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Toward Reconciliation and Interfaith Dialogue Among Christians and Muslims in Indonesia

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Together, Christians and Muslims have responsibility to establish peace in Indonesia. Through education, social care, and the nourishing of the wholesome moral values that are needed for good humanity, Islam and Christianity have made undeniably important contributions to human society. Historically, however, members of both faiths have played an ambiguous role in the affairs of the world. Violence is often linked to passions, which become associated with different faith communities. Issues of poverty and despair can become intertwined with issues of faith.

Islam and Christianity in Indonesia are facing an identical challenge: identifying the challenges they need to face and at the same time providing guidance for basing national development on religious as well as economic values. Both parties need to recognize the living reality, that is, the presence of multiple religious communities, and find the best ways of living together in harmony for humanity to grow. The emphasis on common values (Pancasila) and dominant values (human rights and responsibility) can give a renewed circulation to Indonesian religiosity at the root of each tradition in a common interfaith search and struggle for a harmonious life. As friendship in the common struggle grows, Christians no longer find themselves as a minority to be either admired or feared. They are rather appreciated as transparent partners. Together Christians might join hands to give hope in solidarity with the majority poor. Reconciliation and interfaith dialogue are life-giving experiences.

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Exploring the meaning of Pancasila-*Bhineka Tunggal Ika* in Indonesia

Pancasila is the embodiment of basic principles of an independent Indonesian state. These five principles were announced by Sukarno, the first President of Indonesia, in a speech known as “The Birth of the Pancasila,” given to the Independence Preparatory Committee on June 1, 1945. In brief (and in the order given in the constitution) the five Pancasila principles are: belief in one supreme God, humanitarianism, nationalism expressed in the unity of Indonesia, consultative democracy, and social justice. Sukarno’s statement of the Pancasila, while simple in form, resulted from a complex and sophisticated appreciation of the ideological needs of the new nation.[1] Like the national language—*Bahasa Indonesia*—which Sukarno also promoted, the Pancasila did not come from any single ethnic group and was intended to define the basic values for an “Indonesian” political culture. While the Pancasila has its modern aspect, Sukarno presented it in terms of a traditional Indonesian society in which the nation parallels an idealized village, where society is egalitarian, the economy is

1. Wong Yong Ji and Arne Sovik, “Introduction to Indonesia,” in James J. Fox, ed., *Indonesia; The Making of a Culture. Research School of Pacific Studies*, (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 1980), 158-165.

organized based on mutual self-help (*gotong royong*), and decision making is by consensus (*musyawarah-mufakat*).[2]

The religious figures in attendance at the meeting also recommended that the state guarantee freedom of religious worship and enhance the comprehension and practice of religious values by respective followers. Another important decision involved the empowerment of interreligious forums to promote believers' welfare and harmony. In fostering national ethics and pluralism, it is worthwhile to note that the congress agreed on the state ideology of Pancasila as the common ethics of all believers that make up the nation. In addition, it designed a more sensible religious tolerance for the future and formulated a joint action plan to face global and internal challenges. In Pancasila, religions inculcate their universal values as part of the nation's new ethical domain. Religions are to be practiced in a contextual manner rather than as mere symbols. Pancasila—with its five principles of monotheism, democracy, humanitarianism, social justice, and national unity—suggests that religions avoid total submission to power and choose contextual functioning, so that they are visionary and possess a prophetic spirit.[3]

As the common ethics in national life, the values of Pancasila should serve as the foundation of collective living. It should be actualized in citizens' daily attitude that leads to their being Indonesians imbued with humanity and justice. Along with the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity), Pancasila should be preserved as the pillar of the nation and state, the basis for carrying out the vision of strong nationhood. It means that Pancasila, as the common ethics, is not a political instrument to serve the interests of those in power. It should thus be a point of reference in the systems of politics, law, economy, education, and culture. Its values can be topical if all parties comprehend and practice them in appreciation for humanity and justice in life. By boosting and strengthening the spirit of Pancasila, we automatically encourage policymaking oriented to the development of humanity as the basis for government policies. Pancasila is a condensed form of the universal values of human life and most applicable to Indonesia in comparison with any other values. It can provide all citizens share in a common norm regardless of their classes. But if the common norm fails to serve as a point of reference in life, a conflict of values takes place.[4]

Being Christians in Indonesia with the highest Muslim population in the world

Indonesia has the largest Muslim community in the world. Despite this fact, which gives Indonesia the appearance of being an Islamic country, it is a Pancasila state. It is not based on religion but gives special attention to the religious values of its people and offers substantial support to the development of their religious life. The politicization of religion and the manipulation of both cultural

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and religious extremism have begun to shake the national slogan of unity. Religious issues are becoming more and more a sensitive point of classes.

Islam (Sufism) was introduced to Indonesia in the seventh century by traders and merchants from Persia. The first sultanates were established in the Javanese coastal areas only in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Shortly before the advent of the Portuguese and the Dutch, Muslim coastal merchant-lords, rich from the expanding spice trade, successfully challenged the Hindu kings of the Javanese interior. The strong egalitarianism of Islam, with its emphasis upon diligence, honesty, frugality, and dependability, was welcome in the caste-ridden, hierarchical society of Hindu Java. Islam found itself easily absorbed into the Javanese worldview.[5] As the Dutch gained commercial and political hegemony, they collaborated with the traditional aristocrats to contain the more egalitarian Muslim entrepreneur class. Unsurprisingly, the nationalist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came from the latter. Unfortunately, Christian communities associated with both outlying village communities and urban, Chinese traders were suspected of being not only a product of the colonial enterprise but also part of the colonial strategy to divide and rule.[6]

Moving from the experience of being marginalized in public life, Christians in Indonesia are finding themselves entering a ghetto shaped by their own religiosity. This ghetto was intended for "survival" and "self-defense," which in crisis situations had given rise to religious and cultural fanaticism. It remains to be

2. Ji and Sovik, "Introduction to Indonesia," 158-165.
3. Ji and Sovik, "Introduction to Indonesia," 158-165.
4. Ji and Sovik, "Introduction to Indonesia," 158-165.

5. Cf. Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradition and Change in Indonesia Islamic Education*, ed. A.G. Mahaimin (Jakarta: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1995), 19-24.

6. M.P.M Muskens, *Partner in Nation Building: The Catholic Church in Indonesia*, (Aachen: Missio Aktuell Verlag, 1979), 64-65, and Einar M. Sitompul and M.S. Widdwissoeli, "Islam in Indonesia," in Paul. J. Rajashekar and H.S. Wilson, eds., *Islam in Asia: Perspective for Christian-Muslim Encounter*. Report of Consultation Sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1992), 84.

seen whether in a more democratic future climate, in which the gap between the powerful majority and the powerless minority is less fraught with tension, the accommodating ability of Indonesian culture will once again bridge boundaries between religious adherents of different faith traditions.

There is still an invitation for Christians in Indonesia to "put aside" their religious sentiment by letting go of the compromised institutions of oppression and expressing the creative, critical, and liberative heart present in Indonesian religious cultures. The challenge faced by Christians in Indonesia is to step out of the ghetto and find a new form of witnessing to the Gospel for the transformation of the society. Without losing their identity as Christians, Christians in Indonesia are called to place the emphasis upon a liberative religiosity, not servicing the religious institution. We are called to examine our motivations, attitudes, values, and practices, as well as the root causes of the critical situation in which we find ourselves. To achieve this, we are employing the popular religiosity of the marginalized, the bond that unites the scattered, gives dignity to the trampled upon, worth to the worthless, a name to the unknown, and a place for the displaced. Only then can we engage in cultural analysis together.

My point of view is that we can start and establish reconciliation and interfaith dialogue in the small communities that then give big impact to the larger community. The reconciliation can be established when the people have the same feeling and understanding that they are both people of God and they are brothers and sisters. When we understand that the church is a church of solidarity, we must support people equally. When we build such a community, we become a community of trust. Robert Schreiter proposes:

> …in the process of reconciliation, we are called into faith and invited to touch the wounds of Christ. In that faith we rediscover our own humanity, expressed most poignantly in that reaching out in trust. By restoring trust, we restore the ability lo live in human society.[7]

The community of trust will be established when we feel that we have space in the other people's place; reciprocally, we prepare a place and space for people other than us. When we open the church to the Muslims, they also will open the door to the Christians. Once we understand that the church belongs to the people of God, it means we give space to people who are not Christian to enter and feel at home in the church.

Promoting reconciliation and interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims

Promoting reconciliation and interfaith dialogue in Indonesia is not an easy effort. There are problems with the Christian or Muslim fundamentalists who are always arguing the difference between the Christians and Muslims, and also recalling the dark

7. Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992), 78.

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history between both sides. Fundamentalist Christians always argue about the burning of churches and Christian persecution; the fundamentalist Muslims are always promoting Indonesia as an Islamic State and maintaining the understanding of majority power. Indonesian people sometimes forget about the meaning of Pancasila, and also *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* as the face of Indonesia and the means to reconcile not only Christians and Muslims but other religions in Indonesia. In this article I explore some efforts and possibilities to promote reconciliation and interfaith dialogue.

Teaching reconciliation and interfaith dialogue from the beginning in schools

Teaching reconciliation and interfaith dialogue must start from the very beginning in the schools. I propose that in Indonesia teaching reconciliation and interfaith dialogue must be started from the level of primary school. At this level of education, we can start to teach harmony and tolerance among religions in Indonesia. This process must be started in every school, including government schools, Christian schools, and Islamic schools. The aim can be a process of building harmony and tolerance among children. This process is the basic step to build the future community of Indonesia, that the next generation can live in harmony and establish unity in diversity. From this point of view, we can understand that tolerance, reconciliation, and understanding of other faiths can become part of the school curriculum.

Promoting nationalism in Indonesia to keep the unity

Promoting nationalism in Indonesia means producing a nationalist understanding for the people of Indonesia. Nationalism absolutely means bringing and establishing Pancasila and *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* among the people of Indonesia. Nationalism can be understood as the process of stepping back and remembering the foundation of Indonesia as a state or country. C.D. Ollier suggests that the "Indonesia archipelago comprises about 17,508 big and small islands. Five main islands are *Sumatera* (425,606 km^2), *Kaliman-*

tan (539,460 km²), *Sulawesi* (174,219 km²), *Irian Jaya* (421,981 km²), and *Java* (129,187 km²)."[8] He explains: "The population of Indonesia is almost 325 million and consists of about 425 ethnicities with 375 different languages. The Malay language has been adopted and developed as the official language of Indonesia.[9] From this reality we can understand that the issue of diversity is not only about the religions but also the ethnicities, races, and languages. The process of developing nationalism means planting the deep understanding of Pancasila and *Bhineka Tunggal Ika*, and educating about the Indonesian constitution as state.

Pancasila was the spirit of the independence movement in the revolution era. "Garuda bird" (*Burung Garuda*), was adopted as the sign for *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. Religious diversity is the rule and affirmed under Pancasila, the five principles underlying the constitution (belief in one God, humanitarianism-internationalism, nationalism, people's sovereignty, and social justice). The first of the principles is "belief in one God"; under it all the religions are recognized by the government and accorded equality and full of freedom before the law.[10] This reality opens a way for dialogue and reconciliation between the majority and minority in face of the religious problems in Indonesia.

A day after the Independence Days, August 17-18, 1945, the first president of Indonesia (Sukarno) declared the Constitution, *Undang-Undang Dasar*, as the foundation of Indonesia. Even today, we keep this Constitution, and it should never change. Chapter 29 of Indonesia's Constitution concerns religion.[11] J. Verkuyl translates this section: "The State is based on belief in the only and Almighty God. The State guarantees the freedom of every citizen to profess his own religion and perform the duties of his religion and creed."[12] Verkuyl notes that "this word was chosen in order to avoid the impression that the Republic was to profess the Islamic religion."[13] From the constitution we can understand that the Indonesian government guarantees freedom of religion for all citizens. All religions can respect each other and accept the differences to gain power in Indonesia. The power that I mention here is "unity."

Culture and solidarity in social acts as means of reconciliation and interfaith dialogue

Interfaith dialogue and reconciliation to solve the religion problems in Indonesia are also possible by using cultural and social ethics approaches. We can discover that in the same ethnic group

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people have different religions. For example, among Batak people we find that 50% are Christian and the rest belong to other religions. Culture and custom (*Adat*) can serve as a good medium for presenting and organizing dialogue. We have different religions but at the same time we are Batak people. As those in the same position, same culture, same utility, and same place, the different religions can come together and discuss the good things.

Schreiter proposes that "reconciliation is the work of God, who initiates and completes in us reconciliation through Christ. Ultimately, reconciliation is not a human achievement, but the work of God within us."[14] Desmond Tutu affirms: "It is and has always been God's intention that we should live in friendship and harmony. That was the point of the story of the Garden of Eden, where there was no bloodshed, not even for religious sacrifice."[15] As the people of God we are God's children who work to establish reconciliation, and God works within us.

Justice is reactive action looking for a solution to this problem. Looking for justice brings us the opportunity to open justice dialogically. In justice we can open an interfaith dialogue to look for a peaceable justice. Amid tension we can see another side of justice: justice means "reconciliation" between both sides (majority and minority).

If justice means "reconciliation," we seek a hierarchy of "forgiveness" to rebuild the situation back to harmony and peace. Restorative justice defines justice as restoration to wholeness for those whose lives and relationships have been broken or deeply strained by a criminal offense. This understanding of justice focuses on the harm the offenses have caused to the victims, the victim-offender relationships, and the relationships of both the victim and offender to the community.[16] John W. De Gruchy

8. C.D.Ollier, "The Geological Setting of Indonesia," in James J. Fox, ed., *Indonesia; The Making of A Culture* (Canberra: Australia National University, 1980), 5-6.
9. Ollier, "The Geological Setting of Indonesia," 5-6.
10. Cf. Ji and Sovik, "Introduction to Indonesia*,"* 158.
11. Section 29 of the Constitution of Indonesia notes: "*Negara berdasarkan ke-Tuhan-an Yang Maha Esa. Negara menjamin kemerdekaan dan kebebasan bagi warga negara untuk memeluk dan melaksanakan ibadah sesuai dengan ibadahnya masing-masing*."
12. J. Verkuyl, "Indonesia and Religious Liberty," *International Review of Mission* 38.3, (July 1949): 315.
13. J. Verkuyl, "Indonesia and Religious Liberty," 315.
14. Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation; Spirituality and Strategies*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1998), 14.
15. Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without* Forgiveness, (New York, Random House, 1999), 263.
16. Cf. Walter J. Dickey, "Forgiveness and Crime: The

proposes that, "Restorative justice is not, however, a weak form of justice…Restorative justice is rather the attempt to recover certain neglected dimensions that make for a more complete understanding of justice."[17]

Restorative justice requires that community, interpersonal wholeness, social healing, and individual healing must be fostered by any system that purports to administer justice. Apology, forgiveness, and restitution are important components of any restoration or healing for the victims of an offense both individually and in community. Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder state: "As the Church witnesses and proclaims, prays and celebrates, works for justice for humanity and for creation, is open to people of other faith perspectives and to the context in which people live, it is available as God's instrument of reconciliation."[18]

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Conclusion

The church must promote reconciliation and interfaith dialogue in Indonesia. Reconciliation itself must come from both sides, meaning from both the majority and the minority. Reconciliation will not be established if it only comes from one side. Establishing reconciliation and interfaith dialogue in Indonesia is a long process and needs a long dialogue. From my perspective, the process of reconciliation and interfaith dialogue calls upon church and religious leaders as the main people who will be involved in this process. Reconciliation and living together in the plural religious context depend on how the religious leaders teach and translate the message for their followers. This remains a challenge in Indonesia, especially when religious leaders from the fundamentalists stir up the people to take revenge that results in conflict.

Possibilities of Restorative Justice," in Robert D. Enright and Joanna North, eds., *Exploring Forgiveness* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1998), 107.

17. John W. De Gruchy, *Reconciliation Restoring Justice,* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 202.

18. Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context; A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2005), 395.