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Decolonising Christology in Javanese mysticism: The representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini*

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The portrayal of Isa in *Serat Centhini*, a nineteenth-century Javanese literary encyclopaedia from the Surakarta court tradition, reveals a rich intertextual interaction between the Gospel tradition, Islamic theology, and Javanese mystical cosmology. This raises an important hermeneutical question concerning how Christology should engage with non-Western literary traditions that reinterpret Jesus beyond the categories of ecclesiastical doctrine. This study examined the construction of Isa in *Serat Centhini Pupuh* 65 (stanzas 32–36) through an intertextual hermeneutical approach and proposed a framework for a decolonised Christology rooted in Javanese mystical thought. The research employed qualitative textual-hermeneutical analysis using three theoretical perspectives: decolonial Christology, intertextuality theory, and Javanese cosmology and mysticism. Literary, anthropological and theological sources were analysed in dialogue with contextual Christology. The findings indicate that *Serat Centhini* presents Isa through three interconnected discursive layers: Islamic theological terminology (*ruhullah, Jibril*), Gospel liturgical narratives (death, resurrection and Pentecost), and references to the supreme Divine reality in Javanese cosmology (*Hyang Agung, atmajèng, Pangeran* [Supreme Divine Reality, soul, Lord]). Rather than appearing as separate traditions, these elements are integrated within a distinctively Javanese theological imagination that transcends doctrinal boundaries. The study concludes that *Serat Centhini* represents an early form of theological translation that articulates a decolonised Christology through Javanese mystical language, predating later postcolonial theological formulations.

Contribution: This research contributes to contextual theology by challenging the assumption that Christology belongs exclusively to Western systematic theology and by offering resources for theologians, missiologists and interfaith practitioners seeking culturally grounded Christological approaches in Asian, especially Javanese, contexts.

Keywords: *Serat Centhini*; Isa; decolonising Christology; Javanese mysticism; intertextuality; contextual theology; *ruhullah*.

Introduction

In the field of contextual theology and the study of religions, increasing attention has been given over the past several decades to the ways in which the figure of Jesus is represented outside the framework of Western church traditions. These studies demonstrate that the figure of Jesus, once understood primarily within the boundaries of classical Christian doctrine, now requires reinterpretation within diverse local cultural and religious contexts. In many Asian societies, Jesus appears in symbolic, mystical, or prophetic forms that reflect processes of reception and reinterpretation across religious traditions (Amaladoss 2006; ed. Sugirtharajah 1993). This approach opens space for what is commonly referred to as contextual Christology, namely, an effort to understand the figure of Christ through the horizons of local culture, language, and religious experience.

Within the context of the Indonesian archipelago, one important source for understanding such encounters across traditions is the classical Javanese literary work the *Serat Centhini*. This text is regarded as one of the most monumental works of Javanese literature, compiled in the early 19th century within the Surakarta royal court environment, and is often described as an 'encyclopaedia of Javanese culture' because it encompasses various aspects of Javanese religious, social, and philosophical life. The *Serat Centhini* consists of twelve volumes and hundreds of poetic cantos [*pupuh*] that combine elements of travel narratives, spiritual teachings, social ethics, and mystical reflections rooted in Islamic traditions, Javanese mysticism [*kebatinan*], and earlier cultural inheritances.

Scholarly studies on the *Serat Centhini* have developed through various academic approaches, ranging from philology and literary studies to cultural studies. In general, the text is understood as a masterpiece of Javanese literature whose breadth of content has led scholars to describe it as both an encyclopaedia of Javanese culture and as the pinnacle of Javanese mystical synthesis (Marsono 2005–2008). Previous studies have largely focused on descriptive and structural aspects, including summaries of the text's contents (Adisasmita 1974, 1975), transliterations and translations of the text (Kamajaya 1991), as well as narratological and gender studies that reveal constructions of social relations within the text (Muslifah 2004). In the field of linguistics, scholars have also highlighted the influence of the Arabic language as a result of interactions with Islamic traditions (Junanah 2008), indicating that the *Serat Centhini* is a product of intercultural and interreligious intertextuality. In addition, several studies have examined its symbolic, metaphorical, and spiritual dimensions, including the meaning of sexuality as a form of religious expression in Javanese culture (Nurnaningsih 2016). Tejo (2016) reworked the narrative of the *Serat Centhini* by presenting the characters Gathak and Gathuk as followers of Amongraga; however, he did so in the form of reflective essays and critiques of contemporary life that diverge from the original narrative structure and plot of the text. Thus, previous studies have tended to position the *Serat Centhini* as a rich object of cultural, literary, and linguistic inquiry, yet they have not specifically directed their attention towards a systematic theological analysis.

More recent approaches, particularly within cultural studies, view the *Serat Centhini* as a site of discursive contestation that continually undergoes transformation, wherein the text is reproduced in various popular forms such as novels, performances, and mass media (Agusta, Susanto & Rais 2011). This perspective emphasises that texts are never neutral, but rather shaped by relations of power, ideology, and socio-historical dynamics (Foucault 2002; Haryatmoko 2016). Nevertheless, although these studies successfully demonstrate the dynamics of discourse and textual transformation, there has been no specific research examining the representation of the figure of Isa in the *Serat Centhini* through an intertextual hermeneutical approach that engages Gospel traditions, Islam, and Javanese cosmology. Accordingly, this study seeks to fill that gap by developing a contextual Christological analysis that reads the text not merely as a cultural product, but also as a space for theological dialogue across traditions. The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to decolonise Christology through a reading of classical Javanese texts, thereby offering a new perspective within contextual theological studies that has received little exploration in previous scholarship.

Within this framework, the representation of the figure of Isa [Jesus] in the *Serat Centhini* becomes particularly intriguing from theological and hermeneutical perspectives. In several passages of the text, Isa is explicitly mentioned as a noble figure and associated with theological concepts such as *ruhullah*. However, this representation does not fully conform either to ecclesiastical Christology or to normative Islamic theology; rather, it is situated within the horizon of Javanese mysticism, which emphasises asceticism, purity of life, and spiritual wisdom (Purwaningtyas 2012; Ricklefs 2006). In this context, Isa does not appear as the central figure of salvation doctrine as in Christian theology, but instead as a spiritual exemplar and model of inner mystical life integrated into Javanese religious cosmology.

Studies of Javanese literary texts also indicate that the philosophical values embedded within them reflect the Javanese worldview concerning the perfection of life, the origin of existence, and humanity's relationship with divine reality. These values are often articulated through concepts such as *sangkan paraning dumadi* [the origin and destiny of existence] and the pursuit of life's perfection [*ngudi kasampurnan*], which together form the epistemological framework of Javanese mysticism. In this regard, the representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini* cannot be understood merely as a reproduction of a particular religious tradition, but rather as the result of a complex process of cultural interpretation in which religious symbols are translated into the spiritual language of Java.

Nevertheless, theological studies concerning the representation of Jesus in classical Javanese literature remain relatively limited, particularly from the perspectives of contextual Christology and intertextual approaches engaging Gospel traditions, Islam, and Javanese cosmology. Most studies on the *Serat Centhini* have concentrated on literary, cultural, or Javanese philosophical aspects (Kamajaya 1991), while theological analyses of the figure of Isa within the text remain rare and unsystematic (Banawiratma & Müller 1993; Florida 1995). Yet such analysis is important for understanding how the figure of Jesus is perceived and imagined within non-Christian religious traditions, while also opening possibilities for dialogue between Christian theology and local spiritual traditions.

Based on this background, this article aims to examine the representation of the Prophet Isa in the *Serat Centhini*, particularly in *Pupuh* 65, stanzas 32–36, through an intertextual hermeneutical approach. The analysis explores how the text constructs the figure of Isa through narratives, symbols, and religious language that bring the Gospel tradition, Islamic theology, and Javanese cosmology into dialogue. Rather than evaluating this representation against established doctrinal formulations, the study seeks to understand how the figure of Isa is reinterpreted within the Javanese religious imagination through processes of cultural translation and theological reinterpretation.

Within this framework, the article employs decolonising Christology as a hermeneutical lens through which the representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini* may be interpreted, rather than as evidence that the text itself constitutes a

historically demonstrable process of decolonisation. From this perspective, the study argues that the *Serat Centhini* offers a distinctive contextual reflection on the figure of Jesus by integrating Gospel traditions, Islamic theological concepts, and Javanese mystical cosmology into a coherent religious imagination. Accordingly, this article proposes Javanese Mystical Christology as an interpretative category for understanding this representation, thereby contributing to broader conversations in contextual Christology, intercultural theology, and Christian–Muslim studies within the Asian context.

Research methods and design

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in hermeneutical textual analysis within a theological intertextual framework. The focus of the research is not merely on philological study or literary analysis, but rather on the religious meaning of the representation of the figure of Isa in the *Serat Centhini* as a textual construction emerging from the encounter of various religious traditions. The analysis is based primarily on the original Javanese text of the Balai Pustaka edition, while the English translations provided in this article serve only as analytical aids for international readers. Interpretive decisions were therefore grounded primarily in the lexical, theological, and literary features of the original Javanese text rather than in its English translation. The primary object of this study is the *Serat Centhini* Volume I, Balai Pustaka edition, particularly *Pupuh* 65 (*Juru Demung* [traditional Javanese verse form]), Stanzas 32–36, which were selected because they contain relatively explicit representations of the Prophet Isa, including the use of theological terms such as *ruhullah*, as well as narratives concerning death, resurrection, and the descent of the Holy Spirit. The delimitation of this textual unit enables an in-depth analysis of the narrative structure, religious symbols, and theological terminology employed within the text.

Methodologically, the study was conducted through three stages of analysis. Firstly, a textual analysis was undertaken on the selected stanzas in order to identify theological terms, religious symbols, and narrative structures that construct the representation of Isa within the Javanese religious cosmology of the *Serat Centhini*. Secondly, an intertextual approach was employed to examine the relationship between the *Serat Centhini* and broader religious traditions, particularly the Gospel traditions and Islamic traditions concerning Isa, by understanding the text as part of a network of religious discourses that interact with and influence one another (Allen 2011; Kristeva 1980; Teeuw 1984). Thirdly, a theological hermeneutical analysis was conducted by situating the representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini* within the broader process of cross-traditional interpretation in the context of Javanese mysticism and the Islam–Javanese tradition. Within this framework, the study also employs the perspective of decolonising Christology as an interpretative lens to understand the representation of Isa not as a deviation from normative Christology, but rather as a form of cultural interpretation reflecting the dynamic encounter between Gospel traditions, Islam, and Javanese cosmology (Ricklefs 2006; Singgih 2000; Sugirtharajah 2001). To strengthen interpretative validity, theological interpretations are derived from close textual analysis and are consistently evaluated through the dialogue of the three theoretical frameworks employed in this study. The analysis therefore seeks to identify patterns of intertextual resonance and religious reinterpretation grounded in textual evidence, rather than to reconstruct authorial intention or to argue for direct doctrinal equivalence between the religious traditions under comparison.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Injili Indonesia Surabaya Research Ethics Commission (No. 00434/KEP-STTII Sby/EC/III/2026).

Results and discussion

Theoretical framework

Decolonisation of Christology

In recent decades, global theology has become increasingly aware that Christological formulations did not develop within a culturally neutral space. Many of the dominant Christological categories in modern systematic theology were shaped within a European intellectual context and subsequently disseminated widely through theological education and missionary activity during the colonial period. This situation gave rise to an approach commonly referred to as the decolonisation of theology – an effort to re-read the Christian tradition by attending to the religious experiences, cultural contexts, and historical dynamics of non-Western societies (Segovia 2000; Sugirtharajah 2003). Within this framework, the decolonisation of Christology is understood not as a rejection of church tradition or classical Christological doctrine, but as an opening of interpretative space for reading the figure of Jesus from cultural horizons different from those in which much of modern Western Christology was historically formulated.

Accordingly, the decolonisation of Christology is more appropriately understood as a hermeneutical framework rather than as a historically demonstrable process. The decolonial approach emphasises that representations of Jesus across different cultures do not always follow the patterns of dogmatic Christology as formed in Western theology. Instead, it explores how the figure of Jesus is received, translated, and reinterpreted through the language, symbols, and religious imagination of local communities. In many Asian and African contexts, Jesus is frequently understood through local religious symbols such as the wise teacher, the prophet, the healer, or the spiritual figure who embodies the fullness of life (Bevans 2002; Schreiter 1985). Accordingly, the study of representations of Jesus within local religious traditions cannot be evaluated solely on the basis of their conformity to particular doctrinal formulations

but should also be understood as part of an ongoing process of theological translation within specific cultural contexts.

Based on this understanding, the present study employs the perspective of decolonising Christology as a hermeneutical lens for reading the representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini*. This study does not assume that the compilers of the *Serat Centhini* consciously engaged in a historical project of decolonising Christology. Rather, the decolonial perspective serves as an interpretative framework that enables an examination of how the text constructs the figure of Isa through the encounter between the Gospel tradition, Islamic theology, and Javanese cosmology. Within this framework, the representation of Isa is understood as the result of a process of religious reinterpretation and cultural translation through which the figure of Jesus acquires new meaning within the spiritual horizon of Javanese religiosity. This approach is consistent with developments in contextual Christology, which understand Jesus not only through the doctrinal formulations of the Church but also in relation to cultural contexts and interreligious dialogue (Tinambunan et al. 2025). Accordingly, the decolonisation of Christology in this study functions as an analytical approach for understanding these interpretative dynamics while opening space for the further development of contextual Christology within the broader conversation of global theology (Kärkkäinen 2016; Khalidi 2001; Sugirtharajah 2018).

Intertextuality in religious texts

The second theoretical framework employed in this study is the concept of intertextuality. In modern literary theory, intertextuality refers to the idea that every text exists within a network of relations with other texts that precede it or that are alive within the same cultural tradition. This concept was first introduced by Julia Kristeva, who argued that every text constitutes a mosaic of quotations formed through dialogue with various other texts within a given discursive tradition (Kristeva 1980). Within this framework, a text is not understood as a self-contained entity, but as part of a web of meaning that is continually constituted through its relations with other discourses.

The intertextual approach has since been widely applied in the study of religious texts, particularly in biblical scholarship and the study of other religious traditions. Biblical interpreters have demonstrated that many religious texts develop through a process of dialogue with prior traditions, such that a given text frequently carries traces of symbols, narratives, or concepts drawn from earlier traditions (Hays 1989). This approach helps researchers understand how a text does not merely reproduce a particular tradition but also reinterprets it within a new social and cultural context.

In this study, the intertextual approach is employed to examine how the representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini* interacts with two major religious traditions, namely the Gospel tradition and the Islamic tradition. The narratives concerning Isa in that text display elements with parallels in both traditions, such as the designation of Isa as *ruhullah*, the acknowledgement of the Gospel [*Injil*] as a book of divine revelation, and the narrative of Isa's death and resurrection. By applying the intertextual approach, these elements can be understood as the product of a process of re-interpretation taking place within the Javanese cultural context, in which various religious traditions converge and give rise to a new spiritual imagination.

Javanese cosmology and mysticism

The third theoretical framework employed in this study concerns Javanese cosmology and mysticism. In Javanese spiritual tradition, divine reality is frequently understood through concepts that emphasise the relationship between humanity and the divine source of all existence. One of the central concepts in Javanese cosmology is *sangkan paraning dumadi* – the idea that all things originate from divine reality and ultimately return to that source (Magnis-Suseno 1997; Mulder 2005). Within this framework, spiritual life is understood as a journey towards rediscovering the unity between the human person and the divine source from which all being originates.

Javanese mysticism also places great emphasis on inner perfection and the sanctity of life as the path towards closeness with divine reality. The *kebatinan* tradition portrays holy figures as persons of profound spiritual depth and intimate proximity to *Hyang*, or the supreme divine reality. Terms such as *Hyang*, *Gusti*, or *Hyang Agung* are commonly used to refer to the divine reality that transcends the empirical world while simultaneously serving as the source of all life and of the human spirit (Magnis-Suseno 1997; Mulder 2005). Within this context, a religious figure may be understood not merely as a historical person, but also as a spiritual symbol representing the fullness of life and closeness to divine reality.

By employing this Javanese cosmological framework, the representation of the figure of Isa in Javanese literary texts can be understood as part of the symbolic language of local mysticism, which emphasises inner perfection and closeness to divine reality, even to the extent of the union between the divine and the human (Setyarini et al. 2026). Religious figures originating from other traditions are frequently integrated into Javanese cosmology through spiritual concepts already familiar within that tradition. This process allows a global religious figure such as Isa to be interpreted within a Javanese spiritual framework without requiring the full adoption of the doctrinal system from his tradition of origin. This approach helps explain how Javanese religious literary texts can incorporate elements from multiple religious traditions while simultaneously preserving a distinctively local cosmological framework. In the present study, however, Javanese cosmology and mysticism are not understood as theological systems that replace either ecclesial Christology or the Islamic tradition. Rather, they are employed as the cultural horizon through which the *Serat Centhini* represents the figure of Isa by means of local religious symbols, spiritual language, and Javanese mystical experience.

Accordingly, this framework functions as an interpretative perspective for understanding the symbolic context of Isa's representation, rather than as a basis for identifying a direct equivalence between Javanese mystical concepts and classical Christological formulations.

Representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini*

The *Serat Centhini* is a monumental work of Javanese literature comprising twelve volumes and more than 3500 pages, with the original manuscript held in the library of the Surakarta Palace. The composition of the *Serat Centhini* originated at the initiative of Kangjeng Gusti Pangeran Adipati Anom Amangkunegara III, son of Pakubuwana IV of Surakarta, who subsequently ascended to the throne as Pakubuwana V (1820–1823). The work was written under the leadership of Ranggasutrasna (Sutrasna), a court official, with the support of poets and religious figures including Yasadipura II and Sastradipura (later known as Kyai Haji Mohammad Ilhar), as well as a number of Islamic scholars and other spiritual figures. The central narrative of the text revolves around the journey of Jayengresmi, known as Seh Amongraga, who serves as the principal figure in the exploration of knowledge and spiritual experience (Kamajaya 1991:iii–iv).

Jayengresmi, positioned as a spiritual and intellectual figure on a journey in pursuit of knowledge and religious experience, has been noted for this role from the very opening sections of the work. From its opening, the *Serat Centhini* presents itself as a literary work that functions simultaneously as an encyclopaedia of Javanese culture and a work of spiritual pedagogy, integrating tradition, knowledge, and religious experience through the form of *tembang macapat*.

The *Serat Centhini* encompasses religious and mystical dimensions, incorporating diverse forms of both outer and inner Javanese cultural knowledge referred to as *ngelmu kasampurnan*. It contains ethics, literature, oral tradition, practical knowledge, and aspects of social and cultural life, such that its contents encompass a wide range of matters pertaining to the intellectual world and culture of the Javanese people (Poerbacaraka & Hadijaya 1957:83).

The writing of the *Serat Centhini* commenced on Saturday Paing, the 26th of Sura in the Javanese year 1742, chronologically estimated to correspond to approximately February 1814 in the Gregorian calendar under the original title *Suluk Tambangraras* (Kamajaya 1991:v). The title *Centhini* does not refer to a principal character such as Seh Amongraga or Niken Tambangraras, but rather to a female servant figure named Centhini, who serves as a companion and witness throughout the narrative journey. In Javanese literary scholarship, this choice of title is understood as a symbolic strategy, whereby the servant figure represents the position of the 'observer' who gathers, preserves, and transmits the various forms of knowledge dispersed throughout the text. Centhini, an unassuming figure with no mystical ambitions, paradoxically attains the ideal of the truly complete human being through her attitudes of devotion, surrender, and awareness of her nature as an individual, social, and creaturely being (Alfariz 2025). The *Serat Centhini* thus teaches that human perfection does not lie in the speculative pursuit of union with God, but rather in a life lived in harmony and simplicity, one that brings goodness to oneself, to others, and to the order of the world [*memayu hayuning bawana*]. Amongraga strives to attain the perfection of knowledge [*manunggaling kawula Gusti*], yet he fails because he remains bound by inner weaknesses such as resentment, demonstrating that the path towards spiritual perfection is by no means easy (Alfariz 2025).

A close reading of the opening section of the *Serat Centhini* in *Pupuh* 1 Sinom, stanzas 1–3, reveals that this work was composed as an intellectual and cultural project, commissioned by the Surakarta aristocracy with the purpose of gathering all Javanese knowledge [*sanggyaning kawruh Jawa*] into a systematic and aesthetically refined literary form intended to serve as the mother repository of Javanese knowledge (Wibawa 2013:330). The text is written in the form of *tembang macapat*, the traditional Javanese poetic system governed by patterns of *metrum*, *guru gatra* [number of lines], *guru wilangan* [number of syllables], and *guru lagu* [final vowel], which generally consists of eleven principal types: Sinom, Asmaradana, Dhandhanggula, Pangkur, Durma, Maskumambang, Mijil, Kinanthi, Gambuh, Megatruh, and Pocung. The use of the *macapat* form demonstrates that the *Serat Centhini* functions not only as a narrative text but also as a pedagogical medium that brings together literary aesthetics and the transmission of knowledge.

This study focuses on Volume 1 of the *Serat Centhini*, specifically *Pupuh* 65 entitled *Juru Demung*. A metrical analysis of stanzas 32–36 reveals that this section is composed in the *tembang macapat* [traditional Javanese poetic form], yet does not fully conform to the classical *guru wilangan* [syllable-count pattern] and *guru lagu* [final-vowel pattern] patterns of standard *macapat* metres such as Sinom or Dhandhanggula. The use of the title *Juru Demung*, therefore, indicates the presence of metrical adaptation or flexibility within the *Serat Centhini*, wherein the *tembang* structure is employed with greater freedom in order to accommodate the narrative and theological content of the text.

The representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini*, *Pupuh* 65, Stanza 32, reveals the integration of Islamic theological terminology into the religious language of Java (Table 1). In this stanza, Isa is explicitly referred to as *Nabi Ngisa linuhung* [the noble Prophet Isa] and is associated with a

TABLE 1: Isa as *Ruhullah* within Javanese religious cosmology (Stanzas 32).

Javanese	English
Kaping gangsal srengatira *nJêng Nabi Ngisa linuhung* *sahadatipun ashadu* *Allah ilahailallah* *ashadu ana Ngisa ruhullah* *apan têgêsira* *ingkang nêksèni satuhu*	The fifth teaching is: the noble Prophet Isa. His confession of faith is: 'I bear witness that there is no God but Allah, and I bear witness that Isa is the Spirit of God', which means that he is the true witness.

confession of faith that closely resembles the *shahada*: *Allah ilahailallah* [Declaration of faith: Allah is the only God], followed by the acknowledgement that Isa is *ruhullah*. The designation of Isa as *ruhullah* resonates strongly with the Islamic tradition, particularly with Qur'an 4:171. Within the Islamic exegetical tradition, this term is generally understood as affirming the divine origin of Isa as God's messenger, His Word, and a spirit from Him, without affirming the doctrines of incarnation or divinity as formulated in ecclesial Christology (Muzawwadah 2023). From an Islamic perspective, the Holy Spirit is commonly identified with Jibril [Gabriel], whereas in Christian theology the Holy Spirit is understood as the Third Person of the Trinity (Badhrulhisham & Khadijah 2018). This distinction demonstrates that the term *ruhullah* carries different theological meanings within the two traditions. In Christian theology, the concept of the Spirit of God is already present in the Old Testament and is subsequently understood within the doctrinal framework of the Trinity (Pakpahan 2019). Accordingly, the terminology employed in the *Serat Centhini* indicates that the figure of Isa is represented through an Islamic theological framework adapted into Javanese literary language, where Arabic expressions such as *ruhullah* are woven together with Javanese poetic forms and local cosmology. At the same time, the confession presented in this stanza should not be understood as a literal reproduction of the normative Islamic *shahada*. Rather, within the literary and religious setting of the *Serat Centhini*, it functions as a contextual adaptation that incorporates Islamic confessional language into a broader Javanese symbolic and devotional framework.

Nevertheless, the manner in which the text interprets Isa does not rest solely on reproducing Islamic theological concepts. Within the context of Javanese religious language, the acknowledgement of Isa as *ruhullah* is situated within a mystical horizon that emphasises the closeness between holy figures and divine reality. The expression *ingkang nêksèni satuhu* [who truly witnessed] affirms Isa as the true witness to divine reality, thereby highlighting his spiritual authority within the text. Within the horizon of Javanese mysticism, the designation of Isa as *Ruhullah* is not primarily intended to formulate a doctrinal statement concerning Isa's ontological nature, but rather to emphasise his distinctive status as a spiritual figure who enjoys a unique closeness to divine reality. Thus, the term *ruhullah* in the *Serat Centhini* does more than reproduce Islamic theological terminology; it illustrates how Javanese religious language reinterprets the figure of Isa through local mystical symbolism and spiritual experience (Table 2).

TABLE 2: Representation of Isa as *Atmajèng Hyang Agung* (Stanza 33).

Javanese	English
Tan ana Pangeran liyan *mung sawiji ya Allahu* *lawan anêksèni ingsun* *satuhune Nabi Ngisa* *iku atmajèng Hyang Agung* *salat sabên ari akat* *mung sawindu dangunipun*	There is no other God; there is only One, namely Allah. And I bear witness that truly the Prophet Isa is the Spirit of the Most High. He prays each day throughout the whole of his life.

Stanza 33 reinforces the theological construction that emerged in the preceding stanza by opening with a declaration of monotheism: *tan ana Pangeran liyan, mung sawiji ya Allahu* [there is no other Lord; there is only one, namely Allah] (Table 2). Within Javanese cosmology, the concept of God was not originally expressed through the term *Allah*, but through indigenous terms such as *Hyang*, *Hyang Suksma*, *Hyang Widhi*, and *Pangeran* [God, Holy Spirit, Almighty God, and Lord], all of which have been used since the Old Javanese period and are rooted in the Hindu–Javanese tradition. These terms reflect an understanding of divine reality as the source of existence, the sovereign of the cosmos, and the ultimate refuge of humanity, and they had long been embedded in Javanese religious consciousness prior to the arrival of Islam.

The use of *Pangeran*, for example, portrays God as the personal protector and governor of life, as reflected in early Javanese texts such as the *Nawaruci* (Zoetmulder 1982:621). By contrast, the term *Allah* emerged later through interaction with the Islamic tradition, particularly from the 15th and 16th centuries onward. In texts such as the *Serat Centhini* and *Lokajaya*, it functions as a conceptual adaptation of Islamic monotheism (Marsono 2011).

The introduction of the name *Allah* did not entirely replace earlier Javanese conceptions of divinity; rather, it constituted a new layer within an ongoing process of religious integration. This is evident from the continued use of indigenous terms such as *Hyang* alongside *Pangeran* in expressing the religious experience of Javanese society (Zoetmulder 1982:621).

The term *Hyang Agung* is employed in Javanese texts as a designation for the Supreme Divine Reality and reflects a conceptual encounter between the Hindu tradition and indigenous Javanese cosmology. In the *Serat Centhini*, the term appears repeatedly as a designation for the highest divine reality, similar to its usage in other Javanese works such as *Lokajaya*. Historically, *Hyang Agung* has been attested since the Old Javanese period (approximately the 9th to the 15th centuries) in literary works including the *Adiparwa*, *Udyogaparwa*, and *Uttarakanda*, demonstrating the continuity of a concept of divinity that has been continually adapted and reinterpreted across successive religious traditions in Java (Zoetmulder 1982:517, 557).

The most significant expression in this stanza is Ngisa iku atmajèng Hyang Agung. Within the Javanese tradition, the term *atmajèng* refers to the soul or spirit that originates from divine reality, while *Hyang Agung* denotes the supreme divine reality in Javanese cosmology. Within this cosmological horizon, the expression portrays Isa as a spiritual figure who enjoys an exceptionally close relationship with Hyang Agung and who mediates the presence and authority of the divine within human life. Accordingly, this representation is more appropriately understood as the symbolic language of Javanese mysticism

than as a doctrinal formulation concerning Isa's ontological nature.

From a hermeneutical perspective, this construction exhibits a conceptual resonance with the portrayal of Christ in Hebrews 1:3 as the *apaugasma tēs doxēs* [radiance of the glory] and the *charaktēr tēs hypostaseōs autou* [exact representation of His being]. Such a resonance, however, should not be understood to imply that the compilers of the *Serat Centhini* consciously adopted or directly drew upon New Testament Christology. Rather, it illustrates how the Javanese religious tradition constructed its representation of Isa through its own symbolic and cosmological categories, which at certain points resonate with particular Christological themes.

Accordingly, the expression *Ngisa iku atmajèng Hyang Agung* [The soul is the essence of the Supreme God] is best understood as the result of a process of religious reinterpretation within the horizon of Javanese cosmology and mysticism. This representation is neither identical with orthodox Christological formulations nor reducible to normative Islamic theology. Instead, it demonstrates how the *Serat Centhini* reinterprets the figure of Isa through Javanese symbolic language as a spiritual figure who mediates a distinctive closeness to divine reality (Table 3).

The expression *anênggih sèkêt rêkangat* does not refer to the literal number of 'fifty teachings', but rather functions as a symbolic expression within the Javanese tradition denoting the abundance or totality of teachings regarded as fundamental and authoritative. The phrase serves as a rhetorical affirmation of the authority of the teachings being referenced, which in this stanza are explicitly associated with the *Kitab Injil*. The description of the *Injil* as *sajuga* [the sole one being spoken of] indicates that the *Serat Centhini* represents the *Injil* as divine revelation understood to possess religious authority within the horizon of the text itself. From an intertextual hermeneutical perspective, the text does not present the *Injil* as an alien religious tradition, but integrates it into Javanese religious cosmology through symbolic reinterpretation. Accordingly, the *Injil* is represented as one form of divine truth that is reinterpreted within a Javanese religious horizon.

Within the representation found in the *Serat Centhini*, the *Injil* is not understood according to the framework of Christian theology; rather, it is situated within an Islamic theological horizon that has been adapted into Javanese cosmology. This is evident in the statement that the *Injil* was revealed through the angel Jibril as the messenger of *Hyang Agung*. Within the Islamic tradition, divine revelation to the prophets is understood as being transmitted through the angel Jibril (Masduki 2017). Significantly, this concept is not merely retained in Islamic terminology, but is simultaneously translated into the symbolic language of Javanese cosmology, as reflected in the use of the designation *Hyang Agung*.

Stanza 34 illustrates a process of symbolic integration between the Islamic tradition and Javanese cosmology in understanding the revelation of the *Injil*. The *Injil* is not rejected as sacred scripture but is reinterpreted within a religious framework that combines Islamic theology with the spiritual language of Java. Furthermore, the reference to the twelfth month and the practice of fasting indicates that the teachings associated with the figure of Isa are likewise interpreted through patterns of Islam–Javanese religious practice. Accordingly, the *Serat Centhini* represents both the figure of Isa and the religious tradition associated with him within a broader Islam–Javanese religious horizon, in which diverse religious elements undergo processes of acculturation, reinterpretation, and cultural adaptation (Marsono 2011).

This stanza constitutes one of the most significant passages in *Pupuh* 65 because it contains a narrative of the death and resurrection of Isa that exhibits a strong resonance with the Gospel tradition (Table 4). The text states that the celebration of *Passên* [Passover and Easter] is connected with the death of Isa, who subsequently rose again after 3 days [*dados ing dalêm tri siyang*]. The motif of resurrection on the third day displays a strong conceptual resonance with the Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection (Mt 28:1–6; Lk 24:1–7), yet it should not be taken as evidence of direct textual dependence upon the New Testament. Rather, the presence of this motif suggests that the compilers of the *Serat Centhini* were likely familiar with traditions concerning the resurrection of Isa that had circulated within the religious environment of Java, whether through Islamic transmission, Christian traditions, or other forms of religious encounter. Accordingly, this stanza represents an important point of intertextual contact between the Gospel narratives and the religious representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini*, without requiring the assumption of direct dependence upon the Gospel text itself.

Within the Javanese context of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, interactions among Muslim communities, Christian traditions, and the literary culture of the royal courts created conditions in which narratives concerning Isa could circulate through oral transmission, religious instruction, limited translations, and broader cultural exchanges. Consequently, the appearance of the resurrection

TABLE 3: The Gospel as Revelation within the Islam–Javanese Horizon (Stanza 34).

Islam-Javanese	English
Anênggih sèkêt rêkangat	As for the fifty principal teachings,
musakapipun pan namung	only those are discussed
sajuga Kitab Injillun	which are found in the Gospel Book,
katurunan Malaekat	revealed by the angel
Jabrail dutèng Hyang Agung	Jibril, the messenger of the Almighty.
namung kaping kalihwêlas	In the twelfth month,
pan siyammipun winuwus	fasting is also prescribed.

TABLE 4: The narrative of Isa's death and resurrection within the Javanese religious imagination (Stanza 35).

Javanese	Stanza 35
Sabên Passên akaliyan	Every Passover celebration
ngajêngakên Kamsin puniku	is preceded by the day of Kamsin.
Passên awit sedanipun	Passover begins with the death
Nabi Ngisa dumuginya	of the Prophet Isa,
saking seda nulya wungu	who, after dying, was raised again.
dados ing dalêm tri siyang	This took place within 3 days,
buka sabên wussing surup	and the fast is broken after sunset.

narrative in the *Serat Centhini* may be understood as the result of a process of reception and religious reinterpretation within Javanese cultural space rather than as evidence that its compilers directly consulted the Gospel text.

Noorsena (1992:34–35) explains that the account of Isa presented in this stanza narrates the story of Jesus through the sequence of his passion, resurrection on the third day, ascension into heaven, and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. According to Noorsena, this narrative displays a closer affinity to the Gospel tradition than to the Qur'anic account of Isa, since the Qur'an does not recount Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection in the manner found in the Gospels (cf. Q. al-Nisā' 4:157–158). His interpretation offers one possible explanation for the presence of Christian narrative elements within the *Serat Centhini*, while not excluding the possibility that these traditions were transmitted through the broader Islam–Javanese religious environment. Noorsena further observes that the narrative of Jesus is connected with Javanese calendrical calculations and the classification of auspicious and inauspicious days. This suggests that the representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini* has itself undergone a process of reinterpretation within Javanese cultural and religious categories.

The manner in which the text integrates the resurrection narrative illustrates a process of religious reinterpretation within the Javanese religious horizon. The death and resurrection of Isa are narrated within a liturgical framework associated with Christian celebrations. Nevertheless, the reference to the day of *Kamsin* as a prelude to Passover or Easter indicates the incorporation of Arabic–Islamic terminology into the narrative. The term *Kamsin* derives from the Arabic *khamsīn* [fifty] and, within Christian tradition, is associated with the celebration of Pentecost. Furthermore, the stanza also describes the ritual practice of fasting and breaking the fast after sunset. This integration demonstrates that the resurrection narrative of Isa in the *Serat Centhini* exhibits a strong resonance with the Gospel tradition while simultaneously reinterpreting it within a religious framework that combines Christian liturgical symbolism with ritual practices characteristic of the Islam–Javanese horizon (Florida 1995; Woodward 1989). Consequently, this stanza illustrates how the *Serat Centhini* functions as a hermeneutical space in which elements of the Gospel tradition and Javanese spirituality interact to produce a distinctive form of religious representation.

Turning to Stanza 36, this stanza narrates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the companions of Isa, a narrative that exhibits a strong resonance with the Pentecost account in the Christian tradition. In the New Testament, Pentecost is understood as the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Jesus following his resurrection and ascension, an event that marks the beginning of the early Christian community (Ac 2:1–4). The appearance of this motif in the *Serat Centhini* suggests that traditions concerning the descent of the Holy Spirit had become known within the religious horizon of Java through various processes of transmission and religious reinterpretation. Accordingly, this stanza represents an important point of intertextual contact between the narrative of Acts and the religious representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini*, without requiring the assumption that its compilers made direct use of the New Testament text (Table 5).

TABLE 5: The Holy Spirit and the reinterpretation of Pentecost within Islam–Javanese cosmology (Stanza 36).

Islam-Javanese	English
Kamsin punika nalika	The day of Kamsin is the moment
tumêdhaking Rohul Kudus	when the Holy Spirit descended
dhumatêng sakabatipun	upon the companions
Gusti Kangjêng Nabi Ngisa	of the Noble Prophet Isa.
kalih siyang siyammipun	For 2 days they fasted;
sami Passên bukanira	as in the Passover celebration, they broke the fast,
lajêng ariaya Kamsun	and afterwards observed the day of Kamsin.

However, the manner in which the text interprets this event reveals a process of religious reinterpretation within the Javanese religious framework. This differs from the understanding of the *Rohul Kudus* in Islamic tradition, where it is commonly identified either as a divine agency or as the angel Jibril, who mediates divine revelation to the prophets (Badhrulhisham & Khadijah 2018). By contrast, in this stanza the *Rohul Kudus* is not associated with Jibril or with the function of transmitting revelation as generally understood in Islamic theology. Instead, the narrative corresponds more closely to the portrayal of the Holy Spirit descending upon the disciples after the resurrection of Isa. The expression *tumêdhaking Rohul Kudus* likewise exhibits a particularly close resonance with the account of the descent of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. Significantly, the verb *tumêdhaking* is also employed in the Javanese Bible to describe the descent of the Holy Spirit, indicating a noteworthy semantic affinity without necessarily implying direct textual dependence (LAI Bahasa Jawa 1981; cf. Lk 3:22).

Furthermore, as in Stanza 35, the celebration of Kamsin is accompanied by 2 days of fasting followed by the breaking of the fast after sunset. The integration of the narrative of the descent of the Holy Spirit with these ritual practices demonstrates that the *Serat Centhini* exhibits a strong resonance with the Pentecost tradition while simultaneously reinterpreting it within a religious framework that combines Christian liturgical symbolism with ritual practices characteristic of the Islam–Javanese horizon. From this perspective, the *Serat Centhini* does not merely combine elements drawn from Christian, Islamic, and Javanese traditions; rather, it re-presents the Pentecost narrative through a process of religious reinterpretation within Islam–Javanese cosmology. Consequently, the figure of Isa and the descent of the Holy Spirit are articulated through symbolic language familiar to Javanese religious culture, producing a distinctive form of religious representation within Javanese literary tradition.

Critical theological reflection: The decolonisation of Christology in Javanese mysticism

The analysis of *Pupuh* 65, Stanzas 32–36, demonstrates that the *Serat Centhini* presents the figure of Isa within a religious

framework that is not fully identical to either ecclesiastical Christology or normative Islamic theology. Isa is referred to as *ruhullah* and *atmajèng Hyang Agung* – a formulation that indicates a distinctive relationship with the divine while not corresponding to the doctrine of the incarnation as articulated in classical Christology. At the same time, the text preserves narrative elements that exhibit strong resonance with the Gospel tradition, including the accounts of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Isa, as well as the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. Rather than indicating direct dependence upon Christian sources, this combination of elements suggests that the *Serat Centhini* brings together religious traditions that are subsequently reinterpreted within a spiritual horizon shaped by Javanese cosmology and mystical Islamic tradition.

According to Bakker (1974:11), the earliest traces of Christianity in the Indonesian archipelago can be traced back to the 7th century through the presence of an Eastern Christian (Nestorian) community in Fansur or Pancur, Sumatra. Bakker draws upon the records of Shaykh Abu Ṣāliḥ al-Armini, who mentions the existence of churches and Christian monasteries in that region. In addition, sources from the Church of the East by Abdishoʿ, as well as the travel accounts of Giovanni de Marignolli from the 14th century, further attest to the existence of connections between Christian communities and the Sumatran region long before the arrival of the Portuguese. These historical observations suggest that Christian traditions had encountered the cultures of the Indonesian archipelago, including Sumatra and, potentially, Java, although the nature and extent of such interactions remain difficult to reconstruct because these early Christian communities did not become firmly established within local society (Noorsena 1992:29).

According to Noorsena, the figure of Jesus encountered in a number of Javanese manuscripts cannot be separated from the influence of Islam that accompanied the rise of the Islamic kingdoms of Demak, Pajang, and Kartasura in Java. He further argues that the *Serat Centhini* contains textual fragments from which a portrait of Jesus in Javanese literature may be reconstructed, although the resulting image remains, in his own words, somewhat indistinct (Noorsena 1992:29). This observation is consistent with the present study insofar as it suggests that traditions concerning Isa circulated within a broader Islam–Javanese religious environment and were subsequently reinterpreted within Javanese literary culture. Rather than seeking to establish the precise historical channels through which these traditions were transmitted, the present study focuses on how they are represented and reconfigured within the text itself.

These findings carry important implications for contextual Christological reflection, particularly when read through the lens of the decolonisation of theology. In much of global theological scholarship, Christology has frequently been understood through doctrinal categories developed within the Western theological tradition, such as incarnation, atonement, and the Trinity. This framework certainly rests on a solid foundation within the church tradition, yet it has often given insufficient attention to how the figure of Jesus is understood and interpreted within non-Western religious traditions (Kärkkäinen 2016; Schreiter 1985). The representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini* suggests that the figure of Jesus may also be interpreted within a religious horizon that does not fully correspond to dominant Western Christological formulations. In this text, Isa is understood through the language of Javanese mysticism – which emphasises the relationship between the human spirit and the divine source – as well as through Islamic terminology affirming the oneness of God. From this perspective, the figure of Isa may be understood as illustrating how a global religious symbol undergoes processes of cultural and theological reinterpretation within a local context (Ricci 2011; Sanneh 2009).

The textual evidence suggests that the compiler of the *Serat Centhini* possessed a deep familiarity with Islamic teaching while simultaneously participating in a Javanese religious environment in which traditions concerning Isa had already circulated. The present study does not seek to establish the precise historical channels through which these traditions were transmitted; rather, it examines how they are represented and reinterpreted within the text itself. Drawing upon this religious horizon, the figure of Isa was then creatively reconstructed through patterns of Javanese spirituality marked by mystical and culturally integrative characteristics. Accordingly, the representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini* may be understood not simply as a reproduction of either Islamic or Christian doctrine, but as a Javanese religious reinterpretation that brings together elements from different religious traditions within the framework of Javanese cosmology. Within this structure, the text does not simply borrow from external traditions, but reconfigures them into a distinctive form of Javanese religious expression.

With particular regard to the figure of Isa, the use of the terms *ruhullah* and *atmajèng Hyang Agung* suggests that the representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini* exhibits a form of religious intertextuality – one that brings together the Islam–Javanese tradition, the Gospel memory of Isa, and Javanese conceptions of the divine into a distinctive spiritual construction.

From this perspective, the *Serat Centhini* may be read through the lens of the decolonisation of Christology as a hermeneutical space in which the figure of Isa is reinterpreted within Javanese religious cosmology. Decolonisation here does not mean rejecting the ecclesial Christological tradition, but rather providing space for interpreting the figure of Jesus beyond theological formulations that have historically been shaped primarily within Western intellectual contexts. In Javanese religious literature, the figure of Isa is not positioned as a foreign religious figure, but as a spiritual person who can be understood through the symbolic language of local cosmology. The designation of Isa as *atmajèng Hyang Agung*, for instance, demonstrates how the idea of a distinctive relationship with the divine is articulated

within a Javanese spiritual framework that emphasises the relationship between the human spirit and divine reality. Within this framework, the representation of Isa exhibits a strong conceptual resonance with mystical themes found in the Javanese *kebatinan* tradition, particularly the ideal of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* [the unity of the servant and the Lord], which emphasises spiritual intimacy between the human person and the divine source (Aryanto & Kurniawan 2023). This conceptual resonance should not be understood as implying doctrinal identity, but rather as illustrating how the figure of Isa is reinterpreted through symbolic categories familiar within Javanese religious culture.

Furthermore, the representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini* suggests that the interaction between religious traditions does not invariably produce doctrinal conflict, but can give rise to forms of religious understanding that are dialogical and creative in character. In this text, the Gospel tradition, Islamic terminology, and Javanese cosmology do not negate one another; rather, they interact within a new symbolic structure. The *Injil* is acknowledged as a book of divine revelation, yet is understood through the Islamic paradigm of revelation transmitted by the angel Jibril. The resurrection narrative of Isa is preserved, yet is not linked to a theology of atonement. The Holy Spirit is explicitly mentioned, yet is interpreted within the imaginative thought-world of Java. Taken together, these textual features suggest that the *Serat Centhini* does not merely bring together different religious traditions, but reinterprets them within a symbolic framework that is distinctively shaped by the Javanese religious context.

On the basis of the foregoing analysis, the present study suggests that the representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini* may be understood as what may be described heuristically as a form of Javanese mystical Christology. This Christology is not constructed through doctrinal definitions concerning the nature of Christ, but through spiritual symbols that emphasise divine relationship, the sanctity of life, and closeness to transcendent reality. Within this interpretive framework, the representation of Isa functions as a symbolic expression of spiritual intimacy with the divine rather than as a doctrinal formulation concerning the person of Christ. In this respect, it exhibits a strong conceptual resonance with the *kebatinan* ideal of *manunggaling kawula Gusti*, while remaining distinct from both classical Christian Christology and normative Islamic theology (Mulder 1998). Accordingly, the present study does not propose a new Christological doctrine, but rather offers an interpretive framework for understanding how the figure of Isa is represented and religiously reinterpreted within Javanese literary and spiritual traditions. Such an interpretation suggests that Christological reflection need not always develop in the form of systematic doctrine, but may also emerge through symbolic and mystical representations within local religious traditions (Amaladoss 2006; Pieris 1988).

This study suggests that the *Serat Centhini* offers a valuable locus for theological reflection on the figure of Jesus beyond the horizon of the Western church. The representation of Isa in this text may be interpreted through the language of local cosmology without losing its spiritual dimension. These findings suggest new possibilities for dialogue between Christian theology and Asian religious traditions, while also indicating that contextual Christological reflection does not develop solely within the discourse of academic theology, but also within local literary and spiritual traditions. Within this context, the *Serat Centhini* may be understood as an important source for exploring how the figure of Jesus is religiously reinterpreted within the Javanese religious imagination and how such reinterpretation contributes to a more contextual and dialogical Christological reflection within global theology.

Conclusion

The intertextual analysis of the *Serat Centhini*, *Pupuh* 65, Stanzas 32–36, suggests that the representation of the Prophet Isa in this text is more than a syncretic anomaly or a by-product of cultural acculturation. Rather, it reflects a distinctive process of religious reinterpretation within the literary and spiritual horizon of Javanese cosmology. The text constructs the figure of Isa through three mutually interacting layers of discourse: Islamic theological terminology (*ruhullah*, *Rohul Kudus*, Jibril), the narrative traditions of the Gospels (death, resurrection after 3 days, Pentecost), and the framework of Javanese cosmology (*Hyang Agung*, *atmajèng*, *Pangeran*). These layers are not simply juxtaposed; rather, they are woven together into a symbolic religious framework in which elements from different traditions are reinterpreted within a distinctively Javanese religious imagination. From this perspective, the *Serat Centhini* does not merely appropriate religious traditions, but rearticulates them within its own literary and cosmological context.

These findings carry implications that extend beyond the study of Javanese literature. Firstly, the representation of Isa in this text invites a reconsideration of the assumption that Christology can only be articulated through dominant Western theological formulations such as incarnation, atonement, and the hypostatic union. The designation of Isa as *atmajèng Hyang Agung* suggests that ideas concerning the relationship between the human and the divine may be expressed through the symbolic framework of local cosmology without relying upon the Greek ontological language that shaped conciliar Christology. In this respect, the *Serat Centhini* indicates that reflection on the figure of Jesus may also emerge within non-Christian religious traditions through processes of cultural encounter and religious reinterpretation. Read through the lens of the decolonisation of Christology, these findings contribute to a broader understanding of how Christological themes may be represented and rearticulated across different cultural and religious contexts.

Secondly, this study also clarifies the limits of normative Islamic theology when confronted with the realities of literature. In classical Islamic theology, Isa is an honoured

prophet but not a divine figure. Yet in the *Serat Centhini*, the formulation *atmajèng Hyang Agung* and the integration of the Pentecost narrative indicate that Javanese Islam, particularly in its mystical and *kebatinan* forms, is not fully identical with the normative Islamic theology of the Middle East. The Islamization of Java, as argued by Ricklefs (2006), was not a process of doctrinal homogenisation, but rather a mystical synthesis that continuously negotiated the boundaries between *tawhid*, local spirituality, and the legacy of other religious narratives. Reading the representation of Isa in the *Serat Centhini* solely through the lens of Islamic orthodoxy would therefore yield a reductive reading that fails to do justice to the genuine complexity of the Javanese religious imagination.

Thirdly, and most importantly, this study suggests that the decolonisation of Christology should not be confined to the academic discourse of systematic theology. Rather, when read through this hermeneutical lens, the *Serat Centhini* illustrates how the figure of Isa may be represented and religiously reinterpreted within a local literary and spiritual tradition. In this respect, the text exhibits important conceptual resonances with processes that are now discussed in contemporary theology as cross-cultural theological translation (Sanneh 2009), without implying that the text itself consciously participates in modern decolonial discourse. Accordingly, the present study suggests that contextual theology in Asia may benefit not only from the development of new theoretical models, but also from renewed engagement with local literary and spiritual traditions as important resources for theological reflection.

This means that the study of contextual theology in Asia must not look only forward towards the construction of new theoretical frameworks but must turn back to the archive of local literature and spirituality as the primary source of theological reflection that has for so long been marginalised.

Nevertheless, this study also has several limitations. The representation of Isa in *Pupuh* 65 cannot be generalised as the single or uniform perspective of the *Serat Centhini* as a whole, given the complexity of a text comprising hundreds of *pupuh*, multiple authors, and a multi-layered compositional history. Reading Stanzas 32–36 opens only one window into a much larger literary and religious corpus. Future research may expand the scope of analysis to other *pupuh* containing representations of different religious traditions and may also examine more closely the socio-political and cultural dynamics of the Surakarta court that shaped the religious imagination reflected in the text. Such studies would contribute to a broader understanding of the historical and cultural contexts in which these representations emerged.

Ultimately, the *Serat Centhini* invites us to recognise that the figure of Isa can be meaningfully represented within a religious imagination far removed from the historical and theological contexts of the Western church. In the language of *Hyang Agung*, in the rhythm of *tembang macapat*, and in the contemplative world of Javanese *kebatinan*, the figure of Isa is rearticulated through symbolic categories that disclose a spiritual horizon not always captured by dogmatic formulations alone. From this perspective, what this study has described heuristically as a Javanese mystical Christology may be understood as a distinctive form of contextual Christological reflection rather than as an alternative Christological doctrine. It represents a mode of religious interpretation in which the figure of Jesus is received, translated, and reimagined within the symbolic universe of Javanese spirituality while remaining in dialogue with both Christian and Islamic traditions. In this respect, the present study suggests that local literary and spiritual traditions deserve greater attention as significant conversation partners in the continuing development of contextual Christological reflection within global theology.

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Daud Darmadi: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft. Juanda Juanda: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. Munatar Kause: Investigation, Project administration. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication, and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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