

VAN MISSIONAIR GEBIED NAAR ONAFHANKELIJKE INDONESISCHE KERKEN¹

JAN S. ARITONANG[⊗]

Abstrak:

*Gereja-gereja di Indonesia bertumbuh dari ladang Pekabaran Injil Barat. Sejak kemerdekaan Indonesia pada tahun 1945 sampai saat ini, pertumbuhan itu mengarah pada gereja Indonesia yang mandiri dalam berbagai aspek, terutama di bidang dana, daya dan teologia. Tulisan ini mencoba mengetengahkan proses gereja-gereja di Indonesia menjadi mandiri dengan beberapa pembagian, pertama ulasan mengenai bagaimana proses itu dijalani sejak kekristenan masuk ke Indonesia sampai periode tahun 1800-an; kedua pergumulan Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) menjadi gereja yang mandiri untuk mewakili keberadaan gereja-gereja di Indonesia bagian Barat; ketiga pergumulan Gereja Masehi Injili Minahasa (GMIM) menjadi gereja yang mandiri untuk mewakili gereja-gereja di Indonesia bagian Timur; dan terakhir mengetengahkan proses kemandirian Gereja Bethel Indonesia mewakili gerakan Pantekosta. Tulisan ini berdasarkan buku: *A History of Christianity in Indonesia* (2008), Brill: Leiden, dimana penulis menjadi salah seorang penulis dan sekaligus penyuntingnya.*

Kata kunci: gereja di Indonesia, kemandirian, kemandirian gereja, misi, sejarah gereja

Preliminary remarks

This topic is more or less the same with the title of Hendrik Kraemer's book, *From Missionfield to Independent Church*.² When Kraemer wrote his reports, the churches he visited were still in the status of Missionfields or dependent to their respective missionary societies as their spiritual (and many other aspects) parents. With his reports Kraemer on the one hand criticized the missionary societies for their paternalistic attitude and urge them to give opportunity to the churches they nurtured to be independent; and on the other hand he would like to motivate those churches to gain their independence. The basic question is: After around 75-85 years, are those churches in Indonesia truly and genuinely independent?

If we talk about independence or self-reliance, we can mention many aspects: spirituality, theology, organization (incl. personnel), liturgy (incl. rituals), pastoral care and practices, finance, etc. From a number of chapters in this book we can trace and analyze all of those aspects. But due to time constrain let me limit and focus on only one aspect: theology (esp. doctrine), in order to show theological characteristics of Christianity in the various parts of Indonesia (cf. Introduction, p. 1), while acknowledging that those other aspects have also theological dimension. Even if we limit on this, it is still very wide. Therefore, among so many churches described in this book, I will only point out some examples, and mostly from Protestant circle. While doing so we are also conscious that there are a lot of subjects in theology or church doctrine claimed to be biblical and universal that makes it not easy to conclude whether a church or churches in certain country are already independent or not yet.

[⊗] Pdt. Jan S. Aritonang adalah Dosen pada Sekolah Tinggi Theologia Jakarta.

In p. 187 I say, “In this period [1945-2005] the picture of Church and Christianity [in Indonesia] significantly changed, from the overseas mission- and colonial-nurtured to the independent and national profile.” Nevertheless, the process of independence is not an imminent happening. Therefore we need to trace the process from the very beginning of its presence in this country. Here I give a sketch of the process base on a book, “A history of Christianity in Indonesia”.

1. The First Christians/Churches until 1800

About the Christians in the pre-colonial period (before 16th century; cf. chapter 1), i.e. in Fansur/Barus (west coast of North Sumatra), almost nothing we can say regarding their faith and belief based on the doctrine of the Persian-Nestorian church as well as the participation of the indigenous people (if any). So is the end of their existence, we don't know the exact date.

About the Christian in Portuguese-Spanish period (1511 onwards) there are a good number of resources that showing how they expressed their Christian faith (see chapter 3 and 4). We hardly find the so-called indigenous or authentic expression. Since the Roman Catholic Church was very strict in its doctrine, it is understandable that the Christians in this period expressed and practiced their faith in the ‘standard’ form. However, in certain person there was a consciousness as an indigenous Christian, as expressed for example by **Manuel**, who as a small boy accompanied Francis Xavier and afterwards became the village chief of Hative in Amboina: “I am an Amboinese of the forest and I am not able to say what it means to be a Christian and what kind of a being God is, but I know what Father Master Francis told me, that it is good to die for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that alone gave me the courage and the strength to fight to death” (p. 41). The similar statement was expressed by his master Francis Xavier some years before. Towards his friends who tried to dissuade him and told him to stay away from Ternate, because the savage people would tear him to pieces, Francis replied with smile: “Senhor, because of many sins my merits with God are not so great that he would allow me to suffer such a martyrdom and tortures and death for the salvation of my soul” (p. 54). Very impressive, the similar statement or expression of faith we also frequently heard or read from the Amboinese Christians during the conflict in 1999-2003.

Correspondingly, the Christians’ (Catholic as well as Protestant) understanding and perception on Islam in that period, that more or less colored by the series of conflict during the Crusades in Europe and Middle East, is still inherited by the Christians during the 20th and early 21st century, although since 1960s there are a lot of interfaith dialogues and cooperation.

Heuken’s conclusion on the period of 1511-1680 is interesting to examine: “The Catholic mission laid the foundation, the Protestant build upon that foundation. In the 20th century the building was completed by the foundation of independent Protestant churches besides a local Catholic Church refounded by renewed mission activity” (p. 68).

Regarding the Protestant Christianity during the VOC era (1602/5-1799) we can conclude that there is no striking sign of indigenous and independent Christianity. Compared to the Portuguese-Spanish Catholic power, the Dutch company had no serious attempt to support the evangelization as well as the establishment of a strong Christian community. As Steenbrink noted, the Dutch *Heeren XVII* of the VOC were mostly broad minded aristocrats rather than orthodox Reformed leaders, although there were some theologians (e.g. Justus Heurnius) who voiced their conviction that it was a Christian duty to preach the gospel (p. 101). Connecting to this, “Christian faith was an immediate relationship to a covenant between God and the elected people, the Dutch Protestant community” (p. 103).

Measured with Western idealistic criteria, the quality of Christianity in this period of VOC (in which “the formal conversion to Christianity did not mean a total change in the life and

rituals of the new Christians” (p. 108) that in turn among other things produced “agama Ambon”, a mixture of Christianity or Islam and traditional religion) was very low. Notwithstanding this condition, we still find several indigenous leaders who had a strong awareness and responsibility regarding their task; among others **Paulus Kupang** and **Amos Thenu** in Timor (p. 120) and **Cornelis Senen** in Batavia (p. 123).

One of the issues in discussing Church or Christian independence is its connection with (or its independence from) the state or the government. In this respect, Steenbrink refers to Van Boetzelaer’s praise and positive judgment on the generosity of the VOC on the one side and to his criticism on the other side (as is pictured in Van Boetzelaer’s treatise, “Conflicts and Problems: Total Submission of the Church of Indies to the Government”). This total submission was considered by Van Boetzelaer as the original sin of the Reformed Church in the colony. It was continued during the 19th century and only repaired in 1935 (p. 128-9). But Steenbrink also noted that Schutte severely criticized this negative opinion of VOC policy. “We should not judge the reality of the 17th and 18th centuries by the ideals of missionary spirit of the period 1850-1950. We should also not apply the liberal 19th century separation of state and church to the previous centuries. The core concept should be the *publieke kerk*, protected and paid for by the government, the keeper of the public ethics and morality.” (p. 129). Whatever the opinion of the Dutch theologians and historians on this issue, as a matter of fact up to the moment there are a number of churches or church leaders in Indonesia (who claim themselves as independent) that find the close connection with the state and the government’s back up to the church as very important and not contrary to the Christian faith.

2. Huria Kristen Batak Protestant (HKBP) as a sample from Western Indonesia

From the beginning of its work in Batakland - Sumatra (1861) RMG (Rhenish Missionary Society) disseminated its doctrine and theological conviction to the Batak Christians through the schools (general schools for all people as well as special schools for indigenous church workers) and through ecclesiastical ministry (Sunday worship, Sunday school, catechism, pastoral care, etc.). The doctrine and conviction was formerly implanted in *Missionsseminar* Barmen-Germany. The Seminary provided both theological education and missionary formation in the conservative pietistic and revivalist tradition that undergirded the 19th century Protestant missionary movement. A strong emphasis was placed on developing an ability to communicate the Gospel and to seek the conversion of non-Christian people overseas. There was less attention paid to the critical biblical and theological scholarship of the day, or to developing a critical understanding of the missionaries’ own society and culture.

The missiology of the Seminary was influenced by early 19th century German theology, including the work of major theologians such as Schleiermacher, and by the intellectual and spiritual impact of teachers and mission leaders whose ideas had been shaped by influences from the revivalist movement and German idealism. Of particular significance was romanticism with emphasis on a quasi-mystical concept of ethnic identity, *Volk* in German, leading to the concept of the Ethnic Church (*Volkskirche*) that was to be crucial in the strategy of the Batak mission. Socially the Seminary was conservative, representing the nationalistic German Protestantism of the day. Ecclesiologically the mission saw its link with the life and calling of the German Protestant church as important. Theologically, the Seminary programme focused upon the need of humankind to find individual salvation from sin. The pietistic and revivalist influences gave warmth to what might otherwise have been a cold Protestant scholasticism, and produced a religion of the heart, in which redemption brought a close, personal and individual, relationship to God through Jesus Christ. There appears little evidence of an understanding that sin also operated in the orders of society (p. 536-7).

This kind of theology (incl. missiology and ecclesiology) caused difficulties to the RMG missionaries to appreciate Batak culture and to understand collectivistic nature of the Batak Society. That is why the local values and wisdom was hardly found in the teaching of the Batak Church until early 1900s. Along with the development and implementation of the concept of *Volkskirche*, parallel with the raise of the spirit and consciousness of the Bataks as a nation, since 1920s there was a serious attempt to provide a proper place to the Batak cultural heritage in the life and teaching of the church. In the church order of HKBP produced by the Great Synod of 1930 it was stated that this Batak Church should be led by the Batak Christians and will become self-reliant. In Kraemer's words, "in this Constitution the Bataks have been assigned a larger measure of independence and participation than they had before."³

After the World War II and the independence of Indonesia HKBP was offered by LWF to apply for membership. But membership of LWF was not promptly achieved, because one of the requirements was that HKBP had to accept the Augsburg Confession of the Lutheran church. The HKBP leaders were aware that they were not purely Lutheran since they had inherited from the RMG the so-called *Uniert* tradition, that is a union or combination of Lutheran and Reformed (Calvinist) traditions, and they wanted to define their own theological identity. To solve this problem, HKBP formulated its own confession in 1951 that on the one hand adopted the Augsburg Confession and on the other hand reflected its own theological struggle and standpoint. The LWF assembly in 1952 accepted this *Confessie HKBP 1951* as not contrary to the Lutheran doctrine and confession. This *Confessie* is the first confession formulated by the Indonesian Protestant churches (p. 554).

While experiencing a series of turbulence in many aspects and fields, esp. in 1980 – 1998 (see p. 560-9), HKBP formulated a new confession in 1996, not to replace or to continue the 1951 confession but to add and to update the content that it can adjust to the context.⁴ Compared to the 1951, this confession of 1996 – besides containing many new details in the same subjects, including the acceptance of *Pancasila* in article 13: Concerning Government – also contains two new subjects, i.e. Society and Culture & Environment, while omitting one subject or article, i.e. The Last Judgment. From this confession of 1996 we may see a serious effort of HKBP to respond the needs and challenges of time. The echo of Augsburg Confession is still felt, but much lesser than in the 1951 version.

After succeeding to hold a "Reconciliation Synod" in December 1998 (p. 569), in 2002 HKBP composed its new Church Order. In the Preamble HKBP formulated its new Vision and Mission. The Vision is: "HKBP develops to be an inclusive, dialogical and open church, as well as able and powerful to promote a qualified life in the love of Jesus Christ, together with all people in the global society, especially Christian society, for the glory of God the Father Almighty."⁵ With this new vision [and mission] HKBP is expected to show and to prove its independence and self-reliance in terms of theology and even in all aspects of its ministry.

3. Gereja Masehi Injili Minahasa (GMIM) as a sample from Eastern Indonesia

This church has its roots from the Portuguese-Spanish and VOC era; therefore the picture in point 1 is more or less also applied to this church. But the strong influence was given by NZG (Dutch Mission Society) which worked in this region of North Sulawesi since 1817/20s. Like other missionary societies based on pietistic and revivalist tradition, NZG gave negative evaluation on the local religious and cultural values and tradition (p. 422-3). Nevertheless, the *Pax Neerlandica* worked very positively for promoting religious conversions. It was estimated that about 1880 some 80,000 or 80% of the population was baptized and embraced Christianity. This change was interpreted by Schouten as "a strategy to overcome their cultural disorientation and social distress. ... Embracing what Minahasans called *agama kompeni*, or

the religion of Dutch government, was part of such a strategy” (p. 422). No wonder if the church in Minahasa until that time was far from indigenous character.

This West/Dutch-oriented character was strengthened by the decision of NZG to surrender its mission field to *Indische Kerk*, the established Protestant Church in East Indies, a body financed and regulated by the colonial state. Many observers, including Hendrik Kraemer in 1926, considered this as a great mistake, because a golden opportunity to create an indigenous church at an early stage was lost (p. 424). It was KGPM (Kerapatan Gereja Protestan Minahasa) that was fragmented from the *Indische Kerk* in 1933 (p. 433), which struggled for separation of the church and the colonial state, that seriously striving for national (or regional) pride and identity. Therefore KGPM can be mentioned as one of the first independent churches in the Indies (Indonesia), besides HKI (1927), HKBP (1930) and GKJW (1931).

In 1934 GMIM was formally erected. GMIM adopted the short formula accepted by the *Indische Kerk* as the basis of its faith, i.e. a quotation from 1 Cor. 3:11, “Its foundation is Jesus Christ”. This was formulated as a consequence of the 20th century tendency towards a stricter orthodoxy within this church (p. 436), but it had nothing to show its indigenous or authentic character as Minahasan church. In 1970 GMIM composed its new church order. In this church order there are certain articles in which more doctrinal elements were formulated, i.e. article 6. This formula is very classical; comments on p. 436 of this book (HCI) is important to quote:

It is quite striking that these solemn expressions of a church that defined itself ethnically as a Minahasan church, nothing specific for this ethnicity and local culture can be found. Instead, during the post-1942 period an official rejection of paganism continued, where religious elements of traditional religion and culture could not be accepted. The confessional character was not newly defined, but as such simply a continuation of the basic formulations of classical Christianity, redefined in a strictly Reformed, i.e. Calvinistic sense.

Fortunately, since around 1980 there is a serious and intensive attempt to reflect the positive meaning of the pre-Christian cultural and religious elements for the Christian faith in daily life. This was done especially for the promotion of social awareness and mutual help (p. 440). A traditional value that was given place in the life of the GMIM since then is *mapalus* (p. 442). Although up to the moment GMIM has not officially formulated its doctrine and statement or declaration of faith yet, but since 1990s there are continuing process of expressing its faith more contextually and genuinely. Does it mean that GMIM is more and more independent and authentic theologically? Let GMIM itself answers this question.

5. Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI) as sample of Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches

GBI is not a direct product of a missionary work from a western country, but – as described in p. 881-2 – it was established in 1970 as a product of a series of schism within the Pentecostal churches in Indonesia that already existed since 1920s. As a Pentecostal church GBI also maintains the basic doctrine of the Pentecostal churches, although among the Pentecostal churches in Indonesia we may find several doctrinal differences or even conflicts, as in their country of origin the USA.

Some general similarities found in their statements of faith that at the same time become their special characteristics are: Firstly, the doctrine of baptism, they believe that there are two kinds of baptism: baptism of water (by immersion and given to believers, not to infants) and baptism of the Holy Spirit as the last stage of salvation and as indicated by *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues). Secondly, divine healing; they believe that this miracle still happens now in several ways. Thirdly, the flexible, simple, and spontaneous liturgy or order of service that is usually completed with an altar call or altar service. They believe that the Holy Spirit would lead the leader as well the participants in what they want to do during worship,

including the exposition and the interpretation of the Bible. Fourthly, belief in the second coming of Christ at the end of time (p. 891). These four characteristics are also found in the Statement of Faith of GBI formulated in 1971/73. This statement of faith consists of 14 articles that expressing the classical doctrine and practice of Pentecostal churches in general and nothing mentioned about its contextual awareness or the identity of this church as an Indonesian church.

In 2004 GBI published a book that contains its basic doctrine.⁶ In this 184-pages book we find 13 subjects, i.e. (1) Holy Scripture (The Bible); (2) God; (3) Christology; (4) Humankind; (5) Justification and New Birth; (6) Sanctification; (7) Baptism with Water; (8) Sacrament of Holy Supper; (9) Baptism of the Spirit (indicated by *glossolalia*); (10) Divine Healing; (11) Second Coming of Christ; (12) The Resurrection of the Dead; and (13) Church. In the Introduction, among others was explained that concerning the doctrine of Justification by Faith GBI - like all Pentecostal churches - adopt the teaching of Martin Luther, whereas concerning Sanctification by the Holy Spirit it adopts the teaching of John Wesley. In line with a number of references in the text, in the Bibliography we find a lot of books written by prominent Reformed overseas and Indonesian scholars like Louis Berkhof, G.C. Niftrik & B.J. Boland, R. Soedarmo. Th. van den End⁷, J.L.Ch. Abineno, and Harun Hadiwiyono. This fact shows that GBI wants to combine the classical Pentecostal doctrine with the orthodox Protestantism. But if we scrutinize the whole content of this book of doctrine, then once again, not even a sentence or a paragraph that showing its contextual awareness as a church in Indonesia. This leads us to the repeatedly raised question: how far this church – like many other churches in Indonesia – can be called independent and self-reliant?

Concluding Remarks

The examples provided here on the one hand show how much the churches in Indonesia still owe to their western spiritual parents. Their statements of faith or books of doctrine are full of formulations taken or borrowed from the West, although – as we have repeatedly seen – they are claimed to be biblical, orthodox, universal, and even perpetual doctrine. Even the way of understanding or interpreting the Bible – either literally does not use scientific method (as we also find up to the moment in certain conservative-evangelicals circle as heirs of pietism) or very scientific and liberal – mainly adopts and follows the way and method in the West.

But on the other hand we can also see some examples of Indonesian churches striving for the more authentic expression, which are frequently articulated as contextual theology. What were, for example, perceived by the western missionaries as popish superstition or paganism (cf. p. 49), re-reflected by Indonesian theologians as having theological values and can be used to express Christian faith. It is impossible to draw a very sharp dividing line between the imported and the original theology. Therefore, we cannot strictly say whether Indonesian churches already fully independent in terms of theology, or still dependent. However, we can say that many Indonesian Christians are quite serious in their attempt to build their own authentic theology, although there are also quite a big number of Indonesian Christians that prefer to imitate the theology or doctrine of their ‘colonialist spiritual parents’.

There is one issue – among many other issues – that challenges us to evaluate whether it is a sign of dependence or independence, i.e. denominationalism or denominational fragmentation. This fact has shown up since the beginning of 1900s (an example in Minahasa we see in p. 428-434) and continues up to the moment. As mentioned in p. 838, recently in Indonesia there are more than 300 non-Catholic church organizations besides one strong and big Roman Catholic Church. Many of them are caused by non-theological factors. But there are also many churches founded and characterized by doctrinal and confessional factors mostly inherited from the West. Ecumenical movement attempted and is still striving to manifest

church unity. But each denomination or confessional cluster claims that they also share and contribute to the ecumenical movement. A paradox? An ambivalence? Or an indispensable reality?

¹ This paper was presented in Utrecht, 14th October 2008 on book's discussion

² This book was published by Boekencentrum (The Hague) in 1958. It is a selected excerpts of the various reports" written by Hendrik Kraemer as a result of his investigations and visitations in several Missionfields in Indonesia (those are: Amboina, Minahasa, Bataklands, East Java, West Java and Bali) in the period of 1922 - 1935 (see Kraemer's Preface at p. 9).

³ Kraemer, *From Missionfield*, p. 63; quoted in *HCI*, p. 550.

⁴ *Panindangion Haporseaon – Pengakuan Iman – Confession of Faith HKBP 1951 & 1996* (Pearaja-Tarutung: Kantor Pusat HKBP, 2000), p. 99, 125.

⁵ *Aturan dohot Paraturan / Aturan dan Peraturan HKBP (2002)* (Pearaja-Tarutung: Kantor Pusat HKBP, 2002).

⁶ *Pengajaran Dasar Gereja Bethel Indonesia*. Jakarta: Departemen Teologia Badan Pekerja Sinode GBI, 2004.

⁷ Esp. his book, *Enam Belas Dokumen Dasar Calvinisme* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2000).