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Book Reviews

Schröter, Susanne (ed.) (2011), *Christianity in Indonesia: Perspectives of Power*, Münster: LIT VERLAG

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The idea for this volume formed part of a conference on “Christianity in Indonesia: Perspectives of Power” held on 12-14 December 2003 at Goethe-University of Frankfurt, Germany (in cooperation with the University of Leiden). This conference brought together leading academics to discuss and debate the history and development of Christianity in Indonesia with particular attention to its interaction with local culture and traditions (*adat*). Several papers from the conference, along with some later additions, were combined to produce this volume addressing the broader theme of the understandings and dynamics of power in relation to the Christian community in Indonesia.

The book does not seek to comprehensively cover Christianity in Indonesia, and is largely confined to mainstream Protestant and Catholic communities, rather than Pentecostal or evangelical groups that are newer by comparison. The focus of the book on power is conceived broadly and not confined to one particular theory of power. It is an interdisciplinary volume with a concentration that is two-fold, as reflected in the division of the volume into two sections. The first part contains contributions that look at the history of Christian mission in Indonesia and examine the interaction between Christianity and local cultures. The second part focuses on more recent conflicts, religious rhetoric, and the challenge of pluralism, with a particular focus on Eastern Indonesia, including East Nusa Tenggara, Maluku, and Central and North Sulawesi.

The overarching themes of these two parts are identified by the editor, Professor Susanne Schröter, in the introductory chapter. She begins with the predicament and position Christians have found themselves in since 1998, primarily as both “victim and perpetrator” in conflict with Muslim communities. Schröter highlights local causes in these religious conflicts, in part to counter the narrative of “an allegedly disadvantaged Muslim majority, associating Christians with economic exploitation and a lack of morals” (14). She then puts these more recent tensions in historical context by examining Christianity in the colonial era, including its interaction with other religions (namely Islam) and *adat* (local traditions). In relation to the later, she identifies “significant differences between Protestant and Catholic mission areas” (25) in terms of approaches to *adat*, which other chapters in this volume expand on in more detail. She highlights the way in which Christians’ at-

tained power by achieving high positions in government, economics, and the military.

The essential questions at the heart of this volume can be summarised in three ways: what is the relationship between Christianity and indigenous cultures in Indonesia, past and present? How can the process of conversion to Christianity be characterised in light of culture? What influence did Christianity have on Muslims' communities, and to what extent is proselytisation an ongoing cause of conflict today? Schröter introduces the chapters that follow by conceptualising religion as a force for mobilisation, as a source of collective identity, and as a means of social affiliation, all of which have important implications for pluralism in Indonesia.

Part 1 begins with a chapter by Olaf Schumann on the history, emergence, and establishment of Christianity in the Malay-speaking world. This chapter divides the history of Christianity in the Malay-speaking world into three main periods: prior to 1800; 1800 to independence (Indonesia in 1945, Malaysia in 1963); and since independence. Schumann traces the history of Christian mission alongside Portuguese conquest in Eastern Indonesia, the limits to its growth and its eventual demise to the Dutch VOC (Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie, Dutch United East Indies Company). He captures the sharp distinction between Protestants and Catholics by highlighting the feelings of enmity between the Portuguese and the Dutch after the takeover of Indonesia by the VOC which supported the Reformed Church. He argues that the primary motivation of the VOC was trade, not religion. The close relationship between the VOC and Christianity, however, meant that "Christianity was first and foremost perceived as *agama Kompeni* or *agama Belanda*, that is, the religion of the Company or the faith of the Dutch" (46-47).

He then looks at the changes to the development of Christianity after the demise of the VOC and the arrival of missionaries from the NZG (Nederlandsche Zending Genootschap, Netherlands Missionary Society) in the early 1800s. He identifies two key reasons for the emergence of "tribal" churches: Christian mission was prohibited from working in "Muslim" areas; and missionary organisations were only given permits to work in certain geographical areas, the boundaries of which were usually determined by ethnicity. Schumann highlights the difference in understandings of the connection between religion and *adat*, as the distinction which Europeans drew between the two was "alien" to Indonesians (68). Then he goes on to examine ways that indigenous churches developed through the education of indigenous preachers, and particularly because of the pivotal event of the Japanese occupation, when churches effectively became autonomous as all communication was cut with overseas mission societies and churches. He

also discusses the establishment of Christianity in Malaysia, highlighting the greater success of Anglicans (British), Catholics and Protestants (Lutheran) amongst non-Malays, that is, Indians and Chinese.

After this broad historical overview, Part 1 then contains several chapters addressing particular issues or contexts in terms of mission activities and indigenous cultures. For example, Karel Steenbrink addresses the topic of Christianity and development in Indonesia. He sets out to examine the increase in, and the reasons behind, aid to churches from the 1960s to 1980s. He analyses who directed where aid was channelled, the effects of this funding on the church, and the influence the end of this aid had in the 1980s. Despite the fact that these projects were largely determined by European churches or mission institutions during this period, he argues that development was confirmed as a legitimate goal of the church during this period. Steenbrink illustrates his argument by five specific projects primarily involving the Catholic Church. He shows how some of these projects, such as the 357 projects on agriculture, education and healthcare funded by Germans in Flores, were an attempt to provide an alternative to Communism. The focus on health and education was also a feature of other programs, such as those run by the Dutch. He singles out some prominent individuals as an example of “the search of the religious orders for new paths in the 1970s, particularly in the sphere of social work” (128). He is nevertheless conscious of the unequal power relations between European churches and Indonesian church, and the corrupt practises that often fed off these projects.

Other chapters in Part 1 focus on the tension between the indigenisation of Christianity and the practise of rejecting local traditions in order to embrace Christianity. The chapter by Schröter, for example, emphasises the dynamics of local traditions and the interplay with Catholicism in Flores. She highlights the way Catholics in that area distinguish between *adat* (tradition) and *agama* (religion), in order to allow both to co-exist. In contrast, the chapter by Raymond Corbey explores practises of “missionary vandalism”, that is, the agency of both missionaries and natives in destroying idols in order to embrace Christianity. He details common approaches of destroying idols through a wide range of historical examples across the archipelago, although he concludes that Protestants and Catholics not only “fought” against local traditions in this way, but also amongst each other.

Part 2 then turns to look at more recent examples of local conflicts, particularly between Islam and Christianity. Susanne Rodemeier’s chapter on religious communities in East Nusa Tenggara demonstrates the difference in approaches to local traditions within the Christianity community. She examines the telling of a local story about shared origins as a way of promoting religious tolerance, and the way this myth has lost power due to pro-

cesses of transmigration and resettlement. She finds that while Catholics and Muslims in the area have generally been tolerant towards *adat*, Protestants by comparison have not.

There are two chapters that deal with the Maluku Islands. Birgit Bräuchler's chapter is particularly interesting for its analysis of the role of the Internet in religious conflict. She argues that the Internet "facilitates diverse identity projects that involve religion as a significant identity marker" (222). She explores how the Maluku conflict of 1999 to 2001 also involved the online narratives of cyberactors who further incited religious hatred and violence. In the end, however, she concludes that the dynamics of the Internet have also enabled it to channel attempts at reconciliation since the end of the conflict.

Shifting the geographical focus to Central Sulawesi, Lorraine Aragon examines the conflict and religious rivalry between Muslims and Christians in Poso, and the influence of changes brought about by transmigration. She links motivations for this conflict, and for specific actions such as the burning of churches, to an attempt to exclude and deny Christians from the nation-state. She examines the way citizenship in Indonesia has in part come to be defined by religion and the way this conception of citizenship is used to promote "exclusivist visions of nationalism" (274). She ultimately conceives of such conflicts as an indication of the "failure of the Indonesian nationalist project" (274).

The other chapter on Sulawesi is a detailed analysis by Sven Kosel of calls by paramilitary Minahasa groups of North Sulawesi for independence. He charts the close involvement of Minahasa leaders in the foundations of the state, and demonstrates that the Minahasa (Christian) elite ruled the provincial political scene under the New Order, despite the fact that the province included similar numbers of Minahasa (Christians) and Gorontalo (Muslims). He highlights how these numbers have since changed due to the decentralisation of power and the creation of new provinces, regencies and cities along ethnic/religious lines.

The final two chapters address the concerning issue of the decline in tolerance towards religious minorities in Indonesia. The chapter by Hasan Noorhaidi, the only Indonesian contributor to the volume, examines the hostile discourse of radical Muslims towards Christians during the first few turbulent years of the transition to democracy. He identifies the emergence of key themes in this discourse, including calls for jihad, anti-America sentiment, and Zionist conspiracy theories. The final chapter by the prominent, Indonesian-based Catholic scholar Frans Magnis-Suseno highlights the role of the Indonesian Ulama Council in shaping the debate on tolerance. He argues that the *fatwa* (Islamic legal opinions) issued in 2005 against Ahmadi-

yah, a minority Islamic sect, and more broadly against pluralism, have led to confusion over this term. He characterises the Indonesian Ulama Council's denunciation of "pluralism" as the idea that "all religions are of equal value" and will therefore all get to heaven. Instead, he argues for the redefinition of pluralism as the "willingness to at least accept the existence of the others".

In conclusion, this book is an invitation to rethink and review the history of Christianity in Indonesia, and its interactions with local beliefs and other religions, particularly Islam. This volume makes an important contribution to the intersection between local cultures, Islam and Christianity in Indonesia. The themes of religion, tradition, and conflict in this book make it relevant to comparative work in other contexts. This book will inform and inspire students and scholars alike to engage in the critical study of notions of power amongst religious communities and the influence of Christianity on Indonesia as a plural democratic state.

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