

Discipleship through Literature: A Case Study of the Selamat Series in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article emphasizes that discipleship is a fundamental task of the church. To guide Christians, particularly adults, for discipleship, literature is needed in the form of easy-to-understand reading materials. Andar Ismail, Christian educator in Indonesia, guides adult Christians to understand Jesus Christ through devotional books called the Selamat Series. Although readers find the works meaningful, they need to be used with a critical mind and attitude.

Keywords

Discipleship, literature, Selamat Series, Andar Ismail

Introduction

In the midst of global challenges and pressures today, discipleship is a necessity (Dever, 2016). For Hull (2016) discipleship is a response “to the call to learn from Jesus and others how to live his or her life as though Jesus were living it. As a result, the disciple become the kind of person who naturally does what Jesus did” (p. 20). Tizon (2018) writes, “discipleship means following Jesus Christ in love, worship, and community while submitting to the lifelong, Spirit-empowered process of learning the ways of the kingdom of God in all areas of life and in all arenas of life, even unto death” (p. 152). Ogden (2003) holds that discipleship must aim at life transformation of disciples in order to multiply the task.

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Anthony (2008) points out that “one of the ultimate goals of Christian education is to make Christ, his person and work, known so that all who are involved may be in turn know God and his Son Jesus Christ” (p. 142). Parrett and Kang (2009) hold that the purpose of church education is to guide congregations to understand that Jesus Christ is the Way, Truth and Life (pp. 118–119). Seymour (2014) maintains that renewal and empowerment can only take place when people learn “the path that Jesus offered and his disciples taught, that path of loving God and neighbor, of living the presence of God, of looking for the realm of God, of calling people to the banquet table, of resisting the time of trial, and proclaiming the Resurrected One” (p. 182).

For effective discipleship, contemporary Bible teachers acknowledge the importance of teaching materials and methods beyond traditional ways. Edwards (2010) emphasizes the need for study guides and reading materials used for independent or small group learning. Burns (2002, pp. 272–305), Hillier (2005, p. 114) and Williams (2015, pp. 375–383) maintain that the digital era encourages discipleship to be carried out through social media. Hess (2004), and Roncace and Gray (2007) emphasize that in responding to present popular cultures, Bible teaching needs to occur through music, film, art, literature, poetry, prose (both fiction and nonfiction), cartoons and comics, and animated television. Byrd III (2011) indicates the usefulness of both oral and written personal, communal and biblical narratives in discipleship (pp. 244–262). Moon (2017) suggests that easily understood literature should be used in adult discipleship that will help them to become familiar with symbols, rituals, expressions, figures of speech, stories, and even with music, dance and drama of the learning community (p. 53).

In Indonesia, Andar Ismail uses literature to help adult Christians know Jesus Christ. He creates “learning aids” (Jarvis, 2010, pp. 178–180), namely, devotional books called the Selamat Series. He holds that propagation of the good news of Jesus is a command to be carried out through many forms and variety of methods, by verbal and nonverbal approaches (Ismail, 2001, pp. 75–78). For Andar, the message of Matt. 28:19-20 implies the making of our own selves and others as faithful disciples of Christ (2001, pp. 108–112).

As Edwards (2010) points out, Andar provides the Selamat Series for adult independent learning. As Hess (2004), Roncace and Gray (2007), Byrd III (2011) and Moon (2017) maintain, Andar’s literature contains biblical narratives, stories, poetry, commentaries on fiction, rituals, symbols, music and drama. To provide more evidence and to uncover significance, this paper explores the Selamat Series. In the following, attempts at discipleship through literature are described and Andar’s methods of guiding adults in ways of knowing the Saviour are disclosed. Finally, some critical comments on the Series will be highlighted.

Discipleship through Literature

Contemporary theologians and biblical scholars indicate their concerns for discipleship through literature. They provide books on Christ for congregations and lay readers. McGrath (2001) invites Christians to know Jesus, provides reasons why

they should know Him, suggests how they may meet Him, and describes the meanings of Jesus' actions. McGrath (2014) also helps readers understand the meaning of the incarnation of Jesus, the atonement for his sins, and how the teachings of Jesus need to be the source and foundation of their ethics.

McKnight (2004) assists readers to understand the great commandment of Jesus to love God with their totality of life, and to love neighbors with integrity (Matt. 22:37-39). McKnight (2006) also introduces concise teachings and a concise biography of Jesus Christ. McKnight (2011) further guides readers to recognize Jesus Christ who proclaims the Kingdom of God. In a later work, McKnight (2014) delineates the meaning of God's Kingdom for the church today.

Pastors write their books with more practical applications. Dennis (2005) discloses teaching and life examples of the Lord on prayer, worship, relationship, confrontation, listening, love, gratitude, faith, criticism, family, asking questions, rest, women, giving, hospitality, and generosity. Daniels (2014) provides an answer to the question, "What is Jesus like that I present through my daily life?" He then presents 12 themes that cover loving neighbor, living in truth, grace, and wisdom, and submission to the will of God. Crowder (2018) uses a narrative style in expressing stories in the Gospels about Jesus' compassion for marginalized people such as the lepers, the Samaritan woman, the blind Bartimaeus, the father of a suffering child, and the tax collector Zacchaeus.

Other forms of literature on discipleship are devotional books, namely reading materials that will enable readers to enhance their love and loyalty to God after reaching a new understanding of his words. Devotional books usually speak to the heart and soul of readers so that they experience an intimate relationship with Christ, and demonstrate eagerness for applying his teachings. Devotional literature is designed in such a way that will evoke commitment of readers to God through worship, deeds, and words.

There are books that provide daily devotions based on the Gospels. The sayings of Jesus are exposed and their practical significance in daily life described (Wommack, 2009; Hickey, 2012). There are also devotional books containing a variety of reflective chapters that discuss life issues from the teachings and example of Christ. Readers are guided to understand the meaning of chosen topics using historical, grammatical, and structural approaches. Such devotional books are intended to bring forth understanding, developing spirituality and enhancing the character and morality of readers (Evans, 1989; MacDonald, 2003; Chester, 2011; Issler, 2012; Darling, 2015; Fesko, 2016; Wilson, 2017).

The aforementioned works advance invaluable knowledge about Jesus Christ particularly in contexts where congregations understand English. Should they be used in Indonesia, proper translations are needed. Indeed, there are many translated books that may be helpful for Christians in Indonesia such as the works of Kraybill (1993), France (1996), Yancey (1997), Stott (2013), and Eaton (2008). However, the books are written in essay style. Grassroot Christians may find it difficult to understand the sources.

Motivated by a strong passion for sharing Christ (Ismail, 2013, pp. 133–136), Andar writes devotional books to help Christians understand faith in Bahasa Indonesia. His theological positions do not always fit within the evangelical framework but there is much to learn from him in his educational practices.

Andar Ismail's Selamat Series for Discipleship

Andar's concern for discipleship is firstly demonstrated by his books specifically on the life and teachings of Jesus. Then, he writes on topics which uncover the paths of Jesus in several practices, namely prayer, ministry, teaching and learning, work and vocation, integrity and fruitful life, and love. Before entering into his whole ideas, it is important to first briefly know who is Andar Ismail.

Who is Andar Ismail?

Andar Ismail (b. 1940) was born and grew up in Bandung. He is an emeritus professor of Christian Education at the Jakarta Theological Seminary (JTS). He is also a retired pastor of a Presbyterian church, *Gereja Kristen Indonesia (GKI) Samanhudi*, in Jakarta. He learned Bible stories of Christ when he was four years old. His mother brought Andar along with his three sisters to Sunday school in a Presbyterian church. After two years of catechism his mother was baptized together with her five children. His father, who initially claimed to have no religious affiliation, took baptism 26 years later (Ismail, 2005, p. 52).

In elementary and junior high schools Andar gained favor from teachers and friends for his imaginative stories and parody. Writing and storytelling were his favourite subjects. He enjoyed reading numerous children story books and novels, found in school and also the city council libraries he often visited. There he read the works of Hans Christian Anderson, Anton Chekov, Guy de Maupassant, Charles Dickens, and Karl May (Ismail, 2010, p. 139). His theological knowledge grew through reading the works of Johannes Verkuyl and Hendrik Kraemer (Ismail, 2003, pp. 121–122). Wanting to become a skilled writer, Andar took journalistic training when he was at junior high school, which enabled him to write articles for publication.

Andar studied theology at Balewijoto School of Theology, in Malang, East Java, after finishing junior high school (1957–63). A number of overseas teachers taught him, and three of them appointed Andar as teaching assistant (Ismail, 2003, p. 124). Two years after his graduation, the Samanhudi GKI church ordained Andar as pastor (1965). In that same year, accompanied by his wife, Stans, he was sent to the Netherlands to study adult education in *Agogisch Instituut* at Utrecht, for three years (Sidjabat, 2018, p. 42). The training enabled him to facilitate a theological journal for laity. For six years Andar and his close friend, the late Eka Darmaputera, practiced writing Bible messages and theology that were easily understood by ordinary congregations (Sidjabat, 2018, pp. 43–44).

Andar learned to integrate pedagogy, theology, sociology, and journalism for adult education through his six months of training in Japan (1979). He gained a M.Th degree in Christian Education from Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Seoul, Korea (1981–82). He holds an Ed.D degree in Adult Religious Education after five years (1983–88) of study in the Presbyterian School of Christian Education (PSCE) in Richmond, Virginia (Sidjabat, 2018, pp. 46–47). He then taught Christian Education in JTS which he began in 1978 until his retirement in 2003. Three years earlier (2000) he retired as a pastor (Sidjabat, 2018, pp. 48–49). Besides working as a consulting editor at an old ecumenical Christian publishing house, the *Badan Penerbit Kristen* (BPK) in Gunung Mulia, Jakarta, in his 79th year Andar continues to write the Selamat Series. His recent work is about Christian faith on plurality and nationalism in Indonesia (Ismail, 2019).

Writing Devotional Books: The Selamat Series

The Selamat Series prepares the groundwork to disciple adult Christians. Andar understands that adults struggle in their lives as they have many roles in family, church, marketplace, and society. He realizes their need for guidance in becoming faithful believers. His best way to help them is by producing reading materials they can read and ponder according to their own time and space. As indicated earlier, his Series is devotional and intended for independent learning despite its use for group discussion (Wickett, 1991; Sidjabat, 2018, pp. 54–56).

Since 1981 Andar has written 30 topics on Christian practices. The Selamat Series covers themes on celebrating Christmas (Ismail, 1981), celebrating Easter (Ismail, 1982), prayer (Ismail, 1992), family (Ismail, 1993), following Christ (Ismail, 1994), making meaning of life (Ismail, 1995), Christian ministry (Ismail, 1996), education and teaching (Ismail, 1997), work and vocation (Ismail, 1998), worship (Ismail, 1999), faith (Ismail, 2000), witness (Ismail, 2001), peace (Ismail, 2002), spirituality (Ismail, 2003), prayer collections (Ismail, 2004), heritage of life values (Ismail, 2005), healing (Ismail, 2006), friendship (Ismail, 2007), multicultural living (Ismail, 2008), faith community (Ismail, 2009), togetherness (Ismail, 2010), Bible reading (Ismail, 2011), life struggle (Ismail, 2012), maintaining unity of heart and mind (Ismail, 2013), coping with difference (Ismail, 2014), fulfilment of life tasks (Ismail, 2015), building commitment (Ismail, 2016), life renewal (Ismail, 2017), maintaining identity (Ismail, 2018), faith and nationalism (Ismail, 2019).

The Series' names always begin with the word *selamat* to mean salvation in a broad sense, which Andar calls *syalom* (shalom) in Hebrew. Andar understands shalom covers harmony, wholeness, peace, prosperity, security, long life, and blessed (Ismail, 1981, pp. 17–18; Ismail, 2002, p. 5). The 30 Christian practices above are then expected to become means for understanding God's shalom. Recently, Tizon (2018) has discussed the fundamentality of knowing God's shalom in global church mission today (pp. 77–89). Thomas (2018) acknowledges the search for God's shalom among the Chinese people through their religions and cultural practices (pp. 79–92) that they merely be met by the ways of Jesus (pp. 93–118).

Andar maintains that Selamat Series books are devotional, which means they function to broaden understanding, elicit affection, and evoke the reflection of readers. The Selamat Series is not intended for pastors, students, and professors in seminary. The Series is written in a popular style so that grassroot Christians obtain insights and understanding. Its teachings are written with the right choice of words, appropriate punctuation, simple and interrelated paragraphs. There may be quotes from other books but no footnotes. Each book contains 33 chapters so as to identify Andar's veneration to Christ who lived on earth for a mere 33 years. In addition, all chapters integrate Bible, theology, knowledge, psychology, pedagogy, and journalism. Andar calls his unique approach *gado-gado*, a name for Indonesian food with mixed vegetables and a peanut sauce (Ismail, 2008, p. 132).

With the *gado-gado* form, each book contains a variety of genres including Bible exposition, stories of Jesus, stories of Bible characters, church history and history of evangelism, short biographies of past Christian figures and contemporary Christian leaders, stories about leaders of other faiths that are related to Christianity, children's stories, folktales, novels, comments on hymns, thoughts on encounter with gospel and culture, book reviews, parody, satire, social critics, letters by readers, imaginative interviews, anecdotes, memories of childhood, and Andar's personal reflections (Sidjabat, 2018, pp. 3, 156–157). In the view of LeFever (2004), Burggraaff (2015, pp. 397–414), and Cox and Peck (2018, pp. 243–261) the variety of genre indicates Andar's creative teaching methods. In the light of Hess (2004), Roncace and Gray (2007) and Moon (2017), the *Selamat* Series provides valuable reading materials for discipleship.

Many readers disclose their comments after reading the Series. Here are some examples. First, Sobron Aidit, writer in Paris, admits:

I am firm in Communist ideology. Likewise I firmly conduct my religious obligations including reciting Qur'an, prayer, fasting and almsgiving. But I am often confused, looking for a handle on various problems. Friends in the country send the Selamat Series of the BPK Gunung Mulia. My heart was touched and the more I loved Andar's writing. From year to year I continued to examine his books. Finally at the age of 66 I confessed Christ as my Savior. Christ saves people through various means, also through books! I rejoice every day (Ismail, 2007: back cover. This and the following quotations from Ismail's books have been translated from the original Bahasa Indonesia by the present author).

Second, Gerrit Singgih, theologian, comments:

Andar Ismail managed to show that the genre of preaching and reflection is a variety of literature that must be studied seriously. The presentation can be light, simple, and hilarious, but the preparation, substance, and weight must go through struggles and repentance (Ismail, 2014: back cover).

Third, Yohanes Subagyo, Catholic priest, acknowledges:

The writer of Selamat Series uses the Bible not only to explain. Besides that, he conveys the text of the Bible while carrying out his daily experience and simple life. Thus the text gets its context... Selamat Series devotional books are a blessing for Indonesian Christians, both Catholic and Protestant. Like food, Andar Ismail's writing feels crunchy, delicious and fun to eat (Ismail, 2017: back cover).

Fourth, Harjoko Trisnadi, journalist, acknowledges:

As a journalist and a cofounder of TEMPO Magazine, I am certainly careful in assessing the quality of writing. In my observation, the Selamat Series devotional books of Andar Ismail are solid, high-quality, readable, and especially the contents are worth listening to. Borrowing from the TEMPO motto, I consider that Selamat Series books are consistently "honest, clear, clear, and humorous" (Ismail, 2018: back cover).

More than 75 comments by readers on the value of the Selamat Series are indicated by *Buku Itu Pintu Kalbu* (2010), a compilation of 33 narrative chapters on Andar Ismail in celebrating his 70 years. The present author participated in three meetings with Andar and his readers at the BPK Gunung Mulia, Jakarta, attended by more than 300 people, and learned from their comments, criticisms, and suggestions. On August 14, 2018, the Council of Churches in Indonesia demonstrated an appreciation for Andar Ismail for his consistency in writing devotional books. Undoubtedly, the Selamat Series is worth exploration and dissemination. In the following section of this paper, attention will be given to the ways in which the Series has guided adults to become disciples of Christ.

Sharing Jesus through Specific Books

Andar writes books to disclose the incarnation, works, and character of Jesus Christ. First, *Natal* (Ismail, 1981) explains the significance of Christmas and how Christians need to celebrate the historical practice. Celebration of Christmas will only be meaningful if we accept the death of Christ on the cross for the redemption of our sins (pp. 4–7, 64). Christmas means "God intervenes" in our lives (pp. 8–10). Jesus came into the world to save us from sin (pp. 35–37). Jesus is God with us (Immanuel) (pp. 56–58), and Christ is God's shalom for justice and truth in the world (pp. 45–46).

Brief biographies of John the Baptist (pp. 11–13, 104–106), Mary the mother of Jesus (pp. 20–22, 92–94), Caesar August (pp. 32–34), and King Herod (pp. 107–109) are explained to encourage pastors to model loyalty and obedience, and stay away from pride and hardness of heart. Imaginative thoughts in "If Jesus was born in Jakarta" (pp. 41–44) and "If Jesus Becomes Governor of DKI" (pp. 82–85) disclose the significance of imagination in teaching (Harris, 1987). The 115-page book has generated 65,350 printed copies since 2017, indicating its high value (Sidjabat,

2018, pp. 201–204). Andar's conversations on Christmas appear in the twenty-fifth chapter of several other Series books to indicate the significance of the practice.

Second, *Paskah* (Ismail, 1982) provides arguments of crucifixion, death and resurrection of Christ, and reasons for embracing him. The book is an apology by Andar, to guide adults when answering questions from people of other faiths. Valuable knowledge from the 105-page book cover the resurrection of the body (pp. 4–5, 21–24, 76–78), the melancholic disciple Thomas (pp. 11–13), the slowness of thinking of the disciples (pp. 25–27, 86–88), women the first witnesses of resurrection (pp. 44–46), and the encounter Jesus has with disciples on the road to Emmaus (pp. 50–52). It is disclosed that the resurrection of Jesus reveals that he is the truth, the way, and the life (pp. 67–69), and the holder of power over death, life, the world, and all creation (pp. 73–75, 92–94).

The book (66,750 copies in print since 2017) further reminds readers that the risen Christ gives them eternal life and quality of life (pp. 103–105) that must also be made known to many people through evangelism and discipleship ministry (pp. 92–96). Readers are taught that work and vocation are assignments from Jesus (pp. 41–43, 53–55), and so they need to live with hope (pp. 47–49). Christian leaders can learn from the book that the teaching of salvation is important in Christian education, as also emphasized by Pazmiño (2001b, pp. 37–57) and Allison (2008, pp. 200–231).

Third, *Mengikut Dia* (Ismail, 1994), discusses the dynamics of following Jesus. Andar holds that believing in Jesus is to walk behind him amid difficulty, rejection and suffering, because he has given us quality of life (pp. 1–11). Following Jesus means to observe the path of humility (pp. 12–15) and nonviolence (pp. 20–22). It covers carrying out the cross (pp. 115–117) besides understanding his grace and love (pp. 124–127). Narratives of Mother Theresa (pp. 62–66) and the story of John Newton (pp. 111–114) are described to resonate the joy and cost of discipleship. Andar discloses his own personal struggles in following the Lord during his childhood (pp. 16–19), adolescence, and adulthood (pp. 128–131).

The 33 chapters in *Mengikut Dia* echo the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer where his brief biography was written seven years later in *Berkiprah* (Ismail, 2001, pp. 55–59), a devotional book on Christian witness. In recent years Hull (2016) resounds Bonhoeffer's discipleship. We can also see the calling for discipleship in the works of McGrath (2001, 2014), McKnight (2004), Dennis (2005), Issler (2012), Daniels (2014), and Smith (2014).

Some recent titles of the Selamat Series continue to indicate the fundamentality of following Jesus in Andar's teachings (Ismail, 2013, pp. 1–7, 12–19, 33–36, 65–75, 130–132; Ismail, 2015, pp. 4–11, 29–36, 119–123; Ismail, 2016, pp. 23–27, 51–55, 77–80, 105–108). His *Selamat Mengaku* (2018) strongly encourages Christians to faithfully acknowledge Jesus Christ the Savior and Lord even in the face of growing intolerance in society (pp. 5–8, 49–52, 67–71).

Sharing the Ways of Jesus in Practice

Another way to guide adults to be devoted to Christ is through inclusion of chapters on how the Lord deals with various practices. The following are examples of Andar's guidance for readers to know the teachings, and to imitate examples of Jesus in areas of prayer, ministry, education and teaching, work and vocation, integrity and fruitful life, and love.

The way of Jesus in prayer. Andar encourages readers to spend time praying in the morning to imitate the habits of the Lord (Ismail, 1992, pp. 1–4). He describes the phrase “praying in the name of Jesus” to mean that we should bring our hearts, minds, lives, and desires in accordance to His will (pp. 44–46). Andar uses exposition of John 17 to emphasize the value of the intercessional prayer of Christ (pp. 65–67), and to disclose the feeling when Jesus separated from his disciples (Ismail, 2000, pp. 67–70). The value of John 17 for the church today is examined by Hera (2015), who points out that the prayer of Jesus contains rich teachings on Christology, characteristics of disciple, and discipleship (pp. 123–169).

Andar's 33 collection prayer poems in *Berteduh* (2004), and his poems in other books (*Menabur*, 1997, pp. 100–103; *Mewaris*, 2005, pp. 118–121; *Berteman*, 2007, pp. 32–35, 72–75, 117–119; *Sejahtera*, 2002, pp. 1–3, 128–132) emphasize that as disciples of Christ we have freedom to express thoughts and feelings before him. Andar's poems of prayer also unfold his creative discipleship as emphasized by Hess (2004), LeFever (2004), and Roncace and Gray (2007) where the use of poetry and creation of poems are suggested.

The way of Jesus in ministry. *Melayani Tuhan* (1996) teaches readers simplicity (pp. 50–54), the faithfulness and humility (pp. 103–106) of Christ, and his caring for disabled people (pp. 63–65). The book speaks to other foundations for ministry, namely the cross of Jesus (pp. 85–89), his parable of talents (pp. 97–99), and his way of coping with boredom and fatigue (pp. 111–113). The book discloses that by training leaders, workers, elders, and teachers in the church for ministry is to encourage their character and virtue renewal. *Melayani Tuhan* appears to echo the thoughts of Henri Nouwen in *Ministry and Spirituality* (1996), and that of Baker and Hayward in *Serving Jesus with Integrity* (2010).

The way of Jesus in teaching and learning. To encourage parents and teachers, Andar provides six Christological concepts of education and teaching in *Menabur* (1997). First, they are to sow the seeds of God's Kingdom (pp. 1–3). Second, they are to teach through example (pp. 11–13). Third, they are to disciple children and students (pp. 40–42). Fourth, they need to continually learn from Jesus the Teacher (pp. 47–49). Fifth, they need renewal of understanding of Christ in accordance with his standards and values (pp. 63–66). Sixth, they must help children and students understand solidarity (Jn. 4:39–42) (pp. 78–80).

Christian teachers in Indonesia are required to understand teaching as a profession as emphasized by government rules and national education bylaws. Obviously they also need knowledge of Jesus the Teacher. Christian teachers may learn more about Jesus the Teacher from Alfonso (1986), Warden (1998), Horne (1998), Tolbert (2000), Pazmiño (2001a), and Seymour (2014). Christian teachers in Indonesia may not find such meaningful resources, and hence *Menabur* is a valuable source to understand the vocation of teaching as discipleship.

The way of Jesus in work and vocation. *Berkarya* (Ismail, 1998) guides readers to learn from Jesus the carpenter (pp. 52–54). It is emphasized that the way Christ considers his status provides a basis for Christians to demonstrate humility in work (pp. 91–94). Lay congregations as the light and salt of the world (Matt. 5:13–16) should value work as an instrument for continuing the hope of Christ (pp. 98–101). Andar maintains that the management principles of Christ should encourage readers' planning, delegation, supervision, and evaluation (pp. 107–110). The teaching material is significant because work and vocation are Christian discipleship, as emphasized by Dennis (2005), Issler (2012), Smith (2014), and Hayes (2016).

The way of Jesus for integrity and fruitful life. Andar understands the value of integrity amid cultural, religious, and ideological differences in Indonesia. His *Berpadu* (2014) emphasizes that integrity necessitates life transformation (*metamorphosis*) which is the work of Christ (pp. 29–32). He holds that in following Jesus we are to observe tolerance with people of other faiths (pp. 5–8). Positive thinking (pp. 43–46), care (pp. 68–73), and courage which comes from Christ (pp. 85–87, 108–111) are essential elements in building up integrity. Besides describing the meaning of integrity (pp. 112–115), the book also submits narratives of two Christian leaders that Andar considers to have demonstrated the virtue (pp. 89–92, 127–131).

By living in and with Christ, Andar holds that adults and even older adults can still be fruitful in their life tasks (*Berbuah*, 2015, pp. 132–135). Narratives of C. S. Lewis, Nelson Mandela, and Johannes Verkuyl are conferred as sources for reflection (pp. 12–15, 25–28, 123–128). Personal narratives of Andar himself are provided to motivate readers for a more significant life (pp. 57–60, 61–64, 136–140). In addition, readers are strongly encouraged to be reconciled with God in Christ (pp. 29–32, 37–39, 105–107), to live under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (pp. 1–3, 92–96), and to actively participate in church education (pp. 87–91, 97–100, 119–122). Recent works of Dennis (2015), Issler (2012), Daniels (2014), Swinton (2016), and Crowder (2018) on integrity and fruitful life, can indicate the significance of *Berbuah*.

The way of Jesus to love. Andar admits that guiding adults to understand love and its application is a difficult task. Pastors and teachers can be trapped by theories. Various presentations in *Bercinta* (2016) are intended to describe that love is basically commitment rather than simply feeling (pp. 127–129) or merely sex (pp. 5–9,

130–133). Chapters on God’s love (*agape*) (pp. 1–4) and his faithfulness (pp. 19–22), the love of Jesus for the shallow faith shown by his disciples (pp. 28–32, 51–55) as well as his commitment to die at the cross (pp. 77–80), can furnish the theological understanding of readers.

Narratives of people who are committed to the gospel (pp. 23–27), to family and marriage (pp. 63–67, 123–126), to parents (117–122), to the nation (pp. 72–76) and the disabled (pp. 134–139), to vocation and profession (pp. 98–100), and to the evasion of corruption and bribery (pp. 90–93), are all intended to encourage readers to live as disciples of Christ. Andar acknowledges that writing the Selamat Series is the practice of his love and commitment to Christ (pp. 38–41, 86–89, 140–143). Similar thoughts are also held by Smith (2014) and Hayes (2016), who maintain that being faithful to vocation and calling is a sign of spiritual maturity in Christ.

Some Critical Remarks

In the midst of digital media and learning advancement, Christian leaders and teachers attempt to share faith and Bible knowledge through blogs, vlogs, YouTube, Facebook, and online programs. Unfortunately, the Selamat Series still remains in the format of printed books. Unless this changes, only readers who still prefer learning from printed materials will gain benefit from Andar’s books.

Despite the positive response of readers towards the Selamat Series, some church leaders may object to his high tolerance for people from other faiths. For example, in *Berpadu* he writes on “Christmas of a Muslim” (2014, pp. 96–99). In *Membarui*, Andar comments on “Christmas of a Muslim Poet” (2017, pp. 93–96). There is a chapter on “the cross viewed by a Muslim poet” that in disguise discloses a positive understanding of the suffering of Jesus (*Mengaku*, 2018, pp. 58–62). Andar may intend to demonstrate his friendliness to non-Christian readers and the same time he invites them to adopt a tolerant attitude towards the Christian faith.

In recent years there have been commentaries by Andar on the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ that seem contradictory with evangelical perspectives. His former writings describe that redemption of sins and eternal life are merely found in Jesus Christ. However, his chapters “The Only Way?” (*Berpadu*, 2014, pp. 9–11) and “Is Christ the Only Way?” (*Mengindonesia*, 2019, pp. 5–8) seriously invite critical questions and discussion. In “The Only Way?” Andar admits that the early church confession of Christ as the only way to God is merely an expression of a high veneration to Jesus Christ, and therefore the message of Jn. 14:6 is particular rather than universal. Then, his commentary in “Is Christ the Only Way?” maintains that Jn. 14:6 should be understood to convey Christ’s relationship with the Father who sent him.

This author suggests that a critical mind is needed when reading the Selamat Series. Group discussions need to be facilitated upon reading controversial parts in the Series. Andar admits that he writes the Series with a descriptive approach rather than prescriptive. This means that he neither suggests nor persuades readers to

accept his thoughts (*Sehati*, 2013, pp. 133–136; *Bercinta*, 2016, pp. 140–143). He argues that his devotional books simply share his understanding of the Scripture, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, his knowledge and spirituality, and his life journey with God. Andar realizes that readers of his Series might find it difficult to understand his presentation and yet he is highly thankful because he still feels acknowledged (*Mengaku*, 2018, pp. 140–143).

Conclusion

Discipleship remains the critical calling of the church today. Literature is needed to creatively lead Christians to understand the ways of the Lord. However, books that can help congregations in Indonesia easily understand Christian faith in Jesus and its application to life are limited.

Andar Ismail maintains that effective learning about Christian faith in Indonesia can occur in the space of learners themselves by reading relevant books. He provides devotional books to describe Christian faith with a variety of genres that grassroot Christian readers can easily understand. His *Selamat* Series contains chapters on the work, life, and examples of Jesus Christ intended to encourage congregations facing struggles, challenges, pressures, and difficulties.

On the one hand the *Selamat* Series reveals Andar's strong faith in Jesus Christ who provides forgiveness of sin and eternal life. On the other hand it also portrays a high tolerance towards people of other faiths and traditions. This characteristic urges evangelical church leaders to be critical in using the sources, and to consider writing a better shape of literature for discipleship.

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