



The Foundation and Role of Zending in the Development of the GKJ Ngulakan Church in Kulon Progo, 1916–1980

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the foundation and role of *Zending* in the historical development of the GKJ Ngulakan Church in Kulon Progo from 1916 to 1980. The research aims to examine the establishment of the church and assess the contributions of *Zending* to its institutional and community growth. Employing the historical method, this study follows a structured approach, including topic selection, heuristics, source verification, interpretation, and historiography. The findings reveal that GKJ Ngulakan was officially established in 1916 by the Dutch *Gereformeerd Zending*, following the emergence of a Christian congregation in Ngulakan in 1913. Beyond its religious mission, *Zending* played a transformative role in local education, healthcare, and economic development. Over time, particularly from 1980 onwards, the church witnessed substantial growth, characterized by an increase in baptized members and the institutionalization of synod sessions for pastoral appointments. This study underscores the critical influence of *Zending* in shaping not only the religious landscape of GKJ Ngulakan but also its broader socio-economic environment, offering new insights into the intersection of missionary activities and local community development.

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INTRODUCTION

The role of missionaries has been a fundamental aspect of evangelization, particularly in Java, where their activities were closely associated with the Dutch colonial administration (Cipta, [2020](#); Rodemeier, [2016](#)). The establishment of *Gereja Kristen Jawa* (GKJ) was significantly shaped by missionary efforts, often facilitated through hospitals, schools, and government institutions built under the Dutch East Indies administration (Laoli, [2013](#)). These institutions provided avenues for indigenous communities to become familiar with Christian teachings, ultimately leading to the gradual adoption of Christian values and the formation of *Pasamuan Kristen* or Christian congregations (Tampake & Utomo, [2019](#)).

Ngulakan Hamlet in Hargorejo, Kokap, Kulon Progo, holds historical significance due to its colonial-era heritage, particularly the presence of the GKJ Ngulakan Church. The establishment of this church is intrinsically linked to the missionary endeavors of *Gereformeerd Zending*, a Dutch Protestant mission that played a pivotal role in spreading Christianity (Ma'arif et al., [2024](#)). Beyond religious conversion, *Zending* also contributed significantly to education, healthcare, and economic development to gain local support and establish a sustainable Christian community (Willyam & Suseno, [2024](#)). Despite its historical significance, studies examining the foundation and growth of GKJ Ngulakan remain scarce, particularly concerning the interactions between *Zending* missionaries and the local Javanese community (Wulandari, [2022b](#)).

The establishment of GKJ Ngulakan was not merely a religious endeavor but also a socio-cultural transformation that reshaped the indigenous community's way of life. The influence of *Gereformeerd Zending* extended beyond spiritual teachings, as missionaries introduced Western-style education, modern medical practices, and economic initiatives aimed at integrating the local population into a broader missionary-led framework of societal development (Halim et al., [2024](#)). This fusion of religious and social services played a crucial role in securing the trust and participation of the indigenous community, leading to deeper engagement with church activities. Over time, GKJ Ngulakan evolved into both a spiritual and socio-economic center, fostering a distinctive blend of Christian values and Javanese cultural traditions (Rumekso, [2019](#)).



A primary strategy of *Gereformeerd Zending* in establishing its influence was through education. Missionary schools were among the earliest institutions established by Dutch missionaries in Ngulakan. These schools not only provided literacy and foundational knowledge but also incorporated Christian teachings into their curricula (Wulandari, [2022a](#)). The educational initiatives were particularly effective in attracting indigenous children and young adults, many of whom later assumed leadership roles within the church. Proficiency in Dutch and Javanese afforded these students access to new opportunities, including employment in government institutions and missionary-led organizations (Anam, [2016](#)).

Healthcare also played a crucial role in the missionary agenda in Ngulakan. *Gereformeerd Zending* established small clinics and health centers to provide medical services, which were otherwise inaccessible to most of the local population (Wulandari, [2022b](#)). Missionary doctors and nurses treated various illnesses, introduced modern hygiene practices, and conducted public health education programs. These medical services not only improved public health outcomes but also enhanced the church's image as a benevolent institution. The provision of free or low-cost healthcare fostered goodwill among the local population, reinforcing their willingness to engage with Christian teachings (Wulanadha, [2016](#)).

Beyond education and healthcare, *Zending* also pursued economic initiatives as part of its broader mission to integrate Christianity into local society. Agricultural programs were introduced to help indigenous farmers enhance their productivity through improved farming techniques and access to better tools (Khusyairi, [2020](#)). Additionally, small-scale industries such as weaving and carpentry were promoted, often with financial and technical assistance from the missionaries. These economic interventions aimed to enhance local self-sufficiency while simultaneously reinforcing the church's role as a driver of community development. The resulting economic stability, in turn, facilitated the expansion of Christian teachings and strengthened church membership (Noertjandranata, [2021](#)).

However, the presence of *Gereformeerd Zending* in Ngulakan was not without its challenges. Certain segments of the indigenous population, particularly adherents of traditional Javanese spiritual beliefs and Islam, resisted missionary efforts (Anshory, [2011](#)). Many viewed missionary activities as a form of cultural imperialism, perceiving them as an attempt to replace indigenous traditions with Western religious norms. Additionally, internal debates within the church arose regarding the extent to which local customs should be preserved or adapted within Christian doctrine. These tensions sometimes resulted in divisions within the congregation, highlighting the complexities of religious transformation in both colonial and post-colonial contexts (Pradewi et al., [2019](#)).

During the post-colonial period, the development of GKJ Ngulakan underwent significant institutional and governance-related transformations. By the 1980s, the church had progressively gained autonomy from its Dutch missionary origins, with local pastors and church leaders assuming greater responsibilities. The rise in the number of baptized members signified the strengthening of Christian influence within the community. The organization of synod sessions for pastoral elections further underscored the institutional maturity of GKJ Ngulakan, marking its transition from a missionary-dependent establishment to a self-sustaining religious institution.

The historical development of GKJ Ngulakan offers valuable insights into the broader dynamics of missionary work, colonial influence, and indigenous adaptation in Java. The interplay between religious evangelization and socio-economic transformation illustrates how Christianity was systematically integrated into local communities. By exploring these historical trajectories, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of *Gereformeerd Zending* in shaping both religious and social structures in Kulon Progo, providing a nuanced perspective on the long-term impact of missionary activities in Indonesia.

This study addresses a critical gap in historical scholarship by analyzing the foundation and role of *Zending* in the development of GKJ Ngulakan from 1916 to 1980. Employing a historical research framework, the study seeks to answer the following key questions: (1) What were the primary factors influencing the establishment of GKJ Ngulakan? (2) How did *Zending* shape the church's growth and its interaction with the local community? (3) What were the broader socio-religious implications of *Zending's* activities in Kulon Progo? Through this analysis, the research aims to contribute to existing academic discourse on the historical relationship between Christian missions and indigenous communities in Java, offering new insights into the complexities of religious transformation and institutional development.

METHODS

This study employs the historical method to analyze the foundation and role of *Gereformeerd Zending* in the development of the GKJ Ngulakan Church in Kulon Progo between 1916 and 1980. The historical method follows a structured approach consisting of several key stages. First, the research topic is selected based on its relevance to the study's focus. Second, sources are collected through heuristics, including archival research, official church documents, missionary reports, and relevant historical literature. Third, source verification or criticism is conducted to assess the authenticity and credibility of the collected data. Fourth, data interpretation is carried out by contextualizing historical facts to understand the prevailing socio-religious dynamics. Finally, historiography is employed as a systematic process of writing history based on the analytical findings (Sjamsuddin, [2014](#)). This methodological approach ensures a rigorous and systematic examination of the interplay between missionary activities and the socio-religious transformation of the local community, providing insights into the historical significance of *Gereformeerd Zending* (Kartodirdjo, [2019](#)).

The data for this research comprise both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include church archives, correspondence between missionaries and colonial authorities, and annual reports from *Gereformeerd Zending*. Secondary sources consist of books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and academic theses that explore similar themes. Data collection techniques involve an extensive literature review and document analysis, while data analysis follows a descriptive-analytical approach. This approach is utilized to examine the multifaceted role of *Zending* in shaping the religious, educational, healthcare, and economic landscape of GKJ Ngulakan. By employing this methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical and social contributions of *Zending* within the broader colonial and post-colonial contexts, offering new insights into the long-term impact of missionary activities in Java (Laoli, [2013](#)).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Establishment of GKJ Ngulakan

The GKJ Ngulakan Church was founded by the Dutch *Gereformeerd Zending* in 1916. The construction process commenced in 1913, coinciding with the formation of a Christian congregation in Ngulakan Hamlet. The official establishment date of GKJ Ngulakan, August 20, 1916, was determined based on historical records, including the first *GKJ Ngulakan Residents' Book*, as well as oral testimonies from elderly members of the congregation and the wider community. Additionally, the formal recognition of its establishment was affirmed during a church assembly meeting on June 4, 2004 (Interview with Abdi Kristiyanto & Aris Kristian Widodo, April 14, 2024).



Figure 1: The GKJ Ngulakan Church Building (Post-Renovation)

Source: Personal Documentation, April 14, 2024

The construction of GKJ Ngulakan was a communal effort involving local residents. The land initially designated for the church belonged to the indigenous community but was later transferred to the Sultanate of Yogyakarta. However, the specifics of its early ownership remain unclear due to historical administrative changes in the region. Following the designation of the area as a special territory, socialization efforts were conducted to clarify land ownership. Oral accounts suggest that several Dutch figures (*Dutch Xs*) played a role in this transition, though precise details remain elusive, particularly due to the upheavals caused by the Japanese and Dutch forces in 1942.

The Role of Zending in the Development of GKJ Ngulakan

The *Gereformeerde Zending* was an organization established by the Dutch government to evangelize and disseminate Protestant Christianity across Indonesia. Beyond its religious mission, *Zending* actively contributed to various sectors, including education, healthcare, and economic development.

The Role of *Zending* in Education

The Dutch East Indies government's Ethical Policy had a profound impact on Indonesia's education system. One of the policies implemented under this initiative was the establishment of *Hollandsch Javaansche School* (HJS) in 1921, commonly referred to as the Javanese School. The primary objective of this policy was to address illiteracy among indigenous communities, with Javanese as the primary language of instruction (Wulandari, [2022b](#)). In 1941, another type of school, the *Hollandsch-Inlandsche School* (HIS), was introduced for indigenous children, where Dutch was the language of instruction and Western cultural elements were incorporated into the curriculum (Noertjandranata, [2021](#)). These educational initiatives played a crucial role in expanding knowledge accessibility among the Javanese population.

Following Indonesia's independence, the government appointed numerous Christian educators as state teachers, some of whom assumed leadership roles as school principals and assistant teachers. This was largely due to the scarcity of qualified and experienced educators at the time. Such appointments were particularly evident in Yogyakarta, including Kulon Progo Regency and its surrounding areas such as Wates, Kalipenten, Temon, Kuwojo, Sermo, Kokap, Kalidengen, and Ngulakan. The impact of these educational services significantly contributed to the success of the *Zending* mission.



Figure 2: The Bopkri School Building (Post-Renovation, April 14, 2024)

Source: Personal Documentation, April 14, 2024

One of the most notable institutions established by the *Zending* community was an elementary school in Ngulakan in 1914, later renamed Bopkri School. According to Toto Wardoyo, Chairman of GKJ Ngulakan, the school continued to operate until 1997 (Interview with Toto Wardoyo, June 20, 2024). Amy P. E., an alumna of SD Bopkri Ngulakan, stated that the school's closure was due to declining enrollment following the emergence of newer

educational institutions such as SD Ngulakan 1 and SD Ngulakan 2. She emphasized that the school had significant religious and cultural value, providing both academic education and Christian moral instruction (Interview with Amy P. E., June 20, 2024). Thus, *Zending Gereformeerd* played a fundamental role in shaping the intellectual and spiritual development of indigenous Javanese children, particularly in Ngulakan.

The Role of *Zending* in Healthcare

In Wates, west of the town square, a missionary hospital was established, known as *Hulpziekenhuis Wates* (Petronela Auxiliary Hospital), which was inaugurated by the Dutch colonial government in 1908. The hospital was founded by Dr. Pruys, who served as its first director. Its operations were supported by funding from various sources, and it attracted an average of 60 patients per day (Wulanadha, 2016). Over time, the hospital underwent significant developments, particularly under the leadership of Dr. D. Bakker, who initiated training programs for local healthcare workers. In 1934, Soenoesmo Prawirohoesodo was appointed as the hospital director, marking a period of expansion that solidified the hospital's role in regional healthcare (Wulandari, 2022a).

In 1935, *Hulpziekenhuis Wates* was renovated and expanded with financial support from the Ngayogyakarta Sultanate and the Pakualaman Duchy. Subsequently, branch clinics were established in Temon, Sentolo, and Ngulakan to provide healthcare services to local communities. Oral accounts suggest that a clinic was also established in Ngulakan, operating alongside Bopkri Ngulakan School. However, the exact date of its founding remains uncertain, as some archival records may have been lost during the 1948 *Scorched Earth Incident* (Interview with Abdi Kristiyanto, April 14, 2024). The healthcare services provided by *Zending* institutions not only addressed medical needs but also facilitated the expansion of Christianity within these communities.

The Role of *Zending* in Economic Development

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the local economy in Ngulakan was predominantly agrarian, with residents cultivating crops such as corn and rice. These products were either consumed locally or traded with Dutch and Javanese merchants. Additional agricultural commodities included cassava (*jendhal*), arrowroot, medicinal plants, and various fruits, which were processed into staple foods such as *tiwul*, *growol*, and *jenang garut* (Interview with Abdi Kristiyanto, April 14, 2024).

While farming remained the dominant occupation, a small segment of the population engaged in woodworking, utilizing teak and coconut timber for construction. The arrival of *Zending* in Ngulakan during the 19th century, particularly through the establishment of GJK Ngulakan, facilitated the formation of a cooperative aimed at supporting local economic activities. The Mekar Cooperative was established to provide financial assistance, promote entrepreneurship, and offer savings and loan services.



Figure 3: The Mekar Cooperative Building, Overseen by GJK Ngulakan (Established in the 19th Century)

Source: Personal Documentation, April 14, 2024

The precise history of the cooperative remains unclear due to incomplete archival records, possibly lost during the *Scorched Earth Incident*. However, oral traditions suggest that the cooperative had existed since the 19th century, with official recognition granted in 1998 under Legal Entity No. 06/BH-2-14/X/1998 (Interview with Abdi Kristiyanto, April 14, 2024). This historical trajectory underscores the significant role of *Zending* not only in religious evangelization but also in fostering economic resilience within the Ngulakan community. The establishment of cooperative structures provided a sustainable economic model that supported the livelihood of indigenous people while reinforcing the church’s presence and influence in the region.

Development of GKJ Ngulakan in Kulon Progo, 1916–1980

Early Development of the Ngulakan Javanese Christian Church (GKJ)

The early development of GKJ Ngulakan was influenced by both external and internal factors. External factors included the arrival of *Zending* missionaries from the Netherlands, who played a crucial role in preaching the Gospel and establishing various community services that significantly impacted local society. The support and acceptance of the surrounding community also contributed to the church’s growth. Meanwhile, internal factors that facilitated the church’s expansion included policy reforms within the church, improvements in services, and the continuous innovation and creativity of church members (Interview with Kristian Widodo, April 14, 2024).

Church development can be understood as a progressive transformation aimed at achieving a specific goal. The formation of the Christian community in Ngulakan dates back to 1913, with individuals who had been treated at the auxiliary hospital in Wates. Many of these individuals converted to Christianity after experiencing care, comfort, and what they perceived as miraculous healings during a period of *pagebluk*—a mysterious epidemic that claimed many lives. During this time, a local medical officer known as *Verpleger* or *Mantri Jawat*, named Hadi Purnama, played a key role in providing both medical and spiritual guidance.

The growing interest in Christianity among the local population attracted the attention of Dutch authorities, who consulted with Hadi Purnama regarding the next steps. As a result, he advocated for the establishment of a *Zending* school to educate the local community. Based on the oral testimony of Muhyadi, a former student of the *Zending* school and a retired teacher, this school was founded in 1914. Consequently, the region became widely known as *Ngulakan Zendingan*, and even today, many still refer to GKJ Ngulakan as the *Zending Church* due to its historical connection with the school. Prior to the establishment of the *Zending* school, a Gospel teacher named M. Kalam had already been stationed in Wates to oversee the Christian community, including those in Ngulakan. By 1913, the formation of Christian groups in Ngulakan had already begun, further advancing the process of evangelization (Wolterbeek, 1995).

No.	Nama	Umur	Tempat	Tgl.	Tempat	Tempat	Tempat	Tempat	Tempat	Tempat
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Figure 4: The Oldest Baptism Register (1917)
 Source: GKJ Ngulakan Assembly, personal documentation dated April 14, 2024

According to the oldest baptism register obtained by Abdi Kristiyanto, the first individuals to be baptized at GKJ Ngulakan were Martaatma (Kamidin) and his spouse, Sura Semito. Baptism, derived from the Greek word *baptisma*, signifies purification and a transition into a new community. In Christian tradition, baptism symbolizes repentance and the adoption of a new spiritual life through faith in Jesus Christ (Sumiwi, 2018). The baptism of Martaatma and his wife on August 20, 1916, at the *Ngentha-entha* congregation marked the beginning of Christianity's expansion in Ngulakan.

The conversion of these families was largely influenced by healthcare services at the auxiliary hospital in Wates. The hospital not only provided medical treatment but also served as a center for Christian evangelization. On April 5, 1917, three additional individuals—Martaoepaja, Soeraikrama (son of Roedati Soerakaraja), and Marsoenoe (son of Martaatma)—were baptized. The increasing number of baptisms each year significantly contributed to the church's growth.

By 1928, the Ngulakan congregation had been formally recognized as an official religious community. This transition was documented in the Church Agenda Book on October 26, 1928, reflecting a shift from being an informal Christian group to an officially recognized congregation. However, institutional recognition was still in progress at that time. The role of Gospel teachers also expanded during this period. While previous Gospel teachers such as Sastrokarya, Iskak, and Kalam had retired, new figures were appointed, including Sopater, who became a pastor, and Sis Yoram, who later passed away. Consequently, 1928 marked the first year when a dedicated Gospel teacher was assigned to the Ngulakan congregation.

Congregational Conditions After Indonesian Independence

According to records from Abdi Kristiyanto, the congregation faced significant challenges following the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence in 1945. During this period, the Dutch attempted to reclaim control, leading to widespread violence, including the *scorched earth* strategy, in which schools, churches, and residential buildings were burned. Sumardi reports that, according to the Gospel Preaching Department's records presented at the 1947 GKJ Synod Session, the congregations in Kulon Progo experienced a drastic decline, particularly in Wates and its surrounding areas. Many churches were deserted due to war-related disruptions (Sumardi, [2007](#)).

Muhyadi further corroborates this account, stating that in 1948, the *scorched earth* policy resulted in the destruction of GKJ Ngulakan and the *Zending* school, leaving the congregation without a place of worship and causing the loss of many church archives. However, by 1949, efforts were made to rebuild the congregation. A Gospel teacher, Poerwo Soemarto, who also served as the head of the Bopkri School, along with a colporteur (Christian book distributor) named Martoupoyo, played a significant role in restoring religious activities.

During the Yogyakarta Klasis Council meeting held on July 26–28, 1955, GKJ Ngulakan reported having 50 members: 12 adult men, 14 women, 16 boys, and 8 girls. In the subsequent Klasis Council meeting at GKJ Gondokusuman Yogyakarta (April 23–25, 1957), it was noted that although the congregation experienced a temporary shortage of Gospel teachers, growth continued, with two adult males and five females baptized that year. In 1959, reports from the Ngajogjakarta Klasis Gospel Preaching Deputation indicated that the congregation had grown to 79 members. By 1961, GKJ Ngulakan had expanded to include two places of worship: one in Ngulakan with services at 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM, and another in Kopok, an area east of Jombokan village.

The Appointment of the Second Pastor

With the steady growth of the congregation, the Church Council recognized the need for additional pastoral leadership. Consequently, in 1972, GKJ Ngulakan called upon Probo Wiyono, a retired principal of BOPKRI Ngulakan who had completed theological training, to serve as the second pastor. During his tenure from 1972 to 1980, significant progress was made in congregational stability, evangelism, and Christian education. The XV Yogyakarta Klasis Council, held at GKJ Medari on March 4–6, 1975, reported that by the end of 1974, GKJ Ngulakan had three places of worship and a total membership of 319 people, including 75 adult men, 85 women, and 159 children.

After Probo Wiyono's retirement, Sikam Hadi Susanta was appointed as an Assistant Pastor in 1980 to support the services of Consultant Pastor Sri Hascaryo (1980–1992). The official appointment, reported to Region II Synod, marked a continued effort to strengthen pastoral guidance, particularly in the Sengir and Plampang regions.

The Expansion of *Pepanthan Klepu* and the Appointment of the Third Pastor

By September 1980, services began in Klepu Kokap, occurring on the second and fourth Sundays of each month. On August 9, 1980, the Church Council formally assigned Giran Rianto and Sugeng to assist with sermons. As the congregation in Klepu continued to grow, discussions emerged regarding religious customs, such as circumcision and the organization of *kenduri* (traditional feasts). According to the minutes of the GKJ Ngulakan Assembly session in 1980, the Klasis Council had not yet permitted circumcision within the church (Interview with Abdi Kristiyanto, April 14, 2024).

GKJ Ngulakan also played a significant role in providing religious and moral education. Sunday School classes were established to instill Biblical values in children through storytelling and practical demonstrations (Interview with Esti, April 1, 2024). By the 1980s, small fellowship groups were formed, allowing deeper discussions on faith and spirituality. This period marked a critical stage in the institutional and spiritual development of GKJ Ngulakan, demonstrating its resilience and adaptability in the face of historical challenges.

CONCLUSION

The presence of *Zending* in Ngulakan was not merely a mission to spread Christianity but also a catalyst for social transformation through its contributions to education, healthcare, and economic development. The establishment of the *Zending* school (Bopkri), the polyclinic, and the cooperative exemplifies how missionary efforts extended beyond religious conversion to provide tangible benefits to the local community. The institutionalization of GKJ Ngulakan on August 20, 1916, was a direct outcome of the Christian congregation's growth since 1913, further strengthened by its continuous development in 1980, marked by an increase in baptisms and the formalization of church leadership through synod assemblies. These historical developments reflect the enduring impact of *Zending* in shaping both the religious and socio-economic landscape of Ngulakan, with the remnants of Dutch-era institutions still serving as vital community resources.

Future studies should explore the long-term socio-cultural impact of *Zending* institutions on the indigenous communities of Ngulakan beyond the colonial and post-colonial periods. Comparative studies between GKJ Ngulakan and other *Zending*-influenced churches in Indonesia could provide deeper insights into the adaptation and indigenization of Christianity within Javanese society. Additionally, further archival research and oral history documentation would be valuable in uncovering lesser-known aspects of *Zending*'s role, particularly in the economic sector and its influence on local governance and social structures.

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