

**From Internal Christian towards  
Multireligious Ecumenical Arrangements in  
Indonesia**

**從基督徒內部走向多元宗教合一：  
印度尼西亞**

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[ABSTRACT] The various Protestant churches were continuations of missionary societies at the end of colonial period in Indonesia in 1945. The cooperation between foreign missionaries was moved to a Council of (regional) Protestant Churches. There were some spectacular ecumenical results around 1970: 1) a joined translation of the Bible was accepted, 2) ecumenical Christmas celebrations became popular and even grandiose events in all major towns of the country; 3) exchange of seminary professors between denominations began; 4) there were serious consultations between leaders of churches as to the challenge of stronger and less tolerant groups of Muslims and their influence on government measures (like the 1978 ban on new foreign missionaries and economic subsidies; the 1982 fatwa against Muslim participation in Christmas festivities and many more like the introduction of *sharia* rulings for Muslims

against the public Pancasila Ideology and its pluralistic ethics). Also after 1970, the New Order government became heavily involved in the social role of religion. Its programme for inter-religious harmony in fact eclipsed the idea of ecumenical rapprochement between Christian Churches.

**【摘要】** 1945 年印度尼西亞殖民時期結束時，各種新教教會是傳教會的延續。外國傳教士之間的合作被轉移到（地區）新教教會理事會。1970 年左右有可觀的成果：1）聖經的聯合翻譯被接受；2）普世聖誕節慶祝活動在主要城鎮變得流行甚至是宏大的事件；3）教派之間的神學院教授開始交流；4）教會領袖之間就強大和不寬容的穆斯林群體的挑戰及其對政府措施的影響進行了認真的磋商。同樣在 1970 年之後，新秩序政府開始大量參與宗教的社會角色。事實上，它的宗教間和諧計劃超越了基督教會之間基督教和解的觀念。

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Andreas Yewangoe (born 1945) is a prominent theologian and church leader in Indonesia. He wrote a dissertation on *Theologia Crucis in Asia* (1987). He was teaching theology, but also fulfilled leading positions in ecumenical bodies, especially for the (only Protestant) Council of Churches in Indonesia, between 2004-2009. He served also a period (2006-2012) as member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. In 2012 he wrote about an astonishing meeting in Crete, where the question was debated whether the Lutheran Church of Jerusalem could become a WCC member. The proposal was opposed by the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem which claimed jurisdiction for the whole of Jerusalem since a long time and therefore rejected recognition of another denomination in the region. The result was that the membership of

the Lutherans of Jerusalem was rejected. Yewangoe was deeply disappointed and wrote a comment with the title "Ecumenical Movement: a dead end?" where he regretted the emphasis on institutional aspects in the WCC and other ecumenical bodies. Nevertheless he had also soothing remarks and his last sentence was: "The core mission is service. If the church returns to the mission of this ministry, the ecumenical movement will not be deadlocked."<sup>1</sup>

In 1997 the Kanisius publishing house of the Jesuits of Yogyakarta circulated a book about the 16 documents of Vatican II. All authors were Catholics with the exception of three. Two Muslims wrote about inter-religious relations (besides one Catholic), while the Protestant Dr. Gerrit Singgih was the single one to write about the ecumenical issues. Singgih is an Old Testament scholar and writes often about contextual theology.<sup>2</sup> But here he first gives a general remark about the great difference in ecumenical approaches in Europe and the United States compared to the Asian situation of a country like Indonesia. This is followed by a description of the ecumenical situation of the place where he wrote part of his text: the monastery of Taizé in France, a truly ecumenical heaven where the tricky ecclesiastical rules "are sometimes forgotten and people can experience the unity of the Church in its full glory". But then he turns his focus to the situation in the majority-Protestant (Reformed) province of Minahasa in Indonesia. Here the ecumenical gentlemen's agreement was followed that no other denominations should establish congregations besides the GMIM, *Gereja Masehi Injili Minahasa*, the Evangelic Christian Church of Minahasa. So, a group

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas Yewangoe, 'Ecumenical movement: A Dead End?', in: Huub Lems (ed), *The Changing Landscape of Ecumenism. Reflections from Indonesia and Europe*, (Wuppertal: Eukumindo, 2013), 171-173.

<sup>2</sup> E. Gerrit Singgih, "Tantangan dan Perkembangan Gerakan Oikumene di Indonesia", in: Marcel Beding and others, *Gereja Indonesia Pasca-Vatikan II*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1997:167-182. Quote from p. 169.

of Batak faithful became a Batak-speaking congregation of GMIM. After some time, however, this congregation seceded from GMIM to become member of the Lutheran GBHK, the Batak Church of North Sumatra, the largest Protestant Church in the whole of Indonesia and also the one who has most congregations outside its own ethnic territory, because it considers itself as a non-territorial Church. While attending services in Taizé, Singgih realized that in his homeland the ecumenical situation is sometimes far from ideal.

### **The 1940s and 1960s: the Drastic Changes in Protestant-Catholic Relations, also in Indonesia**

In the colonial period, until 1942, there was a ban on 'double mission' in Indonesia. No rivalry between Protestants and Catholics was allowed in the Dutch East Indies and also not between Protestant denominations. In this way the majority of the native population in the island of Flores turned Catholic while in the islands of West Timor and Ambon Reformed Calvinism became dominant among Christians. The result was in the case of Protestant Christianity not only a division according to European denominations but at the same time to ethnic diversity in the various islands of Indonesia: there is a Lutheran Batak Church in Sumatra, a strictly orthodox Reformed in West Java and among the Toraja of Sulawesi, against a lighter version of Reformed Protestantism in East Java. Besides denominational identities there are similarly strong ethnic labels in the huge country with its great variety of population.

In the late 1930s and 1940s the foreign missions were transformed into independent local churches. In the first two decades after Independence, 1945-1965, the Christians did their utmost effort to show that they were not a colonial creation, notwithstanding their origin from European missionary societies. They wanted to be

known as truly nationalist Indonesian Christians and this was successful: the Christian schools and hospitals could continue to prosper. A recent movie about the first Catholic native Indonesian bishop Soegijapranata (archbishop of Semarang 1940-1963) was given the title: *Soegija, 100% Catholic, 100% Indonesian*. Indonesia has in 2018 a population of 265 million. The Protestant are with some 6.5% of the population larger than the 3% Catholics, but minorities compared to the 87% Muslims.

The change towards ecumenical openness grew in the 1960s through the debates at the Second Vatican Council and under the influence of the World Council of Churches. In 1955 the Conference of Indonesian Catholic Bishops still had decided that a Catholic translation of the full text of the Bible should be continued, notwithstanding the fact that the Protestants had already since long a full Indonesian translation. This decision of the bishops was revoked in a meeting of October 1968, where it was decided that the work should not be continued and Catholics should use the Protestant translation. The Franciscan Friar Dr. Cletus Groenen had for years worked on parts of the Old Testament and his Protestant colleagues were astonished to see that he himself had proposed that his work was now stopped in favour of this ecumenical process. In fact the first formal ecumenical event should be dated four years earlier. In 1950 the Protestant Churches had founded an Indonesian Council of (Protestant) Churches. It held its Fifth Assembly in Jakarta in May 1964. At this event for the first time two Catholic priests came as official observers. It was not a delegation at the highest level, but a promising start.

Since the mid 1960s the usual animosities and strong language between the denominations have stopped, but ecumenical relations never were given the highest priority for Indonesian churches. There is a yearly letter of Protestant and Catholic Church leaders at

Christmas. The ecumenical Christmas celebrations are the most visible aspect of these friendly relations. But there is not much work done for more common institutional activities.

As mentioned above, the actual beginning of official contacts between the two Christian communities had been at the Fifth Assembly of the Council of Churches in Jakarta, 3-13 May 1964. The Presidency of the Conference of Catholic Bishops replied an invitation for this event with the sending of a low level delegation of two priests. This mirrored the impact of better relations as promoted by the second Vatican Council. Also in 1964 a Committee for Ecumenical relations (*Panitia Ekumene*) was erected within the Conference of Catholic Bishops, but in 1975 its name was changed into Committee for Relations with (other) Religions and Spiritual Movements.<sup>3</sup> In a document 99 pages of 1985 with the broad title of “The Catholic Community in the Pancasila Society” the bishops talk about ‘religious harmony’ (*kerukunan*) only in the context of ‘other religions’ while the internal harmony among Christians is not mentioned.<sup>4</sup> There is in Indonesia a quite particular status for the great religions. The state has built some kind of a ‘national ecumenical facility’, it is even a bureaucracy, a Ministry of Religion, to support and manage all (six) recognized religions. This facility is not concentrated on the individual denominations or churches, but on the major religions as such. We will give first attention to this special development here.

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<sup>3</sup> *Panorama MAWI 1925-1977*, A Document of the MAWI Secretariat.

<sup>4</sup> MAWI, *Umat Katolik Indonesia dalam Masyarakat Pancasila*, 1985:31-2.

## **Not a secular nor an Islamic state: the Pancasila ideology as the format and standard of the social role of religions in Indonesia**

From 1 March 1945 the Japanese administration in Indonesia supported a Committee for the Study of Activities Leading towards Indonesian Independence. There were two Protestant Christians, no Catholics in this body of 62 (later 68) members. The majority opposed the idea of 15 members of Muslim organizations to label the independent Republic as a Muslim State. The leading politician, and later the first President, Sukarno, came with the idea to accept a 'five-pillar ideology' or *Pancasila*, where besides Belief in the One Supreme Deity, other basic ideas would be those of nationalism, humanitarianism, democracy and social justice. In the first proposal the 'religious paragraph' was placed last, but in the preamble to the constitution as presented the day after the declaration of independence, on 18 August 1945, it was placed as the first pillar. Sukarno gave the following justification: 'Not only should the people of Indonesia have belief in God, but every Indonesian should believe in his own particular God. The Christian should worship God according to the teachings of Jesus Christ; Muslims according to the teachings of the prophet Muhammad; Buddhists should discharge their religious rites according to their own books. But let us all have belief in God.'<sup>5</sup>

The idea of this political position of monotheistic religions in Indonesia was strengthened by the foundation of a Ministry of Religion(s) in January 1946. Although it served specially the 87% of Muslims in the country, it had from the beginning also sections for Catholics and (Protestant) Christians (where the word *Kristen* in

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<sup>5</sup> Karel Steenbrink, *Catholics in Independent Indonesia, 1945-2010*, (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 5-6.

Indonesian is mostly used for Protestants only). In 1958 a section for (Balinese) Hinduism was opened. A problem in the acceptance of Hinduism was that the four informal criteria for 'religion': monotheism, Holy Scripture, a prophet, and international acceptance, were not clear in the case of Hinduism. In 1967 Buddhism became included in the Hindu-Buddhist section, while in 1980 a special section for Buddhism was opened. A department for Confucianism was only opened in 2006. The formal reason for this delay was that it was considered a 'local Chinese belief' and not an international religion. The real cause for the hesitation to put Confucianism on the list was that it was supposed to be connected to ethnic Chinese citizens who were suspected of being Communist.<sup>6</sup> Traditional or tribal religions only could be accepted in the structure of this ministry when combined with an international religion. In this way the Kaharingan as the (modern construct) of the Dayak tribal religion in Kalimantan became formally defined as *Agama Hindu-Kaharingan* or Kaharingan-Hinduism. Only on 7 November 2017 the Supreme Court of Indonesia concluded that spiritual belief systems should be accepted on the same level as the six officially recognized religions for identity cards, passports and also religious marriage ceremonies.

In a spirit of optimism one could consider the Indonesian Ministry of Religion as a promoter of the 'greater ecumenism', against the proper and conventional Christian ecumenical movement, its network and institutions taken as a branch of 'smaller ecumenism'. We must, however, bring some nuance to this statement. The various religions of Indonesia have given somewhat different reactions to the opportunities created by the ministry. It has been until recently a blind alley for all those outside the circle of the small number of

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<sup>6</sup> Karel Steenbrink, 'Buddhism in Muslim Indonesia', *Studia Islamika*, Vol 20/1 (2013)1-34.

finally six recognized religions. Atheists, adherents of Javanese mystical movements, of older and more recent 'new religions', of tribal religions, they all became outlaws. In order to take part in the state administration (for legal marriage, but also for administrative affairs like a car or motorbike insurance, passports, identity cards, driver licences) Indonesian citizens were until the Supreme Court decision of November 2017, mentioned above, obliged to fill in one of the official religious options. Like the gender option (male or female) and place of birth, also the religious option between six possibilities is often necessary. For the majority religion of the 87% Muslims of the country, the ministry filled the gap of the organization of their religion. The ministry has a service for religious education, with about 15% of the national education, from primary school to secondary and academic education in a mixed secular-religious *madrrasah* system for Muslims. For all six major religions it has hired teachers of religions from kindergarten up to university. It organizes the *shari'a* courts for Muslim marriage, divorce and inheritance. It has the monopoly on the organization of the hajj pilgrimage for yearly about 200,000 faithful. Different from most Muslim majority countries, it does not organize the mosque building or the nomination of mosque officials. On the whole, the ministry has functioned as a modernizing and even liberal body for doctrine and practice of Islam in the modern state. For Hinduism the ministry has been the basis for the reformulation of Balinese Hinduism in a more monotheistic style and it has given jobs to religious functionaries outside the caste of Brahmins. Buddhists and Christians generally found the ministry not really necessary, but some groups have become more active here than others. Evangelical Christians usually want to register their Bible Schools and training for ministers at the Ministry of Religion, while mainstream or classical Protestants and Roman Catholics tried to evade the control

of this ministry by calling their theological education a philosophical school and seek accreditation with the Ministry of Education.

Inter-religious harmony, mostly seen as prevention of religious conflicts, has been a top priority of the ministry. The Indonesian government took in 1980 the initiative to establish a Body for Inter-religious Harmony (*Wadah Musyawarah Antarumat Beragama*), where the MUI, *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* or Council of Indonesian Muslim Clerics represents the Muslims. MUI was established in 1975 at the initiative of the government. Its members represent not their individual position, but the larger, national organizations of Muslims of various traditions. The DGI (later PGI), Council or now Communion of Indonesian Churches stands for the Protestants. The Conference of Indonesian Bishops represents the Catholics. Parisada Hindu Dharma became since 1959 the representative of the Balinese Hindus. It was not the initiative of temple priests, but of bureaucratic and political leaders like the governor of the province of Bali, Ida Bagus Mantri, and the chairman of the provincial parliament Colonel I Gusti Putu Raka.<sup>7</sup> The Walubi as the Buddhist Council was formally established on 8 May 1979 at the initiative of Minister of Religion Alamsjah (minister 1978-1983) in order to 'bring the various Buddhist organizations together and to facilitate the communication between the Buddhists with the government and with other faith communities'.<sup>8</sup>

The *Wadah* had to tackle a great problem in early 1981. The MUI had issued a *fatwa*, prohibiting Muslims to be active in

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<sup>7</sup> I Gusti Ngurah Bagus, 'The Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia in a Society in Transformation', in: Martin Ramstedt (ed.), *Hinduism in Modern Indonesia* (London & New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004) 84-92.

<sup>8</sup> This formula has been taken from the semi-official biographies of the ministers of religion, Azyumardi Azra & Saiful Umam (eds), *Menteri-menteri Agama RI*, (Jakarta: INIS, 1998) 341. Karel Steenbrink, 'Buddhism in Muslim Indonesia', *Studia Islamika* 20(2013) no 1:1-34. Already on 1 October 1979 Alamsyah inaugurated the *Badan Musyawarah Ummat Beragama*, on 30 June 1980 renamed *Wadah* ...

Christmas celebrations and even to express 'Merry Christmas' to Christian fellow citizens. For the Suharto government, making much work of Pancasila as the national philosophy of the nation, this was a challenge. The head of the MUI had to resign and President Suharto ordered his cabinet ministers to be presented among 100,000 (by far majority Christian) people in the national stadium Senayan in Jakarta for the yearly ecumenical Christmas celebration, broadcasted by national television. The Muslim President himself lit the first candle light in the giant Christmas tree.<sup>9</sup> This was not only by quite a few orthodox Muslims seen as an effort to make Pancasila as some kind of 'civil religion'. In this period a law was accepted in parliament which asked that the Pancasila should be formulated as the 'sole foundation' for all civil organizations. In 1984 the Council of (Protestant) Churches formulated in its new constitution, article 3 that "The Communion of Indonesian Churches has its foundation in Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour, in agreement with God's Word in the bible." But it was immediately followed by the statement that the Communion of Churches joined in the effort to conserve the 'Pancasila as the only foundation in state and society'. Only two years later, November 1986, the Catholics Bishops stated in the new statutes for their Conference that "the Pancasila is acceptable as the basis for the Conference in its social, national life."<sup>10</sup>

In the 1980s there was a big support of the government, through its Ministry of Religions for inter-religious meetings. There were ample funds for these activities. Nearly 1000 official reports of local, regional and national meetings of the religions, were printed as booklets. Venues for these meetings were very often in the best local hotels, with all kind of modern facilities. In a somewhat cynic way

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<sup>9</sup> Karel Steenbrink, 'Muslim-Christian relations in the *Pancasila* State of Indonesia', *The Muslim World*, 88 (1998) 320-352, here p. 331.

<sup>10</sup> Aritonang (ed) 2008: 214 and 787.

the Jesuit priest Adolf Heuken wrote about activities in his town, Jakarta, in his Catholic Encyclopaedia, “Herewith a nice tour started along the beautiful carpets in the cool airconditioned convention halls of the great hotels of the capital.”<sup>11</sup>

This politically inspired ‘great ecumenical effort’ had its ups and downs. Between 1983-1993 another Minister of Religion, Munawir Sjadzali gave more attention to inner Muslim affairs, especially the *shari'a* courts. His successor again more stimulated the interreligious harmony, because of the tense political situation preceding the fall of Suharto in 1998. In the turbulent decade after the fall of Suharto there were quite a few incidents of inter-religious violence between Muslims and Christians. In 2006 a joint decree by the Ministers of Religion and the Interior regulated the *Role of the heads of local government in the protection of inter-religious harmony and the building of houses of worship*. In all 33 provinces and 405 districts a FKUB, *Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama* or Forum for the Harmony of the Faithful should be established. They should hold meetings of religious leaders, discussing any problem in their region. They had a special task for the permit to erect new houses of worship, where it was stipulated that mosques, churches and other houses of worship should be built in regions where they had a solid group of faithful. In the case of small Protestant churches it had turned out difficult to build churches in sections of bigger towns where the majority was Muslim. The FKUB had a slow start, although it was (like the *Wadah* of the 1980s) sponsored with government funds, but in some regions it developed into a vivid centre for interreligious understanding. A quite striking example is the Indonesian Province of Papua where in early 2018 Muslim, Buddhist, Protestant and Catholic religious leaders within FKUB

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<sup>11</sup> Adolf Heuken SJ, *Ensiklopedia Gereja*, Jakarta, 2006, vol 9:100.

decided to observe a fasting period of 30 hours (Thursday noon until sunset the next Friday), as preparation for a peaceful election of local administrators. We may consider this as an Assisi style of fasting and praying together for social and religious harmony.

### **The classical ecumenical dreams, encountering painful frustrations**

Ecumenical initiatives were already in progress before the 1960s. In fact, several processes were happening since the declaration of independence in 1945. Most Protestant Christians were members of churches or missionary communities that were still under European supervision. The process towards independent churches was accelerated and this resulted in 21 Protestant churches establishing a Council of Churches in May 1950. The purpose of this council was the growth towards one church for all of Indonesia. It turned out that an organizational unity was impossible. Instead, in 2008 the Communion of Churches counted 88 member churches. The increase was for a greater part the result of schisms among the member churches and only partly because of denominations who sought membership. Besides, since 1950 many new churches of Pentecostal and Evangelical character were created in Indonesia. Quite many of these have become members of two bodies, the PGLII, (*Pesekutuan Gereja-gereja dan Lembaga-lembaga Injili Indonesia* or Communion of Indonesian Evangelical Churches and Institutions) with 91 churches and further 103 Evangelical institutions that do not use the name of 'church', and the PGPI (*Persekutuan Gereja-gereja Pentakosta di Indonesia* or Communion of Pentecostal Churches in Indonesia) with an unknown number of churches.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Andreas Yewangoe, 'Ecumenical Movement in Indonesia, a Map of the Recent

The many meetings of the mainline churches in the Council/Communion of Churches talking about a road towards unity are in strong contrast with the increase of so many more churches during the last 70 years. The great dream of one big Protestant Church of Indonesia seemed to become more and more difficult. In 1984 the name *Dewan Gereja* (Council of Churches) was changed into *Persekutuan Gereja* or Communion of Churches. This was justified by the idea that ‘the unity of the Church, or the One Church in Indonesia, essentially existed already according to the essence of the Church’. The ‘old concept of interdenominational ecumenism’ with its emphasis on organisation, liturgy and confession, was left in favour of unity at the local level and unity in action.<sup>13</sup> This change of name was accompanied by ‘Five Documents of Church Unity’, accepted in this 1984 assembly of Ambon. For some it was a ‘second choice’, necessary since the first option, that of organizational and administrative union, could not be realized, but others saw this more in line with the reality of the legitimate variety within the Christian Church.

In the period 1965-1975 there was a kind of ecumenical passion among some Catholic and Protestant theologians especially in East Indonesia, where some districts have a Christian majority. The most striking example of this was the January 1974 Ecumenical Declaration of three major churches in the Southeastern Islands, the Catholics of Flores, the Protestant Timor Church and the Protestant Church of Sumba. This is a truly optimistic document, written in the quasi-liturgical style of this kind of documents on the international

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Situation, 2008’, in Lems (ed), 2013, 25-40. Here is still another list of 151 churches that are registered as ‘independent churches’ with the Christian Director General in the Department of Religion.

<sup>13</sup> Jan Aritonang, ‘The ecumenical movement in Indonesia with special attention to the national council of churches’, in Jan Aritonang and Karel Steenbrink (eds), *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, 823-864, here 836.

level.<sup>14</sup> Cooperation between the three churches is planned in socio/economic programmes, research, theological education, the common translation of the Apostolic Creed, prayers like Our Father, a common ecumenical training centre, joint programmes and presentation in the media, prevention of proselytism. At the time of writing the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches was still planned for Jakarta July/August 1975. This was later moved to Nairobi after an Anglican priest was killed in Jakarta in July 1974.

The Christmas celebrations in the great national Senayan Stadium of Jakarta were the most visible presentation of the unity of the Christians. They were often attended by the national President, who usually illuminates the first candle or electric light of the Christmas tree, something which is considered as a more or less ceremonial or even liturgical act, although the President always has been a Muslim. Many cabinet ministers also are present at this national event, notwithstanding the *fatwa* of the Majelis Ulama of 1981 that Muslims are not allowed to participate in Christmas celebrations. Also in smaller cities and towns these ecumenical celebrations of Christmas are the most visible common manifestations of the Christian denominations. But in other fields cooperation has remained modest. Student chaplaincy or the work of army chaplains has remained the responsibility for either Catholics or Protestants. The national and local government takes here all Protestants as one 'religion' without making distinction between denominations. In social and economic development projects the religious factor has become less and less dominant and many Christian NGOs have included also Muslim staff. While preparing for this article a Protestant minister, former missionary among the Karo Batak people of Sumatra, commented on the celebration of the

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<sup>14</sup> For the Indonesian text of this document see Steenbrink 2015: 554-557. An English translation is available through <https://independent.academia.edu/KSteenbrink>.

Karo Batak Church, “I was angry that the Catholic bishop or his representative was not invited to participate in the 1990 centennial of the Karo mission/church (or maybe he declined?) - people came from overseas and from many parts of Indonesia - why not Medan diocese?” There was some cooperation between theological academies, but mostly restricted to Catholic Professors of Philosophy and Anthropology for Protestant schools who sent biblical scholar to the Catholic institutes.

### **Three prominent ‘international’ ecumenical theologians from Indonesia**

If we compare Indonesia to India, we see some similarities, some differences too. Indonesia has 9.5% in Christians which makes it with a population of 265 million up to 25.18 million Christians. India has 2.3% Christians and so it counts some 24 million Christians, according to the census of 2011. Notwithstanding a nearly similar Christian population, the Indonesians had not really leading positions in bodies like the World Council of Churches. No Stanley Samartha, no M.M. Thomas and similar personalities. Still, the contacts with the ecumenical institutions were a good supplement to the quite restricted channels of communication with the European missionary organizations. We want to give here three examples of people whose life in part was dominated by these ecumenical contacts with world Christianity.

The first to be mentioned is Marianne Katoppo. She was born in 1943 as the tenth child of a prominent Protestant in the island of Sulawesi who later became a minister in the failed State of East Indonesia and consequently a high official in Jakarta. Marianne was a bright girl, good in European languages and she was in 1960 invited to Lausanne for a European Ecumenical Youth Assembly.

The older theologians at the conference stressed the differences between Lutherans and Reformed Christians and forbade them to have a common celebration of the Lord's Supper. Her age-group found the debate 'absurd and ridiculous'.<sup>15</sup> As a member of the programme 'Youth Caravan' she went to Egypt, Ethiopia and finally Nigeria. After finishing her BA in theology in Jakarta she stayed for 1 1/2 year in Japan, then for a year in South Korea until she worked in London with the British Bible Society until mid 1969. Love brought her then to Sweden, where she stayed four years until she returned in 1973 to Jakarta and finished her Masters in theology in 1977 with a thesis on the low position of women in the Minahasan Church. After a short period of ministry in Jakarta she came to Bossey for the post-graduate course in 1978. Here she wrote the successful book *Compassionate and free, an Asian woman's theology*, on the position of women in Protestant churches worldwide (published in 1980 by Orbis Books). In the 1970s she had already published five novels with some quite sensitive social issues like homosexuality and arranged marriages. The stories of the novels refer often to the international ecumenical circuit and issues like the 'theology of the Death of God'. She served several parishes after 1980, but called herself an 'independent theologian'. She was not really embedded in the local churches of Indonesia. Not all theologians are like Saint Paul who was able to travel again and again and held authority in his congregations. In 1994 she once complained that she did too little in the Indonesian churches. She was active in international ecumenical circles during a decade while still young, without a position in her own church. When she returned to live more or less permanently in Indonesia since the early 1980s

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<sup>15</sup> For references here see Karel Steenbrink, 'Ecumenical Adventures of Marianne Katoppo', in: Leny Lagerwerf e.a. (eds), *Changing Partnership of Missionary and Ecumenical Movements. Essays in Honour of Marc Spindler*, Leiden/Utrecht 1995, 212-225.

she had a restricted network in her own tradition. She died somewhat frustrated in 2007. As an internal migrant from Minahasa to Jakarta she had already made herself loose from her original church. The broad and numerous international ecumenical connections had made her position in her homeland not easy, just the opposite.

The second personality to be discussed here is Yosep P. Widyatmadja, born in 1944 in North Java in a Mennonite family of (partly) Chinese offspring. As a teenager he was baptised in the ethnic Chinese GKI-church in Semarang. He studied theology at the inter-denominational Duta Wacana School of Theology in Yogyakarta and he became interested in Urban Rural Mission as developed in ecumenical circles. In 1973 a Dutch Reformed development organization paid his study of this subject in Singapore, Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong. With foreign funds he could develop projects of Urban Rural Mission in Surakarta, but then in 1975 his own church did not want to ordain him to become a minister, because he worked full time for an interdenominational foundation in this field. Only in 1986 after more than a decade working in social and religious fields, and after some training abroad, especially twice six months in the United States, a local congregation wanted to have him ordained as a minister with special mission for deprived people. Widyatmadja could serve his foundation in Surakarta for 25 years, between 1974-1999 thanks to the funds that flew 'abundantly' from Western countries and gave him the nickname of *pendeta dolar* or 'minister dollar'. Between 1999-2007 he served the Christian Conference of Asia as executive secretary for Urban Rural Mission. Apparently Widyatmadja could work in a more stable position than Katoppo, due to his home base that he did not leave too long during his study and work. It is also clear here that ecumenical work in social projects is easier or at least with less internal church problems

than the writing of critical theological issues raised by Marianne Katoppo.

As one counterpart of the international and ecumenical Protestants, I want to mention here Thomas Michel, born 1941 in Canada, who became a diocesan priest in St. Louis. At the Second Vatican Council bishop Soegijapranata of Semarang asked his colleague of St. Louis for a priest to teach English literature at the Sanata Dharma Teacher Training School in Yogyakarta. Thomas Michel came, and became a Jesuit of the Indonesian province in 1971. After this he studied Arabic and Islam, wrote a Ph.D. Dissertation in Chicago with Fazlur Rahman and then became specialist for interreligious relations, not only in Indonesia. During several periods he was attached to the FABC in Bangkok, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, and also with the Jesuits in Rome and the Vatican Secretariat for non-Christians.<sup>16</sup>

### **Internal Protestant Ecumenical versus Dialogue Circles and Centres**

There is no real great and intense 'ecumenical movement in Indonesia'. The idea is most often restricted to the activities around the formal council or communion of (Protestant) churches, PGI, and to EUKUMINDO, the association of European partners that supports Indonesian Churches who want to meet as equal partners with the emphasis on exchange of information and on cooperation with the ideal of reciprocity.<sup>17</sup> Theological faculties and seminaries have sometimes exchange of professors, but activities for this purpose

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<sup>16</sup> See also here Thomas Michel, *A Christian View on Islam. Essays on Dialogue* (Edited by Irfan A. Omar), Maryknoll/New York: Orbis 2010.

<sup>17</sup> For this process of equality and mutual exchange see the introduction by Henk Venema in Huub Lems (ed.) 2013:7-8 ('Ecumenism as a context for and a vehicle to mission').

among the common faithful are very few. This is different from the broader perspective of a harmony and dialogue among religions in general, with much emphasis on Christian-Muslim Relations. In this respect there are many more initiatives. The best known movement here is the inter-religious forum DIAN/Interfidei ('Dialog Antar-Iman') established in Yogyakarta in October 1991. Its first director was Th. Sumartana, after his untimely death in 2002 succeeded by Elga Sarapung. DIAN/Interfidei is strongly supported by the royal family of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta and by various Muslim and Christian sponsors in Jakarta and the whole nation of Indonesia as well as abroad. It organizes consultations, training and cooperation between many local organizations in the field of human rights (especially for religious and spiritual as well as ethnic minorities), ecology, women's rights. A second place to be mentioned here is located in Jakarta. Here one of the best known civil movements in this field is MADIA, *Masyarakat Dialog antar-Agama* or 'Community for Inter-religious Dialogue', established in 1995 in a time of increasing tension between some Muslim groups and the Christian minority in Java. This was still before the attacks in 1996 on churches in East Java (Surabaya, Situbondo) and West Java (Tasikmalaya, Garut). MADIA is more academic, bringing together staff and students of the UIN, State Islamic University of Jakarta, the Driyarkara (Jesuit) School of Theology and the Protestant School of Theology. Third we turn to the eastern islands. As a reaction on violent conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Ambon and Poso (island of Sulawesi) between 1999 and 2002, a group of women in the Moluccas concluded that violent interreligious conflicts were nearly always started and inflated by men, mostly even young men. Therefore they started the inter-religious movement of *Ibu Peduli* or concerned women. With non-violent means they tried to influence their children and society as a whole that youngsters should take no pride in violent

actions, that they were not brave or champion-like if they would behave like warriors. The movement of the Moluccas quickly also spread to other parts of Indonesia.

Centres, organizations and movements like the three described here are to be listed by hundreds with both Christian and Muslim initiators. But ecumenical ideals in the traditional meaning of Catholics and Protestants only together never found such broad support. The idea of 'ecumenism' remained restricted to the inner circle of Christian church leaders and never developed to become a popular movement. Indonesia is here not an exception, but probably part of the global development. Anyway, something like a *Societas Oecumenica*, a broad network of specialists in ecumenical studies, as found in Europe, never developed in Asia, as far as I know and, as already indicated above, in Indonesia it was only in the decade 1965-1975 with some more fervour an issue among church leadership. Maybe the ideal of a visible and organizational church unity was unrealistic and the lack of results, but also the lack of urgency (related to the absence of conflicts or real problems in this respect), has not intensified the energy of people for the movement as such.

### **A personal conclusion about the 'greater ecumenical harmony' in Indonesia**

The Ecumenical Movement had various roots and has known various faces. Its beginning is often seen to have taken place at the World Missionary Conference of 1910 in Edinburgh. In 1910 John Mott proposed for the WMC as major motto the title of his 1901 book: *The Evangelization of the World in this Generation*. However, already at that time it was considered as somewhat too aggressive. From the WMC the International Missionary Council was born. Two

other ecumenical organizations blossomed since the 1920s: Life and Work concentrating on socio-economic problems and Faith and Order on doctrinal matters. The latter two merged in 1948 in the World Council of Churches. In Delhi, at the 1961 WCC Assembly, the International Missionary Conference joined the WCC. One may finally question whether this development should be understood as an effort towards centralization of many activities of local churches. If there was any temptation to grow into a new giant bureaucracy, it has been curbed by the decrease in European churches and the lack of funds accompanying this process. Or should we say the lack of enthusiasm for too big church-institutions? There is a Conference of Churches in Asia, which was organizing an Asia Ecumenical Youth Assembly during the conference, where this contribution was first presented: 6-13 April 2018 in the Indonesian town of Manado.<sup>18</sup> But, while the CCA repeatedly uses the word 'ecumenical', it has found no real equivalent in common discourse of Indonesian Christians and the general public.

Related to Indonesia, we should think about the terminology of the prominent Indonesian Muslim and Minister of Religion (period 1978-1983), Alamsjah Perwiranegara, who stated that religious harmony should be fostered 1) between various streams within one major religion; 2) between various religions, and finally also 3) between religions and the government. Alamsjah was thinking first about the Muslim community in his country. As to the first issue, he realized that since the first decades of the 20th century two big Muslim organizations, the reformist Muhammadiyah versus the

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<sup>18</sup> The strong position of the central government of Indonesia in religious affairs can be seen in a report of 18 Jan 2018 in local news sources of North Sulawesi/Minahasa, *Sulutlink*: 'North Sulawesi has again been entrusted by the national government, in this case the Department of Religion, to organise an international event, in this case the Asia Easter Celebration and the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly.' See: <https://sulutlink.com/april-2018-sulut-tuan-rumah-paskah-dan-pertemuan-pemuda-se-asia/>, accessed 18 February 2018.

traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama had split the *ummah*. But since the early 1980s a new factor had become important: Salafist Muslims from Saudi-Arabia and the Gulf States seeking to spread of their ultra-orthodox doctrines. However, within already divided Christianity the small groups of Pentecostals and Evangelical Christians also have grown fast. In this sense there has grown an understanding, maybe even sometimes a coalition between nationalist Muslims who defend the concept of 'Islam Nusantara' (some kind of 'motherland Indonesia' Islam) side by side with Christians who like to formulate inculturated, or contextual interpretations of their religion. As to the second issue, the relation between the great religions, we see that at the periods of inter-religious conflicts and violence, the lines are not exactly between the religions, but mostly only between hardline groups or even individuals, both on Christian and on the Muslim side, who want to disturb the relative harmony between the religions. On both side we see that the majority does not join the violent sections and many of them only are victims of the aggressive actions by their co-religionists. Finally, as to the government: it wants that religions cooperate in development and here we can see that most faith-based NGOs active in development are interreligious rather than only bound to one religion.

If we compare the Indonesian situation to other Asian countries, we must conclude first that it is much different from countries with a strong Communist past and present: in China and Vietnam the pressure and control by the government is much more prohibitive than in Indonesia. Basically, Christianity is, like all religions considered as a positive, even necessary aspect for people and society. Compared to Malaysia, Indonesia also has the favourite position, that Islam is not the only or major religion acknowledged by the state. Although in percentage Christians are a 10% minority,

they have in many respects the same rights as the vast majority of Muslims.

Great changes have taken place during the last century as to the internal relations among Christian churches, as well as towards other religions. Religious diversity is with some exceptions accepted as a permanent reality for public life. The management of this diversity is done in national councils of churches, but for many social affairs also by permanent bodies and arrangements founded by the Indonesian government, where the Christians participate in the realization of the social values as formulated in the Pancasila state philosophy of belief in the Supreme Divinity, promotion of a just and civilised humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy, social justice for all.

In 2002, as an act of gratitude because the inter-religious wars in the neighbouring province of the Moluccas had not reached the Minahasa, a former governor, a Protestant, started the building of an exceptional place of pilgrimage. It was named *Gunung Kasih* or the Mountain of Love. Some 40 km from Manado, amidst a stunning nature reserve, a steep hill with many volcanic sulphur sources, a way of the cross with fourteen stations was built. On top a plateau was decorated with a common room for all visitors and a row of five places of worship: from left to right a Catholic Church, a Buddhist and a Hindu shrine, a mosque and a Protestant church. Standing next to each other as a monumental act of grace to God that interreligious harmony was kept in this province and not disturbed through militant groups as elsewhere in the region.<sup>19</sup> This place was also visited during the Asia Ecumenical Youth Assembly in April 2018. During this event not only Protestant speakers will give their speeches, but the Muslim President of Indonesia, also give his view on national

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<sup>19</sup> See <https://relindonesia.blogspot.nl/> blog of 19 September 2009 for pictures of this place.

and international issues and the role religion can play here. The Catholic bishop of Manado attended also part of this meeting. This is quite a development in comparison with the audience present in 1910 in Edinburgh at the first World Missionary Conference. Religious diversity repeatedly has caused problems, but the churches have developed a much more open and tolerant attitude than was possible for them a century ago. In Indonesia this has been supported by state institutions. For harmonious relations Indonesian churches and other religions have created a situation that in general is very open for religious institutions and initiatives and has quite generous regulations for minorities. The internal Christian relations are embedded in a much broader circle of inter-religious facilities, guarantees and networks, that sometimes may be seen as limiting conditions or even as problematic, but in general work in line with their ultimate goals.

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