The Silent Scream of a Silenced History:  
Part Two: Church Responses

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Abstract
Part One of this paper looked at local Church responses to the massacre in the Maumere district of central Flores, Indonesia, during the months of February to April 1966. Instigated by the Indonesian army, the slaughter of from 800 to 2,000 people was implemented by local Catholics against victims who were also Catholic. Responses of the local clergy, Archbishop and Dean are studied together with an account by one of the perpetrators, and the memoirs of three Dutch missioners written 40 years after the event. In Part Two these responses are examined in the light of two analyses of the Indonesian Church, one using an ‘integration’ frame, the other a Volksskirche model. When combined these studies allow us to begin to comprehend how the massacre could happen and why the clergy responded as they did. Honesty and transparency would allow us to move forward in mission with ‘bold humility’.

Keywords
Roman Catholic Church in Indonesia, Church and Politics, Ecclesiology, Religion and Violence

A Church in the Spirit of the Times

Claiming’ almost 70% of the Florenese population by 1967, the institutional Roman Catholic Church was the most powerful organisation on Flores at that time, its leadership by far the most educated.2 In the spirit of papal teaching the church looked upon itself as a ‘perfect society’3 and ran deanery, diocesan and national organisations on very front. During President Sukarno’s time

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3 *Mystici corporis*, 1943, pat. 63 and 68.

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(1945–1965) practically every social action was included within the ambit of the rule of the Roman Catholic church. A main area was education where the church had a virtual monopoly until the early 1970s, but also there were Catholic mass movements for farmers (Ikatan Petani Pancasila), workers (Ikatan Buruh Pancasila), fisher folk (Ikatan Nelayan Pancasila), women (Wanita Katolik), youth (Pemuda Katolik), as well as for teachers (Persatuan Guru Katolik) and tertiary students (PMKRI). These movements were affiliated to the Catholic Political Party (Partai Katolik). The moderators of these movements were clergy; the Florenese laity, living under a strong, united hierarchy, more often than not simply implemented clerical policies. This Catholic culture was largely monochrome with little room for differences of opinion. Having consolidated an interlocking social infrastructure, the institutional church had become virtually a ‘state within a state’, a separate power in society with its own schools and training centres, health and social services, clubs, organisations and cultural bodies, not to mention its own convents and minor and major seminaries. The Florenese church published its own bi-weekly paper Bentara (Herald) and monthly magazines for teachers, Pandu Pendidikan (Education Guide) and for pupils, Anak Bentara (Child of the Herald). In a Muslim majority country fired by left-wing political rhetoric, the Flores community had forged a brand of resurgent yet intransigent Catholicism known for its intense devotion to the Virgin Mary. The church was the pride of the people, the bastion of security for an embattled people. In this church collaboration with the outside, that is, with the Muslim majority, was for the most part neglected. The clergy and their lay assistants had built up a model church, a clear archetype of Catholic social action for the wider society, a comprehensive and successful implementation of the ‘corporate church’ of Pius XI, the ‘organic church’ of Pius XII. In this church the clergy were largely silent as

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4 On Roman Catholic social movements and the role of Catholicism in social movements not controlled by the Church see, Rerum novarum, 1891, par. 42, and particularly the ‘corporate’ model of church and society in Quadragesimo anno, 1931, par. 24, 32-34, 37-38.


6 Organisationally the Flores church approached an ideal pre-Vatican II sample. The nearest comparison I know of is the Catholic church in Dublin during the same period. See the brief review by John Feeney, John Charles McQuaid: The Man and the Mask, Dublin: Mercier Press 1974; the substantial biography by John Cooney, John Charles McQuaid: Ruler of Catholic Ireland, Dublin: The O’Brien Press, 2nd edition 2009; and for a sharp delineation between the pre- and post-Vatican Two Church models in Dublin see Francis Xavier Carty, Hold Firm: John Charles McQuaid and the Second Vatican Council, Dublin: Columba Press 2008. As in Flores, the massive ecclesiastical superstructure in Dublin has since collapsed.
their lay leaders were co-opted into the 1966 massacre. This impressive ecclesiastical superstructure, like Daniel’s giant statue (Dan 2:31-45), was apparently standing on feet of clay. It looked all-powerful in normal times, but it displayed its impotence when faced by a ground-shaking crisis. How come?

Two Interpretative Frames

Reading the pastoral letters of the Archbishop of Ende and the Dean of Maumere alongside the memoirs of the three veteran Dutch missioners written 40 years later, I ask what mission model and what church paradigm were alive in Flores at that time when a bishop could accept the ‘cleansing act’ of the extra-judicial Operational Command (komop) while urging love and requesting the people to pray and fast for the victims?

In studies about the role of the Catholic church in Indonesian society over the past century we find two types of analysis. One investigation sees the journey of the Indonesian church as a path towards an ever greater integration of the Catholic community into the wider Indonesian context: ‘100% Indonesian, 100% Catholic’. An alternative analysis concludes that a Volkskirche was established in Indonesia which had closed in on itself forming a ‘ghetto church’. In combination these studies help us comprehend the attitudes of the clergy and hierarchy towards the massacre in Maumere during February-April 1966.

Frame One: Integration

The fourth volume of Sejarah Gereja Katolik Indonesia (‘History of the Catholic Church in Indonesia’) is a revised version of the doctoral dissertation of M.P.M. Muskens. Muskens constructs the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Indonesia during the first six decades of the 20th century within a discussion about religion and culture (pp. 21-205) and political movements.

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7 I trust the internal dynamics that led to the dispersal of the mass organisations are clear from this essay. The major external factors are the replacement of all mass organisations by innocuous secular substitutes by General Suharto’s government. Also, the Catholic Party was forced to amalgamate with a number of secular parties. The church in Flores had lost its ‘empire’; it temporarily found a new role in large-scale socio-economic development (from the late 1960s to the late 1970s).


pre- and post-independence (pp. 209-493). He details the ongoing dialogue between the Catholic community and myriad Indonesian cultures and religious traditions as well as the national context of pre- and post-independence political manoeuvrings. Unlike the previous three volumes which were largely collections of stories about the institutional church culled from ecclesiastical archives (episodic history), this fourth volume outlines a ‘history in context’.

The basic viewpoint of Muskens is clear: he sees the history of the Indonesian Catholic church as a process of integrating the Catholic communities into the wider nation, whereby the ‘Catholic mission’ became the ‘Indonesian church’. This integration took place through the highly regarded role of the church in education and health, through prominent Catholic politicians at national and local level, and through nationally acclaimed Catholic artists, writers and journalists. Indeed, when the thesis was published in English ten years later, after General Soeharto had been in power for more than a decade, the title given to the work is: Partner in Nation Building: The Catholic Church in Indonesia.10 Since the collapse of Soeharto’s New Order in May 1998 the role of ‘partner’, proudly proclaimed by Muskens, is now seen by many as an example of an ‘embarrassing co-optation’ by the regime.11 Partner or puppet, which is the more correct reading?

In line with Muskens, albeit softer in tone, the sociologist J.W.M. Boelaars painted the process of the integration of the Catholic Church into the mainstream of Indonesian society during the second half of the 20th century through the prism of ‘Indonesianisation’.12 He analyses data collected by the socio-religious research centre of Atma Jaya University in Jakarta. Interpreting numerous surveys on personnel (baptisms, ordinations, vows), he traces how the ‘Catholic Church in Indonesia’ of 1945 morphed into the ‘Indonesian Catholic Church’ of 1990 when it had already become almost entirely indig-

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10 Aachen: Missio, 1980. The title ‘Partners’ sounds rather bombastic given that Catholics formed hardly 3% of the population! Nevertheless, partnership was the aim and ideal of the church hierarchy and the lay Catholic elite. A short church history published in bahasa Indonesia from Jakarta has a photo of Pope Paul VI and President General Suharto on the front cover, a picture taken when the pope visited Indonesia in 1970.

11 Such was the critique made in a Regional Pastoral Meeting at Ledalero Seminary in the aftermath of Suharto’s fall from power. See, John M. Prior & Amatus Woi (eds.), Membaca Tanda Zaman pada Akhir Sebuah Zaman. Maumere: Puslit Candraditya 2003. In particular the papers by Leo Kleden (pp. 35-62), Daniel Dhakidae (pp. 63-87), John Mansford Prior (pp. 89-109, 237-258) and Huberto Thomas Hasulie (pp. 171-192).

enous in personnel (pp. 233-336) and church structure (pp. 337-389), while absorbing many elements of local cultures (pp. 340-441).

Muskens and Boelaars are both very positive about the condition of the church left behind by the cross-cultural missioners and viewed the future of the Indonesian Catholic church with great optimism. As I shall maintain, the integration spoken of by these authors, happened among the educated elite and among the villagers and urban poor in quite divergent ways.

Frame Two: Compartmentalisation

Yusuf Biliar Mangunwijaya (1929-1999) reads the history very differently.13 Mangunwijaya emphasises the minority status of a Catholic community that cannot realistically dream of becoming a major player on the national scene. By employing the term ‘diaspora church’, Mangunwijaya understands the reality of the Catholic Church as a communion of small communities scattered over the archipelago at the edge of the powerful Muslim majority. Despite its minority status, the church was guaranteed respect from the time of the colonial ‘ethical policy’14 at the beginning of the 20th century until the 1960s. This respect was due to the major role the church played in schooling and health care. Apart from extensive outreach in the outer islands, Catholic schools and hospitals on the main island of Java served the founding generation of 1945 who led the nation to independence. However, since the 1960s this role had been dislodged by the rapid development of national schools and health care and by the educational and health services of Muslim bodies. Concomitant with this, since the 1980s the politicisation of religion led to the sidelining of Catholics from influential positions on the national political scene. By the end of the 20th century small, scattered pockets of Catholics were largely left to nurture their own members.15 The nation-wide vision and mission of the mid-twentieth century had given way to a church narrowly busy with itself. These external pressures worked hand-in-hand with internal needs as the church moved to the devotional-ritualistic ethos of the charismatic movement. The

13 Mangunwijaya, Gereja Diaspora, 20-31.
14 In colonial parlance the ‘Ethische Politiek’ (legislated in 1901) was a development plan that emphasised improvement in material living conditions; to the Indonesian nationalists it was no more than a far-reaching exploitation of their natural resources.
church had moved from a primary focus on *missio ad extra* to concentrate on *missio ad intra*, from a national mission to parochial maintenance. This thesis rings true for the majority of ordinary Catholics.

According to Mangunwijaya, another factor that supported the move towards a ‘ghetto church’ rather than towards a small yet dynamic ‘communion of communities’ which he termed a ‘diaspora church’, was the great increase in the number of Dutch missioners right after the First World War (1914-1918) in the 1920s and once again after the Japanese Occupation (1941-1945) in the 1950s and 1960s. The majority of these missioners, such as Boumans and Wetzer, came from the Dutch Provinces of Brabant and Limburg which were almost 100% Catholic. In this southern district of the Netherlands, the priests, sisters and brothers did not see only to the entire religious life of the local population, but oversaw their social and cultural life as well. The result was a *Volkskirche*, that is, the church became identified with a particular social group. This is the type of church planted and nurtured in Indonesia, where, in the outer isles such as Flores, the vast majority of the (comparatively small) population was baptised. This, coupled with the colonial policy of not allowing different denominations to work in the same area or on the same islands, has led to ethnically identifiable religious communities. For instance, the majority of Florenese identify themselves as Catholic, the south-western Timorese Protestant, the Balinese Hindu, the Bimanese Muslim.

During the general election of 1955 virtually every Catholic voter in Flores chose the Catholic Party whose symbol was the rosary. There was no felt need for political education; campaigns centred on getting ‘our Catholic representative’ in Jakarta.

When such a *Volkskirche* was edged out of any significant role in the 1980s, the Catholic *Volkskirche* turned in on itself and became a Catholic ghetto. To borrow the strident terms of (Protestant) theologian Eka Darmaputera: the church became busy with itself and so, ‘internally it was experienced as insignificant, while outside it was seen as irrelevant.’16 General Soeharto (1966-1998) speedily disbanded the ‘social movements’ and organisations, and merged the Catholic Party with other political parties in an innocuous, secular permanent minority ‘opposition’, the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (PDI — Indonesian Democratic Party).

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According to Mangunwijaya’s thesis there was one short period when an explosion of creativity did occur, namely during the Japanese occupation when the great majority of the clergy were interned (1941-1945). For the first time, and without any preparation, village catechists and school teachers took over the running of the church. This happened in Flores. However, when the missionaries returned from internment camps in 1945 and waves of new missionaries arrived in the following years, the teachers and village catechists reverted to their former subsidiary role as the ‘hands and feet’ of the ordained clergy.

According to Mangunwijaya’s thesis, then, the Florenese Catholic church was an omnipresent Volkskirche both culturally and institutionally. And yet, despite its omnipresence in all spheres of life, when probed, clergy inevitably described their mission in terms sacramental (liturgical) and spiritual (saving souls). This partly explains the apparent passivity of clergy to the fate of the political victims of the purge of 1966: they were ordained for the sanctuary, for sacramental ministry. This mission to ‘save souls’ was buttressed by a spirituality that encouraged people to endure the trials of this world while patiently trusting in God’s mercy in the next. When the mass organisations were disbanded by General Soeharto and the Catholic Political Party merged into an amalgam of largely secular parties (PDI), for the most part what remained was a religion of ceremonies, of self-enclosed rituals on Sundays and feast days, and of personal counselling. Bereft of a public role apart from ceremonially supporting the regime, the gap widened between daily life and church liturgy, between public morality and public policy. The church ran adrift from the concerns of the surrounding society. Forty years later, in the first decade of the 21st century, the moderator of the Protestant Synod in Kupang could describe the Christian church as ‘a religion of the lips, not of the heart’, while

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17. From 1913 to 1942 the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) missioned 242 brothers and priests to Nusa Tenggara (Flores, Timor, Sumba and Bali) of whom 145 came from the Netherlands. With such a large concentration of missionaries on these small islands, it is understandable that by 1950 more than 60% of Indonesia’s Catholics were found in this area. With waves of missionaries arriving in the 1950s and 1960s, by 1967 there was one missionary for every 2,190 Florenese Catholics (Aritonang and Steenbrink, 248-249).

18. This did not happen in the Protestant Churches. Before independence there were very few indigenous pastors; after Independence Indonesian pastors rapidly took over their respective churches.

the Catholic Bishops’ Conference could state boldly, ‘The root cause (of economic and political corruption) is the decoupling of faith from daily life’.20

Towards a Synthesis

It remains to ask how these two readings can help us explain the stand taken by clergy, the bishop and the dean during and after the Maumere pogrom of 1966. How come that while the church had been ingratiating itself with the elite it had been simultaneously isolating itself from the human rights concerns of ordinary believers? Following the thought of Karel Steenbrink,21 I conclude that these two theses complement each other. The thesis of Muskens/Boelaars fits with the situation in Flores where, since the middle of the 19th century, the head of the mission collaborated closely with the local establishment: with cultural elders, landowners, colonial officials, school teachers and the growing bureaucracy. Integration took place but within an increasingly segmented society. The clergy and the local cultural and political elite were so interwoven that it is not easy to distinguish between throne and altar.22 For over one and a half centuries, the institutional church in Flores was de facto part of the governing elite. The clergy collaborated with and formed part of the powerful segments of society such as clan elders, district government, school teachers and the business community, although as the years went by so the church found itself with decreasing influence.23

However, integration did not occur only among the elite. At a popular level the church merged with village society. The majority of the Floresnese24 had been baptised by the beginning of the 1960s. Village culture identified with being Catholic. A process of ‘spontaneous inculturation’ had been taking place as the church fused with the peoples’ life. It is nigh impossible to separate Catholicism from the Floresnese identity. And religious identity is not confined

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21 See, Catholics in Indonesia: A Documented History, 2 volumes, Leiden: kitlv Press 2003 and 2007 (Indonesian translation 2006). Steenbrink incorporates over a hundred original documents in Dutch, Latin and Malay, so that the reader can judge the author’s analysis, and if thought necessary, re-interpret the events according to a different frame.
22 For instance, the committees that organised episcopal ordinations in Maumere (2006) and Ruteng (2010) were run by local government officials from the district mayor and his bureaucracy right down to sub-regents and village heads.
23 Even today church leaders still enter the political arena, but are rarely heeded.
24 In the mid-1960s the Flores population was around one million. By 2010 the Flores population had reached two million, despite large-scale economic migration and many overseas workers.
to the sanctuary but involves the whole packet brought by the clergy: schooling, modern health care, socio-economic development and contact with the outside world. While the mass Catholic organisations engaged in social and political affairs until the 1960s when they were disbanded by General Soeharto, the Catholic sense remained extremely strong. This is in line with the thesis of Mangunwijaya who said the missioners gave birth to a Volkskirche similar to the church of their birth in the Southern Netherlands.

Seen like this, the church in Flores is divided into two segments: an ‘institutional church’ interwoven with the local social, cultural, economic and political establishment, as explained in the integration model of Muskens and Boelaars (partners with the powerful), while in village society a ‘popular church’ was given birth. However, this popular church split into two segments: one consisting of ritualistic-charismatic pockets closed in upon themselves, the other more open and dynamic, as exemplified in ‘base ecclesial communities’ (key part of pastoral strategy a decade after the massacre) and faith-based JPIC/NGO networks that campaign for human rights, social and gender justice and ecology. But this occurred only from the 1970s onwards, well after the 1966 carnage.

Taking a Stand in the Crisis of 1966

The stand taken by a majority of the clergy and hierarchy in the face of the bloody tragedy of February — April 1966 can be understood within the foregoing analyses of the integration and segmentation of the Catholic community. On the one side is the strong Catholic identity in the villages, and on the other the close integration between church functionaries with the local elite. The missioners gave birth to a Volkskirche and succeeded. They planted a strong church firmly rooted in the village culture. This they did by developing and maintaining close relations with the local establishment, regular sacramental ministry, a school system that reached out to the most isolated of villages, mass organisations for every sector of society, and since the 1960s large-scale socio-economic development projects. Their world was church-centred, including their engagement in education, health and socio-economic development.

Integration with village culture and tight collaboration with the local elite had led to the church becoming the backbone of the Florenese people, one of the key elements they gave the people their dignity and identity, the one credible presence that truly unites them. This merging of the social world of Flores and popular Catholicism made it very difficult for the church to find a
prophetic voice, to speak out against corruption and human rights violations among the elite with whom they are tightly bound. A 'cultural religion' without a prophetic edge ends up by justifying the status quo, whatever that happens to be. And so, in 1966 when a partner of the institutional church (the army who co-opted elements from the leadership of all local social and political organisations) instigated the pogrom, most clergy remained silent. And afterwards, at the very earliest opportunity, just eight months after the massacre, the former close relationship between clergy and local government was re-established in the interest of each institution.

Indeed, the Vatican II church structures established by Dean Hendrik Djawa only months after the slaughter, namely parish and deanery councils, were filled by personnel from the top level of local government. The massacre was erased from the public memory; we became a forgetful people and a forgetful church.

A Challenge to Mission

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. And this is where I choose to cast my lot today. There may be others who want to go another way, but when I took up the cross I recognized its meaning. It is not something that you merely put your hands on. It is not something that you wear. The cross is something that you bear and ultimately that you die on. (Martin Luther King Jr.)

In Flores today a majority adhere to a devout, ritualistic church managed by a cultic priesthood, while a minority live out a *Gaudium et spes* church accompanied by a more prophetic servant-leadership. One segment is closed and inscrutable, the other open and accountable. The mission challenge here is to find ways of prising church management, clerical and lay, from its over accommodating stance and its embrace of the powerful socio-political establishment, while patiently nurturing base communities as the light and leaven of a networking nexus in the struggle for human dignity. We must not remain content with a 'cultural church' integrated into the social establishment at the top while, at the same time, rooted in the patriarchal village culture of the majority. We need to untangle the pastoral strategies of the church community from the un-evangelical, self-interested, repressive, patriarchal policies of the

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A key element in making such an ecclesial shift would be listening to the ‘silent scream’ of those three fateful months in 1966. Only then can we present ourselves as a creative community, a voice of conscience, a moral force in the midst of society.  

The very characteristics of the integrated yet segmented church that prevented clergy from empathising with the victims of the carnage of 1966, *mutatis mutandis*, are still with us today. This is the crucial relevance of this tragic event of 45 years ago. We need to listen intently to the silent scream of this suppressed history and humbly seek forgiveness from the victims’ families. Then we can move forward together with imagination and creativity as we search to recognize truthfully and openly what the Spirit is saying to the churches, walking the walk in fidelity with the ignored, the unrecognised and the most vulnerable, not necessarily always right, not perfect, but accountable while aspiring to be transparently holy, in order to discern more appropriate responses to the complex issues among the uncertainties and ambiguities of the day.

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26 For the church as a ‘moral force’, see the Lenten Pastoral Letter of the Indonesian Bishops’ Conference, *Keprihatinan dan Harapan* (1997) which finally loosened the support of the bishops for General Suharto’s regime which collapsed in the financial crisis of the following year; Easter Message *Membangun Persaudaraan di Tengah Keprihatinan: Pernyataan Keprihatinan — Pemutusan Tirisakti*, 1998 (topical comment on the chaotic situation then prevailing including the shooting of university students). After 30 quiet years statements poured out of the newly prophetic ‘moral force’ church — two from the Bishops’ Conference in 1998, another two in 1999, three in 2000, two more in 2001, and another two in 2002. Then in 2003 came the first of three major socio-ethical analyses of the situation, the political (2003), the cultural (2004) and the economic (2006).