

INDONESIAN CATHOLICS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY

(A Historical Perspective)

which in 1945 Indonesia was declared a new nation state following centuries of Dutch and Japanese colonization, it was the intention of Sukarno, Hatta and other established an independent democratic republic with equal opportunities for all citizens and religious communities. As a result, in the first years of the republic, under the administration of President Sukarno, Indonesia granted its Catholic citizens religious freedom. During this time the Catholics' political participation was arguably high, even though their number was very small (Tjallingii, 1969).

In the wake of the "1965 Tragedy" in which a half-million Indonesians suspected of being communist were massacred, Indonesian politics gradually became dominated by General Suharto. This period witnessed a great number of conversions to Islam. Religious freedom was guaranteed, but religions were increasingly used as tools of political power (Steenbrink, 2008). Indonesian Catholics felt that they were discriminated by the government. Ironically during this period the political participation of the Catholics gradually diminished. Many Catholics tend to be apolitical, even as many churches were burned or bombed, and Christians were subjected to social religious tensions and conflicts.

When a democratic movement was trying to topple President Soeharto's centralised and authoritarian New Order government in the late 1990's, Indonesian leaders published pastoral letters, such as the 1997 pastoral letter called *Kerrihatinan dan Harapan* ("Our Concern and Hope") that urged Christians to contribute to the process, but limited. This limited participation and contribution continue today, when on the one hand Indonesia is becoming more democratic, but on the other hand is increasingly dominated by the religious majority.

II. PRINCIPAL QUESTIONS

Based on the above observation, we propose the following questions: As a part of

the emergence of a democratic regime in Indonesia, why did Catholic political participation in the 1950s and 1960s decline? What factors contributed to this high political participation of Catholics in the 1950s? What factors contributed to this high political participation of Catholics in the 1960s? Why did Catholic political participation diminish during the political role?

Furthermore, why did political participation continue to diminish following the actions of the Suharto government and the move towards political liberalization? What actions are needed to enhance the role of the Indonesian Catholic community in advancing the process of democratization in Indonesia as envisioned by the country's founding fathers?

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

By using historical perspective, this research will approach the issue diachronically in order to obtain a broader view of it, including its historical roots and Catholics who hold positions in the Church governance; Catholic scholars; Catholics who regarding the relationship between the Indonesian Catholic community and democracy.

In addition to interviews, we will utilize existing statistical information about the Indonesian Catholic community, as well as the available literature relevant to the topic.

IV. ANTICIPATED RESULTS

By using such approach we hope to establish why Catholic Indonesians tended to be apathetic in the struggle for democracy. Additionally we will explicate which steps should be taken in order to enhance the participation of the Catholic community in the increasing democratization of Indonesia.

V. ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTION

With few exceptions, most publications on the Indonesian Catholic community

Gereja Katolik Indonesia (History of the Indonesian Catholic Church, 1972) are monumental, but they deal mainly with documentation of the internal dynamics of the spreading the Catholic faith in the region. Not many studies have been done on the connection between the Catholic community with the broader socio-historical context of Indonesia, let alone with the dynamics of democracy in the country. This research will illuminate the dynamics of the Catholic community in Indonesia from historical-political perspective, rather than a theological approach. It will contribute to the academic discourse on the relevance and contribution of the Catholic community to the struggle for democracy in Indonesia.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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