

# BOOK REVIEW

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**Karel A. Steenbrink. *Catholics in Independent Indonesia: 1945–2010*. Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal, Land en Volkenkunde, vol. 298. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015. 636 pp.**

This third volume completes the historical research on Catholics in Indonesia. The first volume, *Catholics in Indonesia, 1808–1900: A Documented History* came out in 2003, and the second volume in 2007, *Catholics in Indonesia, 1808–1942: A Documented History (Volume 2: The Spectacular Growth of a Self-Confident Minority, 1903–1942)*.

What makes the third volume so different is that it deals with the Catholics in Independent Indonesia. The previous two volumes dealt with the revival of the Catholic presence in the 19th century and the growth of Catholicism in the 20th century up to the end of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia.

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Besides the differences of the stage and development of the Catholic community in colonial and independent Indonesia, there is still sufficient continuity in its continuing growth and specific identity in various regions of Indonesia. The spread of Catholicism in the waste archipelago that was united under the Dutch colonial administration and under the centralized Indonesian government during the Sukarno and Suharto period in the young independent Indonesia was outstanding but very unequal. We have regions with a dominant Catholic community, like Flores Island, in Central Timor and the Southern part of West Papua. More typical for Indonesia as a whole is the presence of the Catholic community, with its educational institutions as a minority religion in most parts of the archipelago, like in Sulawesi, Kalimantan, Sumatra, and especially in the most populated core island of Indonesia Java.

The author has organized his work in two parts. The first seven chapters deal with national issues, like *Religion in Indonesian Politics between Pancasila and Shari'a*; *The Internal Affairs of the Catholic Community*; *The Clergy from Religious Orders to a Spirituality of Diocesan Priests*; *Nuns and Lay Brothers*; *The Secular Basis of a Religion: Education, Health Care, Welfare and Development Work*; *Social Engagement and the Spirituality of the Laity*; and finally, *Creative Thinkers, Writers, Artists, Theological Proposals and Debates*.

The second part consists of eight chapters on *Regional Surveys* and focuses on the stage and development of the Catholic community in various parts of Indonesia. It starts with *The Struggle of Catholicism in Flores* in chapter 8, followed by the situation of Catholicism on *Timor and Sumba* in chapter 9. Chapter 10 deals with *Papuan Society in Search of its Identity between Dutch and Indonesian Domination*. Chapter 11 is on *The Heavy Burden of the Religious Fragmentation and Geographical Isolation of the Moluccas*. Chapter 12 deals with *Minorities in Sulawesi*, and chapter 13 has as its topic the situation of the Catholic community in multi-religious Kalimantan. *The Catholic Diaspora of Sumatra* is dealt with in chapter 14. Chapter 15 deals with the Catholic presence in *Java and Bali*.

Since the second volume of Steenbrink's trilogy on the history of Catholicism in Indonesia ends in 1942, the third volume also covers in its first chapters the years of Japanese occupation between 1942 and 1945, during the so-called Pacific war. The following years from 1945 to 1949 were years of transition, filled with the attempts of the Dutch colonizers to re-establish their pre-war colonial control over the country and the fight of Indonesians for

independence. The Declaration of Independence took place on August 17, 1945, and after years of its struggle for independence, the Netherlands recognized the Independence of its former colony on December 27, 1949. The Catholic Church, its leaders and members had to find a new place in independent Indonesia. Steenbrink's third volume, like the previous volumes, makes it very clear that there was never a unique Indonesian common cultural reality, but the cultural and religious reality and its further development differed greatly in the various regions of the Indonesian archipelago. But the island of Java, with over half of the population, is the most central and important island of Indonesia. The capital Jakarta in Java was called *Batavia* in colonial times, and played an extremely important role for the administration of the country – but even more so in independent Indonesia, since it is the center of power and political decision-making in the nation. Meanwhile, the archdiocese of Jakarta counts half a million Catholics, which is just 2.6 % of the population of the capital of 20 million people. Nationwide, Catholics make up around 2.9% of the 260 million inhabitants of Indonesia, compared to 7% Protestants, 1.9% Hindus, and 87. 2% Muslims. Only in 1998 was Buddhism declared an official religion; around 1% of Indonesians of Chinese descent are Buddhists. The Catholics and Protestants together make up 10% of the national population. Up to the 1960s, their interactions were characterized by suspicion and rivalry. Only since the renewal of the Second Vatican Council has a new spirit of building fraternal relationships developed.

The distribution of Catholics in Indonesia is very unequal and this reflects the very different spread of the Catholic religion in the different regions of the country. The Dutch colonizers did not allow double missions in one region, so that Celebes, nowadays Sulawesi and Sumatra, was open for Protestant missions. The Catholic Church could serve only their expatriate members on those islands up to the 1930s. Therefore, real Catholic missionary work in Sulawesi, Sumatra, and Kalimantan (Borneo) started relatively late. The only great exception was the Island of Flores, Central Timor, and Southern Papua, where Catholic missionary work among the local population was possible from the first years of the 20th century. Christian missionary work among the Hindu population in Bali Island was prohibited up to the 1930s by the Dutch administration. The colonial administration used its power to prohibit or favor certain religions. Beneficiaries of this policy were normally the dominant religion of the region, like Islam in Java and Hinduism in Bali. Catholicism in Flores also benefited from the

support of the colonial administration. The official Pancasila ideology of the Indonesian government under Sukarno, and later under Suharto, was warmly embraced and favored by the Catholics, since it guaranteed the status of Catholic religion in the country besides Islam, Protestantism, and Hinduism as the dominant religion. The widespread Indigenous tribal religion was excluded from the politically protected five official religions in Indonesia. Many of those still remaining indigenous, non-recognized communities in the country opted either for Hinduism or Catholicism with the hope that these two religions would allow them to keep their religious-cultural identity. In fact, the Catholic Church, to a great extent, was more open to the religious-cultural traditions of converting members of ethnic communities compared to the more rigid attitude of Protestant churches in this matter. The 61 pages in this volume on *The Struggle of Catholicism on Flores* (pp. 237–97) should be read together with Chapter 3, *Flores: Efforts to Create a Modern and Christian Society* in volume 2 of Steenbrink's trilogy on Catholicism in Indonesia since it is a continuation of the history of Catholicism in this most Catholic Island of Indonesia. The same can be said for the chapters on other regions or islands in the two volumes.

The very special situation of historical development in Western Papua in Independent Indonesia, treated in Chapter 10, *Papuan Society in Search of its Identity between Dutch and Indonesian Domination* (pp. 323–63), is in itself very insightful for any reader from Indonesia and from other parts of the world. Here the author was, even more than in the other chapters of this volume, challenged to handle the Catholics' part in a society which, only in 1963, was integrated into independent Indonesia in an impartial and objective way. Since, looking at the history of Catholics in West Papua, the integration into independent Indonesia can be seen from very different perspectives, depending on the side the onlooker takes: the perspective of the indigenous Papuan people or the perspective of the Indonesian central government claiming the right to integrate the Western half of New Guinea Island into larger Indonesia. A former rector of the Catholic Seminary in Abepura near Jayapura in former Irian Jaya, now West Papua, has called the policy of the Indonesian central government, a process of making of the Papuans "aborigines." Papua Peace Network (JDP) coordinator and Catholic priest, the late Dr. Neles Tebay (1964–2019), who defended his doctoral thesis on "The Reconciling Mission of the Church in West Papua in the light of 'Reconciliatio et paenitentia'" in 2006 in the faculty of missiology of the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome, is one of the most outspoken Papuans

in the fight of the Papuan people for more justice and participation in the administration of their country in West Papua. In 2006, he wrote: “Although they [the Papuans] have lived under Indonesian rule for more than 40 years, Papuans have never been given an opportunity to become agents of their own development and bring about social transformation in their land. This is because the government usually decides on development policies and forces Papuans to accept them. Any criticism voiced by Papuans is regarded as an expression of separatism. Their opinions are usually ignored by the government and their voices silenced by the security forces” (*Interfaith Endeavours for Peace in West Papua* [2006], 55). The so-called *transmigration* policy, that is settling people from other parts of Indonesia, mainly Javanese and Muslims, is another policy which created a new reality among the dwellers of West Papua, where the indigenous Papuans are becoming only the second largest community in their own land. The profit of the rich resources explored with the help of multinational companies by the central government are not shared with the Papuans as the rightful landowners. The author does not mention the big number of West Papuans who fled to Papua New Guinea’s Western Province and the capital district Port Moresby. In 2000, Franco Zocca, a sociologist who worked for many years in Indonesia and at the Melanesian Institute in Goroka, Papua New Guinea, writes: “One could summarily say that all the efforts of the Indonesian administration during the last 35 years were aimed at the forced and speedy integration of Irian Jaya [West Papua] with the rest of the Indonesian nation. The efforts were also based on the conviction that the Papuan people were backward and ignorant and their customs primitive and barbaric . . . All traditional cultures had to be subordinated to the national unity and interest” (“The Plight of Papuans in Irian Jaya (1963–1998),” in *Catalyst* 30.1 [2000]: 79). From 1963 to 1998, around 20,000 West Papuans have sought refuge in Papua New Guinea.

Besides these rarely touched issues, the whole third volume of Steenbrink’s trilogy on Catholicism in Indonesia is an outstandingly well-researched, -written, and -documented publication on Catholics in independent Indonesia in the period of 1945 to 2010. Steenbrink has not written a history of the Catholic Church in Indonesia which is mainly interested in the history of the hierarchy and the ecclesiastical organizational units, like the Apostolic Vicariates and dioceses. We can be grateful to the author that he developed a new approach of writing on the various members of the Catholic community or Catholicism in

Indonesia and the various actors in its history, like the Catholic politicians, artists, thinkers, and writers, and he has given the laity's participation in shaping Catholicism in this Asian nation its rightful place. Nevertheless, Steenbrink explains well the non-Indonesian and Indonesian clergy and religious participation in creating the Indonesian identity of the Catholic community in Indonesia, which as he showed so well, has many features and expressions according to the specific social-cultural and economic development in the various regions of this huge nation. Steenbrink explained well the secular basis of the educational, health care, welfare, and development activities of the Catholic Church in Indonesia, which has always played a significant role in Indonesia, far beyond its numeric size. The renewal movement the Second Vatican Council has also allowed local and expatriate theologians in Indonesia to promote a more inculturated liturgy and contextualized church life. Steenbrink's strength is that he always describes the development of the Catholic church and its members in the context of its other religions especially Islam and traditional religiosity.

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