

## A Perspective on Indonesia\*

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OBVIOUSLY, *Indonesians* should speak about this theme. The western, middleclass, male, missionary syndrome is a thing of the past. The only excuse I have for my anachronistic transgression into somebody else's territory is the following combination of facts:

I was born in Indonesia of missionary parents and grew up there; studied in a missionary training institute preparing *for* service in my mother—country; *hominum confusione et Dei providentia* “because of the confusion of humankind (wars, etc.) and the providence of God,” I have only been able to serve in various short-term ministries in Indonesia. So I do not pretend to be an expert. In the true sense of the word, I consider myself to be an amateur.

### INTRODUCTION

(1) Pick up a book, any good book, on Indonesia and you will very soon come across words like “complexity”, “diversity”, “unpredictability” (Cooley 1968:911; Neill 1973). To be sure, the national motto now reads, “Diversity Becoming Unity” (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*), Gratefully admitting a growing awareness of common nationhood (“Indonesianhood”), in various places this slogan seems to be an ideological program or a mythical dream, rather than a statement of a sociopolitical fact.

(2) The official *lingua franca* (*bahasa Indonesia*) has, without doubt, been a unifying factor. But the regional vernaculars (the number varies in estimates between 150 and 250, without counting dialects) are by no means dead. They seem to be very much alive in “ethnic churches” (Cooley 1968:50).

(3) For more than a century cultural anthropologists have used the term Indonesia (Indian *islands*) for good reasons: “10,000 islands, 3000 of them inhabited, 5 among the largest in the world.” Along with isolated, “ethnocentric” groups, Indonesia is made up of merchants who took part in the international Asian trade, mainly concerned with the powers that rule the waves (thalassocracy).

(4) By population Indonesia is the fifth nation; by area, the sixth nation of the world. Demographic statistics are not always reliable. A minimum guess suggests 120 million people; the figure is expected to double in the next 20 years.

(5) Not only the magnitude of Indonesia is staggering. The depth of Indonesia's history (pre-, proto-, recorded) is very impressive indeed. Found there are relics of primal man (500,000 B.C.); survivals of Vedoid folk; immigrants from the Asian heartland (China?) via Vietnam (Dongson culture, 8th century B.C. to first century A.D.); the “Proto-Malays” (*Altvoelker*, who still count for about 10% of the present population?); followed by the “Deutero-Malays” (*Jungvoelker*). Ancient contacts with Africa are hypothesized, and the Malagasy peoples and languages are, several of them, clearly from Indonesia. This is an eldorado for archeologists.

(6) In recorded history we hear about Chinese monks who came to Indonesia for their post-graduate studies in Buddhism, long before the Christian faith had made any significant impact on northwestern Europe; infiltration and later occupation by Indian powers (“the Indian period”); about the expansion of Islam, now the dominant religion; about the conquistadores of Spain and especially of Portugal, who brought their missionaries, about 200 in a time span of 80 years (among them Xavier, “one of the greatest missionaries in the whole history of the church” (Neill 1964:148). These were followed by the Dutch, at first in the style of “theocratic mercantilism” of a trading company (1599-1795); later as colonial imperialists (1815-1942). In between came a brief British intermezzo (1811-1815). and finally the Japanese (1942-1945). In its idiom the *bahasa Indonesia* reflects exposure to this cascade of foreign cultures and languages.

(7) In the nationalist movements (probably first among students in 1918?), the very word “Indonesia” has shifted from a cultural-geographical term (as in point 3 previously) to a *political* slogan. It came to stand for the struggle for independence and the celebration of selfhood. Nurtured by the glorious past, the name Indonesia sometimes carries associations of being a significant world power. Famous, and often quoted, are the words of the father of the Republic, Sukarno: “The MA of Malaya, the MA of Manila and Madura, the MA of Madagascar, and the MA of Maoris, all are the same.” After independence, Indonesia continues to be an expression of rediscovered grandeur.

(8) The Republic of Indonesia (August 17, 1945) is unique as it pretends and intends to be “a secular state with a religious basis.” The core of the official ideology is expressed in the Five Principles (*pantjasila*): the state is based on belief in One Deity; nationalism; internationalism as manifested by respect for human rights; representative government (democracy?); social justice. The first principle is “a multi-interpretable formula, providing a real possibility for people to agree while disagreeing” (Boland 1971:39). By definition, an Indonesian is “somebody with a religion”; through all levels of education, religious instruction is compulsory. The secular state has committed itself “by means of its Ministry of Religion to promote religions and religious activities in a positive way.” This “positive neutrality,” with freedom of religion guaranteed, was definitely less than some orthodox Muslim groups desired. In the revolts of these groups, e.g. the Darul-Islam uprising (1945-1965), one might see an expression of the will to change the Constitution and to make Indonesia into an Islamic state.

(9) “Just as the period of the fight for freedom (1945-1950) can be typified as the era of relative unity-in-the-struggle, so the years 1950-1955 can be characterized as the period of strife between the parties” (Boland 1971:47). Sukarno tried to maneuver himself into a position of complete control by means of the concept of “guided democracy”; this was the alliance of the three main sources of motivation for the Revolution: nationalism (NAS), religion (Agama) and communism (KOM), *giving* rise to the acronym NASAKOM.

In a tragic coup, September 30, 1965 (the 30 September Movement, Gestapu), leftist elements tried to break this delicate balance between parties that were ideologically so radically opposed to one another. The coup failed. In an outrageous reaction hundreds of thousands of (alleged) Communists were killed, or arrested and exiled. Muslim youth groups participated in this massacre.

General Suharto took command as President of the Republic. What has developed since has become known as the New Order (ORBA: *orde baru*), strictly based on *pantjasilaism*. Atheism, in whatever form, is now suspect as a possible manifestation of

communist tendencies; every Indonesian (including those who hold on to “primitive” religions) is supposed to choose one of the registered religions (Islam, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism-Buddhism). Within this sociopolitical context we have to try and understand the people movements towards the Christian church (*Christen barn*, “New Christians”).

## SOME ASPECTS OF MISSIONARY HISTORY IN INDONESIA

This is, of course, not the occasion to repeat once again the history of missionary movements in Indonesia. Surveys of this enterprise, including the significant role of laypeople, e.g. in East Java, are available; unfortunately only very few exist in English. Many more data are still hidden in archives waiting to be uncovered.

But, as in most “younger-church histories,” the facts are almost without exception organized in a missio(nary)-centric perspective. We have access to diaries of the messengers of the good news; we are allowed to read their correspondence; we find policy statements galore. Also reports *about* the Indonesia response, but these reports are usually written by missionaries who use (and nobody is to blame) the stereotypes of their current orthodoxy. They overdraw the course of events so that things lie neatly. An Indonesian theologian, after studying this kind of materials, has stated, “almost everything we have available might be used for writing *Western* church history, carried into effect in another, foreign, part of the globe. It is not helpful to *reconstruct Indonesian* church history” (Abineno 1956, ch. 1).

For all of us, who are not willing simply to parrot the great historiographers of missions (Warneck, Richter, Latourette, Walter, etc.) this poses a problem. Walter Holsten urged us, some years ago, to use a different canon (1953:Giff; see also Manecke 1972:15-63). If we go on along the same “classical” lines, he stated, we will project a specific (19th century) model on other eras; “organized missionary efforts” (with societies, etc.) become the yardstick to measure where and when authentic missionary work occurred. He tried to minimize the lamented “missionary vacuum in Reformation theology, so often ridiculed by Catholic polemicists of the time, e.g. Bellarmine (Neill 1964:221). In the same vein, Gensichen has suggested that the missio-centric procedure is as absurd as “asking Napoleon what he thinks of nuclear warfare” (1960:119).

In principle. I think that we all agree. The real *theme* of missionary or church history should be the kerygmatic event (*Geschichte, die sich do vollzieht, wo in Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift das Zeugnis von Jesus Christus laut wird*). But is this possible? Holsten obviously forgot his own Canon when he made his significant contribution to missionary history (1949). Skeptics have asked for a long time, and they continue to do so, whether he really understood the kerygmatic event to have taken place wherever a solid orthodox Lutheran church was planted. And Gensichen’s recent design of a theology of missions is definitely cast in missio-centric terms (1971).

A kerygmatic event cannot be reduced to correct words (*was laut wird*). In the act of proclamation a missionary never is simply a speaker. His or her whole life is part of the story. We also have to know what *was* and is heard and experienced on the receiving end: heard with such compelling force that words spoken are accepted and will lead to an obedience of faith (Rom. 1:3); and obedience expressed in the hearer’s own authentic way. This part of the communication process has, until very recently, been only recorded by outsiders. It is safe to assume that what has been documented as “curious deviations,”

“syncretism,” “Christopaganism” or even “heresy” might very well have been the undetected beginnings of an “indigenous theology.” Statistics are not sufficient to trace the story of kerygmatic events, and, admittedly, missionary statistics have not always proved to be quite correct.

This whole discussion on the right *theme* of church history seems to be ignored in the very best treatise on Indonesia. As if we still lived in the days of Warneck, the author states that whatever happened in the 200 or so years prior to the “Great Century” should be (dis-)qualified as mere *Vorgeschichte*, a preface to the real thing (Muller-Kruger 1968:610).

I often wonder how these same historiographers, using Holsten’s canon, would write church history in general, or European church history in particular. If they would be consistent, the “real thing” might only be supposed to begin with the establishment of their own denomination composed of the *beati possidentes* of THE Truth.

How do we combine the parable of the Seed as recorded in the two versions of Matthew 13 and Mark 4? The seed (the witness of Jesus Christ) is sown, most of it wasted, unproductive; in some cases people “hear the word and *understand* it, bearing fruit” (Mt. 13:23). And again. “This is how it is with the reign of God. Somebody throws out seed on the ground (and waits), and automatically (*automate*, all by itself, ‘without the help of anyone’ NAB) the soil produces fruits” (Mk. 4:26-29). We have the story of the sowers pretty well documented. What happens in the soil we can only guess and wait to see. Something might be going on, of which the sower is not a part.

With the aforementioned *caveats* in mind (careful, mainly missio-centric materials), we still have to try and elicit some sense out of the abundant mass of data, looking for the Indonesian part of the story. And, of course, making use of Dr. Tippet’s very helpful frame of reference.

A report about Christian headhunters might not be quite acceptable. The story of a baptized family who decided to commit suicide, rather than being exposed to Muslim pressure, has, perhaps, a better chance. In neither case are we adequately informed about the motivations. We had better leave the *judicium fidei*, the judgment on faith, where it belongs, with God.

(1) *Portuguese Patronate (1511-1615, or 1512-1612. or*

In a magnificent gesture, Pope Alexander VI exercised his authority as a *cosmarch* (ruler over the cosmos). In one of the most fantastic comity arrangements of all times, he divided the world (which was yet to be “discovered” and explored - Columbus had still not set foot on the mainland of his new world, nor had da Gama crossed the Indian Ocean) into two equal spheres of interest. He prescribed a demarcation line, running from pole to pole, 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands; conquests to the west were to be Spanish and to the east, Portuguese.

The Catholic monarchs of the Iberian peninsula found themselves in the roles of pontifical patrons, carrying out that a pope is supposed to do (*patronate*). Sometimes they preferred to be known as vicars of the vicar of Christ on earth (*vicariate*).

Indonesia was destined to become the area where east and west did meet. The Portuguese rounded Africa and continued on an eastward course, arriving in India, Malacca, the Moluccas (1511-1512). The Spaniards sailed west beyond the Americas and showed up on the same scene. Whatever arrangements were made back home, the Christian

confraters engaged in a brisk little war, until the Spaniards were summoned to withdraw, to make the Philippines their headquarters. As obedient sons of the Holy See, they occasionally sent missionary expeditions to the Indian archipelago. But, in principle, Indonesia became part of the *Portuguese Patronate*.

Contemporary observers, unimpressed by what was decreed in ecclesiastical high places, soon passed the word that the Portuguese were really after “pepper” and “souls” (Plattner 1955). Adding insult to injury, Spaniards spread the rumor that their Christian brethren had set out to find *esclavos, no clavos* (slaves, not cloves).

It is significant to note that for centuries to come Europeans, under whatever flag, had to enter into what has become known as “the International Asian Trade System.” There was no other way to do profitable business (“pepper”). Asian merchants of various nations had used the same communications network. They carried their cargoes from one trading post to the next, without real-life contact with the cultures and languages in the hinterland of their several *rendezvous*. Without undue exaggeration, it can be said that these trading posts (the Portuguese introduced the name “factories”) were extra-territorial, international bridgeheads of the Trading System.

It is only in the last few decades that historians, Indonesians among them (see Abineno 1956) have begun to investigate the implications of this system. In a very provisional list one can summarize some of the findings:

- (a) Unlike the Spanish imperialists, the Portuguese mercantilists were not interested in owning more land than was needed to build up and protect their factories.
- (b) A commercial language was the means of communication in these international posts. As far as Indonesia is concerned, this was a kind of pidgin Malay (“low-Malay”) or Portuguese.
- (c) The missionary enterprise (“souls”) was concentrated on the “people in and around the castle” (this was a standing phrase). People living inland did not figure on the missionary agenda.
- (d) Although they often reported so, European Christians were not in sole command of the seas (thalassocracy), and consequently had to face fierce competition. In the rush for the Spice Islands, the Portuguese found, to their horror, Muslim competitors on every stretch. This intricate story of almost simultaneous expansion of Islam and Christianity towards Eastern Indonesia is often cast in terms of another clash between *jihad* (holy war) and crusade. All the ingredients of such a classical confrontation are there. Perhaps people of the Crescent and people of the Cross had the same objectives: pepper and souls. There are no indications that intra-Muslim or intra-Christian warfare was less bitterly fought than the conflagration between adherents of different religions.
- (e) And, to repeat, this whole drama is only an imported facet of European history, a story of the “sowers” (of whatever brand). The things that happened “automatically” in the soil are only on record insofar as they affected the alien intruders.
- (f) Finally, all these hermeneutical guidelines for interpreting the texts are true, with *exceptions*. History is too amorphous to be caught in a few paragraphs.

We have become used to stereotypes. So we pretend to know (with eyes shut and minds closed) that the Portuguese Patronate could only produce “superficial” or “nominal” Christians. These used to be the accepted adjectives to welcome our Indonesian sisters and brothers in their homecoming party.

Leaving the *judicium fidei* to those who feel comfortable in their role of inquisitors, I simply want to lift up two facets of the story.

First, we know the missionary *methods*, and they were wrong: Europeanization instead of accommodation; a *tabula rasa* way of dealing with the Indonesian cultural heritage (their table had, supposedly, nothing worthwhile to offer for the up building of the church); assimilation and all the wrong words missiological nomenclature may offer. Just an attempt at expanding the *corpus christianum*, that strange mix of faith-culture-and-power. The invitation to accept the gospel must have been heard and understood, most of the time, as: join US, be good proselytes. “Souls” can, apparently, be extricated from the fabric of society and transplanted into another society which one might term Christian, or civilized, or powerful — in this case Portuguese society. Don’t waste time: baptize the souls; they are *naturaliter christianae* anyway, “naturally Christian,” waiting to be harvested.

Before the Portuguese arrived on the scene there were, in fact, rumors about the Indonesian fields white for harvesting. This euphoria gradually diminished when they came closer to the field (see Visser 1925 and Visser 1934).

In this rubric, we have, I guess, to put together most of the reports about mass baptisms without previous instruction, like the famous story of sailors, tired of riding at anchor off the shore of Buru, who decided to go ashore, baptized 4000 people in good old conquistador style, leaving a cross as a “sacrament”. And that is only one instance. Second, there is another facet, mostly ignored by Protestants and glorified by Catholics. This concerns what missionaries of different religious orders tried to pass on of the Words of Liberation. The language used was, as Indonesians say now, the one, more obstacle than means of perhaps wrong one, more than an obstacle than a mean of communication. The very outspoken Xavier once wrote, “It is very hard indeed to translate the mysteries of faith into a language one does not understand.”

This was a style of missionary work one could, I think, best describe as an attempt at a mass catechumenate. However carelessly others had (ab-) used the holy sacraments, some priests were adamant in teaching the basics of the Christian faith (the Decalogue, the Creed, the Our Father, and occasionally, the Ave Maria). Looking over the whole history of missions, this is not a very bad *shibboleth*.

We know the instructions of Xavier, a latecomer (1546~). We might conjecture that some of his confraters conceptualized their tasks in a similar fashion. To oversimplify: the gospel has to be sung and played out in daily processions and parades, mainly by children and teenagers, probably in an idiom not quite (or not at all) understood by either the messengers or those to whom the message was addressed.

We know of at least one instance when a priest refused to administer the sacrament of baptism because he was not sure that the (necessary) post-baptismal catechumenate could follow (Enklaar 1947:27). There might have been other such instances.

How do we summarize the life stories of hundreds of thousands of people in a few cold paragraphs? I have no way of knowing. Counting Christian noses is a hazardous experiment; there may have been somewhere between 60,000 and 150,000. It is more important to remember that the rhymed catechism became part of Amboinese folk music and that the Christian display of pomp and power may have had a lasting effect. We had better add a postscript to the sorry story of the Crusades. Müller-Krüger speaks of the “last Crusade” (1968:260).

Countless Indonesians were baptized. It is not for us to sniff out motivations.

As everywhere else, Christian conquest was accompanied by apostasy; as many as 60,000

may have defected. One of the reasons for this decline is the sobering fact that there never was a sufficient number of gospel messengers, and the means of transportation in this island world left much to be desired.

“Honoring our fathers,” we have to pay tribute to all those who “put their bodies on the line” (Rom. 12:1). Names may have been forgotten. The presence of missionaries can, in some places, only be documented by their graves (Muller-Kruger 1968:145, referring to Halmahera).

(2) *Dutch Theocratic Mercantilism (1599—1795)*

Merchants in the Low Countries joined the rush for spices, without pontifical blessing, to be sure. They set sail while they were engaged in a life and death struggle with the Christian monarchs of Iberia (until 1648).

Imagine the surprise of these sturdy republican Calvinists when they finally (the voyage took fourteen months; more than half the crew did not make it) arrived at their first Indonesian port of call and were told by their Asian colleagues/competitors: “We have visited your king in Rome.” Response: “We are Christians, all right, but we are not so particularly fond of the Pope” (Van Leur 1934:6; trans. 1955).

The theological rationale for this mercantile enterprise was spelled out in the Dutch Confession (1561; art. 36). It was an article of faith that the whole of society was redeemed in Christ, and consequently should be reformed according to Scripture. In this theocratic commonwealth, the “Christian Magistrate” had the privilege and the obligation of exercising the *jus reformandi*; in practical terms: to protect the citizens against erroneous (“popish”) superstitions; to fight false religions and, wherever possible, to spread the gospel among the heathen “sitting in darkness” and among the Moorish Muslims.

The United East Indies (Trading) Company (VOC, founded in 1602) was charged to act on behalf of the reformed magistrate “in the whole of Asia.” The arrogance of such a small nation projecting its own ideology on a vast continent may be difficult to understand now. Theocracies are, by definition, global (“The earth is the Lord’s and those who dwell in it.”). Sensitivity to pluralism is not one of the fortes of their set of mind. The VOC was also present in India, Ceylon, Formosa, Japan, etc. What happened in these other cultural settings influenced the policy in Indonesia and vice versa. The only possible way to cope with such a diversity of situations, so it was thought, was to set strict rules from the home base.

Historians have pointed out that these Dutch adventurers (scholars and pirates among them) brought a survival kit of three books: a Bible (theocracy), an atlas (universality) and a cashbook (profit). This trinity of scriptures may raise some questions for us now. It seems to have been a problem then only occasionally. The many public prayers of this period make it clear that profit was God’s best friend.

If we can speak of a missionary *method*, then it was clearly a classic method of *assimilation*. Everything had to be done in strict conformity with *patria*, the fatherland. Sometimes missionaries requested the synods back home “to close their eyes once in a while because things are so different here,” No such thing: “We keep our eyes wide open.”

This obsession with uniformity led to ludicrous decisions. A *cause célèbre* was the issue of hymn singing. Somebody reported that, without adequate supplies of hymnals and in

congregations where the majority of the members were illiterate anyway, he used the “English mode.” He read the text line by line, to be repeated in song by the church members. Uninformed members of a synod in Holland were quite upset: “Why English melodies; are our own not good enough?” One shudders to think what might have happened if someone would have had the audacity to suggest Indonesian melodies (Abineno 1956:40).

Operating within the trammels of the VOC policy and always subjected to strict censorship, missionaries had hardly any room to move. Innovative Indonesian expressions of the Christian faith were simply taboo.

Missionary work as we understand it today was mainly delegated to a *clerus minor* (“comforters of the sick,” “exhorters”). They were allowed to preach (somebody else’s sermons), to teach and to baptize. Extempore prayers were frowned upon. The sacrament of the Holy Supper was the privilege of the *clerus major*, the theologically qualified, ordained minister. These were always in short supply. We know of cases in which people had to wait 28 years to partake of the sacrament. This separation of sacraments had in Indonesia, as elsewhere, a disastrous effect (Enklaar 1947).

Faithful to their confession, Dutch merchants tried to eliminate “popish superstitions” and to do battle against “false religions,” principally Islam. Most of the time Roman Catholics of the Portuguese era were simply re-labeled Calvinists. Christianity became known as the *agama Kompeni*, the religion of the Company (VOC), and baptism was sometimes referred to as *masuk belanda*, to enter the Dutch system.

Not much is known about organized efforts to reach out to the Muslims. They were, I guess, more often regarded as potential enemies than as prospective converts. Even in our century one of the outstanding missionary Bible translators (Adriani) suggested concentration of all missionary forces on the “not-yet-Islamized” parts of Indonesia (the “prophylactic method”). The “inconvertibility of Muslims” has been for long centuries a nightmarish axiom in missionary thinking (Bijlefeld 1959).

Missiological purists cannot look upon these two centuries of theocratic mercantilism as something resembling anything like a golden age. Almost the whole catalogue of things one ought *not* to do can be documented and abundantly footnoted. Increasing corruption in the VOC and the erosion of the Calvinist ethos in the course of the 18th century do not help to arrive at a positive appreciation. What was conceived as *theocratic* mercantilism deteriorated into mercantilism *sec*. In the 17th century VOC servants were urged to root out “false religions.” In the next century (18th) some were known to have been involved in a profitable trade in idols.

So the policy was wrong. The citizens of the Kingdom who were scattered in this particular part of the field, the world (Mt. 13:38), were truly committed servants of the cause or the dregs of the nation, with everything possible in between. Unless we want to fall into the trap of a Donatist heresy and only accept certified saints as the real *dramatis personae* in the history of the expansion of Christianity, hardly any word of positive appreciation can come from our lips, only a “preface to the real thing.” A couple of solid facts may, however, be remembered.

The church in the Moluccas, especially Amboina, is on record as “the first evangelical Protestant church in Asia” (Muller-Kruger 1968:107, 125, etc.). This “Calvinist Commonwealth” has no great prestige in our current frames of missionary reference (Kraemer 1958:13ff; Cooley 1961). But still, however deficient, there was a church that weathered the storms to come, developed a model of Christian life to be emulated in other parts of the archipelago (“the Amboinese pattern” Abineno 1956:54f) and offered



servants for the evangelization of other regions in Indonesia (Hogerwaard 1953:258-65).

It was in Indonesia that “the oldest examples of a printed translation of a biblical text for missionary purposes” was published, a herald of many other translations to come (Koper 1956). Hot debates about translations of the Bible (and of the creed, catechism, etc.) were a common item on the theological agenda. Portuguese-speaking Christians got sacred Scriptures in their own language. One seems not to have been too successful with Chinese texts. This linguistic accommodation is, to say the least, a hopeful exception to this enterprise in which assimilation seems to have been the key word.

All missionary and church work (including schools, etc.) was paid for by the Trading Company. A minimum estimate suggests that the Company paid for about 250 ministers and 800 assistant ministers. Other estimates by experts set the number much higher and invite us to compare the VOC with the English East India Company.<sup>2</sup>

During the 17th and 18th centuries, theologians *in patria* were very often deeply involved in missionary problems. Voetius (1589-1676), one of the pioneers of the Dutch Evangelical Revival, wrote what has become known as the “first evangelical missiology” (Van Andel 1912).

In the course of the renowned 18th century of Enlightenment, ominous portents of an imminent change in ideology became increasingly evident. We had better ignore the many partial, unicausal “interpretations”. They deal with *epiphenomena*. The real thing, so very hard to identify in precise categories, is now usually referred to as “The Crisis of the European Conscience” (Hazard 1935). It occurred presumably around 1700, with a long prelude of a continuing erosion of the *corpus christianum* and a protracted postlude, that eventually led to the first real (French) revolution.

Among the interpreters of this transition, E. Beyreuther has, it seems to me, made the most significant contributions, especially with regard to the implications for the missionary enterprise. He insists that the two groups who in our current babel of tongues are labeled “evangelicals” and “ecumenicals” arrived on the scene simultaneously. The two were, in fact, one community of believers who tried to express their newly discovered freedom *for* the world in their own authentic way (Beyreuther 1958). The institutional embodiments of this commitment were still provisional and embryonic. Heralds of a new time were not wholly absent, even *in patria* (Van Boetzelaer 1947).

Indonesian theologians are sometimes rather skeptical about this reconstruction of history: “Maybe this was true in the West; we had our own churches in some areas, however deficient; Scripture, maybe not in the best possible translation, a la King James Version; and the Holy Spirit did not leave us because the fabric of society changed in another corner of God’s world.” The one obvious sign of a loss of substance is the multiplication of rules and regulations; a poor substitute for the diminishing number of missionaries.

### (3) *New Begin Fling (1795ff)*

We can be brief about the complex sociopolitical developments in the Netherlands. The VOC was corrupt and moribund: “theocracy” turned into an empty term of sacred rhetoric.

The Low Countries were occupied, then annexed by the revolutionary French. The British took command of Indonesia. After the war was over, it became clear that the old

theocratic syndrome could not be restored. A variety of missionary models was available and different groups set out to experiment with them in the years to come.

(a) As in other European communities, a post-revolutionary *monarchy* was established in the Netherlands. To be sure, no longer an incarnation of the Christian (i.e., Reformed) old-style magistrate, with all its mystique, and not yet quite imperial sovereignty, new-style. The King was a Father (and later, a Mother) figure, trying to take care of the needs of loyal subjects, spiritual needs included. Paternalistic monarchy was mixed with colonial bureaucracy.

The King, William I, felt conscience-bound to provide the necessary means for the pastoral care of the neglected Christian constituencies of the VOC period. By decree, he instituted *one* Protestant Church (1816) “to increase knowledge of the Christian faith; to promote a Christian style of life; to protect law and order; and to bring about love for the government and the country.” Ministers were civil servants. The administrative separation of the Protestant Church from the colonial government came only in the 1930’s. Financial separation was effected in 1950, after independence.

The Indonesian *Protestant Church* is now a federated body, composed of the Moluccan Protestant Church, The Timor Evangelical Christian Church, The Minahassa Evangelical Church (all based in Eastern Indonesia) and the Western Indonesia Protestant Church (mostly members of the 3 other churches living in the western Diaspora). With few exceptions, the church language is Malay. They are a conglomerate of folk churches, jealously protecting their old traditions.

(b) The colonial government, with its “obsession for religious neutrality” (Kraemer), closed off whole areas from Christian evangelism, confiscated Bibles in regional languages (like the Javanese Bible translation) and was, in general, particularly concerned about interdenominational competition (“double missions”) (Beaver 1962:195f). Where a missionary agency was licensed to work, others were, by definition, excluded. These “comity” arrangements by government were, on the whole, not very successful. Indonesia had begun to be part of a mobile society. Comity only makes sense in stable cultures.

(c) In the “miraculous years” following 1790, supradenominational, evangelical missionary societies sprang up in Euramerica. Some of this new breed of evangelists, with their riotous variety of theologies, found their task within the framework of the established folk churches as “revivalists” (e.g. Joseph Kam, the apostle of the Moluccas). Others moved inland, beyond the coastal fringes of the International Asian Trade System, as lonely pioneers, sometimes oblivious to the government regulations. In the second half of the Great Century denominational societies followed, and, of course, “tent-making missionaries” who served as pioneers in various places (e.g. New Guinea).

(d) Christian lay people have played a decisive part in founding some of the evangelical churches, especially in Central and East Java. They did not need a license issued by the government to be able to evangelize as all the “missionaries” did, so they gossiped the gospel in their own style in otherwise “closed” areas.

(e) Neo-evangelical groups of all sorts began their organized missionary efforts in Indonesia during the 20th century without concern for comity arrangements.

(f) Since the early 1930’s, a movement toward ecclesiastical independence gathered momentum. In 1950 a Council of Churches was founded with the express intention of

creating “the One Church of Christ in Indonesia.” Although the Council has initiated several projects of cooperation, the goal of union remains remote. The variety of Christian communities seems to be on the increase, both because of schismatic movements in the Indonesian churches and because of recent imports from Euramerica.

(4) *Summary*

It is obvious, even in this very sketchy overview, that one might detect all the stages/aspects of Dr. Tippet’s axis paper amply documented in Indonesia. It all depends on where one decides to look for evidence and upon the degree of cultural myopia one finds oneself blessed with. There is the whole spectrum: a transplantation of western-style church life; attempts at “Christianizing the vernaculars” (Adriani) so that they become the vehicles of the gospel; experiments with local modes of communication and celebration; trends to understand and present the evangel as the ultimate truth mystics have been searching for. In some instances, we might find small groups of authentically indigenous Christians, who stay away from the sacraments because these were so central in imported church life. In other cases, pre-Christian mythologies are used without inhibition to bring Christology close to the heart of people (e.g. the Javanese “Messianic” expectation of the coming *ratu adil*, the liberating Lord of justice. See Van Akkeren 1970). Some work has been done recently in developing a fresh theological understanding of one’s own traditional background (*adapt*) (Schreiner 1972). On the whole, it seems safe to assume that in terms of a truly indigenous theology, too little has been done too late. An Indonesian theologian says: “The Churches in our nation seem to be obsessed by questions of organization and survival.. whatever theology is available is mostly imported from Europe and America” (Latuihamallo 1966:151ff).

Acknowledging that “the Spirit blows where it will; you hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from and where it goes” (Jn. 3:8), we ought to remember some simple sociopolitical facts and stay away from pious rhetoric.

(a) After the 1965 massacres in which, allegedly, Muslim youth groups played such a dominant role, one might expect a serious self-examination in Muslim circles: “What and where is the real mainstay of our souls?” (Boland 1971:232). Some Muslim leaders have suggested that one should distinguish between mere “statistical” (90% plus of the population) and “authentic Muslims” (perhaps 40% of the population, who knows?).

As far as analogies go, one might think of something comparable to the Evangelical Revival in Christendom during the 18th century, after an often sterile orthodoxy, emphasis on *praxis pietatis*, solid education and new ways of Muslim apostolate (Bakker 1969:121-136).

(b) Hindus on the island of Bali have assured me that in the post-gestapu wasteland, many (5-10?) millions of Indonesians have “come home” (*datang kembali*) to where they originally belong: Hinduism-Buddhism.

(c) Adherents of “primitive” religions seem to find themselves in the greatest identity crisis. Suspect and, sometimes, not quite aware of “being with” the New Order, they are under pressure to adopt one of the “registered religions.” Which one they choose depends very much on the sociopolitical situations where they find themselves. Muslims, as well as Hindus and Christians, can (and do) boast about the rapid expansion of their respective faiths in predominantly “primitive” areas. And, as elsewhere in the world, people in some of these regions have reacted to this “conquest” by outsiders by producing counter-

theologies, in which they reaffirm and update the *raison d'être* of their tribal religion and celebrate it in unprecedented liturgical fashion (e.g. among the Karo-Bataks).

(d) Within this context, we have to reflect upon recent church growth or, as some Indonesians prefer to call it: “the advent of the New Christians” (*Christen baru.*). Accurate documents are scanty; promotional stories with almost hysterical superlatives are easy to find. “Statistical analysis of church life and growth in Indonesia is difficult and risky because of the paucity of data” (Cooley 1973:86). And motivations for joining the minority Christian community are, always, not for us to decide on. Humble agnosticism is one of the key words of our current missiological vocabulary.

One might humbly surmise a few factors, keeping in mind that the Holy Spirit is the true factor in the story. To become humble, we should first of all remember that there are no *prima donnas* in these *Opera Dei*, either in Indonesia or in Euramerica. So this cannot be an exact chronicle of the sowers. It rather has to be a story of the soil producing fruits “automatically”. Whoever appropriates this story as representing the result of his or her endeavors is out.

When people tell how all this came about, one can hardly trust one’s ears. Missiologists will be very suspicious, skeptical or even cynical.

The Christian community served, apparently, as an asylum or refuge for the persecuted and for those who lost their direction in life, for a church, a beautiful role to be in. A Muslim informant said, “You Christians can have them (ex-Communists). We don’t want a fifth column within Islam” (Boland 1971:232ff).

One could go on and on with an evaluation of these “New Christians”: What is their motivation? What personal commitment do they have to the Christian faith? Do they really know what they are doing? And so forth.

It is very likely that we will find our sisters and brothers on different steps of the axis ladder. So what? We Euramericans are somewhere on the same ladder, unless someone is arrogant enough to pretend that he or she has reached the top.

#### Notes

1. The distinction between accommodation/adaptation and “Europeanization”/assimilation has been familiar since A. Vath (1932). A detailed history of the Portuguese Patronate in Indonesia can be found in Visser (1925) and Wessels (1926).
2. Van Hoetzelaer (1947:5) states that the VOC had sent out more than 900 ministers and thousands of assistant ministers and teachers, and suggests a comparison with the English East India Company.

GM Editorial Note: This article is from Chapter 3 of the out of print book, *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity*, Tetsunao Yamamori - editor and was reprinted with permission. This book can be downloaded in its entirety in our Reviews & Previews section.