

Holiness in a Pluralistic Indonesian Society

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Introduction

The title of this paper is so interesting to be investigated because it contains two important items in theological research: holiness and pluralism. Holiness for the holiness church movement is an interesting subject to be discussed, but to the non-holiness church movement, there is still a big question: is there a possibility of being holy in this world? On the other side there is pluralism. It has been an important thing, because we are living in a pluralistic world in regard to cultures, religions, customs, etc. This paper will discuss especially “Holiness in a Pluralistic Indonesian Society.” It is concerned with how the holiness doctrine can be possibly taught in the midst of the Indonesian pluralistic society which is plural culturally and religiously. Several things that will be discussed are pluralism in culture, religion and within Christianity, and the challenges faced in teaching the doctrine of holiness.

Pluralism in Culture

Indonesian society is a pluralistic society (heterogen). Heterogeneity can be seen from the 500 various tribes contained in it. Each tribe has its own language. Of course, each tribe has its own culture or customs which are different from others. For example, I come from a tribe in Indonesia named Ambon of East Indonesia. The Ambonesse generally are straightforward in telling something. They do not hide it in their heart. It is usual for them, and people have no sensitivity to their words or opinion. But it is different with the Javanese where I live. The Javanese generally do not like telling something straightforwardly. To understand what is in their mind is quite difficult, because their sayings are so different from what they want. So, we do not know for certain what they want. It is different with Ambonesse—what they say is what is in their heart. There are many things that cannot be explained here. If there are 500 tribes in Indonesia, possibly there are also 500 different cultures and there might be 500 different languages beside the Indonesian language.

Besides the various indigenous and heterogenous cultures, Indonesia has also experienced “imported” culture. Western culture, which came along with colonialism, has influenced the behavior and worldview of a part of Indonesian society. There are positive things that can be drawn from western culture, but there are also bad things brought by Europeans to Indonesia, like drunkenness, free sex, and extreme individualism. This has influenced a part of Indonesian society, especially the big cities and the Eastern part of Indonesia (Irian Jaya, Mollucas, North Celebes and Southeast Nusa) which was closely associated with the colonialists.

This Western imported culture can be increasingly seen day by day not only in the big cities, but also in suburban areas. It is also influenced rapidly by globalization, which is not anticipated by strong moral posture along with the long monetary crisis. Drugs, organized free sex, and unfaithful marriages have been an integral part of Indonesian society. So, the “indigenous” culture has been abandoned with this culture. In Java Island where Nazarene churches grow, we always encounter this

imported culture more than Indonesian indigenous culture.

Pluralism in Religion

In the context of nation, state and civil societal affairs, what is called religion has been maintained since the 1945 Constitution. The five official religions are regulated by the Religion Department of the Republic of Indonesia. Those religions are Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Beside that, Indonesia also has tribal religions maintained by the Culture Department. The tribal religions are not counted as religion, but rather as spiritual culture of the nation.¹

In this sense, Indonesia is considered a religious nation. This concept is based on five important things, described by Victor I. Tanja as follows:² First, it believes in One God. Second, it is Universal. Third, it was revealed. Fourth, it has a prophet. Fifth, it has Holy Scripture. These five principles have been accommodated implicitly in the state foundation, Pancasila, in its first article: the divinity oneness. The divinity oneness, according to Pancasila, has accommodated every religion in it. In the divinity oneness, every religion is considered to have the same position. In other words, every religion worships the same God. This attitude implicitly promotes a compromise in the field of doctrines. But actually, only Christianity is the divine religion and is different from other religions which mostly include man's effort in its beliefs.

Pluralism in Christianity

The pluralistic scene is seen not only in culture and inter-religions, but also can be seen in Christianity itself. Christian Society is separated into at least three different institutions with churches affiliated with them. Indonesia Churches Fellowship (Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia, PGI) is the oldest institution and has more members than other institutions. The second is Indonesia Evangelical Fellowship (Persekutuan Injili Indonesia, PII) which accommodates the churches calling themselves "evangelical." In it there is the Nazarene Christian Church. The third is Indonesia Pentecostal Council (Dewan Pentakosta di Indonesia). This institution is the official institution for charismatic and Pentecostal churches.

Beside this pluralistic scene in Christianity in Indonesia, we also know that Christianity is also plural in its doctrines. There are the Calvinists, which are the biggest group in Indonesia. Indonesian Christian history began with the coming of Europeans to Indonesia for the purpose of merchandising. The Dutch, who were adherents of Calvinism, came to Indonesia to bring not only merchandise mission, but also religious mission. They oppressed Indonesia for 350 years, so of course Calvinism has influenced Indonesian Churches greatly. Calvinism is found in the "oldest" churches and also in evangelical churches. Wesleyan-Arminians have become a minority group in Indonesia. The numbers of denominations that adhere to this teaching are only four denominations: Methodist, Nusantara Evangelical Christian Church, Wesleyan Church of Indonesia and Nazarene Christian Church. Admittedly, there are Pentecostal and Charismatic churches which have the same teaching, but

¹Victor I. Tanja, *Pluralitas dan Pembangunan di Indonesia* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1996), 24.

²Ibid.

practically especially in liturgy they differ from Wesleyan teaching. Among those four denominations, in my opinion, only Nazarene churches strictly practice the teaching of Wesley-Arminianism. Even in its number of members and church buildings, the Nazarene denomination has more than others do. There are also other movements which are flourishing, like the Seventh-day Adventists, Mormons, Christian Science and other movements.

The plurality in Indonesia is so complex. This scene is followed by a tolerant attitude. This attitude is an important element in our national life. A tolerant attitude has been practiced within religions and between religions. Government has regulated the practice of this attitude in an Act. This condition has made it possible for a Christian to express his or her faith freely. On other side, religious tolerance also has become an obstacle to inhibit evangelism.

The specific tolerance is found also in Christianity itself. As explained before, there are many doctrinal understandings within Christianity, especially in Protestantism. Beside that, Calvinism has strong influence upon Christian life in Indonesia. There are several factors, which cause this phenomenon. First, Calvinistic churches have been in Indonesia since the sixteenth century and have occupied almost every island, city, and region. Second, many Calvinistic church members have high positions in the government, so they have great influence in society. Third, Calvinism has saturated the life of Christian society. Consequently, the churches on the outside of Calvinism, including Nazarene churches, find difficulties and obstacles to change the teaching which has been rooted for long time from generation to generation among Indonesian Christian society. So, the first thing to do is to tolerate their doctrine in order that we will not face rejection.

Besides Calvinism, Indonesia in recent years has been greatly influenced by the Charismatic movement. Substantially, the Charismatic movement is almost the same with Nazarene in the teaching of holiness and baptism of the Holy Spirit. The difference among them is what we call manifestations of the Spirit. Nazarene churches believe that men and women who are filled by the Holy Spirit will so be recognized by their daily life practices according to Galatians 5:22-23. On the other hand, the Charismatic movement tends to emphasize manifestations of the Spirit in the form of speaking in tongues.

So, the problem of pluralism is not found only in culture and inter-religions, but also in Christianity itself. The pluralistic scene had been a unique mark of Indonesia. It can be seen from its motto: "Bhineka Tunggal Ika" which means, "We are different to one another, but we are one."

The Challenges in Teaching Holiness Doctrine

The Nazarene church came to Indonesia in 1975. In her quite mature age, the Nazarene church can be found on four big islands of Indonesia: Java, Sumatera, Irian Jaya, and Bali. These four big Islands represent twelve provinces and fifty churches. In her history, there were so many challenges and obstacles Nazarene churches faced in their effort to present the teaching of John Wesley, especially regarding to the doctrine of holiness.

The efforts to present and proclaim the doctrine of holiness in Indonesia were not so easy. The problem is that the attitude of tolerance is so strong among Indonesia society. We face challenges both from outside and inside. The outside challenges come from other religions, Indonesia culture, and western culture which had been imported to Indonesia. The inside challenges are related to strong Calvinistic convictions, the Charismatic movement which emphasizes an extreme manifestation of the Spirit, and an imbalance between theory and its practical aspect in the lives of members of the Nazarene church.

The Outside Challenges

A. The Tolerance Attitude

As explained before, the religions in Indonesia are regulated by the 1945 Constitution. Since the religions are regulated by the Constitution, all adherents of the religions must maintain tolerant attitudes toward others. This attitude of tolerance has been a great challenge for Nazarenes. The tolerance has been considered a means to control the mission activities of the religions.³ Even according to Frans Magnis Suseno, an Indonesian Catholic philosopher, “all religion are similar and we have to appreciate and accept them as what they are with a tolerance attitude.”⁴ That means the teaching of a religion can be found in other religions in the same substances.⁵ He wrote also, “their goals are not differ from others, but only their ways which differ.”⁶

Based on the above opinion, it is certain that to teach Wesley’s Teaching is too difficult. On the other hand, different holiness teaching is also found in every religion in Indonesia. For the Moslem, the holy life can be gotten by pilgrimage to Mecca, Fasting, and Jihad.⁷ In Hinduism, we know what they called YOGA. For Hindus, Yoga means learn to do good works, for example, abstaining from worldly pleasures, honest, living holy life, etc.⁸ In Buddhism, the doctrine of holiness does not have a special emphasis, but we know what they call as “ethic.” In the ethic, we can find exhortations that teach practical things about holiness. For example, the command not to do sexual sins.

So, the tolerant attitude has been a serious threat for the growth of Christianity. The problem will appear if we try to present what we believe. We will be accused as breakers of the attitude of tolerance.

B. The Imported Culture

Since long ago Indonesia has had the highest ethical values in her society life. These highest moral values have been held on to until now by a part of its society, especially the older generation. But along with the change of ages, there has been a degradation and distortion in ethics in society. It is because Indonesia is entering a new age which is called the age of globalization and technology. On the one hand, it brings a joy for we can be well and rapidly informed about new trends. But on the other hand, this rapid rush of information is not anticipated with enough spiritual alertness, so things which are “taboo” for this society have become normal things. Free sex is practiced. Every where from metropolis to villages, people have become accustomed with this new lifestyle. Marital unfaithfulness

³Emmanuel G. Singgih, *Berteologi dalam Konteks* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2000), 68.

⁴Frans Magnis Suseno, *Filsafat Kebudayaan Politik* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1995), 83.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 82.

⁷Mahmoud Mustafa Ayoub, *Mengurai Konflik Muslim Kristen dalam Perspektif Islam* (Jogjakarta: Fajar Pustaka Baru, 2001), 155.

⁸A.G. Honig, *Ilmu Agama* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1987), 134.

now can be enjoyed as an entertainment. Young men and women are addicted to every kind of drug.

These behaviors apparently are not the inheritance of Indonesia. These behaviors are happening because there is an imported culture. These can be drawn easily because there is a borderless world of information. Beside that, TV and the Internet have become a threat to the moral life of Indonesian Society.

In the churches, pastors do not unceasingly preach the dangers which are coming to these present young people. In my ministry to 90% of the young people in Philadelphia Nazarene Church, I found in certain cases that the young people are facing difficulties trying to free themselves from the trap of this imported culture. Internet stations have made it possible for young men and women to access pornographic resources with just paying several thousand rupiah. Several of them are entrapped to using drugs. This phenomenon has a new trend in Indonesian society, especially among young men and woman. These are the challenges faced by the Nazarene church in her effort to teach and preach the doctrine of holiness.

The Inside Challenges

What I mean by inside challenges are challenges which come from within the church itself. As we know, many churches in Indonesia hold to Calvinism and are the biggest party in Indonesia. Beside that, challenges come from the Charismatic movement which emphasizes outward manifestations of the Spirit, different from the Nazarene teaching.

A. The Calvinists

The Calvinists have been the biggest party in Indonesia churches. They believe in holiness, but the holiness they believe in is positional holiness. Their opinion about holiness is that when a man or woman receives Christ, he or she is sanctified, because Christ is holy. But this holiness is not holiness in character or practice for that man or woman.⁹ According to them, as long as a believer lives, it is impossible for him or her to walk a holy and perfect life. A holy and perfect life can be attained only when a believer meets with his or her Creator.

B. The Charismatics

The Charismatic movement in this decade has grown rapidly in Indonesia. Charismatics also hold and believe the holiness doctrine as Wesley taught. However, in their practice, any one who is filled by the Holy Spirit has to experience the gift of the Spirit so it can be seen by others. According to Jongeneel, sanctification for Charismatics has to be followed by the baptism of the Spirit, which is manifested and seen by others.¹⁰

These two challenges and obstacles are serious things that have to be thought by Wesleyan pastors and theologians, especially for the Nazarenes in Indonesia. In answering these challenges, I will propose several ideas and suggestions which hopefully can help the Wesleyans to minimize the distortion in our effort to teach the doctrine of holiness in the context of Indonesian culture.

To minimize the challenges, in my opinion, we have to go back and use the method which John

⁹W. T. Purkiser, *Conflicting Concepts of Holiness* (Kansas City, Beacon Hill Press, 1972), 11.

¹⁰J.A.B. Jongeneel, *Kharismata, Gerakan Kharismatik dan Gereja dalam Gerakan Kharismatik: Apakah Itu?* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1980), 11.

Wesley used when he presented the holiness doctrine in his age. There are at least three ways he used. Those are preaching around, establishing small groups called “Holy Clubs,” and maintaining a balance between the teaching of holiness and its practices. Among these three ways, I suggest for us to use the last two in considering that preaching around like Wesley is so difficult in Indonesia. But we can teach this doctrine in small groups and maintain the balance between teaching and practices.

Teaching the Doctrine of Holiness through Small Groups

The Indonesian situation, with the majority of its citizens being Moslem, plus the uncondusive political climate, have made it impossible to use direct methods to proclaim the Christian faith. The pulpit sermon which tends to be a monologue, one-way communication where members just come and become faithful hearers, has been an ineffective method to influence Indonesians who in average have had religious knowledge background before becoming a Nazarene. So, in my opinion, the effective way is to use Wesley’s method of establishing small groups.

Besides acting as instructor in Nazarene Theological College, I also act as assistant pastor of the Philadelphia Nazarene Church of Jogjakarta. In my experience, the sermons that have been delivered especially about the doctrine of holiness were too difficult to be understood by the congregation. This happened because many of the members come from Calvinistic and Moslem backgrounds where they have had previous knowledge about holiness. So, the effective way has been to use teaching in small groups. These small groups can be cell groups, youth groups, or womens’ fellowship. Through these small groups, their understanding about this doctrine can be gradually formed. Even most of them become militant Christians in the church, especially regarding this doctrine.

Actually in the past, we were facing difficulties in finding teaching material for these cell groups and Bible Study groups. The cause is that there is no teaching resource material available from the Nazarene church. If we found the resources, Calvinistic and Charismatic churches wrote most of them. But in this year, we have started to translate several books, like Ted Hughes’ book, *First Step in the Christian Life and Going Deeper*. This book is so helpful for us to solve the problem of teaching Wesleyan doctrine, especially the doctrine of holiness. Even in this semester, all students of Nazarene Theological College are obligated to be involved in a small group on campus. The purpose of this small group is that all students can grasp the doctrine of Wesley practically, and it is expected that after their graduation, they will teach this doctrine in their ministry.

The Balance Between the Theory and Life Practices

The other factor in presenting the doctrine is by teaching it on campus and in the churches. In Indonesia, we have Nazarene Theological College, which holds strictly to Wesleyan-Arminian doctrine. It gives the opportunity to teach the doctrine of holiness. In the churches, the sermons delivered were always related to the doctrine of holiness. The problem begins to arise when finding its application. Honestly, the problem is how this doctrine can not only be taught in classes and the pulpit, but also how it can be applied in each person’s life.

I remember the course of Wesley’s Theology where in establishing his theology John Wesley held to four important things: the Bible, Tradition, Reason and Experience. In my opinion, if we talk about “experience,” we are talking about “how to apply a principle.” It means that it is not just theories that are studied, but it has to be followed by practices in every day life. It is true that if we talk about “holiness” as theory using terminology like, “perfect love, purity and mature,” then we must not only

discuss about it, but we must seek to apply it. Greathouse said: “Love for God and love for others are indissolubly connected.”¹¹

Actually, the easy way to influence Indonesians is not by sayings or concepts, but with visible life practices. The pluralistic Indonesian society long ago had its “polite system” and “customs” which highly appreciated moral and ethical values. If we talk about “the doctrine of holiness” practically, then unavoidably we have to talk about ethics and morality. Thomas Cook in his book, *The Holiness of the New Testament*, used the term “filled by the Spirit” for “holiness.”¹² In my opinion, the term, “filled by the Spirit” practically means having the fruit of the Spirit written about in Galatians 5:22-23. It means that if we talk about the doctrine of holiness practically, then we also practically should have the fruit of the Spirit. In contrast, if we say that we live holy lives, this means that we have put to death and avoid all kinds of works of the flesh which are written about in Galatians 5:19-20.

In other words, if we do our doctrine of holiness practically, then we can easily penetrate Indonesian culture. For example, the Indonesian custom accepted by every religion in Indonesia and is close to the doctrine of holiness is “the ethics of dating.” In the past, dating was the time when males and females got acquainted with one another. In this period, a young man can visit his girl friend in certain hours. It is purposed that there should be nothing that could disgrace their families, like free sex which will cause his girl to get pregnant. But in this day, this custom has begun to disappear, especially in the big cities. This practice is practiced not only by non-Christians, but also Christian youths who are entrapped by this custom forbidden by the Bible.

This is the opportunity for Wesleyans to proclaim and teach the doctrine of holiness. Why is it so? Because every religion in Indonesia and all culture traditions do not support perverted attitudes like free sex, unfaithful marriage acts, prostitution, etc. But because of tolerant attitudes and moral decadence, many people tend to abandon these practices, and it is happening everywhere. The way should be to practice the holy life taught by the Bible, “but be holy in all of your life just as He is Holy who has called you, because it written: be holy because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Conclusion

It has been my responsibility and all of Nazarenes in Indonesia to teach the doctrine of holiness from the Wesleyan perspective to this nation. The attitude of tolerance and fanaticism of religions in Indonesia toward its beliefs have been a kind of challenge for us. Beside that, the majority of churches in Indonesia accept the teachings of Calvinism, which is another kind of challenge. However, the effective ways to proclaim and teach this doctrine are:

1. Teaching it in small groups
2. Applying the doctrine of holiness by practicing it in every day life which is centered on Christ and according to Wesley teaching.

By using small groups, we can support the members to grow in the doctrine. But this also can be an effective means to overcome the situation of tolerance in the culture and religions if there will be someone who believes in Jesus and he or she is being disciplined.

Moreover, the life practices which are according to Wesleyan teaching, in this case the doctrine

¹¹William M. Greathouse, *Love Made Perfect: Foundation for the Holy Life* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1997), 108.

¹²Thomas Cook, *The Holiness of the New Testament* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1989), 42.

of holiness, not only can be a means to attract people to Christ, but also can be an example in order to discern the Christians who depend on God from the traditional or the nominal Christians.