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SOME NOTES FOR A LIBERATING THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS An Indonesian Christian Experience

The article views multicultural and multireligious Indonesian society, particularly the relation among people of diverse faith traditions, as a locus theologicus. In an attempt to transcend the customary division of theology of religions into exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist, each of which have their drawbacks, the author tries to develop an “exclusive-inclusive approach” that might be more meaningful for the people and society at large. By listening attentively and sharing delightedly in an attitude of mutual tolerance, the participants in religious encounters can promote a fertile inter-religious dialogue from which a more humane society could be expected, with every person of good will making some contribution from his/her faith. The arguments advanced for this position are quite orthodox, namely the theology of logos spermatikos and the presence and action of God’s saving grace in the world.

1. Preliminary Remarks

We are living in an age of diversity, in a so-called multicultural and multireligious society. Indonesia is one of these plural contexts in terms of cultures, religions, ethnicities, and social classes. The question then is, how do people of different cultures and faith traditions relate to each other? In terms of theological positions we usually categorize three different groups, namely those of the exclusivists, inclusivists, and pluralists. The exclusivists believe that their own faith is the only completely true religion while all others are false, even evil by nature. The inclusivists believe that their faith group is the only completely true religion, although truth and salvific values are also found in other faith traditions. The pluralists believe that all kinds of faith traditions in the world are valid and true, particularly

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when they are viewed from within their particular culture, and that it is unjust to judge them from without, namely from values, rules, morals, and doctrines not their own.

The free online Wikipedia encyclopedia¹ also describes these three theological approaches, each with its particular method and theological implications. The exclusivist position tends to be arrogant, radical, and intolerant to others, while the inclusivists give birth to syncretism, and the pluralists bring about relativism. As far as the Indonesian context is concerned, each group has its own proponents or supporters. The questions raised from this fact, among other things, are: “Are these three positions also able to explain how the church of Indonesia relates to people who belong to other faith traditions? What kind of theology of religions has been developed which is meaningful for each group in this inter-faith encounter?”

The age of dialogue has surely given us some insights that the church should adopt in order to make her existence more meaningful for the whole of society. Since the church is not called into existence for herself, but rather for the whole of humanity, she is expected to intensify her encounter with people of other faiths and elaborate more intensely the meaning of being **pilgrims in the world**, or better co-pilgrims with others along the sacred roads towards God. Therefore, we should find another way of doing theology in this plural society in which the Muslim community predominates, where everyone could offer some contribution for the benefit of all.

Here we are discussing religious commitment and openness to dialogue partners which has been promoted by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). This discussion takes place within the context of Indonesia, a nation-state founded on the multicultural and multireligious ideals of *Pancasila* (the Five Principles)² and the national motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). This modus vivendi has been developed based on tolerance and the heterogeneity of the Indonesian plural context.

Sadly enough, since its independence in 1945 Indonesia has never succeeded in creating a really harmonious nation-state. Social conflicts and many kinds of violence occur throughout the country. Since the downfall of the New Order in 1998 respect for this modus vivendi has been diminishing significantly, particularly through violation by

¹ Cf. “Theology of Religions,” in: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theology_of_religions (accessed, 5 January 2010).

² The Five Principles are (1) belief in the One Almighty Godhead, (2) a just and civilized humanity, (3) Indonesian unity, (4) democracy, and (5) social justice for the whole people of Indonesia.

radical groups. For these groups, instead of implementing *Pancasila*, their religion is the alternative to build a better Indonesian society. These groups are even ready to defend their mission through violence. Also the motto “unity in diversity” has politically been threatened at its base, partly due to the new policy of *otonomi daerah* (regional or provincial autonomy). Many regions in which a certain religion, such as Islam, predominates, have declared their own religious rules (*sharia law*) the law to be applied throughout the region. They have plenty of proponents, even the local government, to push forward their struggle and superiority. According to some sources, more than 50 regencies in 16 of the 32 provinces in Indonesia have passed laws linked to *sharia* or Islamic religious law.³

Theology of religions then is basically a way of doing theology responsibly within a plural society with plural religious traditions. It is an account of faith for the plural world in dialogue with people of other faiths, in a spirit of tolerance and open-mindedness. In principle, the nation-state of Indonesia has put down a firm ground in order that believers of all kinds of religions can make their **contribution** to the development of a really humane society. The reason is that religion is not primarily a system of doctrine but rather a base of faith which should encourage its followers to work for the best of all, to create peace and prosperity for all. What can the church promote for the benefit of all?

This article is primarily a personal account of a Catholic rather than of a Christian community in accomplishing the mission of the church in the world of today.

2. Indonesian Society and the Age of Diversity

2.1. Challenges of Pluralism

Religious and cultural plurality is very obvious throughout Indonesia, a vast country that consists of around five hundred ethnic groups, each maintaining its own ethnic and cultural identity and claiming its own ethnic territory.⁴ Pluralism is a problem, for each group affirms and defends its identity as different while dominant

³ Cf. Ethan Cole, “Sharia Law Overtaking Indonesia,” <http://www.dakotavoices.com/2009/02/sharia-law-overtaking-indonesia> (accessed, 5 January 2010).

⁴ Cf. Parsudi Suparlan, Ethnicity and Its Potential for Social Disintegration in Indonesia, in: Chaider S. Bamualim et al. (eds.), *Communal Conflicts in Contemporary Indonesia*, Jakarta: IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2002, 102.

groups impose some kind of uniformity which time and again triggers conflicts and violence. Sadly, since independence (1945), Indonesia has had a very long history of social conflicts involving ethnic and religious groups.⁵ To some extent, Indonesia seems to have become more fragile on the eve and during the first decade of the 21st century. "It is evident from the fact that communal riots have taken place more often, with an increasingly larger scale of people involved," says Azyumardi Azra, professor of history at the State Islamic University (UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta.⁶ In general, problems of inter-religious relations in Indonesia are mainly dominated by tensions between Islam and Christianity.

Pluralism is still a great challenge to the Indonesian people. A pluralistic society is basically a society "where different groups can interact showing a certain degree of tolerance for one another, where different cultures can coexist without major conflicts, and where minority cultures are encouraged to uphold their customs."⁷ Pluralism admits and celebrates differences of all. It is an active engagement and participation with plurality and diversity. Pluralism requires the cultivation of a public space where people encounter one another, respect one another, and learn from one another, which becomes the venue of human encounter with deep engagement for the common goal.

To some extent pluralism is compatible with biblical teaching. Look, for example, closely at these sayings. Jesus said: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. From anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again" (Lk 6:27-30). Buddha said: "Hatreds do not ever cease in this world by hating, but by love; this is an eternal truth. [...] Overcome anger by love, overcome evil by good. Overcome the miser by giving, overcome the liar by truth" (Dhammapada 1.5 & 17.3).⁸ Again, Jesus said: "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me" (Mt 25:45). While Buddha reminded: "If you

⁵ Cf. R. Tockary, A Short Note on Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Indonesia, in: Bamualim et al. (eds.), *Communal Conflicts in Contemporary Indonesia*, 67.

⁶ Azyumardi Azra, Communal Riots in Indonesia: Decline of Indonesian Nationalism and the Rise of Separatism, in: Bamualim et al. (eds.), *Communal Conflicts in Contemporary Indonesia*, 78.

⁷ www.allaboutreligion.org/cultural-pluralism-faq.htm (accessed, 5 January 2010).

⁸ Marcus Borg (ed.), *Jesus & Buddha: The Parallel Sayings*, Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 2004, 21.

do not tend one another, then who is there to tend you? Whoever would tend me, he should tend the sick" (Vinaya, Mahavagga 8.26.3).⁹

Pluralism is the dynamic by which minority groups could participate fully in the society dominated by the majority, yet maintain their differences or uniqueness. In the multicultural society, fruitful encounters and interreligious relations are guaranteed, while interfaith councils have been founded, such as Forum of the Fellowship of Faith Communities (FPUB: *Forum Persaudaraan Umat Beriman*, Yogyakarta 1997), Centre for the Study of Religions (PPSA: *Pusat Studi Agama-Agama*, Christian Duta Wacana University, Yogyakarta 1994), and DIAN/Interfidei Institute, Yogyakarta (DIAN: *Dialog Antariman*, meaning dialogue between believers, 1991), to name just a few.¹⁰

Tolerance, mutual recognition and understanding, and engagement and empathy for people of other faith traditions are fundamental for the spirit of pluralism. In short, pluralism is a kind of religious ideology that makes room for real commitment, namely a commitment that accommodates encounters with others with all one's particularities and angularities. This is supposed to be very basic for the so-called "theology for life" and "theology of life" in contrast to "theology of death." The argument, among other things, is that pluralism also meant "accepting that everyone had the right to be exclusive as well as inclusive. Muslims' claim of truth is not unique, as the Second Vatican Council stated they respected everyone's right to reach their truths, but they believed the truth was in the Roman Catholic Church. Competing truth claims are normal."¹¹

Pluralism, therefore, has incessantly been promoted by many liberal groups from many faith backgrounds within the nation-state of Indonesia, because they believe that it could guarantee justice for all and peace for the whole of society. Plurality of cultures and religions is accepted as a given in the society, which is in line with the different ways human groups relate to the divine. Abdurrahman Wahid, known as Gus Dur, the late president and former chairman of the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), was cited as saying: "We will not be shaken

⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰ Actually there are hundreds of institutes and groups who are active for conflict resolution across the country. We can find them quite easily in the internet. Cf. Kees de Jong, "Inter-Religious Relations in Present Indonesia: In Between Good Cooperation and 'Pillarization'," in: Freek L. Bakker and Jan Sihar Aritonang (eds.), *On the Edge of Many Worlds*, Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema, 2006, 169.

¹¹ Muhamad Ali, "Gus Dur as a Defender of Pluralism, Religious Freedom," <http://bataviase.co.id/detailberita-10481119.html> (15 January 2010).

in our tauhid concept, but we respect other faiths. Our founding fathers, although mostly Muslims, were able to accept other concepts of God, and worked out to agree on the basic concept of One God for Indonesia.”¹²

Pluralism, however, is also condemned and blasphemed by some exclusive and radical groups, Christians as well as Muslims, Hindus, etc. Theology that is developed based on plurality of religious tradition is accordingly facing the same fate, namely being criticized indiscriminately. The reason for them is that pluralism relativizes the truth of their religion and their faith. The Indonesian Council of *Ulamas*, for example, gives this argument: “Religious pluralism is a concept which teaches that all religions are the same and because of that the truth of every religion is relative; therefore every follower of a religion may not claim that only his religion is true and that other religions are false; it also teaches that all followers of religions will go to heaven and they will live next to each other.”¹³ For the Indonesian Council of *Ulamas*, religious pluralism – as well as secularism and liberalism – is contrary to the Islamic doctrine. For some Christian fundamentalists, pluralism is not only a challenge but also poison that threatens Christian theology today.¹⁴

What lies behind the dispute? Among other things it is a problem of identity. Fundamentalist and exclusive groups are afraid of losing their identity, either ethnic and cultural background or religious affiliation. Pluralism is mostly regarded as a threat which could relativize their identity and endanger the purity of their belief system and their group cohesion. It is also a problem of their group’s uniqueness, mainly the absolute truth of their doctrines. Therefore, purification is one of their main concerns against pluralism. This group call themselves *Pembela Agama Tuhan* (the defenders of God’s religion).

Even theology of religions is condemned. For some fundamentalist groups, theology of religions is regarded as compromising the absolute truth of their religious conviction and the purity of their faith. They uncritically call theology of religions a “gray theology,” a theology that compromises their unique faith that leads to salvation. In short, it seems that there is no religion immune to religious funda-

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (The Indonesian Council of *Ulamas*), “11 Fatwa MUI 2005,” <http://cafe.degromiest.nl/wp/archives/174> (accessed, 5 January 2006).

¹⁴ Stevri I. Lumintang, *Teologi Abu-Abu: Pluralisme Agama, Tantangan & Ancaman Racun Pluralisme dalam Teologi Kristen Masa Kini*, Malang: Gandum Mas, 2004.

mentalism and radicalism. Therefore, it might be urgent to do some research on the roots of social conflict and religious violence in the country.

In addition, if identity consists in the total self-expression of somebody, then loyalty towards the existence of the group is a non-negotiable value, meaning contrast to those of other groups. Reaffirmation of one's group identity means strengthening the borders that reinforce the distinction between "us" and "you" or "we" and "them." Competing in this way is of course a harmful attitude in the multicultural and multi-religious society of Indonesia. It has a great potential for many kinds of conflict that have been threatening the unitary state of Indonesia. Religious conflicts and violence against minorities are a clear sign that religions have failed to humanize and/or spiritualize their followers. Logically everyone who is serious about his/her faith will be a pious man or woman. Those who are religious and committed to their faith will certainly be benevolent and affectionate towards others. Religious conflicts and a lot of violence that occur in today's Indonesia are simply the sign that people only "have religion" instead of "being religious."

2.2. Challenges for a New Civilization

Religions are primarily for humanity, for the betterment of all, human beings as well as every other creature. Institutionalized religions are not exclusively for their own sakes. If religions are used to oppose and destroy others – and it does happen – it is nothing less than **idolatrous acts**. Religion, both as doctrine and institution, has become one's absolute god and can be used to justify and support one's violent acts against "the others," just because they are different. Our world history tells us that religion has become the powerful weapon of a culture of death and a policy of hatred among people belonging to different religious traditions.

Acknowledgement of social plurality and support for fostering the ideology of pluralism are basic for living in the age of diversity. Doing justice and loving each other as fellow citizens are fundamentals for living together in harmony as most religions teach their followers. It is also very essential for a civilized world, a shared world of all people. Any kind of violence must be stopped and the work for reconciliation must be promoted unceasingly. Everyone is called to do justice and to acknowledge his/her guilt, asking one another's forgiveness. Hatred and violence are evil against humanity and humiliation to God, the Absolute Love.

The vision and mission for a better world – or better, a new world, the Reign of God – are supposed to be the vision and mission of all religions. This ideal for living in a shared world presupposes some integrity and openness of everybody. Integrity and openness basically mean respecting one's own religious conviction as well as other faith traditions. The argument is that nobody, not even any particular religion, owns the Absolute Truth. All faithful of every religion are mere earnest seekers of It and hope to grasp It. The Judeo-Christian tradition tells us that we are always on the way, while the Truth is always beyond our limitation, as the Lord declares: "My thoughts are not your thoughts and your ways are not my ways" (Isa 55:8). We are **pilgrims** in this world.

Integrity and openness also signify some contributions that religions could make for the betterment of the country and its people as well as for safeguarding the plurality of our country as the founding fathers have idealized it. Justice, truth, peace, love, forgiveness, acknowledgement of being guilty, and option for the marginalized could be promoted based on joint commitment to build a more civilized society.

3. Intensive Dialogue and Collaboration

3.1. Inter-religious Dialogue

Dialogue presupposes approaching another people, another culture, and another religion by taking off our shoes, as the God of Israel said: "For the place where you are standing is holy" (Ex 3:5). The Second Vatican Council has opened the door for dialoguing and cooperating with people of other faith traditions and everyone of good will. Following this new thrust, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences elaborate their mission as dialogue with Asian realities (the poor, diverse cultures, and living religions). The basic argument is the presence and action of the Holy One in the world.¹⁵ The late Pope John Paul II has been promoting inter-faith dialogue and collaboration with people belonging to other religions. As examples, we can mention his many pastoral activities such as his invitation to leaders of other religions to pray for peace at Assisi (October 1986) and his formal teaching regarding the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in those religious traditions. All these are inspired by the theology of *logos spermatikos* (seeds of the Word) of St. Justin Martyr (c. 150).

¹⁵ Cf. Gaudencio Rosales and C. G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia*, vol. 1, Manila: Claretian Publications, 1997, 14-18.

Inter-faith dialogue and collaboration aim at deconstruction of old patterns of conduct and social relations. Ways of thinking and interacting which damn the other must be put aside. Basically each religion has the visionary roots of peace and justice, which can be elaborated to develop mutual positive attitudes and initiate a mutually embracing way of relating. Everyone of good will believes that a healthy religion does not speak of war and hatred but rather promises peace, love, and justice. People of faith are supposed to seriously seek within their own tradition guidelines and explanations about ways that promote a more civilized world, a pro-life world that is contrary to a culture of hatred and death.¹⁶

Work for an open society that welcomes the others presupposes a rejection of homogenization and uniformity. It is very obvious, even though in many tragic conflicts between groups, security and peace are often thought to be achieved only within a totally uniform social, political and cultural homogeneity.¹⁷ In the multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious nation-state of Indonesia, influenced by the escalating globalization of the world as the result of a revolution in communications technology and transport, nobody can pretend to be able to build a just and upright world on the basis of one's own religion. Exclusivity historically tends to be tyrannical and fosters intolerance, injustice and violence. Exclusivity and religious arrogance have failed practically everywhere, for this approach is replete with dehumanizing practices. As a matter of fact, most exclusive groups have heightened the tension between different social and religious groups, sometimes even causing open conflicts. A well-known Muslim scholar who is a pluralist by nature, Azyumardi Azra, once stated: "There is hardly a single community of the faithful left who can live exclusively, withdrawing into itself separate from other religious communities."¹⁸

3.2. *For the Common Good*

In Christianity, everybody is brother and sister, particularly the ones who live out God's will (cf. Lk 8:21). In Christ nobody is a stranger or a foreign visitor, but rather all Christians are fellow-citizens to

¹⁶ Cf. Charles Kimball, *Kala Agama Jadi Bencana*, Bandung: Mizan 2003, 270.

¹⁷ Cf. Jenie Leatherman et al., *Memutus Siklus Kekerasan. Pencegahan Konflik dalam Krisis Intranegara*, Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press 2004, 84.

¹⁸ Azyumardi Azra, Kata Pengantar, in: Jan S. Aritonang, *Sejarah Perjumpaan Kristen dan Islam di Indonesia*, Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2004, xi.

one another (cf. Eph 2:19). Nobody is “the other.” The Christians are taught that there is no separation between people belonging to one social group and those of another group as long as they are working for the common good, to make this shared world worth living, as the psalmist says: “How good, how delightful it is to live as brothers all together!” (Ps 133:1).

Living together in a plural society such as Indonesia, everybody is actually challenged to accept this heterogeneity. Every citizen is supposed to be ready to collaborate for the common goal, as the fifth principle of *Pancasila* states: “Social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia.” This principle, which is developed from the spirit of *gotong royong* (literally, collaboration, participation, solidarity), is basically protecting the weak against the powerful. The church and people of good will should continue working hand in hand in the spirit of solidarity and mutual understanding built upon courage and justice. All kinds of primordial tendencies and group considerations and interests should be thrown aside. It must be a kind of “*national conduct*” as it has been brilliantly formulated in the national ethical code of *Pancasila* and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as the *modus vivendi* that embraces all groups. This “collective identity”¹⁹ should be the most important principle that overcomes all group identities. With such collective identity, everybody is an insider and nobody is “the other.”²⁰

Humanity and being human are the basis where the theology of religions should start and go to. This indicates a social spirituality, an open mind of religiousness that embraces all, and an orientation that overcomes the narrowness of individual or group interests. An open spirituality leaves primordialism behind, advancing in the spirit of nationalism and humanism, namely the common good (*bonum commune*). No serious and pious religious believer can be exclusive. In other words, a religious person of obedience is one who is naturally dialogical. This insight has been one of Christian mission that followed from Christ’s teaching that everyone is a neighbour since he or she shows compassion to the needy, the weak, the powerless, and the most vulnerable (cf. Lk 10:29-37).

Striving for the common good needs reconciliation among everyone, namely all citizens of the shared world. Theologically speaking, the church believes that Christ has reconciled humankind and God

¹⁹ Raymundus I Made Sudhiarsa, *Iman Sebagai Siasat Rekonsiliasi. Menimbang Lagi Dimensi Religius Pembangunan “Indonesia Baru,”* Seri Filsafat Teologi Widya Sasana 13/12 (2004) 141.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

and established a strong fellow feeling towards others as children of the same Father. "I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike," Jesus said (Mt 5:45).

4. Spirit of Religious Pluralism

4.1. Prophetic Ideals

Theologically speaking, living in a plural society meaningfully presupposes the two moments of listening and sharing. Readiness to welcome and to listen to the others is very fundamental for constructing a fertile inter-religious relationship. Everyone has his/her own particular narrative with the Other, the Transcendent God. Therefore, listening attentively to the others' stories is a *conditio sine qua non* for every religious person if he/she wants to enter and encounter the Mystery of life. In short, listening to the others practically creates some condition of openness to the Most Other.

The second moment in this spirit of religious pluralism is sharing with others both on the action and the theological level. On the action level, all participants are involved in unison to promote justice, peace, liberation, and equality for all. Everyone from each religious tradition is regarded as a participant for the same purpose, namely a better world. On the theological level, dialogue partners put themselves as seekers of the Truth, who is beyond human comprehension and human words. Openness to the others and the Most Other is basically a very religious attitude which liberates people from their dogmatized and frozen theological formulas.

The moments of listening and sharing are not new religious attitudes at all. Genuine Christians of all ages have always been on the same path for making their faith meaningful in ever-changing contexts. Therefore we could comprehend, for example, many ways of doing Christology or Ecclesiology. Indonesian Christians need Christ who says: "You must not stop him; no one who works a miracle in my name could soon afterwards speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us" (Mk 9:39-40). Or, Indonesian people need a servant church more than an institutionalized one. Christians are called to be integral members of the nation-state of Indonesia in line with the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes* – the pastoral constitution on the church in the modern world – of the Second Vatican Council. In short, the church is called to consider herself as an integral part of the total

Indonesian plural society and share the same concerns of her brothers and sisters in the country, since being church means being for others.

The most honest procedure in interreligious dialogue is to set out a firm position on what one believes and why, and at the same time to be a good neighbour and co-pilgrim with dialogue partners. It is both exclusive and inclusive at the same time. Listening and sharing are the way of honest exchange and mutual enrichment. It is also in line with the Vatican's position in *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991),²¹ particularly on the presence of God and his saving grace outside the institutional church.²² Inter-religious dialogue, therefore, is prophetic. Every participant is challenged by this saving grace to go beyond each particular perspective and religious experience and comes up closer to God's will. The encounter of Saint Peter and Cornelius in Caesarea is a good example of mutual conversion (cf. Acts 10:1-48).

Such mutual conversion leads all participants to the light of a *new image of God*. God's image, in whose name we live, is being reconstructed anew. No one can pretend to defend God against blasphemy or any corrupted image of dialogue partners. No one owns God, but rather God owns his faithful. If God is truly God who lives and gives life, then He is also the God of each and every one. He is also the Absolute Love who has a "chosen people" with a "promised land" called Indonesians and country of Indonesia. "Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture" (*Nostra Aetate*, 2).

4.3. Liberating Theology

To some extent, exclusive theologies and their truth claims have failed to humanize their adherents and to teach them to discover their inmost being in relation to the divine. In fact, most of their proponents practically promote segregation and discrimination, to a degree seeing others as enemies of God, and, therefore, meriting punishment. Such theologies should be liberated for the sake of humanity and a civilized world. To be honest, every theology should be acknowledged a very wordy discipline, namely ideas about the divine in

²¹ Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Dialogue and Proclamation. Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, Rome, 19 May 1991.

²² Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

human words, which are determined by a particular cultural context and so are bound to be inadequate. Every religion is also a mere compilation of doctrines about the divine, a set of disciplines that should encourage people to go beyond human formulations. Ours are “particular” and “partial,” while the Absolute Truth is “universal” and “definitive,” beyond what can be expressed. The people, therefore, must be wary of seeking out commonalities among different religions.

Theology that just develops wordy doctrines tends to be fundamentalist. It happens to many fundamentalist groups who interpret their scriptures literally. Literalism is to a large extent the same as fundamentalism. Every theology that interprets scripture in this way has basically reduced the Transcendent God. And every truth claim that emerges from this reduction will certainly condemn or denounce unjustly other ways of doing theology and other faith traditions.

From the standpoint of the Christian minority, doing theology in the Indonesian context should be a theology emphasizing the church’s participation for unity of the whole people of the country and the integrity of the nation-state. The so-called theology of participation is dedicated to the common good of all. This way of doing theology could find some support in the image of the church as servant, who exists for mission – being sent to everybody of every background and every way of life – and who follows the model of the mystery of the incarnation.²³

A theological participatory approach centers its purpose and mission goal on “participating in the mission of God,” for the church is the servant of God’s reign. Participation in God’s mission means that mission does not belong to the church but to God. This theological understanding implies that all groups, both the dominant powerful majority and the powerless minority, should be viewed as participants in a common effort, namely for the *bonum commune*, the salvation of each and every one. The church internally invites every Christian to overcome his/her ethnic and religious difference on the one hand and to intensify their spirit of *gotong-royong* (collaboration, cooperation, participation) to bring about the divine project on the other. “The reign of God,” says the Apostle Paul, “is not a matter of whether you get what you like to eat or drink, but the reign of God is a matter of justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17).

Secondly, the responsibility of the church is to serve humanity as a whole, since everybody is a neighbour whatever his/her primordial

²³ Cf. Raymundus I Made Sudhiarsa, *Towards a Theology of Participation*, in: Robert J. Kisala (ed.), *Urbanization and Mission in Asia and the Pacific*, Manila: Logos Publications 2005, 154-155.

affiliation. The Second Vatican Council underlines that every Christian is responsible for his/her neighbour, particularly those who are weak, disempowered, marginalised or uprooted, as everybody has the same dignity, being created in the image of God (*Gaudium et Spes*, 12; cf. Gen 1:26; Mt 25:31-46). In principle, this Gospel message is not only for Christians but for everybody who is created as a social being, who is *socius* (companion, fellow) to each other. It means that every committed Christian will commit himself/herself to improve himself/herself and renew society according to the mission model of Jesus Christ. It reminds the church of the mission of Christ, namely the poor hear the good news, prisoners are freed and the oppressed receive the fullness of their humanity (cf. Lk 4:18-19).

Thirdly, this approach follows an incarnational model. The mystery of the incarnation is the most decisive model for the Christian community to share its life with the local and indigenous peoples. It invites the church to incarnate herself in the midst of the local population, the indigenous people of the soil. This is what the Council has promoted, namely “to be present in the world, together with the world and for the world” (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 1-3). To this purpose, the life of Jesus, his death and resurrection are an imperative for each Christian wherever they live out their faith. This view is also in line with that of Saint Paul who underlines Christ’s mission through emptying himself of divinity and becoming human in all things but sin (Phil 2:7).

5. Concluding Remarks

Doing theology in the Indonesian context should first of all acknowledge Indonesian plurality and diversity in religion, culture, ethnicity, and language as a theological *datum et factum*, i. e. the common world which gives life to the whole people of the country. In the Christian viewpoint, this *oikumene* is a shared world of all and for everyone. Although conflicts and violence have become a kind of repetitive ritual in this country, the church as a small minority is not supposed to be discouraged. There are still plenty of people of good will, Christian and non-Christian alike. Many are still struggling to find some solution how to reduce radicalism in the country. Education could be one way to answer this problem, where teachers can play a critical role in instilling ideas of tolerance and the importance of valuing and respecting others.

The Indonesian theology of religions is very intensely shaped by inter-religious contacts. In this faith dialogue, between the dominant and/or mainstream and the marginalized, between majority and mi-

nority, each participant is expected to be exclusively faithful to his/her religious tradition and at the same time inclusively open to listen to dialogue partners. This way of doing theology might be called an exclusive-inclusive endeavour which is worked out through attentive listening and sharing between dialogue partners. Religions should be regarded as more than just a set of dogmas and pious rituals. They have to be the base of faith and the inner power of the people in their struggle against the unjust society that dehumanizes humankind.

One may ask whether people of various religious traditions could cooperate in constructing a new way of life, in building a new common world. To be sure, all religious people should be convinced that it is neither a utopia nor a "gray theology" that betray their faiths. Inter-religious dialogue is basically an honest commitment for the betterment of the whole society and the glory of the Almighty and True God. This way of doing theology could serve and protect the diverse religious traditions with all their riches as well as the fertile spirituality of the people and their faithful submission to the Most Other, the Absolute Love, who plans for the well-being of his chosen people. For Christians, Christ has given guidelines par excellence for fostering this salvation, i. e. the Reign of God.

ABSTRACTS

Dieser Artikel betrachtet die multikulturelle und multireligiöse Gesellschaft Indonesiens, insbesondere das Verhältnis zwischen Menschen unterschiedlicher Religionen, unter theologischem Gesichtspunkt. Um die Probleme der üblichen Dreiteilung der Theologie der Religionen in die exklusivistische, die inklusivistische und die pluralistische Schule, von denen jede ihre Nachteile hat, zu überwinden, versucht der Autor einen „exklusiv-inklusive Ansatz“ zu entwickeln, der für die Menschen und die Gesellschaft als Ganze sinnvoller sein könnte. Indem sie in einer Haltung gegenseitiger Toleranz aufmerksam zuhören und bereitwillig andere am Eigenen teilhaben lassen, können die Teilnehmer an religiösen Treffen einen fruchtbaren interreligiösen Dialog fördern, der hoffentlich zu einer menschlicheren Gesellschaft führen würde, in der jeder Einzelne aus seinem Glauben heraus etwas beitragen sollte. Die vorgetragenen Argumente für diesen Entwurf sind ganz traditionell, nämlich die Theologie des *logos spermatikos* und die Gegenwart und das Wirken der göttlichen Gnade in der Welt.

Cet article examine la société indonésienne multiculturelle et multireligieuse, et en particulier le *lieu théologique* des relations entre les diverses traditions de foi dans le peuple indonésien. Tentant de transcender la répartition traditionnelle de la théologie des religions entre courants exclusivistes, inclusivistes et pluralistes, chacun ayant ses inconvénients, l'auteur essaie d'élaborer une «approche exclusive-inclusive» qui puisse être davantage porteuse de sens pour les personnes et la société en général. En écoutant avec attention et partageant avec joie dans une attitude de tolérance mutuelle, les

participants aux rencontres interreligieuses peuvent promouvoir un dialogue fertile, d'où l'on peut attendre une société plus humaine, chaque personne de bonne volonté apportant une contribution à partir de sa propre foi. L'argument en faveur d'une telle position est tout à fait orthodoxe, à savoir la théologie du *logos spermatikos* et la présence et action de la grâce salvatrice de Dieu dans le monde.

Este artículo enfoca la sociedad multicultural y multi-religiosa de Indonesia, particularmente la relación entre gente de diversas tradiciones religiosas como *locus theologicus*. En un intento de superar la división acostumbrada de la teología de las religiones en exclusivista, inclusivista y pluralista que conllevan sus desventajas cada una, el autor intenta elaborar un "acercamiento exclusivo-inclusivo" que podría tener más sentido para la gente y la sociedad en general. Al escuchar con atención y compartir gustosamente en una actitud de tolerancia mutua, los participantes de encuentros religiosos pueden promover un diálogo interreligioso fértil, del cual se puede esperar una sociedad más humana en la cual cada persona de buena voluntad podrá contribuir algo a partir de su fe. El argumento en favor de esta posición es bastante ortodoxo, ya que se trata de la teología del *logos spermatikos* y la presencia y acción de la gracia salvadora de Dios en el mundo.