Abdul Qodir bin Abdurrahman Assegaf (Surakarta).⁴ The group has consistently drawn massive crowds to particular events. This fervor manifests through actions like waving banners, raising hands, and swaying while seated cross-legged. The 'influx of pilgrims' effect stems from multiple factors, not just one. Many elements influence it, including the prestige of the Habib title which can elevate status, fascination with the accompanying tambourine troupe, the melodies and lyrics of the chanted Shalawat, and other internal and external drivers. As it has evolved, some similar group now utilize contemporary musical tools like guitars, pianos, and organs to accompany Shalawat chanting.

Looking at it from a religious perspective, the act of praying is also a small part of Muslim worship rituals. In addition to the fact that reciting it has devotional value, the lyrics of Shalawat contain invocations for the Prophet and God's messenger, which makes this a key recommended practice for Muslims. Furthermore, reciting Shalawat is also one of the pillars of prayer. However, the recitation of Shalawat during prayer should not be accompanied by musical instruments as is the custom when chanting Shalawat. This is because in Islamic tradition, ritual worship (like prayer) cannot be accompanied by musical instruments in order to maintain its sacred nature. The same applies to other acts of worship like Hajj (Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca).

In contrast, in the Christian tradition, church worship rituals of certain denominations (like Lutheran Christianity) actually utilize modern musical instruments such as drums, guitars, bass guitars, keyboards, and so on.⁵ The church's youth not only danced and

⁴ The followers of Habib Syech's mass group identify themselves as Syekher Mania. Some other Shalawat congregations active in Indonesia are the Kanzus Shalawat group led by Habib Muhammad Luthfi Ali bin Yahya located in Pekalongan, and the Maiyah group led by Emha Ainun Nadjib in Yogyakarta, see: Sekar Ayu Aryani, "Healthy-Minded Religious Phenomenon in Shalawatan: A Study on the Three Majelis Shalawat in Java," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 7, no. 1 (2017): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v7i1.1-30>.

⁵ Frans Jimmy Simanjutak, Wadiyo, dan Mochammad Usman Wafa, "Penggunaan Musik dalam Ibadah Kontemporer di Gereja Huria Kristen Batak

clapped to the music being played, but also echoed Shalawat, continuing an Islamic tradition. This contemporary form of worship has sparked debate among church members and outsiders alike. The reason is that using instruments to accompany spiritual pop songs can create a worship experience unlike one without musical accompaniment.

The primary purpose of reciting Shalawat is to receive the Prophet's assistance (intercession) on Judgment Day. In Christianity, group singing reflects the spiritual energy of the church congregation and is a reaction to God's mercy. It is not shocking that singing and music accompany Christian worship since both have been utilized from the time of the New Testament up to now as ways to exalt God.⁶

The esoteric aspects of studying religion and other traditions warrant further examination, particularly regarding Islamic-Christian traditions. This research is significant since Islam and Christianity are Abrahamic faiths thriving in Indonesia. Thus, developing this research is necessary, not just for understanding others, but for building interfaith dialogue, harmony, and 'common ground' between religions. This study will specifically analyze the meaning behind congregants' Shalawat singing and music. It aims to uncover the deepest meanings of their musical spirituality.

The relationship between music and spirituality is not an entirely new research topic. For instance, Muhaya and Aziz have already examined Al-Ghazali's perspectives on music. Muhaya in his book titled *Sufism Through Music: Defending Sufi Music* by Ahmad al-Ghazali analyzed the key issues surrounding music discussed in the book *Proofs of Knowledge Against Those Who Prohibit Listening to Music Unanimously* by Ahmad Al-Ghazali (d. 1111). Muhaya highlights certain Sufis who utilize music as a means to purify themselves, a practice commonly known as *sama'*. He also underscores Al-Ghazali's view that music can prevent one's heart from hardening, nurture love (*mahabbah*) for Allah, and lead the

Protestan (HKBP) Jemaat Semarang Barat," *JSM (Jurnal Seni Musik)* 6, no. 2 (2017), 36.

⁶ Agastya Rama Lista, *Nyanyian Jemaat Dan Perkembangannya* (Salatiga: Fakultas Teologi UKSW, 1999).

singer to the states of *ma'rifat* and *kashf* (self-revelation and being able to 'see' God). Muhaya concludes that *sama'* (listening spiritual music) influences listening habits, local culture, and the spiritual capacity of the singer.⁷ Muhaya briefly mentions the tradition of sacred music (*sama'*) in other faiths (particularly Christianity). However, Muhaya's analysis does not examine specific Christian denominations. In contrast, this research focuses on the Presbyterian church music tradition.

Through an article titled "Sufism and Music: A Study of Abū Hāmid Al-Gazālī's Thought on Spiritual Music", Aziz confirms Al-Ghazali's view that music (*sama'*) contains philosophical mystical elements. Furthermore, music combines material (physical) and immaterial (spiritual) components that serve as intermediaries (*wasilah*) towards God. As such, music can lead to a spiritualization of matter or a materialization of spiritual things.⁸ Similar to Muhaya, Aziz's research uses a literature review methodology, while this research applies a model more typical of field studies. A related study closer to this one was conducted by Morris in an article called "Muslim Musicians, Sufism and Postmodern Spirituality in Britain." Employing Bourdieu's habitus-capital analysis, Morris explores aspects of spirituality in relation to postmodernism in Britain. He noticed British Muslim musicians' freedom to express spirituality openly.⁹

In general, Muhaya and Aziz's research differs from the current study in terms of approach and focus. Muhaya and Aziz examined different issues using different methods. Meanwhile, Morris' study differs from the current research in terms of context and analytical framework. Morris conducted his research in the British context and analyzed pop culture through a postmodern lens. In contrast, the current study is situated in Indonesia and utilizes comparative theology to analyze pop culture.

⁷ Abdul Muhaya, *Bersyfi Melalui Musik: Sebuah Pembelaan Musik Sufi Oleh Ahmad Al-Ghazali* (Yogyakarta: Gama Media, 2003).

⁸ Abdul Aziz, "Tasawuf Dan Seni Musik: Studi Pemikiran Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali Tentang Musik Spiritual," *Jurnal Tajdid* 13, no. 1 (2014): 57–86.

⁹ Carl Morris, "Look into the Book of Life': Muslim Musicians, Sufism and Postmodern Spirituality in Britain," *Social Compass* 63, no. 3 (2016): 389–404.

Based on these previous studies, the current research aims to address the lack of research on spirituality and pop culture, specifically in the context of echo Shalawat and church music. This study will examine the importance of Shalawat and church music for worshippers, explore worshippers' perceptions of spiritual meaning in these contexts, and analyze the phenomena through the lens of pop culture theory.

Overall, this research intends to enrich the body of knowledge on religious moderation by providing new insights into spirituality, worship, and pop culture. The findings are expected to complement previous studies and provide a new perspective on these issues in the Indonesian context.

B. Method

This study utilizes a combination of field research and library research to qualitatively examine its subject matter. The primary field objects of focus are the phenomenon of echoing Shalawat and music chanted in churches, Shalawat sung in church tones, and people of other faiths collectively reciting Shalawat. The literature review provides supplementary data to support the field data. Through a qualitative, explorative, descriptive research design, this study aims to uncover intellectual curiosities that are central to the researcher's inquiry.

The phenomenological approach is employed, where the researcher directly experiences the phenomenon under examination. Data collection methods include in-depth interviews, direct event participation (observations), and documentation. The collected data undergoes analysis using comparative theology to reveal the most profound significance of the phenomenon of Shalawat and music reverberating. Clooney, as quoted by Waugh, describes comparative theology as "an act of faith aimed at gaining understanding. It is grounded in a specific religious tradition yet tries to learn from one or more other faith traditions, using that home tradition as a starting

point."¹⁰ As far as the researcher is concerned, comparative theology examines the diversity of religions and their comparisons. It requires knowing and learning about other religious traditions directly through shared experience.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Shalawat and Church Music for Spiritual Sweetness

Shalawat, grammatically the plural form of the word shalat when singular (mufrad), signifies continuous remembrance of Allah SWT through prayer. In the al-Munawwir dictionary, the term shalawat refers to the plural form of prayer, which signifies prayer.¹¹ Muhyidin's book *A Million Miracles of the Prophet's Salawat* also supports this idea, defining shalawat as prayer. This word is a component of the word "prayer".¹² Shalawat also signifies recollection, remembrance, communication, contemplation, affection, favor, and admiration.

In Islam, Shalawat is seen as a form of "charity" that is not only performed by the believer, but also "performed" by God. Hence, salawat is an act of divine communion between God and His servants. God's blessings show that He approves of the action. Therefore, salawat is the instance when God and the Servant come together. In the Muslim context, sending blessings upon the Prophet is a way to show devotion to God. This is due to the fact that the recitation of salawat includes supplications to God to show his devotion and reverence for the Prophet.

The Prophet adores God, and is loved by Him. Being blessed abundantly by God, why does he need to pray constantly? In addition to being a Divine ritual, it is also a Divine order, allowing the abundant blessings of the Prophet to return to the person who prays.

¹⁰ Earle Waugh, "How to Do Comparative Theology, Edited by Francis X. Clooney and Klaus Von Stosch," *Religious Studies and Theology*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1558/rst.20105>.

¹¹ St. Achmad, *Kamus Al-Munawwar*, 1st ed. (Semarang: PT. Karya Toha Putra, 2003).

¹² Muhammad Muhyidin, *Sejuta Keajaiban Sholawat Nabi*, cet. 5 (Yogyakarta: Diva Press, 2012).

It is clearly stated in the Quran (al-Ahzab: 56): "Indeed, Allah showers His blessings upon the Prophet, and His angels pray for him. O believers! Invoke Allah's blessings upon him, and salute him with worthy greetings of peace." This indicates that performing shalawat draws the individual nearer to God by following divine practices and commands, and receiving blessings from the Prophet which originate from Divine blessings.

In Christianity, music is a blessing bestowed by God. When a servant employs this blessing correctly following its intended purpose, it is a way of showing appreciation to God.

At the same time, in the Christian faith, music is a blessing from God that has the ability to elevate our mood, provide solace, unite us in purpose, offer sanctuary during challenges, inspire us, convey our emotions, and deeply move us, sometimes surpassing mere words. Music can profoundly impact Pastor Bob Kauflin's emotions due to its connection to God's truth. Saint Augustine understood the advantages of singing and listening to others sing, and believed it can also evoke feelings of devotion in those who are less strong.¹³

The teaching of Church music is indeed biblical as Paul advised, "Allow the teachings of Christ to reside abundantly within you" (Colossians 3:16). We do not allow ourselves to fully immerse in the richness of the musical experience. Neither technological innovation, quantity, expertise, quality, nor atmosphere. We should allow the teachings of Christ to abundantly reside within us. The message about Christ that we refer to as "the gospel" is known as the "word of Christ." The positive message is that Jesus Christ incarnated to bear our sin and punishment, making us right before God and welcoming us into His family. We should let those truths reside deeply in us while we sing.

Both shalawat and music touch on aspects and dimensions of spirituality for Christian Muslims. Underwood explains that aspects of spirituality include a sense of comfort and strength, peace, a sense of help, a sense of God's love and reverence.¹⁴

¹³ Bob Kauflin, "Why We Sing," *Worship Leader*, 2011.

¹⁴ Lynn G. Underwood, "Ordinary Spiritual Experience: Qualitative Research, Interpretive Guidelines, and Population Distribution for the Daily

1. A feeling of comfort and inner strength

The sense of comfort in this situation shows that people who pray or make church music feel at ease within themselves. This connects to aspects of psychological well-being that are also influenced by spirituality.¹⁵ Inner strength is an important part that those who pray and make church music believe they achieve through sincere devotion in shalawat and Church music.

2. Tranquility

This feeling of tranquility is experienced by a person when they engage in prayer and church music. This inner peace becomes a result of psychological well-being when someone believes that shalawat¹⁶ and church music lead to calmness and serenity of heart.

In this regard, researchers have not found the term "spiritual sweetness" in theoretical reviews by experts. However, this spiritual sweetness is equivalent to the phrase "spiritual satisfaction" introduced by Elkins - that spiritual fulfillment does not come from material or worldly things.¹⁷ People attain spiritual satisfaction from activities and events related to and raising their spirituality.

2. Shalawat and Church Music as *Pop Culture* phenomena

In today's popular culture, traditional Islamic devotional chants performed by shalawat are combined with both traditional instruments (*terbang, jidur, kicrik, teplak*, etc.) as well as modern

Spiritual Experience Scale," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 28, no. 1 (January 2006): 181–218, <https://doi.org/10.1163/008467206777832562>.

¹⁵ Dirk van Dierendonck, "The Construct Validity of Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being and Its Extension with Spiritual Well-Being," *Personality and Individual Differences* 36, no. 3 (February 2004): 629–43, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869\(03\)00122-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(03)00122-3).

¹⁶ Annisa Fitriani, "Peran Religiusitas Dalam Meningkatkan Psychological Well Being," *Al-Adyan: Jurnal Studi Lintas Agama* 11, no. 1 (August 2017): 57–80, <https://doi.org/10.24042/AJSLA.V11I1.1437>.

¹⁷ David N. Elkins et al., "Toward a Humanistic-Phenomenological Spirituality," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 28, no. 4 (October 1988): 5–18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167888284002>.

instruments. This blending is also seen in church music, where traditional hymns are now accompanied by pop rhythms and instrumentation.

This cultural mixing can be seen as a positive development that brings people closer to the divine, in line with the prevailing discourse on religious moderation. The trend of church youth singing shalawat chants to pop music does not have to be judged in stark black-and-white terms of religious permissibility; while some ethical concerns remain regarding causing controversy, there is value in appreciating the shared spiritual expressions.

According to cultural theorist John Fiske, popular culture provides meaningful perspectives on existence and the human experience. It offers opportunities for skill development, imaginary pleasures, relationship building and community formation. Pop culture can even provide a pathway to transcendence and connection with the sacred.¹⁸

Thus, the blending of Islamic and Christian musical traditions with modern pop culture can be interpreted as a productive intermingling consistent with contemporary ideals of moderate religiosity and shared spirituality across faiths. While ethical concerns remain, there is merit in appreciating the potential for popular art forms to provide meaning, community and transcendence.¹⁹ This statement appropriately conveys the significance embedded in the moment of shalawat sung with the cadence and rhythm of church hymns and the form of shalawat performed by youth groups in the church.

According to Cobb's perspective, everything in nature embodies God's will.²⁰ God ordains that each of His creations be brought into existence in a virtuous state, both regarding the constitution of physical vigor and the resonance of music,

¹⁸ John Fiske, *Reading the Popular, Reading the Popular*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203837252>.

¹⁹ Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 2005).

²⁰ John B. Cobb, *Process Theology as Political Theology* (Manchester Unity Press, 1982).

architectural features - rock, stone, marble, saka - all of which coalesce into a form of entertainment that is fundamentally good in and of itself. Cobb poses the rhetorical question "then what dangers lurk in these facets of human amusement?" in the lens of popular culture, religious music can be delivered in any rhythm because the genuine pulse of music is universal and not constrained by religious divides. If the rhythm is gorgeous and stirs the soul and heart, then a feeling of hushed peace can be sensed.

Popular culture refers to cultural products and practices that are mass-produced and widely accessible to the general public through media technologies like newspapers, magazines, television, comics, pop music, films and more, according to Ariel Heryanto.²¹ The negative side of it is that globalization has shifted religious rituals away from worship and towards crowd-pleasing celebrations focused on entertainment. For example, Islamic movies and soap operas, hijab fashion trends, religious infotainment, and celebrity preachers demonstrate the interplay between religion and media. These phenomena represent an illusion of modernity, with luxury packaging symbolic piety.²²

The contextualization of religion within pop culture leads to the differentiation of religious values. Differentiation becomes a key characteristic in modern society, built on self-identification and the establishment of status differences through modern symbols that emphasize authentic values. This further development gave rise to widespread individualization, resulting in the privatization of religion. The increasing privatization of religion is driven by three indicators of societal change: the prominence of the symbolic value of goods, the aestheticization of life, and the weakening of traditional frames of reference (local culture).

Society's consumption of Islam, where Islam is selectively used or engaged with based on need, necessitates reviewing the aforementioned phenomena either in accordance with or diverging

²¹ Ariel Heryanto, ed., *Budaya Populer Di Indonesia*, Terjemahan (Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 2012).

²² Rina Darojatun, "Konstruksi Kesalehan Simbolik Dalam Gaya Hidup Islami Di Media Sosial," *Adzikra* 13, no. 1 (2022): 15–38, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32678/adzikra.v13i1.5669>.

from religious (Islamic) values. This is an effort to restore Islam's normativity so that Islam is not "cheaply" purveyed to audiences who largely follow uncritically, without grasping the more essential aspects. In the Muslim tradition, honoring the Prophet through shalawat can take various forms, like reciting barzanji, performing salawat before congregational prayer, celebrating maulid, and even incorporating it into other religious events.

The initial intention of the community in performing the shalawatan ritual was solely to receive abundant blessings from Allah. In addition to seeking blessings and mercy from God, the event also demonstrates Muslims' love for Prophet Muhammad. Traditionally, shalawatan gatherings were small in scale, held in mosques and homes. However, with the advent of globalization and modernization giving rise to pop culture, the ritual has undergone several changes.

The community has incorporated elements of pop culture into organizing the event. One major change is the shift away from the simple, traditional Islamic style to a more modern, entertainment-focused format. For instance, the recitations now use contemporary dangdut singing tones instead of traditional recital tones. The events also take place in open fields with large sound systems. While the ritual now has a modern, entertainment-driven style, the core purpose remains seeking blessings from God and honoring Prophet Muhammad.

The audiences for this event may come from many different places outside the local area. They range from elders to kids, and are eager to sit on the ground throughout the night to participate in the event. As such, the shalawatan event, which is coordinated by groups of shalawat activists, is professionally managed. The community's reaction to this activity is quite varied, spanning from those who object to it to those who are supportive. This has the potential to cause significant conflict within the community. However, the event also provides economic potential for the surrounding community, so the village administration permits its existence. That provides a glimpse of the shalawatan tradition being carried out in many parts of Indonesia over the past two decades.

3. Shalawat and Church Music on pop culture and spirituality

The emerging trend of religious pop culture in Indonesia, exemplified by the shalawatan music performances, presents traditional Islamic teachings in a modern, pop-influenced style. These events feature a mix of traditional and contemporary musical instruments and a concert-like atmosphere. Attendees express themselves by dancing and moving to the music when the shalawatan songs are played. While this popularization of religious teachings can benefit outreach efforts, it also carries some risks. The mass commercialization and commodification of religious messages for pop culture opens the door to corruption and misuse.

However, making religion relatable and meaningful for modern society in Indonesia requires adaptable approaches. If the presentation of Islam does not evolve with the times, it risks becoming outdated, irrelevant and abandoned by the people in favor of more popular cultural trends. To sustain interest and resonance, religious messages need to be repackaged using formats and mediums that connect with today's population. Looking back, Walisongo also leveraged the pop culture of their time to spread Islamic teachings centuries ago. Overall, while potential downsides exist, adapting religious outreach to align with contemporary culture may be necessary to keep the teachings meaningful and impactful.

The core purpose of the religious aspects (belief system and rituals) of a culture is to fulfill humanity's innate need for a connection with God. Peter L. Berger characterizes religion as a fundamental human necessity; it serves as a defense against the chaos that endangers human life.²³ For religion to successfully meet people's spiritual needs, it must continually renew its external forms. Otherwise, people will look to satisfy their spirituality through negative means like entertainment, drugs, crime, etc.

²³ asmanidar, "Suluk Dan Perubahan Perilaku Sosial Salik (Telaah Teori Konstruksi Sosial Peter L Berger Dan Thomas Luckman)," *Abrahamic Religions: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 1, no. 1 (April 2021): 99–107, <https://doi.org/10.22373/ARJ>.

According to Berger, religion has to keep expressing its core message using contemporary sociocultural symbols that society recognizes. This recoding process inevitably faces accusations of heresy. The tension arises between formal religion and spirituality. Berger argues that to maintain its capacity to meet human spiritual needs, religion sometimes must commit heresy - what he terms the "heretical imperative."²⁴

That being stated that old and outdated social and religious norms must be supplanted with a new, more accessible social and religious structure, even if it is momentarily deemed heretical. Shalawatan music performances signify a type of global pop culture infiltration that has gone through a process of adjusting to the local culture.

Our research on loyal attendees of shalawat mass events revealed that they reported having profound spiritual experiences and blessings from participating in these rituals. Despite having to travel many kilometers, their faith motivates them to continue pursuing these shalawatan gatherings. In this very case, shalawat for praising the Prophet Muhammad with its popular music instrumentalization and music ringing a gospel message are referred to as spiritual music or songs. The use of modern Christian music with band instruments and popular music styles reflects a type of worship called contemporary worship that is dynamic and enthusiastic.

Contemporary Christian music tends to feature biblically-inspired lyrics praising God, whereas mainstream songs often focus more on human relationships and experiences. In worship services, church leaders carefully select songs with scriptural lyrics to bring the words to life through music. However, music expert John F. Wilson points out that not all church music achieves its aim of glorifying God; some songs merely create an atmosphere of exhilaration while others are somewhat better at stirring emotions.²⁵

²⁴ Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (University of California: Anchor Press, 1979).

²⁵ John F. Wilson, *An Introduction to Church Music* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1965).

Each church denomination has a different "portion" and "style" (genre) of music in their worship. The charismatic church represents its "style" of contemporary Christian music, so do other churches; the traditional church with its "style" of hymns and liturgical worship, the GBKP/Batak Karo Protestant church with traditional Karo music played through a keyboard music program, or the GKJ/Javanese Christian Church with gamelan music in its worship. Theological needs allow the church to do inculturation because it is considered effective so that the message of the gospel can be accepted by various ethnic groups.

In the aforementioned cases, Wilfred J. Samuel opines that music is overused in contemporary worship services.²⁶ But, Hesselgrave differently sees and calls it "indigenization" referring to a fusion of imported and native cultures, where prevalent forms of imported culture take on salient aspects of the local culture. So when reviewing church music, it cannot be limited by one particular genre of music, because each church has its own musical needs and "portion".²⁷ The church strongly emphasizes the importance of a commitment for music priests who serve in the field of music, so that the music used should not be an obstacle in worship.²⁸

What we can grasp and comprehend thoroughly from the praxis of shalawat and church music is that there are at least five dimensions of religion by which either Muslim or Christian experience: (1) The belief dimension, which encompasses hope while clinging to certain theology, (2) The practice dimension, including symbolic conduct conveying religious significance. (3) The experiential dimension, referring to subjective, individual engagement with sacred aspects of a faith, (4) The knowledge dimension, whereby religious adherents possess understanding of tenets, rituals, scripture, and traditions, (5) The consequence

²⁶ Wilfred John Samuel, *Charismatic Folk Christianity: "storm in the Flower" Reflections on Post Charismatic Trends* (Kinabalu: Sabah Theological Seminary, 2003).

²⁷ David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Kontekstualisasi: Makna, Metode, Dan Model*, Terjemahan (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2019).

²⁸ Wilson, *An Introduction to Church Music*.

dimension, denoting the effects of one's convictions, actions, experiences and learning in daily life.²⁹

To further remark, shalawat and church music serve as a symbolic or metaphorical intermediary between culture and subjective thinking, allowing both worship and culture to exchange positions and functions. According to Geertz, religion and worship are two components that concurrently shape and reflect social order. Symbols and ceremonial structures link people's lived realities and experiences to symbolic and ceremonial associations rooted specifically in culture, society, and economy. This places a more inclusive framework into an elemental agreement.

The relationship between religious ceremonies and social structure lies in the ability of worship to position itself above the social structure unit by going through a liminal or anti-structural phase. Therefore, the relationship between worship and the social structure enables religious followers to survive and incorporate worship into various secular, structured activities.

D. Conclusion

Shalawat and church music have their own significance in Islam and Christianity. For Muslims, Shalawat are prayers and praises for Prophet Muhammad which are believed to bring one closer to God. Shalawat are also thought to confer blessings, cure diseases, and provide help during disasters. For Christians, church music is viewed as a gift from God that leads to thankfulness, encouragement, protection and solace during difficulties.

Both shalawat and church music hold spiritual elements that can strengthen Muslims' and Christians' faith. They serve as means to come nearer to God for adherents. Regarding pop culture, Shalawat and church music have become lively with the accompaniment of traditional (like tambourines, teplak, kecrik, tambour) and modern musical instruments (such as drums, guitars,

²⁹ Richard R. Clayton and James W. Gladden, "The Five Dimensions of Religiosity: Toward Demythologizing a Sacred Artifact," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 13, no. 2 (June 1974): 135, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1384375>.

bass guitars and keyboards). This liveliness is further enhanced by the variety of tones and nuances of contemporary music. Shalawat and church music have distinct meanings in Islam and Christianity, they share spiritual significance and incorporation of both traditional and modern musical elements.

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