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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Surprising Success of Christianity in Indonesia¹

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Abstract: The article discusses Indonesia as the largest Muslim majority country which also has the largest percentage of Christians in any majority Muslim country. It looks at the history of Christianity in Indonesia beginning with the presumed activity of the group Church of the East also known as the Nestorian church and then the effects of colonialism by Portuguese the Dutch and for very short period the British and the influence that had on missionary activity noting also the tole of indigenou evangelism. It then looks at the process to Independence and notes the involvement of Christians in both the initial Independent Movement and also the subsequent nation building. It notes certain specific providential activities such as the time of revival in the late 1960s and proposes the future of Christianity within the country will be found in the continuing activity of the current Christian community rather than any missionary activity.

Keywords: Nestorianism Colonialism Missionary Indigenou Independence Revival

Indonesia is an archipelago of over 17,000 islands in Southeast Asia. It is by area the 14th largest country in the world and the fourth largest by population at 280 million. About half that population live on Java (about the same size as England and Wales) making it the most populous island in the world. It is the world's largest Muslim majority country with the largest percentage of Christians in any Muslim majority nation at 10.47% comprising about 20 million Protestants and 8 million Catholics. Despite the predominance of Islam, Indonesia is not an Islamic nation, but nor is it secular. The first point of the constitution, the Pancasila, is Ketuhanan yang Mahaesa - belief in one God.

¹ This article is not fully footnoted. Some material is from verbal information or representing personal impressions.

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Early History of Christianity in Indonesia³



There is a belief that the first place in Indonesia where a Christian church was established is Barus on the North West coast of Sumatra in the 7th century. Barus was an important port and was particularly noted for Camphor. Later it is believed that it was through the same port that Islam entered the archipelago. The Christians entering were most probably from the Great Church of the East, commonly referred to as Nestorian in Western sources and usually regarded as part of Oriental Orthodoxy. In this period the church had begun to expand into China and other parts of Asia. Another possibility would be the Mar Toma church, but by this period the church had already come under Syrian influences and therefore related to the Great Church. Certainly, the message came from Southern India possibly by merchants and Tamil speakers.

The writings of Shaik Abu Saleh al Armini, writing in Arabic in the twelfth century, also mentions the presence of a Christian church in Pancur near Barus.

In the 14th century, the first Catholic mission that reached Indonesia was led by Italian Franciscan friar Mattiusi. In his book "Travels of Friar Odoric of Pordenone" he visited several places in today's Indonesia between 1318 and 1330. He was sent by the Pope to launch a mission into the Asian interiors. In 1318 he departed from Padua, crossed the Black Sea into Persia and then to Calcutta, Madras, and Sri Lanka. Then he headed to Nicobar Island and Sumatra, before visiting Java and Banjarmasin.⁴

In 1347 the Catholic Bishop Marignolli OFM visited Palembang in South Sumatra and reported that there were Christians there.⁵ Palembang had been the centre of the Sriwijaya Empire that controlled much of Southeast Asia from the 500 AD to the 11th century.

A Frenchman, Lois of Varheme, met two Nestorian merchants in Burma en route to Java, Borneo and the Molluccan Islands in 1506.⁶ Patriarch Mar Eliyah consecrated a Metropolitan for Dabag (presumed to be Java) in 1503.⁷

So, the assumption can be made that Nestorian Christianity was found in parts of Indonesia from the 7th to the 16th century. It was Asian Christianity from its Syrian base mediated probably through Indian merchants and possibly monks as found in

³ I will use the name Indonesia throughout even though it only applies to the country from 1945

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church_in_Indonesia

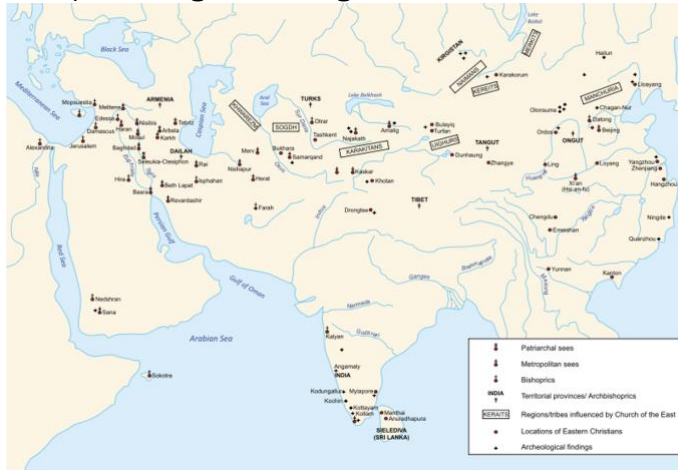
⁵ <http://www.acts.edu/oldmissions/indonehist1.html>

⁶ Nau. L'expansion Nestorienne en Asie. *Annals du Musee Guimet Bibliotheque de Vulgarisation*, Tome 40. p.27

⁷ http://www.oxuscom.com/COTE_Timeline.pdf and http://www.nestorian.org/nestorian_patriarchs.html

other parts of East Asia. There were two periods of expansion of the church to China and East Asia – the first during Tang Dynasty as testified by the Xian stela and then in the period of Mongol control, the Yuan dynasty.

A map showing something of the extent of the church.



Roman Catholicism

Indonesia is home to the spice islands that were eagerly sought by western merchants. Christopher Columbus was attempting to find a westward route to them when he stumbled on the Americas. The first maritime power was the Portuguese who established their control over Goa in India, Malacca in Malaya and the Moluccan Islands in Indonesia. With Portuguese control the path was open for Roman Catholic missionaries of whom the most notable was Frances Xavier, one of the founders of the Society of Jesus commonly known as the Jesuits. Xavier baptised several thousand and my suspicion is that these were not pagans but Nestorian Christians.

The Dutch East Indies Company

The Dutch arrived in Indonesia in 1596. Their conflict with the Portuguese and the English continued into the next century. The Dutch conquest was a commercial enterprise run by the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC – Dutch East Indies Company). It was under their auspices that the conversion of the Eastern islands of Indonesia took place. As Latourette reports⁸, the Company “regarded Christianity as one of its functions”. In the renewed “oktroi” (monopoly) in 1622 it was bound to carry out Article 36 of the Dutch Confession of Faith that reads “The government is to care for the Holy Church, to oppose and to destroy all false religions and idol worships, to ruin the kingdom of Antichrist, and to advance the Kingdom of Jesus⁹”. This meant a

⁸ Latourette 1970 p. 303

⁹ Quoted at www.acts.edu/oldmissions/indinehist1.html from Müller Krüger Sedjarah Geredja di Indonesia Badan Penerbit Kristen Jakarta 1959:26

banning of Catholicism and the baptising of many Indonesians¹⁰. The Company's motive was to have compliant natives. From the Indonesians' point of view, there advantage in being baptised was that it opened the way to great privileges from the Dutch, even though it was not equality. These Christians were regarded as black Dutchmen. Ministers were appointed to Indonesia, but their main concern was to pastor the Dutch people. The number of ministers in 1776 was only 22 who had declined to 4 by 1810. 30,000 Catholics were (re)baptised, but there was no confirmation for most of them and no provision for Holy Communion.

The ministers were appointed, controlled and paid by the Company. It presents a picture of the worst aspects of colonialism using religion for its own ends. And yet, there were true Gospel initiatives. Many of the classes of the Dutch church examined those who were going out as missionaries and kept in contact with them. In the 1620s and 1630s, a seminary was maintained in Leiden, at the expense of the Company, to train ministers for the Indies. The church did not need to raise funds, but there was a missionary interest. There was a concern to present the scriptures in local languages. Indonesian, in the guise of Bahasa Melayu Ambon (Ambonese Malay), can claim in the post-Reformation period to be the first non-European language into which parts of the scriptures were translated. The New Testament was produced in 1668 although some Gospels had been produced before that¹¹. The full Bible was published in Malay in 1734 in Roman script and in 1759 in Arabic script¹². Several ministers learned Malay. Many of these were godly and dedicated men.

Before the Company was abolished in 1799, the Christians of the Dutch East Indies were more numerous than in any other country east of India. Latourette reports estimates of as many as 200,000 Christians¹³. However shallow their faith might have been, which we are in no position to assess, the presence of large numbers of Christians was an important factor in the evangelisation of the largest Muslim nation. The Company was happy for the Gospel to be preached where it was advantageous to trade, but there were two areas where it banned Gospel preaching. The first was in those Kingdoms like Ternate where commercial agreements with local Muslim Sultans included the promise of no attempts being made to change the religion of the population. The other was in the Kingdoms of Java outside of Batavia (Jakarta)¹⁴. This was similar to the agreements that the British made with the Sultans in Malaya¹⁵ and which still in law forbid the evangelisation of Malays.

¹⁰ The term is used for convenience to describe any of the diverse peoples of the archipelago, but it is anachronistic before the Twentieth Century. Likewise, the use of the term Indonesia when the true title should be the Dutch East Indies.

¹¹ Albert Cornelisz Ruyl in 1603 produced the first translation of the Gospel of Matthew.

¹² Roman script has predominated for Indonesian, but Malay has used Arabic script extensively. Other Indonesian languages, like Javanese, have used a Sanskrit based script.

¹³ Latourette 1970:306

¹⁴ Jakarta is spelt Djakarta in documents before 1974. This Dutch orthography is also found in the use of "oe" to represent the sound "u" and "tj" for the sound "ch" represented by "c" in modern Indonesian, but by "ch" in Malay.

¹⁵ Pangkor Treaty 1874

How should we regard this period? First, we may rejoice in the entrance of the Gospel to many parts of Indonesia and the godly Dutchmen involved in this work. There were those churches and individuals from Holland who had a true understanding of the need to preach the Gospel to the heathen and were ready to use the opportunity presented by the Company. We may note how, despite the college in Leiden, few made it to the East Indies. Some had health that failed. Others failed morally. At one stage, the Company sent new ministers, soon after they arrived in Batavia, to Bali, whose women were regarded as the most beautiful in the colony, to obtain a wife! The Dutchness of the church left little room for indigenous theology to develop. The Company was always more concerned for the spiritual welfare of the Dutch than for native inhabitants. The foundations were laid that could produce church growth after Independence in a similar way to the growth of the church in China after missionaries had left.

Coolen and the Church in East Java

The different ways in which Christianity became established in Indonesia is well illustrated by the saga of Coolen and the establishment of a church in East Java. It is important to know the nature of religion in Java¹⁶ before attempting to understand the ways in which the evangelism took place.

Java has an ancient civilisation. Hinduism and Buddhism have dominated the culture since before the building of the great Candi of Borobudur in the Eighth Century and the Hindu shrines of Prambanan at about the same time. The Kingdoms of Java dominated the island as first one and then another held the greater power¹⁷. Despite the adoption of Islam and the conversion of the kingdoms into sultanates, this influence is still apparent. The magical practices from the animistic past have been combined with ideas from Hinduism and Buddhism under the general umbrella of Islam to produce what is best called "The Religion of Java"¹⁸. This strange syncretism results, for instance, in the Sultan of Jogjakarta (officially a Muslim) going each year to the southern coast to celebrate his ritual marriage to Dewi Loro Kidul, the Queen of the Southern Ocean. Underlying all this belief and practice is the panentheistic and mystical concept of *menyatu dengan semesta alam* (being at one with the universe). Javanese traditionally would describe their religious quest as *mentjari ngelmu* (the seeking of mystical knowledge) to unlock the secrets of relating to the universe. Various means of achieving this are called *kebatinan* (inwardness). The court background of Javanese culture has produced dance, music, shadow puppets (*wayang kulit*) and the visual arts which have developed from its Indic base into something distinctively Javanese. The most Hindu part of Indonesia today is Bali. The remnant of

¹⁶ Although the whole island is called Java, the Javanese people are to be found primarily in Central and East Java.

¹⁷ The Sumatran kingdom of Sriwijaya should not be forgotten!

¹⁸ A book of this name by Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (New York, The Free Press, 1959) is still regarded as an authoritative guide to the beliefs of the Javanese although some of his conclusions have been questioned by subsequent scholars.

the old East Javanese kingdom of Majapahit which fell in 1478 is preserved there. After that Islam became the major religion of East Java.

Because of the Napoleonic wars¹⁹, from 1811 to 1815 the East Indies were under British control with Stamford Raffles as Governor. He permitted missionaries to come to Java. 1st May 1813 marks the arrival in Batavia of William Robinson as the first known missionary to the Javanese. He was a Baptist and had spent time with Carey, Marshman, and Ward in Serampore. He was sent to Java with instructions to learn the Javanese language first and after that Malay and Dutch. Robinson was plagued with ill health and never learned the complicated Javanese language in which there are about nine ways of saying anything depending on who you are and to whom you are speaking. He left Java in 1821, never to return.

On 26th May 1814 Joseph Kam, Gottlob Brückner, and John Supper arrived in Batavia as members of the London Missionary Society. Kam was from Flanders and had buried his parents, wife, daughter and two unmarried sisters before he was free to proceed as a missionary at the age of 45. Kam was to have his main ministry in the Moluccan islands where he would earn the sobriquet "The Apostle to the Moluccas". On his way there he stayed in Surabaya for six months. He was given charge of the European Christians there and under his ministry the group grew spiritually so that they were nicknamed "The Pious of Surabaya". Amongst the group was Johannes Emde a German watchmaker who became the leader after Kam left. Many of the group were Eurasians²⁰. Emde's wife was Javanese and she and her daughter were also converted. The group was vigorous in evangelism which did not fit into the plans of the Dutch after they had taken back the government in 1816. "The Pious" were often taken to court and in 1820 Emde was imprisoned.

David Bentley-Taylor, who has written this history²¹, seeks to steer a clear path through the different people and missions who became involved in Java during the British interlude and the subsequent years under the Dutch. Kam, Brückner and Supper were all ordained in London as Dutch Reformed ministers, and it was expected that they would work in the Reformed Church in the Indies. However, Brückner changed his mind on baptism and resigned from LMS to join the BMS²². As a German trained in Holland, he was allowed to continue after the restoration of Dutch control. Based primarily in Central Java (but also for a while in India at Serampore) he began translating the New Testament into Javanese. As he completed sections, he sent them off to Emde. His wife and daughter copied the text out and then handed them on to Javanese they met. Amongst these was Kiai Midah, a Madurese maker of wooden sheaths for keris (short ritual Javanese sword). He was illiterate, but he took the text to a group of devout Muslims that met in the village of Wijung in the house of Dasimah,

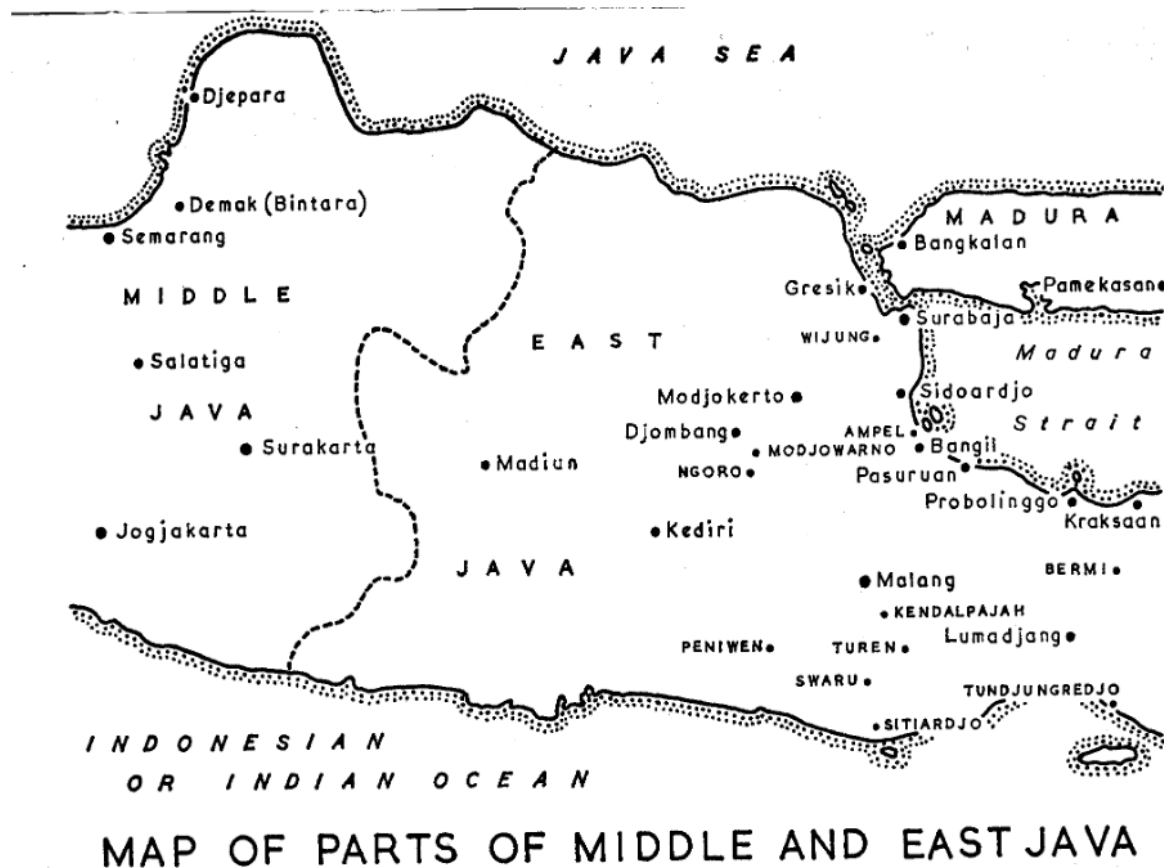
¹⁹ The French had controlled the East Indies from 1806-1811 after they captured Holland

²⁰ The term Eurasian has been used to describe anyone with mixed Asian and European parentage. Indonesians would call such a person "Indo". There have been many such people in Indonesia. Since Independence some have managed to connect with their Dutch ancestral families and moved to Holland. Many struggled both linguistically and culturally in the new Republic.

²¹ David Bentley-Taylor *The Weathercock's Reward* (London; OMF books, 1967)

²² The opening of China in 1842 meant the end of the Java Mission for the LMS. The BMS left in 1847.

a modin (a minor Islamic official). The text was part of Mark's Gospel and they were all puzzled by the opening words, "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God". Over subsequent months the group discussed the strange contents of the book.



Then one of the group, Saminah, attended a wedding feast in the house of Kiai Kunti where an unusual prayer was used. Kunti said that he had learned it from a wise man in Ngoro, a Eurasian called Coolen. The "prayer" was in fact a Javanese translation of the Apostles' Creed. Dasimah realised that this prayer was related to the text they had been studying. After further enquiry to Kiai Kunti about Coolen's teaching, ten of the group walked for 25 hours to cover the sixty miles to Coolen's house.

Coenrad Laurens Coolen was the son of a Dutch father and a Javanese mother, who was related to one of the royal families. He combined Dutch vigour and the mysticism of Java. He became expert in the wayang, the gamelan (gong orchestra) and Javanese dance. He acquired land in Ngoro and began clearing the jungle to cultivate it. This gave him a spiritual character so that he was regarded as sakti (spiritual) by the Javanese, who were attracted to join him²³. He left his wife and five children in

²³ To enter the forest and build a settlement was regarded as a bold step that risked the enmity of the spirits. Coolen, by establishing such a community, he was identified by the Javanese as someone having peculiar spiritual power. A modern Indonesian account can be found at <http://www.pikiran->

Surabaya and lived with a Javanese woman by whom he had more children. His settlement with its wayang performances, and the prosperity of the village he established, was attractive to Javanese who came to live there. At one stage in his career, he had met the "Pious of Surabaya" who made a lasting impression on him. He began to teach the ngelmu of the prophet Jesus and the spiritual power that could come from him. He translated extemporarily from his Dutch Bible into Javanese and used the wayang to tell Bible stories. Sunday worship followed Javanese religious patterns. Hymns and prayers were intoned in the Javanese reciting style known as tembang. Converts were accepted on their recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed. Coolen rejected the sacraments ostensibly because he feared that Baptism would cause the Javanese to regard themselves as Dutch and lose their own culture.

Dasimah and his group stayed ten days at Ngoro and were instructed in the Christian faith. They returned to their village and began to practice Christianity in the same way as Coolen. Over the next five years they returned annually to Ngoro and had further instruction. From Wijung the message went out to others and many Javanese were attracted to this new ngelmu. One day Mrs Emde was talking to a tradesman in Surabaya whom she discovered knew something about Christianity. Upon enquiry he told her that there was a group in Wijung of which Dasimah, his father, was the leader. Enthusiastically the Emdes expressed their desire to meet Dasimah. The next day he was in contact with the "Pious of Surabaya".

Emde and the Pious of Surabaya were working on a very different basis to Coolen. Those who joined their congregation embraced Dutchness with Christianity. They wanted Javanese believers to cut their hair, replace the sarong with trousers and stop carrying their keris. The Malay-speaking congregation of the church worshipped in that language which the Javanese barely understood. They were town dwellers and the Javanese came from a village culture. In addition to the Javanese aspects of the Christian life in Wijung and Ngoro, Coolen's own marital situation aroused the concern of Biblical Christians. Conflict between the rival claims of Emde and Coolen was bound to occur as soon as the new believers in Wijung were in contact with both. The additional factor was the missionaries.

akyat.com/cetak/0703/10/khazanah/lainnya01.htm (accessed in 2006) "*Hutan bagi orang Jawa juga menunjukkan kesaktian seseorang apabila ia berhasil bertahan di hutan itu beberapa lama. Banyak pertapaan dibangun di tengah-tengah hutan. Pertapa yang berhasil keluar dari hutan tentulah seorang yang sakti mandraguna lantaran berhasil menaklukkan kekuatan-kekuatan jahat dalam hutan. Hutan adalah hunian roh-roh jahat, jadi harus dihindari. Inilah sebabnya ketika seorang bangsawan Jawa keturunan Rusia, Coenraad Laurens Coolen, yang meminta izin pemerintah kolonial untuk membuka hutan dan berhasil tanpa gangguan apa pun pada dirinya, ia dianggap sakti dan banyak para petani lain daerah berbondong-bondong ikut hidup di desa "percobaannya" itu. Itu terjadi sekira tahun 1835 di Ngoro dekat Surabaya*". Translation: For Javanese the forest is the sign of the spiritual power of someone if he is able to clear the jungle and stay there for a period. Much asceticism is developed in the midst of the forest. An ascetic who succeeds in escaping the forest is certainly a spiritual person, invulnerable because he has succeeded in overcoming the evil forces in the forest. The forest is haunted by evil spirits that have to be avoided. This is the reason why a noble Javanese man of Russian descent, Coenrad Laurens Coolen, who asked permission from the colonial government to open up the forest and succeeded without any difficulty, is regarded as spiritual and many farmers in the area in great numbers followed to live in that trial area. That happened in 1835 in Ngoro near Surabaya.

The first missionary to visit Wijung and Ngoro was Medhurst²⁴, another missionary from the London Missionary Society. He was a Malay speaker and knew no Javanese. He was not impressed with the two groups and seemed to have been more concerned with those areas in which they had not distinguished themselves from their neighbours than the fact that here were the first Javanese believers. The continuation of circumcision for young men entering puberty²⁵, the use of the confession “There is one God and Jesus Christ is the Spirit of God²⁶, the comparisons of Jesus to Krishna²⁷ and the use of the Javanese prophecies of the coming of a righteous king, were points that Medhurst noticed., Coolen’s own marital arrangements in particular caused Medhurst to ask him whether he was himself the recipient of grace. Brückner never visited Ngoro but did see the little group in Wijung. He was more positive about them and rejoiced in meeting for the first time a group of Javanese believers. Both Medhurst and Brückner were concerned that they should know the Christian faith more accurately. They were concerned especially about baptism. Under the influence of Emde many of the group were baptised. Coolen for many years would not allow people who had been baptised to remain in Ngoro.

The events in Java in the nineteenth century raise many issues for modern approaches to Muslim peoples. The Javanese were not classic Muslims. Traditional Javanese values and beliefs had a stronger influence. Coolen did not seek to reproduce Islamic patterns of worship but rather took aspects of Javanese culture as the vehicle for Christian worship. Bill Musk has drawn attention to the folk element in Islam in many countries²⁸.

²⁴ Medhurst left Java for China in 1842 and is chiefly known for his work there.

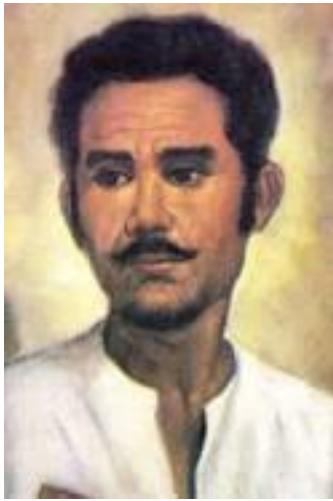
²⁵ A survey in my congregation in Central Java in 1984 showed that amongst believers there was every view represented from those who misapplied Galatians to forbid all circumcision to those who accepted circumcision in a way that differed little from their Muslim neighbours. The position of consensus that we reached was that anything Islamic was not acceptable; that circumcision should be carried out by medically qualified people and that it was acceptable to have a celebration feast. I enjoyed preaching on the circumcision of the heart to almost a complete village community. The starting of a preaching post in that village was not unrelated to this “compromise” with culture. One of my colleagues, in another church which was more opposed to circumcision, was publicly asked, as the father of three sons, whether he was circumcised as a counter to the argument that uncircumcised men could not beget children!

²⁶ There have been missionaries more recently who have advocated either the saying of part of the syahadat and stopping before the confession of Mohammad, or, for Muslim Background Believers, the replacement words, “And the prophet Isa is his Son”

²⁷ Coolen may have been wiser than he appears in these comparisons of Jesus and Krishna, since there is the argument that the Krishna legends were created as a counter to the advance of the Gospel in India rather than predating the Christian era as is usually claimed.

²⁸ Bill Musk *The Unseen Face of Islam* Monarch Publications Eastbourne 1989

Although the rest of the history of the church in East Java really belongs to a period later than the British interlude, it is convenient to conclude here the nineteenth century history of this church. The Dutch authorities, whilst not favourable to missionaries,



began to see the value of establishing more churches in Central Java for Dutch people at a time when Diponegoro, a Prince of the household of the Sultan of Jogjakarta, mounted a rebellion against colonialism between 1825-30. In other parts of Indonesia there were also rebellions. The one in the Moluccan Islands was led by Pattimura, a Christian (1817). He was executed by the Dutch but went to his death singing psalms and hymns. It is important to note that whilst



Coolen and Emde, Brückner and others were seeking to bring the Gospel to the Javanese, there had been colonial uprisings, which in Java were Islamic and syncretistic, whilst elsewhere it was the Christians who rebelled.

Paulus Tosari (1813-1882) was from Madura and he sought wisdom from Coolen. He later resided in Wijung and then in Sidoardjo. Sidoardjo became another village of believers alongside the land of Gunsch, who was one of the Pious of Surabaya. Paulus Tosari was one of those who were baptised in 1843. In 1844 he established a new village at Modjowarno near to Ngoro. Tosari was a bold evangelist who sought to bring the Gospel to his native Madura as well as to Javanese leaders. Just as Coolen had established a new settlement in which the “ngelmu” of Jesus might be taught, so other Javanese believers established new villages for the converts.

This pattern of establishing Christian villages was to continue in East Java. Dutch missions²⁹ were finally admitted and the key person in East Java was E J Jellesma. He



arrived in East Java in 1849. Two years later he moved to Modjowarno. He succeeded in bringing together the results of the work of Emde and Coolen. Before his death in 1858 he had baptised 2500 Javanese. New villages had been established throughout East Java. Javanese were trained as preachers of the Gospel. The foundations of the church were laid. It was not until the 20th century that the church really moved into the cities of East Java.

²⁹ Nederlandsche ZendingsVereniging – the Dutch Missionary Society

Other contextualised evangelism is that of Sadrach Surapranata (1835-1924) to whom David Garrison has drawn attention in his book 'A Wind in the House of Islam'³⁰. Notable was the form of building for worship that he constructed which was like that of mosques in Java, and his pattern of evangelism through protracted debates.

The Age of Modern Missions

Once the Dutch permitted mission agencies to work in Indonesia there was a lot of activity. As was the case in many other countries, parity agreements meant that different mission agencies and different denominational loyalties concentrated on specific ethnic groups.

The progress of Christianity in Indonesia can be summarised as follows:

- Timor, Manado, Moluccan Islands – from the work of the official state church. Conversions and baptisms but too few clergy so very little discipleship. Worship in Dutch and Bahasa Melayu (Indonesian)
- East Java – Bible translation into Javanese. Coolen's indigenous (syncretistic?) church. East Java church based initially in villages
- Bataks in N. Sumatra – work of German Lutheran Nommensen led to a church of 3 million today
- Toraja – evangelised by Gereformerde Missionary Bond-Holland
- Kalimantan (Borneo) Rhenish Swiss mission
- Papua – various evangelical missions
- Chinese churches - growth especially from visits of John Sung
- Many older churches linked to specific tribal groups

Indonesia has the largest Christian community in any majority Islamic country and, with some exceptions, tribal and religious groupings are not identical unlike Malaysia where Malays are Muslims and most Christians are Chinese, Indian or Tribal. Christians in Indonesia are to be found in most ethnic groups. Statistical analysis of the ethnic origin of Indonesian Christians is probably not to be trusted in that Indonesian churches treat members as Indonesians and not record their ethnic origin³¹.

Independence

May 1908 is usually regarded as the beginning of the struggle for Indonesian Independence, but in October 1928 the direction of the struggle was set at a congress of Indonesia youth which promulgated the Youth Oath (Sumpah Pemuda). This had three points:

³⁰ Garrison, David *A Wind in the House of Islam* Berlin: Wigtake resources, 2014. See also Sutarman Soediman Patronadi *Sadrach's Community and its Contextual Roots* Leiden: Brill, 1990 (which is also available in Indonesian at a much cheaper price).

³¹ American mission publications of ethnic responses to the Gospel cannot be relied on. One recorded that no one from the Dilly people of North Sumatra had ever become a Christian. I knew that I had baptised one, but her ethnic group would not be recorded in Indonesian church records!

Firstly

We the sons and daughters of Indonesia, acknowledge one motherland, Indonesia.

Secondly

We the sons and daughters of Indonesia, acknowledge to be of one nation, the nation of Indonesia.

Thirdly

We the sons and daughters of Indonesia, uphold the language of unity, Indonesian

Christians were part of this movement. After the Japanese occupation, revolutionary leaders saw that independence was nearer. As the allies' victory seemed assured, they realised that there would be a short opportunity for a declaration of Independence. On 1st June 1945 Sukarno gave his Pancasila speech setting out the five principles of the new nation – Pancasila.

1. Belief in one supreme God
2. Just and civilised humanity
3. Indonesian unity
4. Consultative democracy
5. Social Justice

Japan surrendered on 15th August 1945, and Indonesians believe that God gave them the short gap before the Allies re-entered Indonesia, so that Independence could be declared on 17th August 1945. There was a turbulent period of conflict as the Netherlands and their allies sought to regain control until they agreed to Independence on November 7th, 1949, which was effective from 29th December 1949.

The period of Sukarno continued until 1965 with varying experiences for Christians in Indonesia as he sought to establish a united nation amidst the competing factions not only in Indonesia but also in the world order. Many Christians were active in political life as is illustrated by perhaps the most outstanding among them, Johannes Leimena.

Johanes Leimena (1905-77)

Leimena is probably the most outstanding example of an Indonesian Christian's participation in the political life of Indonesia.

Born in Ambon, he grew up in Cimahi and Jakarta. He studied medicine and worked at Immanuel Hospital Bandung. He served in the Indonesian navy from 1945. Appointed Minister of Health from 1955 and Deputy Prime Minister in Sukarno's 1960 cabinet. He was one of the longest serving ministers in successive cabinets. Chairman of Parkindo (Indonesian Christian Party).

The Leimena Institute named after him continues Christian political and social engagement and has worked with several leading Imams to develop cross-community understanding within Indonesia and the popularisation of moderate Indonesian Islam worldwide.

Christians were part of the nation building and during this period churches disassociated themselves from links with Holland. The establishment of the Council of Churches in 1950, affiliated to the World Council of Churches, was not only part of the theological and ecclesiastical ecumenism found worldwide but also part of the movement to establish a united nation by breaking down the barriers between churches that were based in ethnic divisions. This was also in the context of some Christians being involved in separatist movements like the South Moluccan Republic (RMS) which was also formed in 1950 and did not cease completely until 1966 when the majority of the remaining followers moved to Holland.

The final years of Sukarno saw the advance of communism throughout the archipelago with Communist cadres being established in many areas. During this period, it was expected that Communism would spread successfully throughout Southeast Asia domino fashion and this alarmed many Christians.

Suharto (1965-98)

Suharto seized power from Sukarno in 1965 to avert a supposed attempted Communist coup. He established a military dictatorship which lasted till 1998. This was a period of stability because of strict controls. Church growth continued. Christians and Catholics held positions in government which sometimes caused Muslim resentment³². Some Christians involved in government did not realise the corruption that was at the heart of it. The beginning of the Suharto era was the time of the "Indonesian Revival".

³² At one period the Minister of Defence, the Heads of the Army and the Secret Police were all either Christians or Catholics

The Indonesian Revival

In the mid 1960s there occurred what has been termed 'the Indonesian revival'. Two separate happenings are often erroneously collated. In the aftermath of the supposed coup, many people found themselves considering what they believed. There was a re-emphasis on the first point of Pancasila = belief in one God and everyone was required to have a religion. Not to believe was equated with identifying as a Communist, now proscribed. Many had forsaken Islam as they followed the Communist ideology and did not want to return to it, Villages particularly in Java would meet to decide what they would believe and identify with. Many would then seek out a pastor or missionary to make the move to becoming Christians. There were insufficient personnel to disciple them all and how deep or sincere the conversion was has been questioned. In the late seventies a research project in Central Java found that many who had converted at that time had left Christianity to follow Javanese mystical sects stating that they had not found a depth of spirituality in Christianity. However, despite these reservations during the mid to late sixties the number of Christians in Indonesia grew. It has been suggested that some of those who converted at this time had been secret disciples previously.

At the same time in West Timor many miraculous events were reported. These were popularised in the West by books like Mel Tari's *Like a mighty wind* (London: Coverdale House, 1973). Questions have been asked about the veracity of every detail of this account, but a spiritual outpouring in the church during the sixties cannot be denied with some events still being reported in the seventies.

Supernatural events continue to be part of Indonesian Christian life and particularly in accounts of conversions from Islam where often visions and dreams begin the journey to Christian belief. On other occasions there are direct confrontation with occult powers.

Under Suharto

In general, this was a time of stability when the Christian church could grow and flourish. Various restraints were put on Christian evangelism but these often paralleled similar restrictions on Muslims. During these years an Indonesian Evangelical Fellowship was formed in 1971 and an Indonesian Pentecostal Fellowship in 1979. They reflect both the growing diversity of church life in Indonesia and also alignments with movements reflective of movements in other parts of the world.

In 1974 a new translation of the scriptures was published making them more accessible to many people.

After Suharto

Since Suharto was ousted in 1998 Presidents were now elected by universal suffrage.

- 1 May 1998 – 20 October 1999 B J Habibie

- 20 October 1999 – 23 July 2001 Abdulrahman Wahid aka Gus Dur
- 23 July 2001 – 20 October 2004 Megawati Sukarnoputri
- 2004-2014 – Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono
- 2014-2024 Joko Widodo
- 2024 - date Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo

In the immediate aftermath of the ending of Suharto's regime, the relaxation of controls coinciding with the increase of aggressive forms of Islam from the Middle East led to serious persecution of Christians. In the Moluccan Islands the tradition of *pele* that governed relations between Muslim and Christian villages broke down and many Christians lost their lives.

Summary

Why is there such a large Christian community in Indonesia?

- Continual Christian presence since the seventh century with many indigenous developments alongside missionary work from outside
- Christians took part in the growth of nationalism and the independence movement
- Pancasila protected the right to believe in One God as Christians and Catholics
- Conflict with Holland (1945-49) separated many churches from their colonial inheritance and gave them an Indonesian identity
- It is not non-Indonesian to be a Christian
- Converts have a viable identifiable community to join
- Indonesian Islam is, in the main, tolerant of other faiths
- Significant providential and spiritual events
- With some notable exceptions religious and ethnic divisions do not overlap

The future of Christianity in Indonesia is bound up with the strength of the community whose full potential is still to be realised.

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