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Little Suffering Messiahs in the Public Square: Reimagining Asian Missiology through Aksi Kamisan

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Abstract: Persistent impunity for gross human-rights violations in Indonesia poses not only a political and legal crisis but also a missiological challenge: where is Christian mission located when suffering is carried publicly by those whom institutions have failed? Existing Indonesian missiological studies have largely emphasized what the church should do for victims, leaving underexplored how victims' embodied suffering itself can become a theological source that reshapes the church's understanding of mission. This study addresses that gap by interpreting Aksi Kamisan through Choan-Seng Song's Theology of Transposition and Missiology of Enfleshment. Using a qualitative textual-hermeneutical design, it analyzes JSKK weekly letters and official statements, literature on gross human-rights violations, and Song's theological writings through the dimensions of spatial-temporal transposition, communication, and incarnation. The findings show that Aksi Kamisan transforms the secular public square into a *locus theologicus* in which collective suffering, resistant memory, and intergenerational solidarity disclose a contextual form of Christ's presence. Victims and survivors thereby emerge as "Little Suffering Messiahs": active theological subjects who embody Christ's solidarity in history without displacing the uniqueness of Christ as Messiah. The study's originality lies in reconstructing Asian missiology from an ecclesiocentric model toward mission as public enfleshment, positioning suffering as a generative source of theological knowledge and framing solidarity, human-rights advocacy, and the pursuit of justice as integral forms of Christian witness with wider significance for Asian public theology.

Keywords: Aksi Kamisan; Asian missiology; public enfleshment; Little Suffering Messiahs; theological transposition

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Introduction

When a society repeatedly fails to deliver justice, suffering does not disappear; it acquires memory, bodies, symbols, and public voices. In Indonesia, this reality is particularly visible in the unresolved legacy of gross human-rights violations, where prolonged legal stagnation has left victims and their families negotiating not only personal grief but also the institutional production of impunity. Cases associated with the violence of 1965, Talangsari, Trisakti, and Semanggi demonstrate how unresolved historical violence can persist within national consciousness when judicial accountability is displaced by political compromise and pragmatic reconciliation. It was within this landscape that the Jaringan Solidaritas Korban untuk Keadilan (JSKK/Victims' Solidarity Network for Justice) initiated Aksi Kamisan on 18 January 2007. Gathering weekly near Merdeka Palace, participants transformed black umbrellas, black clothing, disciplined silence, and bodily persistence into a distinctive grammar of resistance against political indifference and historical amnesia (Andini et al., 2024; Putra, 2020; Yudistira & Husodo, 2022). Such practices demonstrate that collective memory is not simply retrospective: public remembrance can sustain communal identity and political agency, particularly where particular deaths and sufferings become socially transmitted through practices of commemoration (Murphy, 2023). Moreover, research on Indonesian grassroots movements shows that religious meanings and cultural practices can be creatively reconfigured within collective action rather than remaining confined to formal religious institutions (Smith et al., 2024). Aksi Kamisan therefore warrants attention not simply as a recurring protest but as a durable public space in which suffering, remembrance, resistance, moral imagination, and hope are continually enacted.

For Christian theology, the deeper question is not merely whether the church should respond to such suffering, but whether such suffering can become a place from which the church must learn to theologize differently. Choan-Seng Song's theology is particularly important here because his notion of *enfleshment* refuses any separation between divine action and concrete human history. For Song (1977, p. 53), enfleshment signifies God's movement beyond transcendental distance toward material and historical existence, reaching its decisive expression when the Creator enters the world and participates in creaturely vulnerability. Christian mission, on this account, cannot be reduced to ecclesiastical expansion, doctrinal transfer, or verbal proclamation; it is called to inhabit the historical locations where human dignity is wounded and where persons struggle for life, truth, and justice. The perseverance of Aksi Kamisan survivors—whose movement was historically influenced by Argentina's *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo*—may therefore be interpreted not merely as secular activism but as an event capable of provoking theological discernment. Drexler's (2022) analysis of Aksi Kamisan demonstrates how its repetitive temporality contests impunity by keeping unresolved injustice publicly present rather than allowing it to be absorbed into official narratives of closure. Within Song's theological grammar, this struggle becomes especially significant because incarnation relocates theological attention to precisely such concrete histories of suffering (Song, 1977, p. 53). Contemporary scholarship on public missiology similarly argues that mission is transformed through its encounter with public life, institutions, power, and social conflict rather than simply applied to them from an ecclesiastical center (Kim, 2017; Okesson, 2016), while

Southeast Asian public theology increasingly stresses responsible Christian agency in contested civic spaces (Kung, 2025).

Existing scholarship has illuminated many dimensions of Aksi Kamisan, yet those very accomplishments make the remaining theological lacuna more visible. Andini et al. (2024) examine Aksi Kamisan in relation to the formation and maintenance of movement strategies, revealing the importance of symbolic practices and collective participation in sustaining resistance. Putra (2020) analyzes the movement's activism in demanding the settlement of human-rights violations and demonstrates its role in maintaining public pressure where formal political processes have stalled. Yudistira and Husodo (2022) provide a historical account of the movement's prolonged search for justice, emphasizing the extraordinary continuity through which victims, survivors, and supporters resist political forgetting. Drexler (2022), meanwhile, places Aksi Kamisan within debates on impunity and transitional justice and interprets its repetitive temporality as a challenge to linear state narratives that seek to consign unresolved violations to the past. These studies have substantially clarified Aksi Kamisan as a civil-society formation, a politics of memory, a strategy of resistance, and a human-rights movement. Wider scholarship likewise reinforces the analytical importance of embodied and everyday practices. The lived-religion perspective deliberately shifts attention from official texts and institutions toward the ways meaning is produced and negotiated through ordinary experience and practice (Knibbe & Kupari, 2020), while practical theology has increasingly treated lived religious praxis itself as a serious site of theological investigation rather than merely as the application of previously established doctrine (Ganzevoort & Roeland, 2014). Majority-world practical theology further emphasizes that theological knowledge must be responsive to concrete social realities, public aspirations, and local epistemologies rather than reproducing abstract or imported frameworks (Magezi, 2023). Nevertheless, these trajectories have not yet been brought sufficiently into conversation with Aksi Kamisan. The principal gap, therefore, is not an absence of research on the movement but an epistemological absence within its theological interpretation: scholarship has explained what Aksi Kamisan does politically and socially, but has given much less attention to how the suffering embodied within it might function as a source that interrogates and reconstructs Christian theology itself. The movement has consequently been studied predominantly as an object to be interpreted, whereas victims and survivors have rarely been approached as potential theological subjects through whose embodied histories theological knowledge may also be generated.

A parallel limitation can be identified within scholarship on Indonesian contextual mission, social justice, and the church's public responsibility. Rusiati et al. (2025) make a valuable contribution by interpreting the human-rights crisis through *Missio Dei* and identifying prophetic, pastoral, and educational responsibilities through which churches can respond to injustice, including advocacy and institutional forms of assistance. Their work appropriately expands mission beyond narrow evangelistic practice; nevertheless, the fundamental direction of agency continues largely to move from the church toward suffering communities. The suffering of victims consequently functions primarily as the field in which ecclesial mission is exercised rather than as a theological reality capable of transforming the church's own categories of mission. Panjaitan (2021, p. 153) advances the discussion by challenging hierarchical understandings of poverty and positioning marginalized people as equal subjects within contextual mission. Yet even this

important move does not fully resolve the epistemological asymmetry. The framework remains substantially oriented toward what ecclesial communities should undertake for or alongside marginalized people, without sufficiently examining how the lived experience of oppression may destabilize and reformulate the church's own theological self-understanding (Panjaitan, 2021, p. 160). This limitation is especially significant in light of broader missiological scholarship. Kim (2017) argues that missiology and public theology converge precisely where Christian witness becomes critically engaged with society and the common good; Fensham (2017) similarly emphasizes that the church's encounter with the world requires theological transformation rather than one-directional intervention; and Leffel et al. (2023) conceptualize public missiology as attentive to complex publics, changing social orders, conflict, and the social locations in which Christian witness takes form. At the same time, contemporary public theology increasingly calls for theology "from below," particularly where human rights require theological reflection to begin with actual human vulnerability rather than abstract anthropology (Oviedo, 2025). Purboadji (2024) likewise demonstrates the need for a stronger theological grounding of human-rights discourse in Indonesia. What remains insufficiently examined across these conversations, however, is the reverse missiological movement: not only how theology enables Christians to respond to injustice, but how encounters with victims' suffering can test theology, disclose its limitations, and reconstruct the meaning of mission. This study therefore identifies a conceptual gap between mission directed toward suffering and mission reconstructed through suffering.

The niche and novelty of the present study lie precisely within that reversal of theological direction. Rather than treating Aksi Kamisan as another sociopolitical context to which a pre-established Christian missiology is subsequently applied, this study approaches the movement as a potentially generative *locus theologicus* through which Asian missiology itself can be interrogated and reconstructed. It accomplishes this by bringing Aksi Kamisan into sustained conversation with Choan-Seng Song's Theology of Transposition, Missiology of Enfleshment, and concept of the "Little Suffering Messiahs." For Song (1982, p. 108), the suffering Messiah becomes the prototype through whom the suffering of marginalized persons may be understood Christologically; nevertheless, such language must be employed with theological precision. Calling victims "Little Suffering Messiahs" does not create alternative messiahs, assign salvific equivalence to human actors, or displace the singularity of Jesus Christ. Rather, the concept names the historically mediated visibility of Christ's solidaristic presence among those whose vulnerable bodies bear the consequences of injustice. The study's novelty therefore consists in proposing a deconstructive-constructive model of missiology: structural suffering first exposes the inadequacy of an ecclesiocentric understanding of mission and then becomes a site through which mission is reconstructed as embodied public solidarity. This produces a threefold contribution: epistemologically, it recognizes sufferers as theological knowers rather than merely recipients of theological action; Christologically, it interprets solidarity without collapsing the distinction between Christ and those who witness to his suffering presence; and missiologically, it relocates mission from institutional self-expansion toward public enfleshment. Such an approach resonates with scholarship that takes lived experience and theology from below seriously while giving those conversations a distinctive Asian Christological and missiological articulation (Magezi, 2023; Oviedo, 2025).

The significance of this study consequently extends beyond the interpretation of a single Indonesian social movement. Its primary aim is to investigate how the suffering embodied in Aksi Kamisan can function as a theological locus for reconstructing Asian missiology through Song's hermeneutics of transposition and theology of enfleshment. More specifically, the study examines how the movement's relocation of suffering into public space, its symbolic communication through silence and black umbrellas, its preservation of collective memory, and its intergenerational embodiment of resistance can be read through the interconnected theological movements of spatial-temporal transposition, communication, and incarnation. In doing so, it seeks to clarify how victims and survivors may be understood not simply as objects of ecclesial compassion but as theological subjects whose embodied persistence calls the church to reconsider the meaning of witness, salvation, solidarity, and mission. This aim is significant for Asian theology because contexts marked by structural injustice cannot function merely as illustrations for doctrines produced elsewhere; they must participate critically in the production and transformation of theological meaning. It is equally significant for contemporary missiology because public witness increasingly requires engagement with institutions, contested civic spaces, and social forms of power rather than retreat into ecclesial self-reference (Kim, 2017; Leffel et al., 2023; Okesson, 2016). The study thus seeks to provide a theological bridge between Asian contextual theology, public missiology, Christology, human-rights discourse, and the concrete historical experience of Indonesian victims of impunity.

The argument developed from this framework ultimately points toward a broader educational consequence: theology must learn not only to speak about suffering but also to be educated by those who suffer. If Aksi Kamisan demonstrates that public spaces of memory and resistance can become sites of theological knowledge, then Christian theological education cannot remain organized exclusively around classroom instruction, inherited doctrinal systems, or institutionally controlled accounts of Christian mission. The implication is not that classical theological sources should be abandoned, but that their interpretation must be brought into disciplined encounter with testimony, contested memory, histories of violence, and embodied practices of solidarity. This insight has particular relevance for theological colleges, seminaries, faculties of theology, and Christian religious education in Indonesia. Research on intercultural theological education suggests that education oriented toward social justice requires deliberate attention to marginalized voices and epistemic inclusion rather than pedagogies that reproduce dominant theological perspectives (Naidoo, 2022). In the Indonesian context, Purboadji (2024) argues that religious education can contribute to developing a culture of human rights, while Utami (2022) demonstrates the importance of interreligious competence in religious education within Indonesia's plural educational environment. Read alongside these studies, the present research suggests that Aksi Kamisan may offer theological educators a concrete contextual case through which students can connect Christology, mission, public ethics, human dignity, memory, and structural injustice. The educational value of the study therefore lies not in turning political activism into theological curriculum uncritically, but in cultivating the capacity to discern where theological knowledge is produced, whose experiences are authorized to inform theology, and how future Christian leaders are formed to encounter suffering without reducing sufferers to objects of ministry.

Accordingly, the larger contribution of this study is to propose a movement from a "theology of walls" toward a theology capable of learning on the pavement. Its concluding trajectory is that Aksi Kamisan can be understood simultaneously as a resistant public sphere, a repository of wounded memory, and a contextual theological location in which the church is confronted by the embodied consequences of injustice. Such an interpretation does not romanticize suffering, baptize every social movement as Christian, or collapse political resistance into salvation; instead, it demands a more rigorous theology of incarnation in which Christian witness is accountable to the dignity of persons whose histories have been marginalized by structures of power. For Asian missiology, this means reconceiving mission as public enfleshment: participation in God's mission through embodied solidarity, truthful remembrance, defense of human dignity, and the pursuit of justice. For theological and Christian education, it means forming students who can move responsibly between biblical-theological traditions and the concrete histories of their societies, critically reading both theological texts and the "living texts" of public suffering. Such formation can encourage future pastors, theologians, educators, and Christian communities to understand human-rights advocacy not as an optional political supplement to Christian faith but as an arena in which theological discernment and public responsibility meet. In this wider educational context, the study contributes a contextual model for integrating missiology, public theology, Christian ethics, and human-rights formation, thereby enabling theological education to become more responsive to Indonesia's plural society and more attentive to the voices through which the demand for justice continues to be heard.

Methods

This study employed qualitative library and documentary research using contextual theological hermeneutics and critical conceptual reconstruction. The primary documentary corpus consisted of publicly available chronological letters issued by the *Jaringan Solidaritas Korban untuk Keadilan* (JSKK/Victims' Solidarity Network for Justice) in connection with Aksi Kamisan and relevant official statements concerning unresolved gross human-rights violations. The primary theological corpus comprised Choan-Seng Song's writings, especially *Christian Mission in Reconstruction: An Asian Analysis* and *The Compassionate God*, from which the study derived the categories of transposition, enfleshment, suffering, and the "Little Suffering Messiahs"; Song's account of transposition supplies the methodological-theological framework for moving between inherited theological meaning and concrete Asian historical experience (Song, 1982, pp. 5–10). Secondary sources included scholarship on Aksi Kamisan, Indonesian impunity and human-rights violations, Asian and contextual missiology, *Missio Dei*, public theology, and interpretations of Song. Sources were included when they contributed directly to one of three analytical tasks: establishing the historical-social context of Aksi Kamisan, clarifying Song's theological concepts, or providing alternative missiological and theological interpretations against which the proposed reconstruction could be assessed. The analysis was deliberately limited to the theological interpretation of documented representations of suffering, memory, resistance, public space, and solidarity; it did not seek to reconstruct participants' subjective religious experiences, determine their personal theological beliefs, establish the legal facts of individual human-rights cases, or conduct biblical exegesis. Because the research used documentary and published materials rather than interviews, surveys,

experiments, or participant observation, no empirical claims about participants beyond those supported by the documents are made.

The analysis proceeded in four connected operations. First, the JSKK and Aksi Kamisan documents were read in their immediate historical and rhetorical contexts, and recurring textual features were organized around collective suffering, memorialization, public-space symbolism, embodied resistance, and intergenerational solidarity, categories already identified in the manuscript's documentary analysis. Second, these features were subjected to thematic comparison with the three movements through which the study operationalizes Song's Theology of Transposition: the relocation of theological meaning across space and history, symbolic communication, and incarnation/enfleshment. Thus, rather than merely labeling Aksi Kamisan "theological," the analysis asked whether and how the documents portray the public square as a site of theological meaning, how silence, letters, black umbrellas, and bodily persistence communicate resistance, and how embodied suffering can be interpreted in relation to Christ's solidaristic presence. Third, these documentary meanings were brought into comparative theological dialogue with Song's treatment of suffering and the "Little Suffering Messiahs," with particular care to distinguish Christ's unique messianic identity from the derivative and witnessing significance attributed to suffering persons. Fourth, the resulting interpretation underwent critical conceptual reconstruction: claims generated through Song were compared with the documentary context and with relevant historical, legal, and missiological scholarship, including interpretations that understand Aksi Kamisan primarily as civil resistance, transitional-justice activism, or ecclesial engagement with social injustice. Only interpretations consistent with both the documentary evidence and the conceptual contours of Song's theology were carried forward into the proposed reconstruction of Asian missiology. This procedure is appropriate because the research question is neither causal nor empirical but interpretive and constructive: it asks how a documented historical practice may enter into disciplined dialogue with a theological tradition and, through that encounter, expose and reformulate an ecclesiocentric understanding of Christian mission.

Results and Discussion

Reconstructing Asian Missiology: From Ecclesiocentric Mission to the Enfleshment of Popular Suffering

The first major finding is that Aksi Kamisan destabilizes an ecclesiocentric understanding of Christian mission by relocating theological attention from institutional expansion to the historical suffering of people subjected to structural injustice. Within Song's theology, mission cannot be reduced to transmitting Christian doctrine from an ecclesial center to a passive social periphery. Rather, mission is an act of *enfleshment*: participation in God's movement into the concrete vulnerability of human history (Song, 1977, pp. 52, 67–68; Song, 1982, pp. 5–10). This finding is especially significant within Asian contexts shaped by religious plurality, poverty, political violence, and histories of colonial and postcolonial domination. Song's insistence that the God of mission is already active within Asian histories therefore reverses the conventional directional logic of mission. The church does not carry an otherwise absent God into places of suffering; it is summoned to

discern and participate in God's prior involvement in those histories (Song, 1977, pp. 54, 61–62; Tampubolon & Nassa, 2022). Theologically, Aksi Kamisan thus confronts Christian communities with a more demanding question than what the church should *do for* victims: what must the church learn about God, Christ, salvation, and mission when it encounters people who continue to resist dehumanization despite institutional abandonment? This finding strengthens the manuscript's movement from church-centered toward people-centered missiology.

Such a movement can be clarified through the distinction between theology *about* lived suffering and theology that permits lived suffering to become epistemically significant. Scholarship on lived religion has challenged approaches that identify religion primarily with authoritative texts, doctrines, and institutions by directing attention toward practices through which religious meanings are embodied and negotiated in everyday life (Knibbe & Kupari, 2020). Ganzevoort and Roeland (2014) similarly argue that lived praxis constitutes a serious object of practical-theological reflection, while Magezi (2023) emphasizes the importance of context, social transformation, and public aspiration for theological construction beyond dominant Western epistemologies. These perspectives illuminate, but do not determine, the present finding: Aksi Kamisan is not declared Christian merely because it involves suffering or moral resistance. Rather, its documented practices become critical interlocutors with Christian theology. Theology consequently moves beyond interpreting the context from a position of conceptual sovereignty and allows the context to interrogate its own assumptions.

Wibowo's notion of double transformation provides an especially productive conceptual bridge for this reciprocal movement. In double transformation, theological meaning enters a new context and is rearticulated through that encounter, while the transformed meaning also acts upon the new context (Wibowo, 2019, pp. 121, 126). Applied to Aksi Kamisan, this process generates three interconnected shifts. First, there is an epistemological transposition: theological knowledge is no longer presumed to originate exclusively in seminaries, ecclesial institutions, or doctrinal systems but may be critically generated through encounters with histories of suffering. Second, there is a missiological transposition: victims cease to appear primarily as beneficiaries of Christian compassion and emerge as historical subjects whose endurance and resistance question the adequacy of ecclesial mission. Third, there is a Christological transposition: Christian claims concerning the incarnate and suffering Christ are tested against the church's actual relationship with bodies damaged by structural injustice. This advances beyond previous Indonesian missiological approaches that emphasize what churches should undertake pastorally, prophetically, or educationally for marginalized communities (Panjaitan, 2021, p. 157; Rusiati et al., 2025, p. 54). Their contributions remain important, but the present analysis identifies an additional movement: the suffering community not only receives mission but participates in reconstructing its theological meaning.

The original interpretation developed here may therefore be described as epistemic solidarity. Solidaristic mission is inadequate if it means only that privileged Christian actors move toward those who suffer while retaining complete control over the theological interpretation of their suffering. Epistemic solidarity requires something more demanding: willingness to recognize that encounters with marginalized communities can expose the inadequacy of ecclesial categories themselves. In

this respect, suffering is neither romanticized nor treated as intrinsically revelatory. Structural violence is evil precisely because it diminishes human flourishing; suffering does not become sacred simply because theology learns from those who endure it. Rather, suffering functions as a **critical interruption** that tests whether Christian discourse about incarnation, salvation, and mission corresponds to the historical vulnerability it claims God has embraced. Song's "mission of reconstruction" consequently becomes more than an ethical summons to compassionate action; it becomes an epistemological conversion through which the church's understanding of mission itself is reconstructed (Song, 1977, pp. 54–55; Song, 1982, p. 108).

This reconstruction also clarifies the relationship between human rights and *Missio Dei*. The manuscript's discussion of discrimination, restrictions upon religious communities, legal impunity, and other injuries to human dignity cannot be relegated to a sociopolitical appendix to Christian mission. Bosch's account of *Missio Dei* situates mission within God's prior restorative movement toward the world rather than within ecclesial self-expansion (Bosch, 2011, p. 390), while Rusiati et al. (2025, p. 50) and Tampubolon and Nassa (2022, pp. 45–46) similarly associate Christian mission with social responsibility and the flourishing of creation. Recent Indonesian scholarship strengthens this connection: Purboadji (2024) argues for a stronger theological grounding of human rights in Indonesia, while Oviedo (2025) proposes a public theology "from below" in which human rights are tested against concrete human experience. More broadly, public theology understands religion as capable of reasoned participation in questions affecting the common good (Kim, 2024), and van der Ven (2006) demonstrates the longstanding importance of human rights within public-theological reflection.

The theological implication is therefore more precise than the assertion that "human rights are mission." Rather, the defense of human dignity constitutes one historical criterion by which claims to participation in *Missio Dei* may be ethically tested. Christian witness becomes internally contradictory when it proclaims an incarnate God while remaining indifferent to bodies diminished by unjust structures. Conversely, participation in movements for dignity should not be understood as replacing evangelization or salvation with political activism. It demonstrates instead that salvation, when confessed through the incarnation, cannot be rendered historically indifferent to dehumanization. The manuscript's proposed movement from a "theology of walls" to a "theology of the pavement" therefore signifies not merely a spatial relocation but a change in theological posture: from possession to participation, from ecclesial centrality to contextual attentiveness, and from compassion alone to epistemic solidarity (Andini et al., 2024, p. 39; Jayakusma, 2022; Putra, 2020, p. 94; Song, 1977, p. 63).

Song's Theology of Transposition in Public Space: From Protest Site to *Locus Theologicus*

The second major finding is that Aksi Kamisan can be interpreted through Song's Theology of Transposition as a transformation in the social location of theological meaning. For Song, theological transposition moves the message of salvation beyond inherited cultural and ecclesiastical enclosures into concrete human histories where its meaning must be rediscovered

(Song, 1977, p. 92). This movement challenges accounts of *Heilsgeschichte* that restrict salvation history to narrowly conceived biblical-European trajectories and instead directs theological attention toward Asian histories, cultures, tragedies, and struggles (Yahya, 2011). Song's incarnational logic provides the basis for this move: incarnation is itself the paradigmatic transposition through which the transcendent God enters vulnerable historical existence (Song, 1982, p. 181). From this perspective, the pavement before Merdeka Palace becomes a *locus theologicus* not because a secular site is magically converted into sacred territory, but because the events enacted there confront theology with questions concerning suffering, human dignity, memory, truth, and justice.

This qualification is crucial. To describe Aksi Kamisan as a *locus theologicus* must not mean that Christian theology appropriates a plural civil-society movement by imposing religious meanings upon participants who may not share them. The claim belongs to the constructive theological interpretation of this study, not to an empirical assertion about the religious self-understanding of all participants. The distinction permits theology to recognize public reality as theologically provocative without ecclesializing it. Knibbe and Kupari's (2020) account of lived religion is instructive precisely because it problematizes the assumption that religious meaning is found only where institutional categories explicitly identify it. Indonesian research likewise demonstrates that grassroots movements can combine religious meanings, local practices, ethical commitments, and social resistance in creative ways that exceed formal religious boundaries (Smith et al., 2024).

The documentary symbolism of Aksi Kamisan strengthens this interpretation. Black clothing and umbrellas, weekly silence, bodily standing, repeated gatherings, and sustained visibility before the center of state power together form a performative vocabulary through which unresolved grief becomes public testimony (Yudistira & Husodo, 2022, pp. 2, 8). Their significance cannot be reduced to verbal propositions. Silence may function as testimony precisely because it refuses the language through which unresolved violence is normalized; repetition contests the assumption that the past has ceased to matter; and black umbrellas materialize grief in a visual form capable of maintaining public attention. Political-memory scholarship similarly shows that commemoration can transmit accounts of violent death across generations and thereby shape collective identity and political mobilization (Murphy, 2023).

The theological interpretation arising from this finding can be called a material hermeneutics of public suffering. Transposition does not occur only when a doctrinal sentence is translated into another cultural vocabulary; theological meaning may also be provoked through bodies, places, objects, silence, repetition, and memory. This is why describing the silence of Aksi Kamisan metaphorically as a "public sermon" can be useful, provided the metaphor is not confused with participants' own religious self-description. The silence becomes homiletically significant for Christian theology because it exposes a contradiction: a society may possess extensive political discourse while those demanding justice remain effectively unheard. In this sense, silent presence becomes an indictment of speech that has ceased to produce accountability. The black umbrella similarly does not become a sacrament in the technical Christian sense. Rather, it functions as a material counter-symbol to institutional forgetting—a visible reminder that wounded history has not disappeared simply because political power ceases to speak about it.

The temporal character of Aksi Kamisan deepens this finding. Standing repeatedly for nearly two decades, enduring weather, ageing, writing, remembering, and returning constitute an embodied refusal to permit unresolved injustice to become socially invisible. Song's insistence that suffering is first bodily rather than conceptually abstract guards the analysis against aestheticizing such perseverance (Song, 1982, p. 161). The suffering of victims' families should not be celebrated because endurance itself is virtuous; their endurance exposes the morally unfinished character of the social conditions that necessitate it. Kriswanto's (2026) reflection on encountering Christ in the street similarly directs theology away from abstraction, while Moore's (1982) interpretation of Song underscores the performative orientation of his theological project. The result is a different conception of theological time: the repeated Thursday gathering interrupts the political claim that unresolved violence belongs simply to the past.

The weekly letters sent to the President intensify this temporal dimension. Administratively, they remain letters of advocacy; historically, they document unresolved demands; but within the theological interpretation developed here, they also form an archive of counter-memory. Song's language of "God's Case Before the Nations" makes it possible to interpret this archive as a sustained moral appeal without pretending that the letters themselves are formal theological documents (Song, 1982, p. 249). Their theological importance lies in what they perform: they preserve names, events, demands, and wounds against institutional amnesia. This finding resonates with Murphy's (2023) analysis of the relationship among death, commemoration, identity, and public memory and with Kung's (2025) Southeast Asian public theology of civic agency, which identifies memory and responsibility as important dimensions of Christian engagement under constricted civic conditions.

The original contribution of this analysis is therefore the concept of eschatological counter-memory. Aksi Kamisan does not possess the political power to guarantee judicial resolution, yet its repetition refuses to grant impunity the authority to determine the final meaning of the past. Christian hope, when brought into dialogue with this practice, is consequently neither optimism nor escape. It is a disciplined refusal to treat the existing order as eschatologically final. The protestors' persistence cannot itself inaugurate the Kingdom of God, but it may confront Christian communities with the difference between reconciliation and premature closure. In this respect, remembrance becomes eschatological because it measures present reality against justice that remains unrealized. Song's "politics of love and justice" thus becomes intelligible not as domination exercised in God's name but as a theological critique of every politics that demands peace without truth (Song, 1982, p. 161).

Liberation Movements as Confession: The Church, Power, and Public Solidarity

The third finding is that Christian engagement with movements resisting structural injustice may function as public confession when such engagement arises from Christological fidelity rather than partisan sacralization. This distinction is necessary because the church's participation in public movements can easily be misconstrued in opposite directions: either all political engagement is dismissed as a corruption of spiritual mission, or particular political projects are too quickly

baptized as embodiments of the gospel. Song avoids both extremes by interpreting incarnation as God's movement into history while refusing to identify Christ with structures of domination. For Song, Jesus' messianic identity is disclosed through vulnerable solidarity rather than proximity to oppressive power (Song, 1977, p. 54; Song, 1982, pp. 108, 181). Putra's (2020, p. 87) account of Aksi Kamisan as human-rights activism provides the sociopolitical context against which this theological interpretation becomes possible.

The key ecclesiological question, therefore, is not whether the church should "become political." Churches already occupy social positions, possess institutional interests, distribute authority, and interact with political structures. The more important question is what form of public presence corresponds to the Christ whom the church confesses. Contemporary public theology similarly resists the privatization of religion and asks how religious communities contribute critically to public life and the common good (Kim, 2024). In Indonesia, Purboadji (2024) argues that theological engagement with human rights requires a more robust grounding in human dignity, while van der Ven (2006) demonstrates that human-rights discourse can form an important arena for public theological reasoning across religious and civilizational boundaries.

This leads to a more critical interpretation of ecclesial neutrality. Neutrality is not necessarily the absence of a political position; under conditions of structural injustice, it may become a socially consequential location within existing relations of power. The claim does not justify indiscriminate activism. Christian participation requires discernment regarding truth, nonviolence, accountability, pluralism, dignity, and the common good. Yet when the church withdraws from situations in which vulnerable persons are systematically denied justice, withdrawal itself can preserve the status quo. Song's suffering Messiah thus functions as a Christological criterion against which ecclesial relationships with power are judged. Faithfulness is not measured simply by political visibility but by whether Christian public presence assumes the cruciform form of solidarity rather than domination.

The manuscript's use of *status confessionis* becomes more defensible when interpreted within these limits. Aksi Kamisan should not be transformed into a universal test by which Christian authenticity is measured, nor should participation in one specific movement become a new ecclesiastical requirement. Rather, *status confessionis* functions here heuristically to identify circumstances in which the credibility of Christian confession is jeopardized by silence before grave violations of dignity. Theological confession becomes historical precisely because the God confessed by the church is believed to act within history. Thus, the accompaniment of victims may be interpreted as contextual public liturgy not liturgy in the sacramental and ecclesially regulated sense, but embodied testimony in which Christian confession acquires visible ethical consequences (Andini et al., 2024, p. 39; Song, 1982, p. 108).

The case of Maria Katarina Sumarsih illustrates this argument concretely. Her sustained demand for truth concerning her son's death in the Semanggi I tragedy transforms personal bereavement into enduring public testimony and a demand for substantive accountability (Rini, 2022, p. 302; Song, 1977, p. 52). Christian solidarity with such testimony should not appropriate her grief as ecclesial property. Instead, her public persistence confronts Christian communities with the theological question of proximity: does the church locate itself principally beside institutional security or beside those whose dignity remains contested? The intergenerational character of Aksi

Kamisan further expands this question. Students, activists, journalists, survivors, and younger participants become involved in transmitting memories that they did not necessarily experience firsthand (Putra, 2020, p. 91). This transfer transforms memory from private recollection into public ethical responsibility.

Here the imagery of the manuscript's "public ecclesia" and "extended Eucharistic table" can be retained but must be carefully qualified. Aksi Kamisan is not thereby identified ontologically as church, nor does the pavement become sacramental space in a formal ecclesiological sense. The analogy performs a critical function instead: if Eucharistic remembrance trains Christian communities to recognize the broken body of Christ, then such remembrance should cultivate attentiveness toward broken bodies in history. The analogy therefore turns back upon the church as self-critique. A Eucharistic community that remembers Christ's suffering liturgically while remaining indifferent to historically violated bodies produces a disjunction between sacramental memory and public discipleship. This is precisely where Aksi Kamisan becomes pedagogical for ecclesiology—not by becoming church, but by asking whether church practices actually form communities capable of truthful remembrance.

"Little Suffering Messiahs": Christological Solidarity and Hope from the Asian Margins

The fourth and most distinctive finding is that Song's concept of the "Little Suffering Messiahs" provides a theological grammar for recognizing the agency of suffering persons, but its usefulness depends upon maintaining a rigorous distinction between Christ and those whose suffering analogically witnesses to the cruciform pattern. Song's Hermeneutics of Transposition resists theology produced exclusively at centers of religious and intellectual authority and directs attention instead toward God's incarnational movement into marginalized histories (Song, 1982, p. 181). This methodological orientation converges with contemporary approaches that take lived praxis seriously as a source of theological questioning (Ganzevoort & Roeland, 2014) and with "theology from below," which argues that theological categories require critical interaction with concrete human experience rather than remaining sealed within conceptual systems (Oviedo, 2025).

Song's Christology is decisive at this point. Against political constructions of messiahship associated with domination and elite power, Song presents Jesus as the suffering Messiah who identifies with the powerless and enters human suffering in solidarity (Song, 1982, pp. 108, 161). The marginalized can consequently be described as "little suffering messiahs" insofar as their wounded histories and resistant agency disclose something of the cruciform pattern normatively revealed in Christ. Yet the theological relation must be stated precisely. Victims are not additional Christs, their suffering does not possess independent salvific efficacy, and oppression does not confer messianic status automatically. The designation is best understood as analogical, participatory, and derivative rather than ontological or substitutive. Christ remains the normative Messiah; suffering persons may become historical witnesses to the form of solidarity disclosed in him. This qualification preserves the originality of Song's insight while protecting the argument against a romanticization of victimhood.

This distinction also clarifies why suffering itself must never be sacralized. Suffering caused by hunger, violence, poverty, and state impunity is not valuable because it creates theological insight. Song's insistence upon its bodily brutality resists precisely such abstraction (Song, 1982, p. 108). The theological significance lies instead in agency amid suffering: the refusal of victims to permit violence to have the final word over their identities or histories. The bodies beneath black umbrellas are therefore not theological because wounded bodies are inherently holy. They become theologically provocative because embodied resistance asks whether Christian claims concerning the suffering Christ have any historical consequence for how Christians perceive people whose dignity has been violated.

This interpretation yields a further conceptual contribution: the "Little Suffering Messiahs" should be understood as an epistemology of cruciform agency rather than a multiplication of messiahs. The category redirects attention from heroic, sovereign, and triumphalist images of agency toward forms of agency exercised through vulnerability, endurance, truth-telling, solidarity, and remembrance. The marginalized are not significant only because Christians decide to serve them; they possess agency capable of exposing political falsehood, preserving memory, and unsettling theological complacency. Such an interpretation resonates with scholarship emphasizing the importance of contextual and socially transformative theological knowledge (Magezi, 2023) and with work showing how Indonesian social movements creatively mobilize religious and cultural repertoires in response to contested public realities (Smith et al., 2024).

The resulting understanding of hope is likewise distinctive. Song's "politics of love and justice" refuses both authoritarian power and an eschatology that postpones justice so completely that present suffering becomes religiously tolerable (Song, 1982, p. 231). Hope among the marginalized is therefore neither optimism that political institutions will inevitably improve nor a metaphysical escape from history. It is a mode of inhabiting unresolved history without conceding that injustice determines history's final meaning. Aksi Kamisan's repeated public presence embodies precisely such refusal. The participants cannot guarantee judicial resolution, yet their continuing appearance prevents political neglect from becoming uncontested historical closure.

This finding makes possible the study's strongest original theological formulation: Aksi Kamisan embodies a form of cruciform counter-hope. It is counter-hope because it contests the political production of forgetting; it is *cruciform* because its public power is exercised through vulnerability rather than coercion; and it is hope because it refuses to identify present impunity with the limits of what history can become. Kung's (2025) account of civic agency under authoritarian conditions similarly emphasizes responsibility, memory, and transformative possibility, while Murphy (2023) demonstrates the capacity of public remembrance to transmit moral meaning across generations. These perspectives strengthen the interpretation of Aksi Kamisan's intergenerational continuity without requiring the movement itself to be classified as explicitly Christian.

Adiwilaga's (2018, p. 2) analysis of Aksi Kamisan as a civil-society response to unresolved human-rights violations reinforces the importance of maintaining precisely this distinction. The movement possesses its own civic and political integrity. Theologically interpreting participants as "Little Suffering Messiahs" is therefore the interpretive act of this study, not an identity attributed empirically to participants themselves. This methodological clarification matters because

contextual theology becomes ethically questionable when it colonizes the experience of marginalized people by assigning meanings they did not claim. A genuinely contextual reading should instead permit the movement to retain its plural identity while asking what Christian theology learns when confronted by its witness. In this sense, the study proposes not a theology *of* Aksi Kamisan as though the movement belonged to the church, but a theology in critical dialogue with Aksi Kamisan.

Theological Synthesis: Toward Missiology as Public Enfleshment

Taken together, the findings reconstruct Asian missiology through a series of interconnected movements. First, the locus of mission shifts from institutional expansion toward participation in wounded histories. Second, the locus of theological knowledge shifts as victims and survivors move from being objects of compassion to critical interlocutors capable of questioning inherited theological categories. Third, the meaning of salvation is widened without being reduced to political liberation: truth, dignity, reconciliation, and justice become historical dimensions against which Christian claims about salvation are publicly tested. Fourth, the form of ecclesial witness is reconstructed from institutional neutrality toward cruciform solidarity, while retaining critical discernment toward every political movement. Fifth, the "Little Suffering Messiahs" provide a qualified Christological grammar for acknowledging suffering persons as agents without displacing the uniqueness of Christ.

The central theoretical contribution may therefore be expressed as missiology as public enfleshment. Public enfleshment describes mission as participation in God's movement toward vulnerable human history in which the church does not simply transport theological answers into the public sphere but also permits encounters with suffering communities to transform its understanding of witness. Its operative sequence is consequently not church → doctrine → mission field, but gospel ↔ wounded history ↔ reconstructed ecclesial witness. In that reciprocal movement, the public square does not replace the church, human-rights discourse does not replace salvation, and victims do not replace Christ. Rather, public suffering exposes the historical consequences of Christian confession and calls theology into more accountable relationship with the flesh it claims God has embraced. The study therefore moves beyond a missiology concerned primarily with what the church does *for* marginalized people toward a more demanding proposition: Christian mission must also allow itself to be judged, taught, and reconstructed through encounters with those whose struggle for dignity reveals the inadequacy of a gospel confined within church walls.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the movement from church walls to the public square is not merely a spatial relocation of Christian mission but a theological reconstruction of how mission, suffering, and public witness are understood in Asian contexts. Through Choan-Seng Song's Theology of Transposition and Missiology of Enfleshment, Aksi Kamisan emerges as a *locus*

theologicus in which embodied suffering, resistant memory, public symbolism, and intergenerational solidarity challenge ecclesiocentric models that position marginalized people primarily as recipients of Christian compassion. The study's key finding is that victims and survivors may be interpreted as "Little Suffering Messiahs"—not as substitutes for Jesus Christ or independent agents of salvation, but as theological subjects whose perseverance analogically witnesses to the cruciform solidarity revealed normatively in Christ. Its principal novelty therefore lies in moving beyond mission toward suffering to mission reconstructed through encounter with suffering, conceptualized here as missiology as public enfleshment. This reconstruction generates an epistemic form of solidarity in which the church not only accompanies marginalized communities but also allows their histories to interrogate and reformulate its theological understanding of mission; at the same time, Aksi Kamisan's embodied symbols, persistent remembrance, and intergenerational resistance illuminate what this study identifies as material theological witness, eschatological counter-memory, and cruciform hope. The wider implication is that Asian missiology must regard human dignity, truthful remembrance, advocacy against impunity, and solidarity with the oppressed not as secondary sociopolitical additions to mission, but as historical arenas in which the credibility of Christian confession is tested. Future research should examine how this model of public enfleshment is received and contested within churches, seminaries, and Christian educational institutions; investigate empirically how Aksi Kamisan participants themselves interpret religion, suffering, and solidarity; and comparatively explore whether similar movements of memory and justice elsewhere in Indonesia and Asia can generate, challenge, or further refine contextual understandings of Christian mission.

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Author Contribution

Eliezer Mei Kriswanto: Conceptualization; development of the research methodology; literature and documentary search; theological and textual analysis; interpretation of findings; manuscript preparation; critical revision for important intellectual content; and final approval of the version to be published. As the sole author, Eliezer Mei Kriswanto assumes responsibility for all aspects of the research and for ensuring the accuracy, integrity, and scholarly accountability of the work.

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