

INDONESIA

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You would see very little jetting the 3,200 miles from east to west high above the 13,000 inhabited islands of the Indonesian archipelago, scattered across the equator between Australia and Malaysia. You need to board a low flying aeroplane to note how dry the smaller isles are to the south and east and how lush the tropical forests on the larger ones to the north and west. Spot every type of sea craft from dugout canoes on the rivers of Papua to the latest semi-automated tankers on the high seas. Observe environmental-friendly traditional dry-land farming, but also the flooded thousand-year old rice terraces of Bali. View the gold, copper, tin and coal opencast mines in Papua and Kalimantan that are polluting rivers and destroying nature. Catch a glimpse of several of the 128 volcanoes in this equatorial 'ring of fire', one at least will be lighting up the night sky.

LANGUAGE

Land on islands at random and pause for a while. You will hear some of the 350 distinct local languages while everywhere people will also speak the national tongue of *bahasa Indonesia*. This modern language has matured from the thousand-year old inter-island lingua franca of Malay, absorbing vocabulary from merchants, mystics and migrant settlers who spoke Sanskrit, Arabic, Portuguese, Dutch or English. From time immemorial the islands of Indonesia have been ports of call to seafarers plying their trade between South Asia and Southern China, establishing trading centres and so enriching the ever increasing variety of peoples, cultures and religious beliefs.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Politely ask to photograph half a dozen Indonesians hailing from different islands, and you will not immediately recognise them as coming from a single nation. Make out the varied features from Malay to Papuan, from tribal to Chinese. The 245 million multi-ethnic population enjoys over 30 major cultural domains, the majority, some 60%, coming from Java and Madura. Many worldviews swirl within these islands for each island cluster has developed its own linguistic, cultural, religious and physical characteristics. Aptly enough Indonesia's national motto reads: *bhinneka tunggal ika* - unity in diversity, a unity recreated by each generation through ongoing tensions oscillating between centre and periphery, the majority and myriad minorities.

CHRISTIAN DIVERSITY

Given the thousands of islands and hundreds of cultural domains, as well as the strategic site the archipelago holds for seafarers and the fortunes of history, unsurprisingly each of the island clusters has developed Christianity in its own

unique way. This diversity has been entrenched through the Dutch colonial policy of not allowing more than one church tradition to work on each island. Thus the Dutch Reformed Church (Presbyterian) began in the Moluccas but today has its largest membership on West Timor. The Dutch Re-reformed Church (Gereformeerde or Congregationalist) is significant on the neighbouring island of Sumba, while Catholics have a majority on nearby Flores. Lutherans gave birth to what is now the largest Protestant Church in the Bataklands of north Sumatra. Catholics first came with the Portuguese in 1534, Calvinists with the Dutch in 1605, Lutherans with the Danish/Germans in 1862. Pentecostals began with a single house church in 1924. Twenty-six Indonesian Churches are members of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Church growth took place in quite different ways also: the outer isles witnessed mass conversions while the villages of Java and the Chinese minority in the cities have seen more individual conversions. Each denominational and cultural mix has worked out differently.

The largest number of conversions took place in the decades immediately preceding and following independence (1945/49). Christianity is not just rooted in local cultures, it also answers the need for a renewed identity in a rapidly changing world.

OUTWARD FORM, INNER SPIRIT

While the formal thinking and organisation of the churches seem Western, their heart is Asian, their soul indigenous. Christian faith and values are expressed in Indonesian painting and sculpture, architecture and theatre, music and dance, literature and poetry, in both classical and modern styles. While western liturgical forms function as an identity marker for many Protestants, the spirit of the liturgy is intimately Indonesian as are many of the hymns and musical instruments.

CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS

As you across the archipelago do not be surprised at how churches and mosques nestle side by side, for customary celebrations bond neighbourhoods together. Inter-religious cohesion is reinforced through regular local cultural celebrations by extended families whose members hail from different faith traditions. While 87% of Indonesians declare themselves Muslim, 9.5% are Christian of which almost 7% are Protestant and 2.5% Catholic, with a growing Pentecostal/charismatic presence. Meanwhile 2% are Hindu, mainly on the island of Bali, 0.9% Buddhist or Confucians, mostly among Chinese Indonesians, with just 0.6% classed as "other". Indonesia possesses the largest Muslim *umma* (community) anywhere and has one of the larger Christian minorities of any Muslim country.

All is not harmonious today. For centuries Christians studiously ignored the Muslim majority; today they can no longer do so. Until the 1980s Christians

claimed that only 40% of Indonesians were 'real' Muslims, the other 47% merely 'nominal' adherences. The recent Islamic resurgence has given lie to this claim. Meanwhile rapid social change and mass migration have weakened social ties. As families have become more individualised, local cultures more globalized and the values of a competitive market more central, so inter-ethnic and religious strife has erupted. Open conflicts in the late 1990s have forced the pace of a long delayed rapprochement. And so if you were to pop into Ambon in the Moluccas or Poso in central Sulawesi today you would hear of the 1999-2002 conflict with inter-ethnic and inter-religious overtones; and in Jayapura and Banda Aceh you might learn of longstanding separatist struggles. From the air Indonesia is a tropical paradise, on the land we face the challenge of nurturing the vision of unity in diversity, of a common future in the face of widening communal fractures.

PAPUA: DIGNITY AND IDENTITY

We begin our tour where the sun first rises, in Papua, the western half of the island shared with Papua New Guinea. Indonesian Papua now has as many (mainly Muslim) migrant settlers as native Papuans of whom the large majority are Christian. Christianity came almost a century before West Papua was integrated into Indonesia in 1969; they converted collectively as clan and village communities. Christianity brought the modern world to Papua and is today central to the peoples' dignity and identity as they are being overwhelmed by Javanese migrants. Pentecostal-like movements often sweep across the island Melanesian style. Ancestors continue to be acknowledged and cosmic rituals persist, for local traditions and biblical Christianity have merged. Local congregations are lively while their church leaders are vocal on human rights and environmental issues. As the dominant religious group in northern Papua, Protestants support autonomy if not independence, while Catholics, who dominate the south, limit their advocacy to human rights abuses. Despite difficulties in maintaining educational standards in such mountainous terrain, the neighbouring Protestant and Catholic faculties of theology in Abepura are well attended. Papua has produced a number of Christian theologians of note.

One such is Karel Phil Erari (b. 1947) who researches environmental ethics, with particular reference to land issues. He maintains that the peoples of Papua have components within their cultures that could lay the foundation for a contextual eco-theology. After teaching theology in Abepura (1976-1984), Erari became General Secretary of the Papuan Synod (1984-1992), director of research for the Communion of Churches in Jakarta (1988-2001), was on the executive of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. He has since returned to Abepura to direct the postgraduate programme in theology and is active in a number of Papuan NGOs.

AMBON: CONFLICT AND RECONCILIATION

From Papua we call in Ambon among the famed spice isles of the Moluccas. Here the Catholic Church was born in 1534 but whose members were drawn into the Protestant Church by the Dutch after their arrival in 1605. Protestants remained the dominant group until rapid economic development since the 1970s which brought in a large influx of Muslims. Social unrest accompanied the collapse of Soeharto's regime in 1998, when common norms collapsed, traditional family ties loosened and religion became increasingly politicised. The ethnic-religious patchwork that survived for almost two centuries was rent asunder when Muslims rivalled Protestants for local hegemony. Violence broke out in January 1999 subsiding only in 2002 after some five thousand deaths. Triggered by rival local elites, the conflict was kept aflame by elements of the police and the army who took opposing sides. Involvement by national politicians prolonged the crisis. The sickness was in Ambon, the virus in Jakarta. Reconciliation was brought about through the extraordinary bravery of groups like the "Movement of Concerned Women" founded by a Protestant Pastor, a Catholic Sister and a leading Muslim lady. Visitors need to listen to peacemakers, to those who refuse to allow their religion and race to be manipulated by politicians and the military.

SULAWESI: VIBRANT AND VOCAL

And so we move further west to Sulawesi, one of the five larger islands of Indonesia, where we find strong minority Christian communities in the north and centre and staunchly Muslim communities in the south. Manado district is dotted with churches. The outstanding church choirs can be heard on any of the numerous local Christian radio stations. The Protestant Church of Minahasa (GMIM), as well as the Catholic Church, has a comprehensive school system from kindergarten to university. Theological faculties in north, central and south Sulawesi educate church leaders, lay and ordained.

The Protestant churches of Sulawesi have given birth to some remarkable women. Henriette Marianne Katoppo (1943-2007) is Indonesia's first internationally recognised woman theologian. A freelance theologian, novelist, journalist and translator, she is independent and forthright and conversant in a dozen Asian and European languages. Her most explicitly Christian novel is *Raumanen* (1977), her most well-known theological work *Compassionate and Free* (1979). Meanwhile Sientje Merentek-Abram (b. 1947) is a biblical theologian and ordained minister in GMIM (1981). She has worked in theological education for both the WCC and in Southeast Asia as well as chairing the General Synod of the churches of north and central Sulawesi.

Another outstanding woman, Agustina Lumentut (1937-2002) hails from the Central Sulawesi Church. One of the first women to be ordained (1959),

Lumentut worked for the Indonesian Communion of Churches in Jakarta (1985-1989). Back in Sulawesi she was elected the first woman president of her church (1989-1996) apart from working for the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the WCC. She was a key mediator during the ethnic-religiously driven conflicts in Poso (1999-2002). Here as elsewhere, conflicts arose where a community felt politically silenced, socially ostracised, culturally belittled and economically sidelined. When on top of this the community is religiously harassed, then dignity and identity tend to be defended with much aggression.

Of a younger generation, Septemmy Eucharistia Lakawa (b. 1970) teaches theology in Jakarta. She has been General Secretary of PERWATI (Association of Theological Schools) and was the founding editor of *Sophia*, the first feminist theological journal in Indonesia (2000).

Henriett Tabita Hutabarat-Lebang, universally known as Ibu Ery (b. 1952), is yet another of the outstanding women from the Sulawesi churches. She was born in the southern city of Makasar and ordained in the Toraja Church (1992). After heading the women's desk of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (1984-1986), for ten years she became Programme Co-ordinator of the CCA in Hong Kong. On returning to Toraja she has directed the *Institut Teologi* for the ongoing formation of Church leaders. She was elected onto the executive of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (2004-2011). As with other women theologians Hutabarat's work has been developed with teams of colleagues and published jointly. She ranks among the more influential Indonesian theological thinkers today.

In Sulawesi as elsewhere, many of the more creative theological scholars are working outside theological faculties and seminaries; they are evolving their theology as writers, journalists, novelists and in broad ecumenical networks.

EAST NUSA TENGGARA: CHRISTIAN HEARTLANDS

And so we move south to the islands of Nusa Tenggara. In these Austronesian cultures Christianity is woven into the very fabric of the peoples' identity. For the majority, to be Timorese, Sumbanese or Florenese is to be Christian, whether Presbyterian (Timor), Congregationalist (Sumba) or Catholic (Flores). Cultural values such as hospitality, generosity and accepting everyone as they are, have readily inter-pollinated with Christian virtues. Similarly, pre-modern religious rites, modern education and post-modern global horizons intermix in both individuals and communities. For instance, you can witness how cosmic marriage rituals handed down from the ancestors form a single process with the church blessing at its climax. Similarly, widely-scattered extended families fly in from neighbouring islands and countries to attend funerals, replete with ancestral rites. Visitors pour into East Flores to take part in the annual Holy

Week processions, introduced by Portuguese Dominicans four hundred years previously.

Magnificent hand woven *ikat* cloth, lively rhythmic singing in local tongues and graceful dancing are all integral elements of major Christian liturgies which are often celebrated in the open due to the number of worshipers.

The mass conversion of Flores and Timor took place in the first half of the 20th century although Catholics proudly trace their origins to the late 16th and Protestants to the early 17th centuries. Flores, and much of Timor, remained under Portuguese influence until sold to the Dutch in 1859. West Timor has the second largest Protestant Church in Indonesia (GMIT), while over 30% of Indonesia's Catholics live on these islands. In East Nusa Tenggara Muslims form a small minority. Rooted in a popular religiosity, church leaders collaborate closely with both cultural leaders and government officials, most of whom are Christian. This tends to mute the church's prophetic voice.

Tens of thousands of migrants from these islands are found on every Indonesian island and beyond. These migrants not only make their voice heard in church choirs throughout the country, they are also creatively present among Jakarta's intelligentsia, in the media, the theatre, journalism and the universities. The Nusa Tenggara school system, both Protestant (Timor and Sumba) and Catholic (Flores), begun early in the 20th century, led to Christianity being almost identified with education. The Catholic seminary of Ledalero in Flores, celebrating its 70th anniversary in 2007, has among its alumni 16 bishops, over a thousand priests and 350 missionaries working in 46 countries. These days the Protestant theological faculty in Kupang, Timor, has more women than men studying for the ordained ministry for both Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches.

BALI: A MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY

To the west of Sumba lie the Muslim isles of Sumbawa and Lombok and then the Hindu isle of Bali, a tourist hotspot. In Bali Christians are a tiny minority within a Hindu culture which is itself a 2% minority in the country. Although a majority of Christians are migrants from Timor, Flores and Java, much art and sculpture, dance and flower offerings, hymns and *gamelan* percussion orchestras are Balinese. And so try to avoid the surfing beaches of Kuta and Sanur and go west to the town of Negara to the Christian village-complexes of Blimbingsari and Palasari.

The tightly knit culture of the walled villages of Bali had little space for Christians whose first converts came from the lower caste. Rejected by the village, the Protestant community established their own village complex in the

western forests at Blimbingsari in the 1930s, while the Catholics built their refuge at Palasari, five kilometres away. To some extent these Christian complexes parallel the Hindu mother temple complex of *Pura Besaki* on the slopes of Mount Agung in the east. Blimbingsari centres upon an open plan church with a *candi bentar* (split gate) entrance separating the outside world from the inner sanctum. Appropriate scriptural verses give Christian significance to each construction. The large church at Catholic Palasari is recognisably western in shape while its decoration is quintessentially Balinese.

Just north of Denpasar is Tuka village, the Nazareth of the small Catholic community. Visit the small Balinese open-plan church and *Widya Wahana* reference library next door with a collection of over 20,000 books and manuscripts on Balinese culture.

JAVA: INDIGENOUS ROOTS

You will need time to absorb the variety of Christianities in Java, the island where more than half the population lives. Among the overwhelming Muslim majority, small Christian communities are visible in cities such as Surabaya, Malang, Jogjakarta, Semarang, Bandung and the capital, Jakarta. These vibrant congregations consist not only of Javanese and Chinese-Indonesians but also of migrants from the outer islands. Many cultural and religious layers interlock producing a great variety of churches.

Central Java has evolved a fluid religious culture with a localised Buddhist-Hindu root upon which the Islamic faith has been grafted, the whole planted in cosmic soil. One hundred and fifty years ago many Javanese were open to new spiritual paths and religious symbols to satisfy their inner need for cosmic harmony. Religious borders were porous and as individuals converted so they felt they had the right to embrace and develop Christianity according to their own feelings and inner needs. The most famous of the 19th century evangelists was Kiai Sadrach Surapranata (1835-1924) who announced the gospel as *ngelmu* (esoteric knowledge) which gives inner contentment and answers the secret of life, a guide on the way to perfection. Christianity made inroads due to such inter-religious blending, where cosmic culture and popular religion merge. Cosmic religiosity is still very much alive in individuals and families. Recently, as globalisation has shaken cultural roots, so local cultures have revived, and with it, Sadrach and other 19th century evangelists have been appreciated anew.

JAVA: EDUCATION

The 20th century nationalist movement valued western education, better living conditions and political emancipation and the churches responded by centring their outreach on schools, health and social service. The more important cities have Christian universities and Christianity came to be identified with education

and modernisation. Jakarta and Jogjakarta (Jogja) are home to numerous Christian educational institutions at all levels. In Jogja visit the Protestant Duta Wacana University and the Jesuit Sanata Dharma University, both of which have ongoing relations with the State Islamic University (UIN). At postgraduate level their theology faculties educate thematically via the “pastoral circle” of insertion, social analysis, academic reflection and practical response.

JAVA: ART AND MUSIC

Christian artists, composers, choreographers, dramatists, poets, literati and architects have entered the mainstream of Indonesia’s cultural life. In Jogja art, theatre and dance interweave the traditional and the ultra-modern. Socially-engaged artists and politically-aware dramatists are creating a new language in which to re-picture the Jesus of the gospels: portraying the Incarnate Word as the heart-beat of the popular culture struggling for space to breathe, for dignity, for a meaning that overcomes death.

The most well-known artist, musician and choreographer was Bagong Kussudiardja (1928-2004). His picture of Jesus the cosmic dancer ascending to the heavens is widely appreciated. Several of his dance and theatre productions are explicitly Christian. His theatre continues with his children, one of whom, Gregory Djaduk Ferianto (b. 1964), composes multi-media productions drawing together song, poetry, declamation, dialogue, dance, acting and lighting effects. His is a pluralistic model synthesising Javanese culture and post-modern technology, accessible to anyone of goodwill, Christian or Muslim.

The Jesuit Audio Visual Studio sponsors artists, producing, in one programme, one hundred Balinese-style paintings of biblical scenes. Suryo Indratno, a young artist from central Java, painted a large (1.80 x2.66 metre) jubilee-year hanging expressing a theology of creation and of the Spirit in the context of violent times. The studio also runs training sessions on street theatre drawing on social justice themes. For the past three decades the Jesuit Centre of Liturgical Music has composed liturgical songs according to the scales and rhythms of Indonesian musical traditions. Most hymns today are Indonesian in tone and texture.

Others deserve a mention such as Judowibowo Poerwowidagdo (b. 1942) who has worked in theological education both in Jogjakarta and Jakarta (since 2000) as well as with the World Council of Churches (1992-1998). Together with his wife, the professional artist Timur I. Poerwowidagdo, Judo has established a dance troupe who acts out scriptural narratives in Javanese style. He is also president of the Asian Christian Art Association. Timur painted a series on Christ’s passion as an act of compassionate solidarity with the women raped in Jakarta as the Soeharto regime collapsed in May 1998.

JAVA: MAKERS AND SHAKERS

Throughout Java Catholics will proudly speak of their first Indonesian bishop, the Jesuit Soegijapranata (1895-1963). An alumni of Francis van Lith's elite teacher's training school in Muntilan (opened in 1904), Soegijapranata was one of the first generation of nationalists, lay and ordained, produced by the school. Firmly siding with the revolution (1945-1949), Soegijapranata, until his death, remained a close friend of Indonesia's first President, Soekarno.

Perhaps the bishop's most well known protégé is Yusuf Bilyarta Mangunwijaya (1929-1999). After ordination (1959) Mangun studied architecture as part of a diocesan plan to Javanise the church. Visit his open-plan *joglo* churches at Tambran-Ganjuran, Klaten, Sragen, Salam and Jogjakarta and do not fail to miss the trappist convent at Gedono. His design for the Marian pilgrimage centre at Sendangsono, birthplace of the contemporary Catholic Church (1904), focuses upon popular religiosity and natural beauty rather than formal liturgy or large-scale buildings. His use of cultural symbols (tree of life) replaces more explicitly Christian ones (e.g. the cross). Retiring from grand designs he turned to "people's architecture" and redesigned the squatters' camp by the Code River in Jogja (1980-1986) which won the (Muslim) Aga Khan Award (1992). In eleven novels, numerous newspaper articles and other writings, Mangunwijaya is the most creative theological thinker to have emerged from the Indonesian Catholic Church over the past 150 years. He died on the shoulder of the young Muslim intellectual, Mohamad Sobary. His funeral was attended by thousands, not just clergy and literati, but also rickshaw riders, squatters and street children, many of whom he knew personally.

Make an appointment with Agustina Nunuk Prasetyo Murniati (b. 1943) who lives near Gaja Madah University. Ibu Nunuk, as she is known, is a retired economist and university administrator, and is one of the first generation of Catholic women to take up theology. For Ibu Nunuk theology is conversation, an ongoing questioning process by groups of involved people. Not one-sidedly cerebral, theology is personal, birthed by the heart in music, movement, painting, architecture, meditation and asceticism. Theology brought on a faith-crisis as the pious Jesus of her upbringing was challenged by the biblical Jesus of feminist research. Ibu Nunuk is active in both national and international theological and human rights networks such as *Ecclesia of Women in Asia* and the *Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians* (EATWOT).

JAKARTA: PIETISM AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

It is invidious to pick out a single figure from the host of major thinkers and church people in the capital, Jakarta, who have made their mark over the past half century. Nonetheless, the life and thought of Eka Darmaputera (1942-2005) sums up the rapid and radical changes the churches are undergoing. Throughout

his adult life Pak Eka led a local congregation while teaching ethics at tertiary level; “Not doing theology”, he disclaims, “but theology by doing”, responding to ethical, political and dogmatic questions as they arise. A well-known preacher and newspaper columnist, he changed the quietist Chinese-Indonesian congregation into a socially engaged multi-ethnic church. He is one of many Indonesian theologians to study the state ideology of Pancasila (1982) which he saw as an attempt to enable traditional culture cope with contemporary problems. A “both-and” or “neither-nor” worldview leads to acceptance, not of right over wrong, but of what fits in with one’s feeling and intuition. Eka found in this traditional worldview fertile soil in which to advocate basic human rights. While Christians have maintained their public profile through journalism, literature, theatre, the arts and human rights advocacy, it is also true that some urban congregations have retreated into a more ritualistic religion that gives instant fulfilment to their followers’ emotional needs rather than work for societal transformation.

Towards the end of his life Eka was critical of the increasingly charismatic style of the richer churches describing them as, “internally irrelevant and socially insignificant”. Muslim resurgence over the past 30 years had drawn some to collaborate more closely, but led others to withdraw into ritual.

SUMATRA: LOCAL ROOTS, NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

And finally our tour takes us to the northern part of Sumatra, the western-most island in the archipelago, nestling beside Singapore and the Malay peninsula. Here we find the largest Protestant Church in Indonesia, the *Huria Kristen Batak Protestan* (HKBP) which has many congregations in Jakarta also. The lively Batak people have embraced Christianity with great verve. From their beginnings in the 1860s the Lutheran Rhenish Mission announced the gospel in conscious dialogue with Batak culture. Free of both colonial rule and Islamic influence, Christianity brought security to an area as their culture was no longer capable of holding society together. Due to Ludwig Nommensen (1834-1918), the pioneering visionary, and his companion, P. H. Johannsen, the linguist and bible translator, the Bataks embraced Christianity as a development of ancestral wisdom and values (*adat*). Today, both the Toba Bataks and the Karo Bataks live side by side with Catholic Christians and Muslims in a dynamic and tolerant religious kaleidoscope, held together by the traditional bonds of custom and kinship, a pattern also found elsewhere whether by design (mission method) or appropriation (the genius of the local people). Before the rapid social-economic change of 1970s - 1990s, custom and kinship were fundamental and so multi-faith families were able to keep an increasingly pluralistic society together.

This strongly Christian area of North Sumatra has produced some remarkable national figures. Tahi Bonar Simatupang (1920-1990) is not your likely

international church statesman let alone ecumenical theologian. He was a guerrilla leader during the revolution (1945-1949) and after independence Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces (1951-1954). Pensioned off early by President Soekarno in 1959, Simatupang became one of the more original theological thinkers of his generation. He claimed that the church needed to become ecumenical in order to counter the ethnic composition of most local churches. He felt it vital that the churches move from a position of weakness and isolation to the centre of society. The churches should engage society, "positively, creatively, critically and realistically". He was one of the key figures who shifted pietistic congregations into the mainstream of national development in order that they develop a coherent social vision. And all this while active in the World Council of Churches.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

What then of the future? The continuing influence of *Kompas*, the largest circulation broadsheet and published by Catholics, the Protestant *Suara Pembaruan* newspaper and the Islamic daily *Republika*, indicate that religion is maintaining an important role in society, although not always as the most crucial compass in life. Despite an apparent decline in values and conspicuous consumption, society maintains an important place for religious values. Religion is where people feel significant both ritually and morally and as a distinct group. Confined largely to ritual under an authoritarian government (1968-1998), Christianity is now being challenged to live as a free and faithful minority. *Kompas* and *Suara Pembaruan* are engaged in an ongoing public conversation with a resurgent Islam and revitalized local cultures within the context of a public life which is practically devoid of morality and where force rules rather than law. Columnists such as Mangunwijaya and Darmaputera in the recent past, and contemporary thinkers such as Mudji Sutrisno SJ of the Driyarkara Institute of Philosophy in Jakarta and A.A. Yewangoe, Chair of the National Communion of Churches, envisage an open, flexible, accommodating church, a future in terms of widely scattered networks of prophetically-inspired ecclesial and inter-faith communities. In a pluralistic society, Christians no longer focus upon the congregation, let alone the church institution, but rather upon the family supported by networks of base communities.

Partners on the Muslim side are intellectuals such as Nurcholish Madjid ("Cak Nur", 1939-2005) and Abdurrahman Wahid ("Gus Dur", b. 1940) who argue for a tolerant, righteous and democratic civil society. Gus Dur, is the one time leader of the 30 million strong Nahdlatul Ulama traditional movement, while Cak Nur worked in academic circles, coining the phrase: "Islam, yes; Islamic political parties, no".

Literati such as the Jesuit Sindhunata (b. 1952) are actively evolving the syncretistic tradition while giving voice to the victims of oppressive politics and rapacious economic development. Theirs is a universal humanism, open to the Spirit, in the language of popular culture; a vision of universal solidarity that acknowledges that everyone has been made in the image of a single creator. Such thinkers are unconcerned whether sources are Muslim, Christian or indigenous, as long as they give voice to and strengthen the cultural renewal needed to empower the marginalised. This religious-cultural syncretism at the commencement of the twenty-first century contrasts with the politicisation of religion which is endeavouring to draw ever-sharper demarcations between religious institutions. The churches are having to learn how to sustain mission without the traditional support of schools, health and social outreach by nurturing Christian and inter-faith communities as “contrast cultures” where trust, honesty, transparency, mutual help, advocacy and a social conscience can thrive.

And so, the gospel-culture encounter has become a multi-dimensional, critical, transforming dialogue, for Indonesian culture is no longer simply cosmic-holistic but also global-secular. Similarly, a gentle but firm feminism is gradually deconstructing Islam and Christianity both in their patriarchal cultures but also in their dogmatic traditions. In a pluralistic society authentic witness, rather than creedal formulation, become central. And yet both Christians and Muslims have small hardcore extremes; for people threatened by rapid change tend to reassert their impervious boundaries.

As Indonesia undergoes profound change in all sectors, the churches are having to choose between reinforcing internal cohesion, often in charismatic mode, or embracing a broadly ecumenical and inter-faith agenda to build up a society of justice and compassion where the gospel emancipates human consciousness leading to solidarity with others. The future is coming about more through an instinctive urge than by any ecclesial grand vision. This essay hopes to have shown that Islam and Christianity do not only differ from each other, but that both also have a range of internal differences as well. Acceptance of internal plurality permits openness to, and collaboration with, “the other”. Only thus will reality – and realism – accurately reflect Indonesia’s national motto “Unity in Diversity”.

TIMELINE

7th – 13th centuries Buddhist Kingdom of Srivijaya.
9th century Prambanan (Hindu) and Borobudur (Buddhist) temples. Small Christian enclaves on coasts of Sumatra & Java.
13th – 15th centuries Hindu Kingdom of Majapahit.
12th – 16th centuries – Peaceful conversion of Sumatra and Java to Islam.
1534 Portuguese arrive in the Moluccas; birth of the Catholic Church.
1605 Dutch establish spice centre in Ambon; Protestant Church born, Catholic Church outlawed.
1807 Progressive emancipation of Catholics begins.
1859 Portuguese sell Flores & Central Timor to Dutch; Catholic clergy return to Flores.
1908 Nationalists and Islam spearhead national renaissance & independence movement.
1904 Rebirth of Catholic Church at Sendagsono, Java.
1942-1945 Japanese occupation. Protestant Churches separate from the state.
1945 Political independence declared, internationally recognised in 1949.
1949-1959 Parliamentary Democracy.
1959-1965 Guided Democracy under Soekarno.
1965-1966 Abortive coup-de-tat followed by army instigated massacre.
1966-1998 The authoritarian 'New Order' of General Soeharto.
1990s Hundreds of churches bombed & fired as Soeharto's regime enters final phase.
1998 Soeharto's regime collapses in corruption, a monetary crisis & student unrest.
Since 1998: Slow shuffle to a renewed democracy. The churches work at reforming themselves as family networks of gospel communities.

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Illustrations:

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