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## Self Identification of the Churches in Indonesia

### I. The Churches in the Colonial Era

Most of the churches in Indonesia are the fruits of the missionary work which began in the early 15th and 16th centuries. They were geographical and ethnic churches, due to the condition of the Indonesian archipelago. Denominationally they derived from Reformed and Lutheran traditions, and a bit of the evangelical. But theologically most of them inherited the so-called pietistic motivation: a motivation which had brought those missionaries to the country. With the rise of nationalism and the influence of the ecumenical movement in the early part of this century those geographical and ethnic churches in Indonesia arrived at a common experience and entered into a common consciousness of being one Church in one country with one responsibility for the whole people of Indonesia, which is one nation. Many of those churches became independent from their respective mother churches in Europe and other countries, and sought to find their own ways in exercising their calling and mission, and their own identity in the new reality of an independent Indonesian nation.

### II. The Churches in the Early Independent Era: 1945-1950

This is the formative period in which the Indonesian churches faced hard problems. Japanese occupation in Indonesia separated them from their mother churches and forced them to find their own ways to maintain existence. The situation then was so hard that it was a real blessing that

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the churches existed at all. Many of the churches confessed that it was only because of the work of God himself that they were sustained. This is like the Israelite confession which says that the work of God is never realized in a vacuum, but always in real worldly history. Having experienced this hardness the churches in Indonesia began to look back at their history, and at the same time looked forward to what should be their identity and destiny in the newly independent country.

Indonesia proclaimed her independence in 1945. At the very same time the churches also suffered from the suspicious finger of the Muslims who accused them of being western, and therefore alien to Indonesia. So the churches had to deal with three major problems: (a) their past, (b) their future, and (c) their place in Indonesian society. As a result they began to find their identity: They have to be an Indonesian Church, i.e., *God's Church in the context of Indonesian reality*. This was recognized by the foundation of the Indonesian Council of Churches in 1950.

### III. The Double Wrestle: 1950-1970

From 1945 to 1950 the political situation of Indonesia was in great uncertainty, marked by the rise of multiple political parties, including those of Roman Catholic and Protestant persuasion. From 1950 to 1965 the Communist Party formed itself as the dominating party with the consequence that it almost brought the country into the Communist camp. In this period the churches felt called to exercise their duty in mission for the whole country. On the one hand they had to remain faithful to their God and Savior Jesus Christ; on the other hand they had to be responsible for the salvation of the whole nation. In other words, they had to engage in a double wrestle: wrestling with their God and with the reality of the country. It was because of God's will that the communists failed in their abortive coup in 1965, so that the country was saved from disaster. Again the work of God is realized in real world history. Here again the churches had seemingly to learn not only that man cannot live by bread alone, but

also that man cannot live by the word of God alone. This made the churches in Indonesia feel that they have to bring the good news into the historical reality of Indonesia. This is what we understand by contextualization.

Since then many, if not all, of churches in Indonesia, under the intense guidance of the Indonesian National Council of Churches (NCC), began to involve themselves in many efforts to develop a contextual theology which addresses not only the churches themselves, but also the reality of the Indonesian country and people, not only at the grass-root level but also the level of policymakers whose decisions affect the fate of the whole nation. It must be noted here that there has been no intention from the side of the churches to fight for a Christian country or a Christian government for Indonesia. By being faithful to God, the churches feel it right if they are able to bring the good news into reality and make the whole people of Indonesia good in every responsible sense of the word. This was really hard work. The churches have to put themselves not in the compound of confinement, but in the framework and context of the whole nation. Many warnings and precautions were needed and the churches were well aware of them. It is in this period that contextual theological thinking, slightly different from and very critical of the existing and inherited theology, began to arise in the churches. And it is also in this period that the Association of Theological Schools in Indonesia (PERSETIA) was founded (1963). PERSETIA's purpose is to develop this kind of contextual theology in Indonesia.

#### **IV. The Era of Responsible Development: 1970 to the Present**

Indonesia and her people is the real context of the Indonesian Church. Beginning in 1970 the Indonesian government launched a grand development program which hopefully will bring the Indonesian people and their nation into a modern, industrialized, and religious era. The program will be carried out in successive periods of five years each. This year we enter

into the fifth period. The churches have been involved in this program not only in theory, but also in practice. On the one hand they try very hard to develop a theological basis and direction for their involvement in development, and on the other hand they are involved in development in their practice. In most cases the theoretical and the practical involvement go side by side in such a way that the dynamic quality of contextualization is maintained. That is the praxis of the churches in the development program of Indonesia.

However, it must be noted that it is not always easy for the churches to develop theological thinking that really meets the contextual need. Many of them tend to use theological systems inherited from their mother churches to cope with contextual demands. This, of course, does not work well, since those theological answers were developed outside of the real Indonesian context. So they have to work hard to formulate their own questions which require contextual answers. And yet the answer is still to be sought and developed within the context itself. However, we are very fortunate that after a long and thoughtful struggle, enlightened by the theme of "Salvation Today" (1969-1970), the churches came to a theological position that is responsive to the development program of the nation.

The churches came to a formulation which says that the theology of the Indonesian Church is a theology articulated in the language of *Pancasila*. *Pancasila* is the state ideology, principle, and way of life of the Indonesian people as a nation. One elaboration of our theology says that the relationship between the Church and State in Indonesia shall be realistic, creative, critical and constructive, and that the development program of Indonesia is understood as the implementation of *Pancasila*.

The development program in Indonesia is not without direction, nor is it a blind copy of development programs carried out in other countries. The development program in Indonesia is a *Pancasila* development program which is most suitable for her multi-religious and pluralistic society.

## V. Some Clarifying Notes

(a) The Indonesian churches move from geographical, ethical and denominational contexts into a national context of Indonesian reality. This means that they look back critically to their inheritance (theologically and otherwise) and at the same time open up themselves to new reality and develop theological thought which is contextual and inclusive (not only for themselves but also for other people of the country). The process is not always easy, but certainly forces the Indonesian churches to find their own identity in the real context. In this kind of context we no longer talk about the church herself, but always about the church and her relation with other people.

b. The Bandung Conference in 1955 was a real landmark of the rise of self-identification of the Asian and African nations.

c. *Pancasila* consists of (1) belief in God, (2) humanity, (3) democracy, (4) social justice, and (5) the unity of Indonesia.

d. Indonesia consists of more than 13,000 islands (large and small), and has a population of about 170 million, 10-15% of whom are Christians (mainly Protestant and Roman Catholic).

e. PERSETIA is the abbreviation of the *Perhimpunan Sekolah-Sekolah Theologia di Indonesia*, that is, the Indonesian Association of Theological Schools. It began October 27, 1963 when 16 theological schools all over Indonesia were convened in Sukabumi by the Indonesian NCC. Up to its 6th General Assembly in Salatiga, the nub of PERSETIA's purpose has been to develop its member schools and to promote theological thought in the context of Indonesia. To achieve this purpose and goal PERSETIA runs some programs in which the member schools get the utmost benefit through direct participation. One of the programs, which is directly related to the curriculum construction, is the annual Study Institute. So far, PERSETIA has managed to conduct 11 Study Institutes covering all of the theological disciplines, the last being Ecclesiology which was held in Ujung Pandang in July 1988.

From the beginning of its existence PERSETIA has had to acknowledge diversity among its member schools which are divided into Lutheran, Presbyterian and Pentecostal or Evangelical. Academically speaking, they range from the so-called theological education for lay people to schools that offer university level courses and degrees. With regard to sponsorship, there are schools sponsored by one single church, and others sponsored ecumenically by two or more churches. There are also churches sponsoring more than one theological school. The variety exists not only because of the historical heritage of the sponsoring churches, but also because of Indonesia's geography. There have been efforts on the part of the Indonesian NCC to reduce the number and perhaps minimize the variety of theological schools in Indonesia, especially those member schools of PERSETIA.

To put the whole matter another way, the variety among the member schools of PERSETIA is inseparable from that among the churches in Indonesia. On the one hand, the churches want institutions of theological education which will provide ministerial training suitable for their respective needs. At the same time, they also want such institutions through which their ecumenical concern can be expressed. These two facts make most, if not all, of the member schools of PERSETIA church-related. This is a very good thing. However, the variety among the member schools tends to perpetuate the variety already existing among the churches. Or the other way around: the variety of the churches will certainly perpetuate the variety of the theological schools.

All that has been said above is also true concerning the curricula of theological schools in Indonesia. We do not have time nor feel it necessary to talk about the curriculum of each member school of PERSETIA. What we would like to point out is this: in spite of their variety, each member school of PERSETIA continues to review, renew and readjust its own curriculum to better meet the needs of the sponsoring church(es), including the need to answer their theological problems. Some of the member schools

undertake these efforts periodically, while others only do so irregularly. Nevertheless such efforts are very positive. Also, there are some principal aspects which are common to all of the member schools of PERSETIA. All of these schools regard themselves as church-serving, church-oriented, and Biblical; preparing and training ministers for now and the future; practical, spiritual, but as academic as possible; open to the ecumenical movement; contextual, critical; willing to develop and to cooperate. Based on these positive things PERSETIA feels much encouraged to run programs that lead to the achievement of these aims and goals. Experience shows that all of the member schools will participate in these programs.