

Fish in Faith: Exploring Symbol as Survival Strategies in Christianity

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Received: 2021-12-16; Accepted: 2022-11-20; Published: 2022-12-26

Abstract: This study explores the history of one of the important symbols in the Christian tradition, namely the history of the fish symbol. This study argues that the fish symbol is one of the survival strategies for Christians to survive and contest with other groups in the socio-religious context at that time. Thus, this study formulates research questions such as how is the history of fish in the Christian tradition? How does the fish symbol become a medium of survival and resistance? Does the fish symbol have any relevance in the history of Christianity in Indonesia? This research uses literature study, which means relying on written literature discussing fish symbolism in Christianity's history. The results of this study indicate that the symbolization of fish in Christian history can not only be seen from the theological aspect but also from the socio-historical aspect as a survival strategy. Furthermore, the research material is structured with the following framework: the first part discusses the history and meaning of the fish symbol as a savior and unifier in ancient Christianity; the second part discusses the symbolic significance of fish as the spread of Christianity in Indonesia; the third part, symbolism as a strategy to survive both in the form of acculturation and *religious-cultural* identification in the context of religion and culture. In short, the symbolism of fish in the Christian tradition is very complex, containing theological content and historical-social-cultural. By understanding how symbolization works in religious traditions, we, therefore, can understand how religion in all its aspects developed from the past to the present, and also to the future.

Keywords: Fish Symbol; Survival Strategy; Christianity.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi sejarah salah satu simbol penting dalam tradisi Kristen, yaitu sejarah simbol ikan. Penelitian ini berargumentasi bahwa simbol ikan merupakan salah satu bentuk strategi bertahan umat Kristiani untuk bertahan dan bersaing dengan kelompok lain dalam konteks sosial keagamaan saat itu. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini merumuskan pertanyaan penelitian seperti bagaimana sejarah ikan dalam tradisi Kristen? Bagaimana simbol ikan menjadi media kelangsungan hidup dan perlawanan? Apakah simbol ikan memiliki relevansi dalam sejarah kekristenan di Indonesia? Penelitian ini menggunakan studi kepustakaan, yang berarti mengandalkan literatur tertulis yang membahas simbolisme ikan dalam sejarah agama Kristen. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa simbolisasi ikan dalam sejarah Kristen tidak hanya dapat dilihat dari aspek teologis tetapi juga aspek sosio-historis sebagai strategi bertahan hidup. Selanjutnya, bahan penelitian disusun dengan kerangka sebagai berikut: bagian pertama membahas sejarah dan makna simbol ikan sebagai penyelamat dan pemersatu dalam agama Kristen kuno; bagian kedua membahas makna simbolis ikan sebagai penyebaran agama Kristen di Indonesia; bagian ketiga, simbolisme sebagai strategi bertahan baik dalam bentuk akulturasi maupun identifikasi *religious-cultural* dalam konteks agama dan budaya. Singkatnya, simbolisme ikan dalam tradisi Kristen sangat kompleks, mengandung muatan teologis dan historis-sosial-budaya. Dengan memahami bagaimana simbolisasi bekerja dalam tradisi keagamaan, maka kita dapat memahami bagaimana agama dalam segala aspeknya berkembang dari masa lalu ke masa sekarang, dan juga ke masa depan.

Kata Kunci: Simbol Ikan; Strategi Bertahan Hidup; Kekristenan.

1. Introduction

The importance of symbols among religious people is a belief in today's Christian space. Apart from that, the symbol is a symbol of the faith possessed by Christians. Symbols can also be the meaning of belief to find belief in the God of the Universe. The history Christian symbols depicted by the cross in the early 2nd century were used as a seal or symbol of early Christianity. Even in 326 AD, the symbol of the cross was used where in the story Helena in her dream received a revelation from her Lord to make a spiritual journey to Jerusalem to visit the temple of Jesus Christ (Sari, 2018). In addition, the Symbol is also described by Robin Jensen as taking the reader on an intellectual and spiritual journey through the two-thousand-year evolution of the cross as an idea and an artifact, illuminating the controversy-along with the form of devotion to the central symbol of Christianity that inspires (Elsner, 2019). Symbols used by Christians have become part of faith or belief in life.

So far, the study of the importance of symbols in life is a Christian belief. There are three trends from the study that can confirm the importance of Christian symbols, namely the church, the cross, and the fish symbol, which can be categorized as dominant symbols in Christianity, although all three have different dominant symbol characteristics (Uhrin, 2020). In addition, the symbols in Eastern Christianity are almost identical to the symbols of Christianity in Rome, and the Nestorian Church's view of the existential nature of Jesus is inconsistent with the Roman Catholic Church (Sarmadijou & Zarshenas, 2019). The non-Christian symbols adopted into Christianity had a tremendous impact on Christian life from the earliest times, especially in liturgical practice (Ossom-Batsa & Apaah, 2018). Symbols of Christian theology are deeper, metaphorical, and symbolic in teaching the Christian faith from an ideological point of view (Rajalakshmi & Adaikalaraj, 2016). From the trend of studies on the importance of Christian symbols, it is explained that these symbols illustrate that their beliefs and beliefs are born from an ideological and practical point of view in everyday life.

This study focuses on explaining the fish symbol which is a belief in the life of Christians. This symbol gave birth to an argument that fish have a good relationship with humans through trust that is always guarded in faith. This study complements the shortcomings of existing studies by looking at how the fish symbol becomes important in viewing the beliefs of Christians. Moreover, it is a phenomenon that will increase with time, especially in the 6th century i.e., one of the most common supports is pottery decorated with various types of Christian symbols, used from the middle of the 4th century, which will gradually replace pagan symbols from previous centuries (Fernández Fernández, 2021). In particular, this paper answers how Christians find the fish symbol in their faith and how the fish symbol is very important for Christians. Thus, a deep understanding of the fish symbol in the dimension of belief provides a model for history and human relations with symbols as a picture of social and cultural life.

This research is based on an argument that finding clues in the fish symbol as a faith belief in the life of Christians has implications for both the outlook on life and the doctrines that have been disseminated in various regions. The fish symbol is owned by Christians as a strategy to survive in religion. The main purpose of the symbol of the fish is to hide their identity against the Jews in the past. This symbol can be interpreted as a sign that is visible to Christians and finding fish in faith means that symbols are important for Christians to survive.

2. Method

To answer this research through the results of the description that has been described, this study uses qualitative methods to answer research on fish symbolization in belief. Research sources are primary sources such as journals and books related to the topic in general. In addition, this research uses a literature and historical study approach to trace back the history of Christians in believing in symbolic fish in ancient times. So, in this study, we want to convey a concept map in the historical analysis of the fish symbol as a belief in Christians.

After the data was collected, then we analyzed the approach through several data analysis techniques, 1) analyzing the history of the article sources that we had found. 2) find sources of information through news and other sources related to fish symbols in Indonesia. 3) analyze the fact of the symbolic significance of fish in Christianity in Indonesia. 4). Analyze the strategies used by Christians in using the fish symbol as their belief. This methodology provides space to answer our future research.

3. Literature Review

"You never hungry on land if you have fish" (Todd, 2015). This sentence explains how important it is for humans to maintain a relationship with fish. The river has a fish civilization which is the main source of human life. In local problems in the world of human social ecology, animals are often a factor in the balance of natural ecosystems. Like fish, which greatly affect natural life, if one of the fish species is lost or extinct, it will disrupt the cosmological balance of world life. Over time it turns out that religion and spirituality in indigenous peoples also affect the relationship between humans and fish, highlighting the mutual relationship between humans and humans and humans and animals. Fish not only guarantee the necessities of human life as food for the world, but they also establish human and fish relationships that link social, cultural, traditional, and religious life to every human being.

Anthropological work on human relations with animals, religion and spirituality, epistemology, and indigenous peoples challenges the anthropocentrism of human life, which is accepted as the utilization of the material dimension and offers anthropologists to be willing to consider the relationship of animals to humans as well as human relationships with animals and should not perpetuate objectivity by focusing only on the human side of the relationship (Mullin, 1999). Similarly, in searching for social theories that explain human relations with animals, zooarchaeology can find social theories developed in the postprocessual archeology setting that are useful and beneficial (Marciniak, 1999). The original general condition of humans and animals is not animality but humanity (de Castro, 2017). The human-fish relationship is another form of custom indigenous, as it facilitates discussions about history, government, cosmology, and the legal order that community members actively seek to address in various ways (Todd, 2015). Tribal people have their physical, cultural, religious, and spiritual identities (Goswami, 2017). In many cases, there is nothing like equivalence between human and animal benefits, but the claimed animal benefits may still be enough to recast animal rearing as a two-way rather than a one-way association that can assuage moral concerns (Knight, 2018).

Religious symbols play an important role in everyday human life and affect well-being (Bilewicz & Klebaniuk, 2013). The symbol can also be interpreted as a permanent symbolic indicator of Christianity's final refusal to fully identify with the secular order (Gager, 1982). In line with this, Moe explained that symbols involve challenges in applying the principles of liberal democracy, secularism, and pluralism in the human environment (Körtner, 2022; Moe, 2019). Issues related to the use of religious symbols have been relevant, and remain an open question even in democracies such as the member states of the European Union (Lyapina, 2021). As the first example is the tribal symbol of the shaman drum from Central Asia, the second is a Medieval Christian motif with the main Christian animal symbol in a concentric circle structure, and the third is the Chinese Taoist symbol Bagua with eight octagonal trigrams and a Yin and Yang motif in the center (Újvári, 2021). This symbol gives the meaning that religious symbols are part of human beliefs.

Symbols can be studied through two approaches, namely theology and culture (Nabil Guirguis et al., 2020). Shults explains that theological symbols themselves have a transformative (pragmatic) effect because they are "taken" in context and "destroyed" in the Infinite (Shults, 2010). Although this discourse is so fundamental to the expansion of the Christian faith in any ecclesiastical context (Kiarie, 2019). While the cultural symbol is a distinctive embodiment of the ideas, customs, and cultural heritage of the community with artistic values and distinctive aesthetic experiences (Zhang, 2021). These symbols not only function as symbols of affection but are also loaded with beliefs that

contain transcendental values (Salma, 2021). These symbols are redefined in such a way that the regional identity conforms to “religious requirements” and becomes “harmless” (Jong & Lu, 2022). In other words, theological and cultural symbols are part of the religious symbols practiced by religious people (Alfian, 2022).

Survival strategies are strategies used to support survival and produce life (Demir, 2019). Survival strategies have a superior concept in trying to work in a profession or community (Tarisayi & Manik, 2021). Survival strategies have been adopted by various organizations in the environment (Aghimien et al., 2018; Körtner, 2022). As in religious organizations that use defensive strategies to contest fellow religious people to develop each other. In a strategy of survival, Ringvee states that new religious groups seek to establish a successful presence in society (Ringvee, 2017). In addition, survival strategies are part of conflicting socio-economic and religious transformations, reflecting the important role played by religion in identity construction (Mpofu, 2021). In other words, a survival strategy is a strategy used by humans or groups, be it social, community, or religious groups in playing strategies to protect themselves from everything related to threats or resistance in life.

4. Result and Discussion

A Brief History of the Christological Fish

The symbol of Christ as fish comes from the Greek word *ἰχθύς* (*ichthys* or *ichthus*) which means fish (figure 1). It became a religious symbol for Christians started in the second century. The word “fish” in Greek was used as an acronym for *Ἰησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱός Σωτήρ* (Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior). Early Christians drew or engraved this symbol in many places more than the Jews or other religious communities. Although Christians began to use it in the second century, the popular usage of the symbol had only begun in the third and fourth centuries. Christians used the symbols in their catacombs associating them with the Eucharist (Costanzo, 1989). The symbol also appeared in baptismal contexts. However, the certain origin of the symbol remains a matter of dispute (Rasimus, 2012).



Figure 1 The symbolism of the fish emerged from the Greeks - Ichthys

Source: Parke (2022)

The fish symbol could connect Christians in many historical periods through self-identification or the meanings associated with the symbol such as baptism and eucharist (Gockel, 2016). In Matt. 14:17, Jesus fed more than 5,000 men with five loaves and two fish, and in Matt. 15:34, he fed more than 4,000 people with seven loaves and “few small fish.” The first occasion is also recorded in John 6:9-13, and it is often used as the theological basis for the Eucharist. John 6:11 narrates how Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, He gave thanks to God, then distributed it to the multitudes. The expression “gave thanks” comes from the Greek word “eukharisteo” (ἐυχαριστέω) (Danker, 2009). Although there is no fish in the Eucharist but only bread and wine, fish is a significant element in the John 6 narrative that has become the theological basis of the Eucharist. Thus, the association of Ichthys with the Eucharist is an indirect one.

The Christological fish was also associated with the practice of water baptism through immersion in the early church. Through water baptism, believers were in fellowship with the fish. As Tertullian, the second-century church father said: “We, little fishes, after the image of our Ichthys, Jesus Christ, born in the water” (Tertullian, 1995). Christians also used the symbol as a secret symbol for those who were persecuted because of their faith. The fish attracted little suspicion if compared with the cross, thus making it suitable for persecuted Christians. When threatened by the Romans, Christians would use the fish symbol to mark places for meeting and also their tombs; distinguishing their communal identity from others. An ancient story narrates how when a Christian with a stranger on the road, he or she would draw a simple fish symbol in the dirt. If the stranger writes another fish symbol, it would be an indication that both of them are Christians (Chase, 2018). The nature of this symbol is functional, aesthetical, and also constructive in the sense that it is adaptive to the demands of Christianity in history and how it is relevant to the experience of the Christian community (de la Fuente, 2022).

Fish has also many biblical meanings. The Bible uses fish as a symbol of God’s judgment on nations or individuals (Jer. 16:16; Ezek. 32:3). Several of Jesus’ disciples were fishermen (e.g., Mark 1:16), but then Jesus charged his disciples to be fishers of men (Matt. 4:19). The Kingdom of God is symbolized as a net that catches all kinds of fish (Matt. 13:47). And after His resurrection, Luke 24:42 narrates how Jesus ate broiled fish with the disciples (Coplen, 2016; Douglas, 2007). To understand the biblical meanings of the “fish,” several passages in the Old and New Testaments mentioned above will be examined.

Jer. 16:16 is more about the restoration of Israel from exile conveyed by the prophet Jeremiah, rather than a judgment. Verse 15 tells the readers on how God would bring Israel back to the promised land. However, the imagery of fishers and hunters has an ambiguous meaning for both restoration and judgment. On the one hand, the image shows how Israel will be caught by God and then gathered to be one people of God as it was before the exile; but on the other hand, the image pictures Israel as the prey (Bible, 2015). Verse 18 might clarify the meaning, that God would gather His people and return them to the promised land; but they must first be judged for their sins (J. D. Barry et al., 2016). Here the image of fish plays a very important role since it signifies how God will gather the fish which are the exiled Israelites from Babylon and restore them to Jerusalem, the promised land.

Ezek. 32:3 is a prophetic judgment spoken by Ezekiel to the king of Egypt because of the crime he had done to God’s people (Biwul, 2013). God said that he would throw His net over him, and drag him by that net. Here the image of fish is not explicitly stated, however, it is implied that the king of Egypt would be the fish that is dragged by God’s net. Verse 11 then clarifies the meaning of the judgment, that the sword of the king of Babylon would come over Egypt as a punishment.

In Matt. 4:19, Jesus called his first disciples by the expression “follow me.” It implies an act of physically following him during his ministry. That also means that his followers are not just listeners, but they follow Jesus by doing what he did. Jesus said that he would make those who follow him “fishers of men.” This metaphor is related to Jer. 16:16 in which Yahweh sends “fishermen” to gather the exiled Israelites. But in the New Testament, it is more referring to the beginning of the messianic reign, which is directly related to the Great Commission in Matt. 28:18-20. The fishers of men are

called to catch men, in the sense of evangelization of the world (Carson, 1984). The image of the Kingdom of God as a net that catches all kinds of fish in Matt. 13:47 also contributes to the logic of the Great Commission. Through evangelization, the Kingdom of God would be expanded to the whole earth.

The usage of “fish” is also prominent in the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ. Luke 24:42 shows how the risen Christ eats and drinks. This narrative is very important to show that it was a true bodily appearance, not a mere visionary one. It strengthens the early church's position, which tried to show how Christ had truly risen from death. The specific reference to fish here might call readers to remember how the “fishers of men” were called, then prepare the narrative of the Great Commission which occurs right before the ascension of Christ (Bible, 2015).

Symbolizing Fish as Survival Strategy for Christianity

This study uses “survival theories” as a framework and argues that the use of fish symbols in the Christian tradition in Indonesia is a form of survival strategy. As an introduction, survival strategy or survival theories are theories that are often used to explain how strategies are carried out by one actor or community in a place to defend themselves from various challenges, dangers, or threats to the survival and sustainability of their existence (Mintzberg et al., 1995). In other words, survival strategy can be interpreted as a strategy used by a person or group of people to maintain their existence, both material and non-material. From a sociological perspective, survival strategies usually occur when a person or group is in a threatening condition, or in this context, becomes a minority and experiences threats from the majority group. Why do minority groups, such as Christians, have to defend themselves with a “survival strategy” because other groups are threats to them, slowly, Christian values will disappear if they do not defend themselves (Alfian, 2021). Finally, this strategy manifests itself in many forms, either in the form of symbolization, acculturation, assimilation, moderation, and so on.

Symbolization as an effort to defend Christians affects increasing the number of Christians in Indonesia, meaning that symbolization is used as a medium for spreading Christian teachings in various regions. In 2000, it was recorded that there were four out of 34 regions in Indonesia that had a Christian majority religion, including Maluku 50.19% i.e. 1.1 million, North Sulawesi i.e. 62.27% i.e. 2 million population, Papua 75, 51%, namely 2.2 million people, and East Nusa Tenggara 87.67%, namely 3.8 million as the region with the highest percentage of Christians (Steenbrink & S. Aritonang, 2010). A total of 9.1 million Christians in the region are in Indonesia. However, in 2020 the number of Christians will increase based on data from Global Religious Future which estimates it will reach 26.93 million people the 26th largest in the world (katadata.co.id). From a comparison of twenty years ago, it is clear that the rate of Christianization has increased slowly over the last twenty years.

The significant growth in the number of Christians, as can be seen above, cannot be separated from the role and strategy of Christians in spreading religion in various regions. There are many roles and defensive strategies carried out by Christians, including political strategy, cultural strategy, social strategy, and symbolic strategy (Alfian, 2021; Bourdieu, 1977, 1984). In political strategy, Christians try to be active actors to maintain their existence. Political activities of religious organizations use strategic characteristics for political actors such as lobbying and mass mobilization (Pötz, 2016). Politics as a politician is a social subject who tries to influence power relations in a political system to achieve their goals and these actors embrace a set of beliefs and doctrines, norms, and religious laws that motivate and guide them to behave from the point of view which is the ideology of the subject acting (Alfian, 2022; Pötz, 2016). This strategy is usually used by Christians as a defensive strategy to politicize religious identity through political chords or religious leaders. For example, the Netherlands has implemented ethical politics in various parts of Indonesia as education for understanding Christianity. Likewise, cultural and social strategies were used as human-to-human interactions to spread Christian teachings more broadly during the Dutch colonial period.

In the context of this research, the survival strategy used by Christians is a symbolization strategy in which the fish symbol is constructed and reconstructed as needed. Symbolically the fish

has been associated with the disciples of Christ in the new testament as fishermen and Christians are depicted symbolically in the form of a fish. In addition, the Early Church Father Tertullian described that "We, the little fish, were born after our Jesus Christ in the water (of grace), and only by staying in it can we be saved". This symbolism is a strategy for Christians in providing an understanding of the meaning of the teachings of Christ. They need symbols as a reconstruction of Christian teachings through church doctrines or massive dissemination through symbolic meanings of biblical verses.

In the last few decades, research on the role and strategy of spreading religion in Indonesia has been increasingly widespread. This is because there are interreligious interrelationships that can become a relational phenomenon and religions are involved in competing struggles against other religions (Reeh, 2013). Christians, for example, use a strategy of symbolization as an effort to defend themselves from the persecution of other religions. The reason is that, in Indonesia, religious contestation occurs very strongly, so it is necessary for religions to need a strategy to survive.

Survival strategy theory explains that there are two challenges for a person or group of communities to survive. First, it challenges each evolving species to "know" exactly what they must know to survive; and, secondly, the challenge of each social species to encourage cooperation, even to the point that individuals give up their lives, even though their primary instinct is survival (Baskin, 2019). Survival strategy means modifying or symbolizing what is rejected so that it can be accepted by the community in religion. This process then gave rise to acculturation and identification in each religion. The components of social identities, such as ethnicity, religion, and culture, indicate the need to modify Western acculturation models to embrace the multifaceted reality of non-Western multicultural societies (Adams & van de Vijver, 2017). In this case, the survival strategy is the role of Christians to symbolize (baptism) through acculturation by entering into the ethnic identity of the local community. This is called Christianity through interaction by following local culture and traditions without losing the teachings of the ancestors. Thus, people who previously did not have an identity religion slowly entered and followed the teachings of Christianity.

The Significance of the Fish Symbol in the History of Christianization in Indonesia

The fish symbol has significance for the history of the entry of Christianity into Indonesia. Even though the introduction of Christianity in Indonesia coincided with the arrival of Portugal and Dutch Colonialism in the 16-19 centuries, Christianity in Indonesia cannot be claimed as a colonial religion (Alfian, 2021; Ruhulestin & Parihala, 2021). They spread Christian teachings through baptisms in various parts of Indonesia. Like the Dutch type, Christianity has been adapted into a model so that the forms of institutions and teachings of Protestantism in Maluku move dynamically following socio-political and cultural changes in line with the colonial and post-colonial history of the people of Indonesia and Maluku (Gaspersz & Souisa, 2021). Rajalakshmi and Adaikalaraj explain that the spread of Christianity has had a significant symbolic impact. Rajalakshmi argues that in ancient Christian symbols, for example, the fish is the acrostic of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior, but on the other hand, it appears in the context of baptism. Moreover, in the view of Rajaksami and Adaikalaraj, a fish as a symbol of savior does not appear often these days, but whenever we see it, we think of the heroic times when Christians experienced persecution and because of their faith managed to spread the gospel despite many obstacles (Rajalakshmi & Adaikalaraj, 2016). The symbolic significance of fish, which was once a secret symbol for salvation, has now become a symbol for the Christianization of a region in Indonesia.

In the sense of a savior, Christian teachings provide space for many people to join according to their own beliefs. The symbol of the fish in the Bible, for example, is explained in Matthew 14:19 that after taking the five loaves and the two fish, Jesus looked up to heaven and said a blessing, then broke the loaves and gave them to his disciples, distributing them to the crowd. In this explanation, the concept of the savior in the fish symbol turns into a savior for human life in the modern era. This is because the context of salvation has expanded its meaning that can be used as a tradition of Christian religious life in history and culture. In addition, salvation is the Christian concept of a savior who will arrive at the end of time, and Christian theology considers Jesus as the Redeemer who came for the

salvation of mankind after major sins (Alma'itah & Haq, 2022). The savior belief in Christianity is the Messiah (KÖSE & ARTAN, 2021). The symbolic significance of the fish gives the meaning of savior in the Modern era as a human helper at the end of time.

Against this background, analysis and research studies of symbolic fish in Christian beliefs related to the history of the entry of Christianity in Indonesia have provided a story of struggle in general. Such as the spread of Catholic Christianity in the Minahasa area led by the priests Diego de Magelhaens and Pedro de Mascarenhas in 1563 who expanded Catholic Christianity in North Sulawesi. In addition, the influence of Christianity also occurred in Timor-Leste from 1975-1999, when the Roman Catholic Church grew in importance to the people of East Timor, the increase was in East Timorese's affiliation with the Church: 25-30% of the population were Baptist Catholics in 1975 compared to more than 90% in the 1990s (Hodge, 2013). In the spread of this Christian teaching, it gives significance or meaning that the symbolic validity of the fish which is interpreted as a savior can be interpreted as religious assistance through the Christianization of the population. This concept continues to be used by Christians in the existence of religion in Indonesia, both through baptism and also information in the Bible or the Bible. For example, the Western Indonesian Protestant Church (GPI) in Depok. This church uses symbols on the pulpit cloth in dark purple and yellow colors around the fish and letters on the day of Lent (Figure 2).



Figure 2 Pulpit Cloth Western Indonesian Protestant Church (GPI) in Depok

The pulpit in the Christian church is one very important part, apart from being a symbol of the delivery of God's word. The pulpit is also a sign for the congregation about the ongoing ecclesiastical church. This cloth is made by adjusting the colors and symbols of the ecclesiastical year that are installed on the pulpit. In addition, the difference between the fish symbol in the past and now lies in the meaning of the fish symbol in the past and present. If the fish symbol in the past was depicted as a code of war, it is now used as a messenger in the pulpit of the Church.

5. Conclusion

It turns out that symbols are not only a theological issue but also a historical, social and cultural issue. The fish's symbolism has been widely viewed largely in ignorance by many religious people. The fish symbolization that occurs provides an expansion of meaning that is not only as a savior during the persecution of Christians during the Roman Empire but also as a symbol in the spread of Christian teachings and also as a strategy to survive in culture in Indonesia. This study has explained the fish symbolism as a religious symbol related to society and culture that has undergone acculturation and identification in society. This can be seen from the history of the entry of Christianity in Indonesia, the symbolic significance of fish, and also Christian efforts in survival strategies in the modern era. Thus, fish in belief is not only symbolic of history but has a broader meaning following the current context.

This study provides a perspective on seeing the symbolic fish in Christian beliefs not only in historical factors but also in social and cultural significance. Various forms of the symbolism of beliefs in Christians have become the basis that the fish symbol is very important to know by many people as a defense strategy in the modern era. Knowledge of fish in belief provides an argument that the symbol is needed by Christians as the savior of the people through the doctrines they have. Thus, this paper emphasizes that the survival strategy of Christians can be seen in several aspects and deep analysis of the symbolism of fish.

This paper has limitations in data sources that only rely on library and media research, so it cannot be used as a strong basis for claiming broadly the symbolism of fish as a Christian belief. Policy formulation as broad knowledge requires a broad search for Christianity which can be seen as a belief in fish as symbolic. Research into some Christianizations in fish symbolism is ongoing and is looking back at various aspects of symbol research that may differ from the symbolic meaning of fish. Follow-up studies that accommodate a wider sample and diverse sources of information can be a source of knowledge for the authors and a better arrangement of research structures.

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