

**Union with God:
Cross Textual Reading in Surat Centhini VI
and John 15: 1-8**

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Abstrack

The article wants to analyze the meaning of “union with God” in Javanese literature, Surat Centhini and in the Christian bible, John 15: 1-8. John Gospel has one focuses on the need of human beings to have a deep relationship with God. the same idea also can be found in Javanesse text, Surat Centhini. Both has the same purpose of spiritual life that is union with God or *manunggaling kawula Gusti*. The methodology will employ "cross-textual reading". The method seeks to provide space for readers to understand the text of the Holy Scriptures in the context of religious diversity, such as in Indonesia. The study wants to juxtapose the concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* which is taken from Serat Centhini VI, the song Gurisa pupuh 368:46-56 with the Gospel of John about the true vine. Hopefully this contextual theology effort will be able to contribute to theological reflection about relation between humans and God on the Javanese culture.

Keywords: Union with God, Joh Gospel 15, Serat Centhini, cross-textual reading, Manunggaling Kawula Gusti.

Abstrak

Artikel ini akan menganalisa makna “kesatuan dengan Allah” dalam literatur Jawa (Surat Centhini) dan dalam Injil Yohanes 15: 1-8. Salah satu fokus utama Injil Yohanes adalah kebutuhan manusia untuk membangun relasi intim dengan Allah. Gagasan yang sama juga ditemukan dalam tulisan Surat Centhini. Kedua tulisan itu memiliki tujuan spiritual yang sama yaitu “kesatuan dengan yang Ilahi” atau *manunggaling kawula Gusti*. Metode yang dipakai adalah pembacaan lintas textual. Metode ini memberi kesempatan pada pembaca Injil masuk dalam kontekstual budaya Indonesia yang beragam. Penelitian ini akan membandingkan konsep kesatuan dengan yang Ilahi dalam Centhini VI no 368: 46-56 dengan perumpamaan pokok anggur dan cabangnya dalam Yohanes 18. Harapannya, studi kontekstual teologi ini akan memberi refleksi teologis tentang relasi manusia dan Allah dalam konteks budaya Jawa.

Kata Kunci: Kesatuan dengan yang Ilahi, Yohanes 15, surat Centhini, pembacaan lintas tekstual, *manunggaling kawula Gusti*.

1. Introduction

People from all religions yearn to have a closed relationship with God do that they practice both personal dan communal prayer to be closer to God. Javanese people have surat Centhini telling the story of a man who wants to have a perfect life, and the purpose of his life is “*manunggaling kawula Gusti*” (union with God). In the John Gospel, Christians also have a story about Jesus who wants his disciple to be unite with God through him. This study attempts to analyze the meaning of “union with God” in Javanese literature, Surat Centhini and in Christian bible, John 15: 1-8. It also describes what human beings need to do in order to have a such relationship. It will apply a cross textual reading method that will enlighten us to find inshighs in both texts so that they may enrich our faith and our lives.

The methodology takes into account the existence of texts from other religious traditions is called "cross-textual reading". This method seeks to provide space for readers to understand the text of the Holy Scriptures in the context of religious diversity, such as in Indonesia. On one hand, the presence of various religions or beliefs can create tension, but on the other hand it can also produce a positive insight.¹ Indonesia which is thick with diversity needs to be embraced in interpreting the Holy Scriptures. The meaning of the Bible text will become even richer when it is approached by conducting a comparative study of texts from other belief traditions.

The cross-textual type of reading and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures has several other terms such as cross-textual reading, cross-textual hermeneutics, and cross-textual interpretation. In simple terms, the point of this method is how

¹ Daniel K. Listijabudi, *Bergulat di Tepian* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2019), 108.

the text of the Scriptures is interpreted according to its own context, namely through contact with culture and texts from other religious traditions. That is, a text not only has its own context but must also be interpreted in context.² This cross-textual reading allows Christians to open themselves to multi-textuality and plurality of religions.

2. Methodology: The Cross Textual Reading through an Indonesian Perspective

Indonesia's diverse culture provides space for scholars of the Scriptures to interpret texts in a more contextual way. The method of interpretation in this paper will follow the thoughts that have been developed by Daniel K. Listijabudi who provides the basis for the method of reading the texts of the Holy Scriptures compared to other textual traditions. Listijabudi argues that cross-textual reading in order to find and offer enrichment of meaning can lead to the creation of possibilities for building peace efforts among adherents of religions and related religious traditions.³

Listijabudi quoted CS. Songs who showed how myths, legends, and stories from Asian contexts can be used creatively and imaginatively to interpret the Bible.⁴ According to him, Asian Christians have two kinds of texts, namely Asian texts inherited from local religious cultural traditions and Bible texts from Christianity. They are inheritors of the Biblical story and their own story as Asians. There is a hybrid reality where the presence of the Scriptures gives new meaning to life, but at the same time Asian Christians also cannot leave Asian texts that have nourished and shaped their lives beforehand.

As a Javanese Catholic, the author has known the Holy Bible since childhood and realizes that Javanese culture is a living context that cannot be separated. Therefore, this paper tries to see how the text of the Bible is compared to other texts from the Javanese tradition. The theme raised is unity between humans and the Divine. The human experience of seeking unity is illustrated by parables taken from Indonesia, especially Java.⁵ In Javanese mysticism, human unity with the Divine is referred to as “*manunggaling kawula Gusti*”.⁶

² Archie Lee, “Cross Textual Hermeneutics and Identity in Multi Scriptural Asia”, dalam *Christian Theology in Asia*, diedit oleh Sebastian C. H. Kim (New York: Cambridge University, 2008), 190.

³ Daniel K. Listijabudi, *Bergulat di Tepian*, 1.

⁴ Sam P. Mathew, “Indian Biblical Hermeneutics: Methods and Principles,” *Neotestamentica* 38, no.1 (2004): 115.

⁵ P.J. Zoetmulder, *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1990), viii.

⁶ Some Javanese terms for describing “union with God”: *manunggaling kawula lan Gusti*, *pamoring kawula Gusti*, *jumbuhing kawula Gusti*, *curiga manjing warangka*, *warangka manjing curiga*, dan lain-lain. Lih. Suwardi Endraswara, *Agama Jawa, Ajaran, Amalan, dan Asal-usul Kejawen* (Yogyakarta: Narasi, 2015), 221.

Manunggaling kawula Gusti can be understood as a union between man and the Divine. It turns out that this concept is not only found in the Javanese tradition, but also in the Christian tradition. The Gospel of John illustrates a similar theme vividly in the parable of the vine and branches. "Abide in me and I in you" (John 15:4). It appears that between the two there is convergence (meeting point), namely the similarity of the concept of unity even though it comes from two different traditions. Indeed, the two do not have the same explicit expression, but at least they have the same meaning. After looking at the various possibilities that exist, this study seeks to explore the richness of Java contained in the *Serat Centhini*. This fiber as a religious poem invites people to contemplate the relationship between humans and God.⁷ In composing this thesis, the author wants to juxtapose the concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* which is taken from Serat Centhini VI, the song Gurisa pupuh 368:46-56⁸ with the Gospel of John about the true vine (John 15:1-8). *Serat Centhini* becomes a partner to see how this concept speaks for a Catholic who is also a Javanese. Hopefully this contextual theology effort will be able to contribute to theological reflection on Javanese culture.

3. Result of the Study

3.1 Union with God in *Serat Centhini VI*

Serat Centhini contains teachings that can provide instructions on how people should live in order to become good, ethical and happy human beings.⁹ *Serat Centhini* was composed by three Surakarta court poets, namely Raden Ngabehi Ranggasutrasna, Raden Ngabehi Yasadipura II, Raden Ngabehi Sastradipura, and led by Prince Adipati Anom who later reigned as Pakubuwana V (1820-1823). The diversity of contents contained in it makes this *serat* called as the "Encyclopedia of Javanese Culture". This *serat* is written in the form of a macapat (prose) song, but this literary work can be equated with narrative poetry because narrative or story elements are thicker than poetry elements.¹⁰ *Serat Centhini* has 12 volumes with 722 poems and 30,837 songs.¹¹ This paper uses the 12-volume *Serat Centhini* latinized by Kamajaya and published by the Yogyakarta Centhini Foundation.

⁷ P.J. Zoetmulder, *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, vii.

⁸ Kamajaya, *Serat Centhini Suluk Tambangraras Jilid VI* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Centhini, 1988), 210.

⁹ Sutrisna Wibawa, "Nilai Filosofi Jawa dalam Serat Centhini," *Jurnal Litera* 12, no. 2 (2013): 330.

¹⁰ Pardi Suratno, "The Character of Tembangraras and Centhini in Serat Centhini Written by Pakubuwana V," dalam *Character Education Across Culture*, diedit oleh I Gusti Ngurah Agung Wijaya Mahardika dan I Dewa Gede Rat Dwiyanana Putra (Denpasar: Dharma Acarya Faculty, 2016), 153.

¹¹ Diambil dari <https://ki-demang.com/centhini/index.php/1-pambukaning-atu/>, diakses pada hari Jumat 15 Oktober 2021.

As an illustration, the main theme of the Centhini text or what is called as *Suluk Tambangraras* is the journey of Sufism towards the perfection of life. *Serat Centhini* is called *suluk* because the literature uses many Islamic terms besides using Javanese as the main language. The word "*suluk*" comes from the Arabic language, namely *salaka*, *yasluku*, *sulukan*, which means journey or way of life.¹² As a *suluk* literature work, *Serat Centhini* has an Islamic breath and contains teachings of Sufism or Islamic mysticism that are intertwined with Javanese mysticism, for example an explanation of Javanese "religion" which aims to achieve perfection in life, namely the union of the servant with God (*manunggaling kawula Gusti*).¹³ The explanation of this concept is in an advice given by Seh Amongraga to his wife, Tambangraras. The name Centhini is taken from the name of Tambangraras' loyal servant.

3.2 The Concept of Union with God (*Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*)

The concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* is actually an expression that originates and applies to the mystical world.¹⁴ In the Javanese perspective, mystical thought known as the term *ngelmu kasampurnan* (knowledge of perfection) is the path to unity. This thinking views the mystical path as a path that starts from the base to the top, from aspects of birth (*lair*) to intuition (*rasa*) which contain elements of one's origins in *Hyang Suksma* or God. The system of mystical thinking is usually reflected in real actions called behavior that is synonymous with being concerned.¹⁵ Those who practice mystical practice have the goal of subduing the external conditions of lust and passion, by dealing with them to the level where human impulses are deemed irrelevant.¹⁶

Javanese mysticism is oriented to bring its followers closer to God. The pinnacle of mystical appreciation in the deepest Kejawen tradition is called *ngelmu sangkan paran*. Human autonomy in this regard is unique because humans try to break free from every form of bondage that is profane in nature in order to be able to reunite with God which is the *sangkan paraning dumadi*.¹⁷ *Sangkan paraning dumadi* spirituality shows the existence of a life force called *suksma*, which moves towards and unites in a life force called perfection.¹⁸ To

¹² Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (London: MacDonald & Evans Ltd., 1974), 423-424.

¹³ Fauzan Naif, "Seh Amongraga Tokoh Mistik Jawa dalam Serat Centhini," *Jurnal Refleksi* 16, no. 1 (2006): 92.

¹⁴ I. Wibowo dan B. Herry Priyono, *Sesudah Filsafat* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2006), 60.

¹⁵ Suwardi Endraswara, *Mistik Kejawen* (Yogyakarta: Narasi, 2018), 8.

¹⁶ Niels Mulder, *Ruang Batin Masyarakat Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: LKiS Yogyakarta, 2001), 57.

¹⁷ Dr. Simuh, *Sufisme Jawa, Transformasi Tasawuf Islam ke Mistik Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 1995), 136.

¹⁸ Andreas Kristianto, "Syeh Amongraga Eroticism, Study of the Mystical Theology and Sexuality in Serat Centhini," *Gema Teologika* 6, no. 2 (2021): 205.

achieve the perfection of life, intuition plays an important role.¹⁹ It takes some practice and guidance from people (teachers) who are more experienced to develop both mind and intuition. Generally, the mystical learning process takes place in a teacher-student model. The Javanese devote their entire existence, both physical and spiritual, both body and spirit to achieve this goal.²⁰

In the context of suluk literature, *Serat Centhini* provides four paths to the perfection of life, namely *syariat*, *tarekat*, *hakekat*, and *marifat*.²¹ These four paths are related to each other and cannot be separated. The last two paths are paths that can only be passed by certain people. *Hakekat* can be achieved by knowing God through perfect knowledge, including by praying constantly, always mentioning God's name and loving Him, and knowing God as far as possible.²² *Marifat* is the last and highest path. At this stage, humans have united themselves with God or in other words, humans have achieved *manunggaling kawula Gusti*. The unity of human and God in the concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* is difficult to explain in the appropriate words.

*Wujud makal jatineka, basa makal iku yayi, patemon kawula gusti, iku makal namanira, datan gusti tan kaula, ya gusti iya kaula, gusti kang sipat kaula, kaula kang sipat gusti*²³. *Yayi iya iku makal, gaib ing roro ning tunggal, nora tunggal nora pisah, tan kakalih tan sajuga, nora ewuh nora gampang, loro loro ning atunggal, iya ewuh iya gampang, ana ning Hyang wujud kita*²⁴

(*Serat Centhini* 6 pupuh 368:47-48).

This expression wants to say that the concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* can be easily understood but also difficult to understand as a formulation regarding transcendence and immanence.²⁵

3.3 The Path to Achieve Unity with God

A mystical figure who has reached a high level in the science of perfection or unity with the Divine in *Serat Centhini* is Seh Amongraga. Seh Amongraga

¹⁹ Sutrisna Wibawa, "Nilai Filosofi Jawa dalam Serat Centhini", 332.

²⁰ Abdullah Ciptoprawiro, *Filsafat Jawa* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1986), 21.

²¹ Fauzan Naif, "Seh Amongraga Tokoh Mistik Jawa dalam Serat Centhini", 98.

²² Fauzan Naif, "Seh Amongraga Tokoh Mistik Jawa dalam Serat Centhini", 99.

²³ Wujud makal sesungguhnya. Yang disebut makal ialah perjumpaan antara kawula dengan Gusti. Tiada Gusti dan tiada kawula. Yang ada baik Gusti maupun kawula. Gusti mengenakan sifat-sifat kawula, kawula mengenakan sifat-sifat Gusti.

²⁴ Inilah adikku, makal, rahasia kedwitunggalan, bukan tunggal dan bukan terpisah, bukan dua dan bukan tunggal. Tidak sukar dan tidak mudah, kedwitunggalan itu. AdaNya Tuhan ialah wujud kita.

²⁵ Fauzan Naif, "Seh Amongraga Tokoh Mistik Jawa dalam Serat Centhini", 102.

represents the heterodox mystic group. He has talents, traits and behaviors that (eventually) lead him towards a mystical life.²⁶ In the mystical effort, people have to overcome the material side such as emotions and instincts, lust and worldly rationality, so that their mind is free to reunite with their origins and so that they experience *kemanunggalan* in their hearts.²⁷ Amongraga started to become a mystic by practicing *zuhud*²⁸ (by eating and drinking just a little to eat and drink, live a simple and humble life), praying diligently/*dzikir*²⁹, get away from the crowds³⁰, has supernatural powers (survive from *wingit* places)³¹, until eventually they are seen as guardians³²

One more thing that is unique in *Serat Centhini* is the practice of *dzikir* accompanied by a head turning movement. The head is moved left and right in rhythm with the words in the *dzikir*. That is, the movements of the physical parts must also be harmonized with the mind in living up to the meaning of the pronunciation of *la ilaha illallah*. Actions like this reflect religious customs before the advent of Islam. *Dzikir* becomes a kind of yoga exercise in which the breath is held longer, then released more slowly by saying more and more words

²⁶ Fauzan Naif, “Seh Amongraga Tokoh Mistik Jawa dalam Serat Centhini”, 98.

²⁷ Andreas Kristianto, “Syeh Amongraga Eroticism, Study of the Mystical Theology and Sexuality in Serat Centhini”, 207.

²⁸ Seh Mongraga ngecani sarwi sidheku, puluke mung sakermiri, ginalintir tos lir watu, tan dhahar ulam sacuwil, namung sarem lan temu poh (Serat Centhini Latin VI 359:74).

²⁹ Amongraga jumeneng aneng wukir, manjing ing guwa asamun, alenggah jroning guwa, asembahyang aneng jroning guwa ngriku, sabakdane salat donga, lajeng mawantah amuji. Tan wonten ingkang kacipta, mung sihing Hyang pinandeng jroning ati, samana apan sadalu, aneng sajroning guwa, enjingira sang moneng wus medal gupuh, saking wau jroning guwa, lajeng lampahira aris (Serat Centhini V 342:1-2).

³⁰ Mangkana sadangipun, kang angibing genti-genti, tan winuwus solahira, yata kang aneng ing masjid, panepen Seh Amongraga, ingkang (ng)girisaken ngelmi (Serat Centhini Latin VI 366:305).

³¹ Prapta dhepoking parbata, guwane kalangkung wingit, guwa Dalem namanira, petenge anglilimputi, sigra Ki Jamal Jamil, ngagar kaywaking karya pyu, kang guwa ingoboran, kathah parane kaeksi, alurungan ngidul ngulon ngaler ngetan. Kalih dalu aneng guwa, enjingira samya mijil, laju manjad ing aldaka, kekayon keh anggi-anggi, sekar sangkep mawarni, panjrah ing sari rum-arum, gandapura ngayangan, suket sulanjana mamrik, memerakan emer sere kamijara. Pakis galar kasimbaran, wisamarta jenggod resi, kucila lan katilampa, talompe tampelan tangkil, prijatha kajar keji, lung wana lan kencor wulung, malelu kumlandhingan, bilungan lan adhem ati, kaywan inggil manisreja lan paponan. Wau Ki Seh Amongraga, ngancik sapucaking wukir, myarsa swaraning pepasar, umyung tumawon kapyarsi, diyeng gyanne dhedhemit, apepasaran gumuruh, sang moneng gya istipar, sirna swaraning pawestri, lir mirangrong kawanguran janma tama (Serat Centhini Latin VII 388:103-106).

³² Wali atau *waliyullah* adalah orang yang telah dianugerahi penghayatan makrifat. Wali dianugerahi berbagai macam ilmu gaib. Ia menjadi gambaran *insan kamil* yang dapat dicapai dengan jalan tasawuf (Bdk. Dr. Simuh, *Sufisme Jawa, Transformasi Tasawuf Islam ke Mistik Jawa*, 90).

in one breath.³³ Zoetmulder added that the ecstasies that are achieved by *dzikir* is not an exercise that is carried out communally (together), but a private exercise that is only carried out by a few people who are advanced in mysticism.³⁴ People who can achieve ecstasies is proof that they are advanced in esoteric knowledge.³⁵ As a private exercise, it can only be understood by the person concerned.

Based on the discussion above, prayer, *dzikir*, breathing regulation are means to be able to achieve unity with God. The mystical level is achieved thanks to Amongraga's teachings which are taken from Islamic mysticism.³⁶ By doing *dzikir*, people try to concentrate their whole mind solely on God. *Dzikir* becomes a kind of effort to divert awareness of the outside world and then focus it on the inner realm so that awareness of the outer world is mortal (disappears) or what is called ecstasy.³⁷ When appreciation begins, all attention to the natural surroundings begins to vanish because awareness shifts into the soul. In this case, the idea of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* is the results of mortal appreciation which is a composition of Sufism teachings about the sinking of human awareness in God.

3.4 The Purpose of Unity with God: Moksa

The character in *Serat Centhini*, Amongraga, experiences a transformation from a physical body to an invincible body, and vice versa. He can be invisible, but he can also return to a physical body like an ordinary human. It is different from death, where the invincible body cannot return to the physical body. These two bodies complement each other, forming a unity called life.³⁸ When humans live, the physical body will frame the invincible body, after humans return (*mulih mula-mulanira*) the physical body will enter the invincible body.³⁹ In such a state, the physical body is *moksa*, vanishes and becomes one again with the invincible body. The invincible body has a connection with eternity. The conception of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* is marked when the physical body merges back into the invincible body.⁴⁰ The metaphor of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* will actually only be achieved when humans *mulih mula-mulanira*. The *larung* punishment

³³ P.J. Zoetmulder, *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, 140.

³⁴ P.J. Zoetmulder, *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, 141.

³⁵ Seh Mogruga tuminggal, mring garwa jumurung, wus pinter narik kanengan, tan keslangso pamapan ing isbat napi, kang raka wus pitaya, kumandele kang rayi mring ilmi.

³⁶ Andreas Kristianto, "Syeh Amongraga Eroticism, Study of the Mystical Theology and Sexuality in *Serat Centhini*", 201.

³⁷ Dr. Simuh, *Sufisme Jawa, Transformasi Tasawuf Islam ke Mistik Jawa*, 196.

³⁸ Suwardi Endraswara, *Agama Jawa*, 46.

³⁹ Bdk. Nenggih ingkang curiga, manjing warangkaneki, elokipun warangka manjing curiga, punika pralambangira, suksma manjing badaneki, lan badan manjing ing suksma (*Serat Centhini* Latin 5 355:12-13).

⁴⁰ Suwardi Endraswara, *Agama Jawa*, 234.

that Amongraga received was the beginning of his transformation from his physical body into an invincible body. From then on, he lived in a realm of perfection with the ability to transform himself.

At the end of his life story, Amongraga experienced something called *moksa*. *Moksa* is the final and highest goal in human spiritual life.⁴¹ *Moksa* is seen as freedom, being free from something temporary (finite) and finding the infinite, being in the happiest state and that happiness is not affected by any circumstances.⁴²

3.5 Union with God in John 15: 1-8

The text of John 15: 1-8 is part of Jesus' farewell sermon with the disciples before He left this world. On the occasion with His disciples, He gave advice and invitations to live in Him (15:1-8). The disciples were invited to unite or be in unity with Jesus as Jesus himself was in unity with the Father. The advice was actually intended to greet the disciples so that they would seek the true meaning of Jesus' death and the meaning of their solitude after Jesus' ascension.⁴³

Passage John 15 records an intimate conversation that took place between Jesus and His disciples. In the discourse on the vine, the word "abide" (*μένω*) is repeated 7 times (verse 4 [3x], verse 5, verse 6, verse 7 [2x]). This number shows how important the theme of "abide" is in this passage. This metaphor mentions three parties, namely Jesus (15:1), the Father (15:1), and His disciples (15:5). Jesus' relationship with the Father is described like the vine and its cultivator (15:1), while Jesus' relationship with the disciples is described as the vine and His branches (15:5). If Jesus places Himself as the vine, then what is meant by the image of the vine and His branches is Jesus' relationship with His disciples (verse 5). The invitation to "abide in me" is the main point in John 15:1-8. Jesus invites the disciples to abide in Him.

3.6 Concept of Unity with Jesus

Greek version: *μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί, κἀγὼ ἐν ὑμῖν. καθὼς τὸ κλῆμα οὐ δύναται καρπὸν φέρειν ἄφ' ἑαυτοῦ ἔαν μὴ μένη ἐν τῇ ἀμπέλῳ, οὕτως οὐδὲ ὑμεῖς ἔαν μὴ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένητε.*

RSV version: Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

⁴¹ Andreas Kristianto, "Syeh Amongraga Eroticism, Study of the Mystical Theology and Sexuality in Serat Centhini", 208.

⁴² Andreas Kristianto, "Syeh Amongraga Eroticism, Study of the Mystical Theology and Sexuality in Serat Centhini", 208.

⁴³ Lamar Williamson Jr, *Preaching the Gospel of John: Proclaiming the Living Word* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 172.

The word “abide” (μείνατε⁴⁴) has *aorist* imperative form. This form is used to order someone to start something. The command in aorist form also emphasizes the feeling of separation that the disciples will experience. The themes of enmity with the Jews and the suffering of Jesus form the basis of this interpretation.⁴⁵ The phrase “abide in me” can be interpreted as “from now on stay with me”. The image of the vine is expanded when the branch is given the responsibility of remaining in the vine. The order to stay is an order to make a decision. They had to make a decision whether to continue following Jesus or not. Furthermore, there is the word “to produce” which is not translated by LAI “unable to [produce] fruit” (οὐ δύναται καρπὸν φέρειν⁴⁶). φέρειν is an infinitive present verb that wants to emphasize ongoing actions, not actions that will occur (infinitive future). The phrase “unable to [produce] fruit” refers to a state or situation that is currently happening.

“If He doesn't abide” (ἐὰν μὴ μένη⁴⁷) is repeated again with a different subject “if you don't abide” (ἐὰν μὴ...μένητε⁴⁸). The word “abide” in these two phrases uses the present subjunctive form. Both begin with the word “if” (ἐὰν), meaning that there is a certain condition or requirement, namely if you not abiding in Jesus. This is a conditional imperative emphasizing continued dependence on the vine. This conditional sentence confirms that there is a possibility that will happen if they do not abide. The possibility referred to is “unfruitful” (οὐ δύναται καρπὸν φέρειν). It appears in this verse 4, the word “does not abide” is connected with “unable to produce fruit”. Later in verse 6, the word “did not abide” is connected with “cast out, cast into the fire, burned”.

3.7 The Path to Unity with God

In John 15:1-8, Jesus does not appear to have given any practical advice on how to unite with Him or abide in Him. In the context of the last supper with the disciples, Jesus did reveal the purpose of His departure. He preceded the disciples to go to the Father's house to prepare a place for them. “In my Father's house there are many dwellings. If not then surely I will tell you. For I am going there to prepare a place for you” (14:2). Thomas, one of the disciples, did not know where Jesus had gone (14:5). He then asked where Jesus was going. Jesus then said to him: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (14:6). The next two words (truth and life) describe the “path”. This interpretation interprets the use of the word “and” (καί) as

⁴⁴ μείνατε (dari kata μένω): *verb, imperative aorist active*.

⁴⁵ Daniel Horatius Herman, “Tinggal dan Berbuah di Dalam Yesus: Eksegesis terhadap Yohanes 15:4-5,” *Predica Verbum: Jurnal Teologi dan Misi* 1, no. 1 (2021): 5.

⁴⁶ φέρειν (dari kata φέρω): *verb infinitive present active*.

⁴⁷ μένη (dari kata μένω): *verb subjunctive present active 3rd person singular*.

⁴⁸ μένητε (dari kata μένω): *verb subjunctive present active 2nd person plural*.

exegetical/explanatory meaning that the word that follows "and" explains the word that precedes it.⁴⁹ This text wants to reveal the truth of Jesus' identity. Jesus not only showed who He was but also related to what He did. The path leads to a goal (10:7,9) namely to the Father. He is the path to the Father, the path that connects humans with the Father because He is the messenger of the Father. As the Only Son of the Father, Jesus is the only path to the Father.

Jesus revealed Himself as the path to get to the Father because He is the messenger of the Father who was sent to the world so that all who believe in Him may have eternal life (3:16). God cannot be recognized by humans if He does not reveal Himself through his Son, Jesus. Through Him, humans can understand God correctly. Therefore, Jesus as the Son of God is called the path (*ὁδὸς*) for those who believe in Him to live with the Father.⁵⁰ The path meant is not in a geographical form but a description of the revelation of Jesus. For this reason, an attitude of faith (belief) is needed as a response to God's self-revelation in Jesus. Without trust, nothing stays.⁵¹ The belief that is possessed brings eternal life. The signs Jesus made are stepping stones to faith. Faith in Jesus will bring people to have fellowship or become one with Him. John interprets faith in his Gospel as a total "Yes" to Jesus.⁵²

3.8 The Purpose of Unity with God: Eternal Life

The union of Jesus with the Father is one in love (cf. 15:9). The content of that unity is love. Thus, being united with Jesus is not only a requirement but also a demand. In this unity, there is no personal amalgamation or omission of human identity. There is no evidence that the unity in John gives rise to states of ecstasy or trance.⁵³ The disciples are not called to experience mystical contemplation, but to produce fruit.⁵⁴ There is no concept of mystical union in the Bible that is ascetic in nature: asceticism, meditation, confinement to solitude, and the like.⁵⁵ The signs of a disciple of Christ are first, one who abides in Him, unites with Him: "If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples" (8:31). Second, "You are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (13:35).

⁴⁹ Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B. *Sacra Pagina The Gospel of John Vol 4* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1998), 587.

⁵⁰ Martin Harun, *Yohanes Injil Cinta Kasih* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2015), 217.

⁵¹ J C De Smidt, "A Perspective on John 15:1-8," *Neotestamentica* 25, no. 2 (1991): 263.

⁵² Nico Syukur Dister, *Pengantar Teologi* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1991), 133.

⁵³ Ferdi Purwanto, "Sorotan Yohanes 17:20-23 Tentang Kesatuan Allah dan Manusia Terhadap Mistik Toenggoel Woeloeng," *Missio Ecclesiae* 7, no. 1 (2018): 17.

⁵⁴ J C De Smidt, "A Perspective on John 15:1-8", 264.

⁵⁵ W. Johnston, *Mistik Kristiani: Sang Rusa Terluka* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1987) 83 sebagaimana dikutip oleh Hali Daniel Lie, "Analisa Kritis Terhadap Pandangan-Pandangan Unio Mystica Ditinjau dari Teologi Perjanjian Baru," *Veritas* 2, no. 2 (2001): 237.

The arrival of Jesus to the world has a specific purpose, namely to reveal the Father and His plan of salvation. The Gospel of John discusses salvation with the idea of "eternal life", so it is not surprising that the idea of eternal life will often be found in the Gospel of John. Since the beginning, the evangelist has presented the theme of life. "In Him was life, and that life was the light of man" (1:4). Eternal life in the Gospel of John is always associated with the context of Jesus' mission.⁵⁶ The purpose of Jesus' mission is "so that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life, and that I may raise him up at the end of time" (6:40). Based on this text, eternal life is given to everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.⁵⁷ The fruit of faith (belief) is that humans have eternal life. Everyone who believes in Jesus has eternal life. In this verse too, eternal life is equated with the resurrection at the end of time⁵⁸. In this case, eternal life can have a double meaning. Eternal life has been experienced when believing in God and Jesus as His messenger, but it will also only be experienced when Jesus raises the dead at the end of time.

3.9 Reading the Cross Textual Concept of Human Unity with the Divine

In cross-textual reading, the method used will be based on the cross-textual reading process that has been made by Daniel Listijabudi in his book *Cross-Textual Reading of Two Mystical Stories (Dewa Ruci and Jacob in Yabok) to Build Peace*. The first step is to interpret the two texts separately. The second step is to look at the similarities and differences of the two selected texts. The text differences consist of three types, namely appreciative differences, enriching differences, and irreconcilable differences.⁵⁹ The third step is to perform a reciprocal crossover of the two selected texts. These steps are expected to contribute to the expansion of the meaning of the two selected texts.

The two texts, *Serat Centhini* and John 15: 1-8 can be juxtaposed because both have the same topic of discussion, namely the unity between humans and the Divine. Even though both of them come from two different traditions, they contain a section that talks about human unity with the Divine (*manunggaling kawula Gusti*). In *Serat Centhini*, Seh Amongraga is described as a heterodox mystical figure who has experienced unity with the Divine. He then shared

⁵⁶ I. H. Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and The Gospel*, diedit oleh Joel B. Green dkk., (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 723.

⁵⁷ Roy B. Zuck (ed.), *A Biblical Theology of The New Testament* (Chicago: Moddy, 1994), 91-92.

⁵⁸ "Dan inilah kehendak Dia yang mengutus Aku, yaitu supaya dari semua yang telah diberikannya kepada-Ku jangan ada yang hilang tetapi supaya Kubangkitkan pada akhir zaman. Sebab inilah kehendak Bapa-Ku yaitu supaya setiap orang yang melihat Anak dan yang percaya kepadanya beroleh hidup yang kekal dan supaya Aku membangkitkannya pada akhir zaman" (Yoh 6:39-40).

⁵⁹ Daniel K. Listijabudi, *Bergulat di Tepian*, 271.

(taught) the unity experience to his wife, Tambangraras. In line with *Serat Centhini*, in the Gospel of John, at the Last Supper, Jesus advised His disciples to abide (unite) with Him. They are invited to have unity with Jesus. From these two texts, it appears that the Divine is always the object that is aimed. Humans strive for unity with (to) the Divine, which is supernatural beyond humans.

3.10 Differences in the Text of *Serat Centhini* (A) and John 15: 1-8 (B)

a. Appreciative Difference

What is meant by appreciative differences are differences during which the interaction process cannot enrich each other so that they can only be accepted.⁶⁰ The appreciative differences here concern several things such as differences in name or nickname, place, time, socio-historical, as well as some secondary references.

- The tension between Human and the Divine

Text A sees that there is a similarity between the Divine and human, thus influencing *manunggaling kawula Gusti* mindset. Text B sees that the Divine and the human are different. In *Serat Centhini*, anthropomorphism is more prominent. The Divine is described as having human-like characteristics, while humans are described as resembling God. "*Gusti kang sipat kaula / kaula kang sipat gusti.*"⁶¹ Descriptions of the Divine overlap with descriptions of humans. If you say that humans are God, they are not. If you say that humans are not God, they also look equal to God. In Text B, there is a clear distinction. I am the vine and you are the branches (15:5). There clearly is a firm difference between human and God. This difference is further supported by the concept of incarnation in the Gospel of John (John 1:14). Jesus took a human "form" so that humans would know the Father who had sent Him.

- Human Effort vs Human Response

Text A describes how humans who can achieve *manunggaling kawula Gusti* are human beings. That is, humans can unite with God because the origin and nature of humans are the same as God (*sangkan paraning dumadi*). Unity here is more understood as a human effort to achieve unity with the Divine. It seems that the unity in Text B is more focused on how humans respond to God's revelation. Those who respond (believe) in Jesus as the fullness of God's revelation, are indirectly in union with God. Text A does not talk about revelation, while in Text B, union with Jesus also means acknowledging the existence of an initiative from God who greets humans and brings them to salvation. It is in Jesus that human responds to God's revelation.

⁶⁰ Daniel K. Listijabudi, *Bergulat di Tepian*, 272.

⁶¹ Gusti mengenakan sifat-sifat kawula, kawula mengenakan sifat-sifat Gusti.

b. Enriching Differences

The efforts to find enriching differences are actually part of the process of crossing texts.⁶² Both texts speak of human unity with the Divine. The unity meant has a different meaning or form. Likewise, how the unity is cultivated and the fruit of the unity also has a different meaning. These differences will be mutually enriching.

- Unity that is Done and Not Done

Unity with the Divine in *Serat Centhini* is one that has been experienced while living on earth. By performing prayers and *dzikir*, Seh Amongraga attains a state of ecstasis and finally experiences unity with the Divine. *Dzikir* becomes a kind of means/effort to divert awareness of the world and then focus it on the inner realm so that awareness of the outer world is mortal (disappears) or what is called as ecstasy.⁶³ After experiencing a state of ecstasis, awareness will return even if temporarily the awareness of oneself disappears. Unity with the Divine in John's Gospel is a bit different in that it has a futuristic element. The disciples were already united (have faith) in Jesus, but the unity with the Divine will be fully experienced in eternal life with the Father in heaven. Life on earth is bound by eternity in a new life after death.

- Teaching Authority (from text B to text A)

The idea of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* is given by different authorities. In *Serat Centhini*, the concept of human unity with the Divine was introduced by an ordinary human named Seh Amongraga to his wife. He himself has no element of the Divine. Unlike in the Gospel of John, Jesus invites His disciples to unite (abide) with Him as the Father lives in Jesus. In Jesus, there are two natures, namely the Divine (sent by God) as well as human (taking elements of humanity). He is truly God (Divine) and truly human. In this case, the character from Text B has stronger authority in teaching the concept of unity with the Divine. Why? Jesus is both the teacher and the goal, whereas in Text A, Seh Amongraga is a teacher for Tambangraras but not the goal (the Divine). Text A shows the idea was from human to human (human > human), while text B shows how the idea was given by human but has Divine authority to human (Divine > human).

c. Illumination Movement from the Text of *Serat Centhini* to John 15: 1-8

In the advice that Seh Amongraga gave to his wife, Tambangraras, he explained how humans try to achieve perfection in life, namely the union of servants (humans) with God. He taught his wife the teachings of Islam on an

⁶² Daniel K. Listijabudi, *Bergulat di Tepian*, 285.

⁶³ Dr. Simuh, *Sufisme Jawa, Transformasi Tasawuf Islam ke Mistik Jawa*, 196.

exoteric level and slowly moved towards an esoteric understanding. The stages of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* are not something that must be looked for outside of human beings. It is achieved through the help of a teacher. The ultimate goal of human spiritual life is to know from and where this life is going. *Serat Centhini* explains the nature of *sangkan* (origin) and *paran* (purpose) of life. The Javanese philosophy in *Serat Centhini* is reflected in the value of perfect life (*ngudi kasampurnan*). *Ngudi kasampurnan* in *Serat Centhini* is reflected through the main character Seh Amongraga. Seh Amongraga died with the aim of purifying himself by means of *moksa*. Human effort to achieve the highest goal, namely to achieve deliverance⁶⁴ and *kamoksan*⁶⁵, an attempt at merging oneself with voidness perfectly, attaining *kemanunggalan*.

The fruit of unity in the Gospel of John is eternal life, living with the Father in heaven. There is no *unio mystica* found in text B (personal fellowship). There is a difference between Javanese mental exercise and Catholic mental exercise. Javanese inner practice places more emphasis on human efforts to respond to the Divine, while Catholic inner practice means responding to God's revelation. Unity with the Divine means more that there is an acknowledgment of God's initiative to greet humans and human efforts to respond to God's revelation. The perfection of life in the Gospel of John is obtaining eternal life. Jesus is the path to achieve a perfect life.

d. Illumination Motion from the Text of John 15: 1-8 on *Serat Centhini*

Unity in John's Gospel takes into account the role of the Divine. In order for humans to have unity with the Divine, then there is a role from the Divine which is also given. This role is seen in the figure of Jesus. In text B, unity with the Divine is unity with the Father in heaven. To be able to unite with the Father, there is a role given by the Divine, namely by the presence of Jesus as a person (the Divine) sent by the Father. Jesus' divine character is shown from the beginning (1:18). Jesus has divine authority because the presence of Jesus in the world is also the presence of God. The presence of the role of the Divine gives instructions for humans on how to achieve unity. Jesus revealed Himself as the path to the Father. Jesus is the path that leads people to the Father. The journey in the world will achieve unity with Jesus, but perfect union will be achieved in the Father's house. Text B reveals what the ultimate goal of the journey to follow Jesus really is, namely unity with the Father in heaven. Therefore, the union with the Divine in the Gospel of John must be understood within the framework of God's work of salvation. Unity here does not refer to trance/ecstasy experiences.

In *Serat Centhini*, Seh Amongraga describes the spiritual practices of the Javanese people which are reflected in both physical and spiritual guidance. To

⁶⁴ Kalepasan: kesempurnaan jiwa pada masa masih hidup.

⁶⁵ Moksa: kesempurnaan yang diperoleh ketika sudah mati.

achieve the perfection of life, humans need to practice. Seh Amongraga seeks and makes efforts to experience the unity. The unity in *Serat Centhini* does not seem to have been guided by the Divine. Unity occurs in repeated and rhythmic prayer.

Text A describes how humans who can achieve *manunggaling kawula Gusti* are human beings. That is, humans can unite with God because the origin and nature of humans are the same as God (*sangkan paraning dumadi*). Unity here is more understood as a human effort to achieve unity with the Divine. The unity in text B seems to focus more on how humans respond to God's revelation. Those who respond (believe) in Jesus as the fullness of God's revelation, are indirectly in union with God. Text A does not talk about revelation, while text B's union with Jesus also means acknowledging the existence of an initiative from God who greets humans and brings salvation. It is in Jesus that human responds to God's revelation.

4. Conclusion

This study is an attempt to apply cross-textual reading that departs from *Serat Centhini* and the Gospel of John. Both texts have the same concept of unity with the Divine or what in Javanese terms is known as *manunggaling kawula Gusti*. The theme of unity is given in a teaching in the form of a command to unite with the Divine. In *Serat Centhini*, the teachings are given by Amongraga to his wife, Tambangraras (cf. *Serat Centhini* VI 360:12). In the Gospel of John, teachings are given by Jesus to his disciples at the last supper (cf. John 13:1-2).

Unity in *Serat Centhini* seems to be more of a goal that must be achieved considering that in Javanese society there is an assumption about the perfection of life. In John's Gospel, unity is more of a means because the goal is to produce fruit. "Abide in Me and I in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in Me" (John 15:4). Being fruitful not only presupposes that one is united with Jesus, it is also something that is required.

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