



## THE ROLE OF CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS PREACHING IN THE WAYANG WAHYU PERFORMANCE BY THE NGAJAB RAHAYU COMMUNITY.

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Article history:		Abstract:
<b>Received:</b>	June 11 <sup>th</sup> 2024	Wayang Wahyu is a puppet show as a medium for religious propaganda for Catholics. This study of the form of wayang Wahyu presentation aims to reveal the impact of the Wayang Wahyu performance in strengthening the interpretation of the book, as well as deepening the appreciation of the faith of Catholics in Surakarta. This research is a form of further thought on the occurrence of updates in the wayang Wahyu presentation and its relevance to the appreciation of the audience. The perspective used in this study is phenomenology in which observations of the phenomenon of wayang revelation performances aimed at giving views and appreciation of Catholic teachings are developed from their lives in society. The study was conducted by observing the performances, views, behavior, manner and quality of appreciation of Catholics towards the revelation of wayang revelations. Observations were made on the dalang who had different backgrounds, but presented the same play. The two dalangs have different perspectives, even though they perform the same play, they produce different perceptions in the audience's atmosphere. This study produces evidence that there is an effect of the form of wayang Wahyu presentation on its correlation with the audience's response in the context of appreciation. So that it is important to update the wayang Wahyu to fulfill its function as a medium for preaching to Catholics.
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### INTRODUCTION

The art of puppetry (wayang) has a very close connection with the Javanese community because it contains elements of Javanese cultural wisdom. This wisdom is reflected in various aspects of the performance, especially in the narrative content (Soetarno 2011). The close relationship between wayang performances and the social conditions of the Javanese people is evidenced by the enduring existence of wayang performances throughout the ages. The adaptive nature of wayang performances in response to social phenomena has led to the complex development of wayang's functions.

Performing arts must be able to create artistic breakthroughs that are current and adaptive to maintain their existence in the digital era (Wrahatnala 2021, 70). In addition to maintaining existence, changes and developments occur due to the shift in the function of art toward something more complex. This shift in function refers to art as a means of self-entertainment, which then develops into a medium for conveying values, rituals, and religious interests (Shidiq and Rizki 2021, 375). Like other forms of art, wayang performances have also evolved due to functional changes, leading to the creation of new types of wayang to fulfill these complex functions.

Wayang performances are considered effective for mobilization and socialization purposes. This is evidenced by the use of wayang performances as a medium for government program socialization, mass mobilization for political interests, and even as a religious preaching medium for certain groups. This is because wayang art is considered to have a close relationship with the community and can influence the audience's perspectives. Wayang performances in Indonesia, particularly in Java, have had dynamic functions over time. The dynamism of wayang functions parallels the eras or times they traverse (Solichin and Suyanto 2011, 15).

The development of wayang performance functions has led to the creation of various new types of wayang. Even without the creation of new types, wayang performances already contain values of life. However, these conveyed values are still universal and do not specifically target any particular community (Ibrohim, Nurhayati, and Gumiandari 2022, 309).

The emergence of new forms of wayang is a creative exploration process that often pushes boundaries and steps out of the mainstream zone of wayang performances to become more innovative, interactive, and communicative (Wrahatnala 2020, 116). Additionally, new types of wayang are typically used to frame a specific function. Wayang Wahyu is one such type of wayang classified as new, with a specific function as a medium for preaching or conveying Catholic religious teachings. The primary function of Wayang Wahyu is as a means of delivering religious teachings to Catholics.

From the perspective of its function as a medium for religious teachings, the source of the story must refer to the sacred scriptures, which the puppeteer (dalang) interprets and views through the lens of divinity, then presents in a performance crafted through the concepts and techniques of wayang storytelling, resulting in dramatic and relevant conflicts in the presentation. The structuring of Wayang Wahyu narratives evolves depending on the orientation of the creator and the actualization of social life to make it more engaging and easier to understand. These developments culminate in the function of Wayang Wahyu as a means of deepening Catholic faith.

Paguyuban Ngajab Rahayu is one of the groups that develop Wayang Wahyu and continues to contribute to the growth of Wayang Wahyu in Surakarta. Wayang Wahyu Ngajab Rahayu operates under the auspices of the Yayasan Pangudi Luhur. In their efforts to serve and raise awareness of Catholic faith in Surakarta, the Wayang Wahyu Ngajab Rahayu Community makes various significant updates to the form of Wayang Wahyu performances. The development of Wayang Wahyu performances can be clearly seen from the historical perspective of Wayang Wahyu, from its initial creation to the forms of presentation that are often staged today.

In its development, changes can be observed in the aspects of performance production. The most striking changes can be seen in the selection of wayang characters used, the accompaniment of Wayang Wahyu, and the structure of the narrative performed. These developments and changes are inseparable from the significant role of the artists involved in the Wayang Wahyu Ngajab Rahayu Community. The updates in wayang performances are heavily influenced by the skills and courage of the main actor (dalang) in exploring and actively engaging in current creative perspectives (Putra 2021, 386).

The Wayang Wahyu Ngajab Rahayu Community has several puppeteers (dalang) from different backgrounds, including priests, brothers, artists, and students. This diversity fosters dynamism in each performance by the Wayang Wahyu Ngajab Rahayu Community. The changes occurring in each artistic performance are directly related to the creative process of the artists. The creativity of the performers determines the new works with different aesthetic values, moving toward a better direction (Rachmawati and Prihatini 2019, 318).

The presence of several puppeteers from different generations and backgrounds makes Wayang Wahyu performances dynamic. This is because each puppeteer has a varied orientation towards interpreting Christian values according to their own artistry and faith. This diversity makes it interesting to study, especially regarding the correlation between the innovations in Wayang Wahyu performances and the deepening of Catholic faith, considering that Wayang Wahyu functions as a medium for religious teachings. It is hoped that contemporary updates to the performances will be more accepted and better able to convey the values within the performances.

### **METHOD**

This study is a qualitative research, involving descriptive data collection on phenomena related to the development of Wayang Wahyu and the Catholic faith. Qualitative research is a procedure that generates descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from individuals whose behaviors can be observed in the research. It also analyzes the results descriptively to seek scientific truth by providing a comprehensive and detailed explanation of a problem, rather than relying on numerical calculations (Moleong 1989, 3).

The research method involves three stages: data collection, data analysis, and report writing. Data collection is conducted through several methods, including observations of performances by various puppeteers in the Ngajab Rahayu Community, interviews with key figures involved in the development of Wayang Wahyu, and observations of the audience's understanding of the moral values conveyed in Wayang Wahyu narratives.

The perspective used in this research is phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach popularized by Edmund Husserl, which begins with finding a specific way to understand phenomena. In this context, phenomena refer to anything that appears in human consciousness in a certain manner, whether as creations or as realities, and can be ideas or actualities (Soemargono 2001, 105). Phenomenological analysis of knowledge shows that in the process of knowing, the subject and object face each other. The object determines the nature of knowledge and is not dependent on the subject (Soemargono 2001, 112).

Phenomenology aims to uncover the meaning of an individual's experience. The meaning of something experienced by a person depends on how that person relates to it (Hasbiansyah 2008, 166). The phenomenological approach is used to analyze the perspectives and viewpoints of Catholics regarding Wayang Wahyu performances and their relation to expressed moral teachings of faith. The phenomenological perspective is expected to serve as a tool to determine the correlation between the subject and the object, with the Wayang Wahyu performance as the object influencing the experiences of the Catholic audience, who act as the subjects.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study of the function of Wayang Wahyu performances by the Ngajab Rahayu Community as a medium for preaching involves observing the development of these performances and their correlation with the audience. According to functionalist theory, the functions of a performing art include: informing, educating, changing perspectives, and entertaining. These functions can be encompassed within a performance as a whole (Takari 2017, 13). Wayang Wahyu

exhibits a complex function according to this theory, making its form significantly influenced by its function, with a need to balance one functional element with its primary function as a medium for preaching.

The dynamic nature of wayang performances allows them to adapt to various social phenomena. Historically, wayang served as a ritual tool imbued with sacredness but has proven highly adaptive to changing times and social interests. Compared to other sacred arts, wayang has been the most adaptable and widely accepted among the Javanese people (Suparno 2011, 10–21).

Changes in the presentation form occur due to the acculturation between the aesthetic tastes of the puppeteers and those of the audience. In other words, the form of the performance can influence society, and vice versa, the form of the performance is affected by societal changes. The reciprocal balance between creative aesthetics (universal moral values) and reception aesthetics (entertainment; audience preferences) is considered the reason why wayang remains dynamic and relevant according to its function and purpose (Soetarno 2010). This aligns with the development of Wayang Wahyu performances, which strive to balance preaching or religious teachings contained in sacred texts (creative aesthetics) with packaging them in a performance format that serves as entertainment for the audience (reception aesthetics).

The balance between creative aesthetics and reception aesthetics in wayang performances brings wayang to a performance that contains guidance. This guidance refers to the moral essence intentionally incorporated into the behavior of the depicted characters. The behaviors portrayed by wayang characters are inadvertently absorbed and used as guidelines by the audience. Wayang serves to show the contrast between good and evil, but the resolution of issues and final perspectives are left to the audience (Solichin and Suyanto 2011, 63).

On the other hand, wayang performances are an effective mass communication medium. They can attract large audiences from diverse backgrounds and groups. This indicates that wayang art has a significant appeal to the audience and is highly effective as a mass communication tool, similar to religious sermons. The difference is that wayang performances are attended by a heterogeneous audience, whereas sermons are attended by a homogeneous audience. This encourages the development of Wayang Wahyu performances to make moral teachings easier to convey and experience within an entertaining framework.

Historically, Wayang Wahyu in Surakarta originated in 1960, specifically on February 2, 1960. Brother Timotheus L. Wignyosoebroto initiated the creation of wayang using biblical stories, aiming to introduce biblical narratives while also serving as entertainment for Catholics. This initial development marked the beginning of the function of wayang kulit as a medium for Catholic preaching (Wignyosoebroto 1975, 19). Since its inception, the form of Wayang Wahyu performances has undergone significant development in its production aspects. Current Wayang Wahyu performances have seen various updates, including changes in narrative structure, creation and selection of wayang figures to enhance interpretation, and the introduction of new musical accompaniments to create distinctive scene atmospheres in the performance.

Research into the development of Wayang Wahyu has been extensive. One such study explores the diversity of Jesus figures in Wayang Wahyu, which arises from differing interpretations by creators based on their backgrounds, understandings, and creative capacities. Despite these differences, they converge on portraying the character of Jesus as understood in Catholic teachings (Nursanti 2018, 3). A similar situation occurs with other Wayang Wahyu characters. The lack of established standardization provides room for artists to freely express their perspectives for a deeper understanding of the characters.



Figure 1. Young Jesus Figure  
(Photo: Yayasan Pangudi Luhur, 2013)

Another study on the experience of Wayang Wahyu concludes that Wayang Wahyu is not merely a spectacle to be used as guidance but rather a guidance that is presented through performance. From an artistic perspective, Wayang Wahyu is an entertainment that must entertain, whereas from a preaching perspective, it serves as a model for Christian faith education. In other words, Wayang Wahyu is an effort to "incarnate" Christian teachings through an entertaining puppet show. This approach addresses the modern human need for different learning models to understand the guidance explicitly outlined in sacred texts (Gutama 2020, 218).

A Wayang Wahyu enthusiast stated in an interview that Wayang Wahyu is a way of fostering tolerance with adherents of other religions. Wayang Wahyu is not a religious lesson but an effort to introduce Christian teachings to followers of other faiths (Gutama 2020, 219). This statement is supported by Handi Setyanto, a priest and advocate of Wayang Wahyu. According to him, Wayang Wahyu is a smart way to introduce the stories from sacred texts to both Christians and people of other faiths (Setyanto 2017, 28). This is based on the fact that Wayang Wahyu performances, while primarily for entertainment, contain Christian values. Unlike the doctrinal preaching by pastors, Wayang Wahyu is more flexible in conveying values, allowing the audience to interpret the moral teachings embedded in the performance as a form of preaching.



Figure 2. Older Jesus Figure  
(Photo: Yayasan Pangudi Luhur, 2013)

Evidence of the relationship between the development of Wayang Wahyu presentation forms and the efforts to enhance the audience's understanding is found in the art journal written by Blacius Subono. The article includes a new script for Wayang Wahyu that has been updated to contain a solid concept of performance production (Subono 2015). This represents an effort to explore Wayang Wahyu presentation forms that are relevant, ensuring that the values conveyed through the performance are truly internalized by the audience as a medium for preaching.

Blacius Subono's works consider aspects that may affect the transmission of values in the performance to the audience. These aspects include the performance production, which encompasses script development, accompaniment, and visual elements. The dynamic approach to these aspects aims to engage the audience's interest and focus their attention on the Wayang Wahyu performance. Increased audience interest enhances their reflection on the teachings conveyed in the Wayang Wahyu presentation.

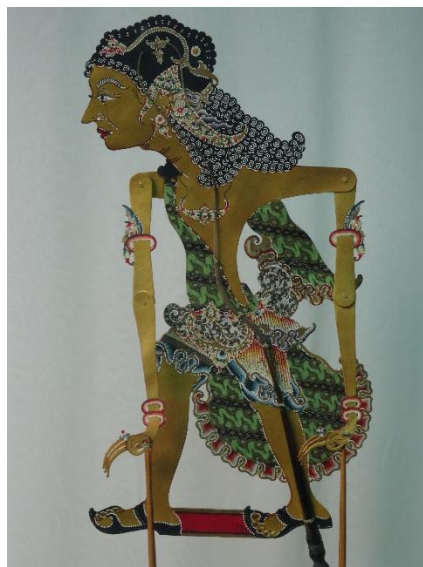


Figure 3. Wayang Wahyu Created by Bambang Suwarno  
(Photo: Yayasan Pangudi Luhur, 2015)

From the perspective of functionalism theory, the development of Wayang Wahyu represents an effort to meet several functional elements of the performance in a complex manner. The functions in question not only refer to entertainment but also to teaching, providing knowledge, and changing perspectives. Another focus of this study is to assess the extent to which changes in the presentation of Wayang Wahyu affect the understanding of Catholic audiences witnessing the performance. The study examines the phenomenon of changes in Paguyuban Wayang Wahyu Ngajab Rahayu's presentations and their impact on the faith of Catholic viewers through a phenomenological approach, based on the feelings and experiences of the audience.

Observations were made on two different cases: two Wayang Wahyu performances by Paguyuban Ngajab Rahayu, each presented by puppeteers with different backgrounds. The first observation was of a performance by Ki Blacius Subono, while the second was by Bruder Frans Sugi. The choice of these two puppeteers was based on the innovations present in their performances. Although both presented the same story/play, their presentation forms were very different. These differences were examined based on the innovations included. Innovation here refers to the process of creating new combinations derived from existing elements and their implementation (Mudra, Mahadi, and Karuni 2020, 59).

The differences in innovation aspects are influenced by the distinct orientations, views, understandings, and artistic backgrounds of the puppeteers. The backgrounds of the two presenters resulted in different performances, making it interesting to compare them to find the relationship between audience responses and the innovations displayed in Wayang Wahyu performances.

The development of performance elements in Wayang Wahyu is considered important to meet societal tastes (Putra 2021, 386). Based on this assumption, it is necessary to observe and compare two different presentation forms to understand the relationship between the development of Wayang Wahyu presentations and the teaching functions that are expected to be conveyed and experienced by the audience.

Ki Blacius Subono, a former lecturer in Puppetry at ISI Surakarta and a renowned gamelan composer, incorporates extensive development in the performance elements. These elements include *catur*, *sabet*, and gamelan. All these aspects are technically and aesthetically interconnected as a cohesive whole (Harpawati et al. 2015, 153). The dynamic treatment of these elements is expected to attract and focus the audience's attention, with the hope that the values and messages of the story can be conveyed to the audience as a form of religious teaching.

In contrast, Bruder Frans Sugi, a monk dedicated to preaching, does not focus as much on the development of performance elements. Bruder Frans's presentation is more centered on the substance of moral and religious teachings for Catholics. Consequently, his performance appears less dynamic compared to Ki Blacius Subono's. Although both are presented by Paguyuban Ngajab Rahayu, they exhibit very significant differences.

Table 1. Comparison of Wayang Wahyu Presentations

CRITERIA	KI BLACIUS SUBONO	BRUDER FRANS SUGI
<b>Prologue Usage</b>	Uses	Does not use
<b>Plot</b>	Dynamic development of modern drama	Conventional static one-night performance
<b>Gamelan Treatment</b>	Uses new compositions	Uses conventional compositions
<b>Duration</b>	2-3 hours	2-3 hours
<b>Audience Retention</b>	2 hours	1 hour

Table 1 illustrates the different phenomena observed from two puppeteers with distinct artistic backgrounds. Blacius Subono has a deep understanding of puppetry and excels at crafting dynamic wayang wahyu performances to captivate the audience's emotions. In contrast, Bruder Frans Sugi, a puppeteer and monk, brings a different technical and artistic approach, resulting in a performance that adheres more to conventional structures. This difference in presentation style is reflected in the varied enthusiasm of the audiences.

Viewers of Ki Blacius Subono's performances tend to be more engaged and emotionally invested compared to those watching Bruder Frans Sugi. Interview results indicate that more dynamic performances encourage deeper engagement with the drama. This highlights that the evolution of presentation forms affects audience enthusiasm. High enthusiasm leads to deeper appreciation, demonstrating a direct reciprocal relationship between presentation development and audience engagement. The more interested the audience is in a performance, the more effectively the instructional values are conveyed.

Although faith experience is a personal and internal matter not easily measured by material, this research can at least reflect the impact of wayang wahyu presentations on it. It is essential to prove that the evolution of wayang wahyu presentations effectively supports its role in religious instruction for the Catholic community. The depth of influence and the effectiveness of the innovations proposed by artists in Paguyuban Wayang Wahyu Ngajab Rahayu in conveying moral values to the Catholic audience or viewers in general are central to this investigation.

**CONCLUSION**

The findings of the research can be summarized by stating that there is a direct reciprocal relationship between the development of wayang wahyu performance forms and audience response and Catholic faith engagement. Comparing the two different wayang wahyu performances, the impact on audience enthusiasm and endurance in experiencing the stories is evident. Audiences are generally more engaged and able to appreciate performances that have been updated in terms of execution, script, and other supporting elements.

The current updates have increased interest and enthusiasm among the audience of Paguyuban Ngajab Rahayu's wayang wahyu. While it is not possible to directly conclude that faith engagement correlates with audience enjoyment of wayang wahyu, it does reflect that the Paguyuban Ngajab Rahayu's performances influence audience enthusiasm. Greater enthusiasm among viewers suggests that religious values are more likely to be effectively experienced.

Literature and field studies indicate a tendency among people in Surakarta to be enthusiastic and attentive to current and dynamic wayang performances that are not overly elaborate. This is influenced by the social conditions of Surakarta's population, which tends to have urban-like preferences. Therefore, to maintain the existence and efficiency of wayang wahyu as a medium of religious instruction, it must continuously evolve both technically and aesthetically.

The research concludes that the development of wayang wahyu performances by Paguyuban Ngajab Rahayu has successfully impacted audience enthusiasm and has been accepted by the majority. This shows that wayang is indeed effective as a mass mobilization medium with a specific instructional mission. However, the performances must innovate and adapt to current social phenomena. For wayang wahyu in the mission of Catholic faith instruction to remain relevant in the digital age, it must be able to evolve with shifting public tastes.

Javanese cultural life is closely tied to wayang. Wayang is often considered more special compared to other forms of art and is seen as a well-established medium for communication within Javanese society. However, the existence of wayang performances depends on their ability to adapt to contemporary social phenomena. The development of wayang wahyu not only ensures its existence but also supports its role in religious instruction. Therefore, it is hoped that Paguyuban Ngajab Rahayu's wayang wahyu performances will continue to improve and adapt effectively to the fast-paced digital era.

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