

# Current Ecumenical Movement and Spirit in Indonesia

Jan S. Aritonang<sup>1</sup>

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## Preliminary Remarks

In September 2008 a new and very comprehensive book on Christianity (including churches) in Indonesia was published. *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*<sup>2</sup> covers a period of almost 500 years, and provides a chapter concerning the presence of [Nestorian] Christianity since the 7<sup>th</sup> century in a small town at the west coast of Sumatra. One of the 21 chapters concerns the ecumenical movement and spirit in this country (written by the writer of this paper). This paper refers mostly to that chapter.

The Nestorian Church of the 7<sup>th</sup> century was discontinued. The existing Christianity or churches started from early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The first one is the Roman Catholic that came with the Portuguese-Spanish imperialism. This was followed by the Protestant / Calvinist / Reformed Church brought by the Dutch East Indian trading company (VOC) since early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The quite fast and fertile growth of the churches (with various confessional identities) was in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Currently there are around 24 million Christians (10% of the population). They are scattered or divided into more than 350 denominations or church organizations (324 are registered in the Department of Religious Affairs; around 50 are still queuing for registration). In terms of number of members, the biggest is the Roman Catholic Church with ca. 7 million. Among the non-Catholic churches, the biggest is Gereja Pantekosta di Indonesia (GPdI is a Pentecostal church) with around 4.2 million members and 11.000s local congregations; the second is Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP, Batak Christian Protestant Church) with around 3.75 million members and 4000 local congregations (covering several congregations overseas: Singapore, Los Angeles, Denver, etc.); the third is Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI, also a Pentecostal church) with around 2.5 million members and around 6000 local congregations, including overseas. Besides those big churches there are hundreds of church organizations whose members are less than 10.000.

In terms of church tradition (doctrine/confession and practices), those churches are divided into various 'streams'. Besides the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox, there are Lutheran, Calvinist / Reformed / Presbyterian, Anglican, Mennonite, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal (including Charismatic), Evangelical, Adventist, Salvation Army, Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, and also New Age Movement. A number of churches

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Dr. Jan S. Aritonang is President of Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Jakarta (Jakarta Theological Seminary) and vice chairperson of Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia (PGI, Communion of Churches in Indonesia). He presented this paper at the South East Asian consultation on "Churches and Seminaries: Appraising our Ecumenical Vision in Today's World," in Manila, Philippines, 24-29 November 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Jan S. Aritonang & Karel Steenbrink, eds., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia* (Leiden etc.: E.J. Brill, 2008, xvi + 1004 pp.), supplied by 24 contributors. Launched and discussed in Utrecht, The Netherlands on 14 October 2008.

claim to be interdenominational, non-denominational, independent, or even ecumenical. Yet, if we scrutinize and trace, we can find the influence of certain traditions (doctrines and practices) in them.

In this paper I will focus on the development of ecumenical spirit and movement, and relate this theme with some issues, i.e. (1) interfaith relationship, especially the encounter of Christianity and Islam; (2) church-state relationship (and tension); (3) environmental concerns; and (4) information, publication and communication.

## **I. Development of Ecumenical Movement and Spirit**

After around 80 years of ecumenical movement in Indonesia (started from IMC Jerusalem 1928 where a number of Indonesian Christians participated), and after 58 years of the founding of the Council [since 1984: Communion] of Churches in Indonesia (CCI/DGI/PGI), the basic question is: does the ecumenical movement in Indonesia show a progress or a retreat? When the DGI was founded in 1950, its main goal – as formulated by its 27 initial members – is to form a united church in Indonesia. In the meantime its members and the church organizations all over the country increased from year to year. In 2008 the members of PGI are 87 among 300 churches. Besides PGI there are other communions, including the Communion of Evangelical Churches and Institutions in Indonesia/PII/PGLII (with around 150 members); Communion of Pentecostal Churches in Indonesia/DPI/PGPI (with around 90 members)<sup>3</sup>, Union of Baptist Churches in Indonesia/PBI (with 6 members). At least the PGLII and PGPI also claim themselves as ecumenical bodies, although they have their specific doctrines/confessions and practices.

Since the 1970s many criticisms have been directed against the DGI/PGI. The presence of some other 'ecumenical' bodies among the Protestant churches (PII/PGLII, DPI/PGPI, PBI, etc.) can be understood as an expression of dissatisfaction with the performance of the DGI/PGI, or with its failure to embrace and unite all [Protestant] churches in this country. But more Evangelical and Pentecostal churches have also joined this communion.<sup>4</sup> The criticisms correspond in part to the theological color or tendency of the DGI/PGI. When it was founded, the DGI adopted and inherited the theology of the mission societies and their founding churches that was more or less the combination of orthodox Protestantism and Pietism-Revivalism. But then gradually the theology of the World Council of Churches (WCC), that was commonly known or called ecumenical, became more dominant. But this was seen in the eyes of the Evangelicals and Pentecostals as liberal or horizontal-oriented. Even the members of the DGI/PGI – that are mostly traditional and regional or ethnic churches – did not easily understand and follow the new theology. That is, among other factors, the reason why the members of the DGI/PGI as well as the regional communions

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<sup>3</sup> Some churches have double or triple membership – e.g. with PGI and PGLII (and PGPI).

<sup>4</sup> In 2008 there were 87 member-churches of PGI, compared to 27 at the time of its forming in 1950. Around 20 of these 87 churches can also be categorized as Evangelical and/or Pentecostal. Besides joining DGI/PGI certain churches, like Gereja Bethel Indonesia, also join PII and/or DPI/PGPI. The growing number of DGI/PGI members cannot always be perceived as the enhancement of the ecumenical spirit among the churches, because some of the new members are the products of schism.

(*PGI Wilayah*) could not easily implement the decisions of the DGI/PGI, including the “Documents of Unity”, although theoretically they participated and were involved in the process of making the decision.

As already mentioned, among the members of PGI are a number of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. There are also churches that got established as a result of schism. The increase in number of the members of PGI from those splitting churches raises a serious question: Does PGI unite the churches or just push the schism? There was an idea that the splitting churches will not be accepted as members of PGI. But usually they have their ‘theological’ argument and they are also recommended by other members (even by the churches they had split from). Meanwhile, the understanding of unity also develops: not institutionally and in uniformity but spiritually. As far as a church confesses that Jesus Christ is its Lord and Savior and as far as the church accepts “the Documents of Unity” formulated by the members of PGI, then the church can be accepted in the PGI. Together with this problem, the PGI and its members struggled with many other problems. We will only highlight some of the striking issues that especially appear in the last 13 years (1995-2008).

### *(1) The Fading and Disorientation of the Ecumenical Spirit and the Attempt to Revitalize*

One of the sharpest criticisms thrown at the PGI is that it more and more tends to be bureaucratic and institutional. In the centralistic-formalistic structure of the PGI the *ecumene* lost its *élan vital* and spirit as a movement. It was indeed realized that the unity of the church does not mean uniformity and does not necessarily lead the churches to be institutionally one church. It was also understood that the PGI is not a super-church above all of its member-churches. The tendency of institutionalization, however, was quite strong especially since the 1970s. The organization of the DGI/PGI became very big. Under the general assembly there are a central committee, an executive committee, departments and bureaus, around twenty foundations, and a number of working groups. On the one hand, this gave some inertia in its action and in making decisions. But on the other hand, it seduced many church leaders or activists to pursue full-time positions, especially during the boom-time of overseas grants.

When the PGI celebrated its golden jubilee in 2000 there was a gloomy atmosphere. Besides lamenting the result of nominations, there was awareness and anxiety that not only the PGI but also the ecumenical movement as a whole was threatened and could become disoriented and fade away. To avoid this, some observers gathered in a series of meetings on the revitalization of the ecumenical movement in Indonesia, and the result was published in a book. In that meeting it was stated that the ecumenical movement in Indonesia – including the PGI – needs re-evaluation, redefinition, revitalization, reorientation and reformation (5R).<sup>5</sup>

The problem that particularly needs to get attention in this 5R movement is a paradigm change from an exclusive to an inclusive ecumenical movement; from an inward-looking to

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<sup>5</sup> Robert P. Borrang & Supardan, eds., *Revitalisasi Gerakan Ekumene di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Wonosari Sawunggaling Ent., 2001), 17f.

an outward-looking ecumenical movement. The fifty year journey of the ecumenical movement in Indonesia, especially motored by PGI, that tends to be exclusive and narrowing, only noticed a unity of church organization, which is in fact not achieved yet. An outward-looking movement (looking to the society) is getting very minimal attention. With this, the ecumenical movement became weak.<sup>6</sup>

To recover the ecumenical spirit and orientation while entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a recent meeting of mission partners and churches in Europe recommended some agenda issues. These include: redefining the vision and mission of the PGI, leaving the centralistic approach and developing the principle of decentralization and regional autonomy, and planning a systematic cadre-forming through the so-called *ecumene*-education. This leads PGI to an understanding that ecumenical spirit and movement is “*ecumene* in action”, it is functional rather than formal. PGI also understands that ecumenical movement is a “learning process”, never-ending process, in which all members are called to learn together through their up and down.<sup>7</sup> With this understanding PGI composed programs in the fields of *marturia* (including interfaith dialogue and cooperation, see section II), *koinonia* (including political education for church leaders, ministers and members, *diakonia* (including legislation matters), besides some programs for women and children as well as for youth and teenagers. PGI also arranges research concerning theological shift among the churches.

Besides those programs planned directly by the head office of PGI (and implemented together with the member churches and with the 30 Regional/Provincial Communion of Churches and with some other Christian institutions), PGI also works through some working units and foundations, e.g. Working Group for Law and Human Rights, Working Group for Service to Prisoners (Kelompok Kerja Pelayanan Lembaga Pemasyarakatan/ Pokja PLP PGI), Communication Ministry for the People (Pelayanan Komunikasi Masyarakat; Yakoma), Foundation for Health/Hospital (Yayasan Kesehatan/ Rumah Sakit PGI “Cikini”), Foundation for Ecumenical Scholarship (Yayasan Beasiswa Oikoumene; YBO), Foundation for Social Welfare (Yayasan Kesejahteraan Sosial), etc.

Of course, many of the member churches also set up their own programs and some of them also build network and cooperation with other churches as well as with other Christian institutions. Several Christian institutions that deserved to be mentioned are World Vision International Indonesia (WVII) and Network of Christian Social Ministry Institutions in Indonesia (Jaringan Lembaga Pelayanan Kristen di Indonesia; JLPKI). Together with PGI the member churches also build network and cooperation with some non-Christian organizations (including with government institutions) and even with organizations or institutions from other faiths, especially Islam. By developing the networking, the ecumenical movement does not only work within church or Christian circles but also in broad surroundings.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> This awareness is also reflected in the General Assembly of Eukumindo (Europäische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Indonesia), an ecumenical forum of around 11 churches and mission organizations in Europe which stands as a partner of PGI on 9-11 October 2008.

## *(2) The Crisis of Leadership and Trust and the Attempt to Recover*

In spite of many shortcomings and weaknesses of the ecumenical movement in general and the DGI/PGI in particular, during the almost forty years of its presence the DGI/PGI has had quite strong leaders and leadership. Some figures like T.S. Gunung Mulia, Simon Marantika, W.J. Rumambi, J.L.Ch. Abineno, P.D. Latuihamallo, T.B. Simatupang, S.A.E. Nababan and Fridolin Ukur were well-known persons with integrity. They were also successful in building a networking with and trust from many circles. Sularso Sopater was actually a good, very fatherly, leader and a man with integrity, although he was incidentally trapped in the case of the 'tribute to the palace'. With their leadership at least the Christians and the church-members of the DGI/PGI have boldness and self-esteem when they were facing serious problems or pressure regarding the existence of Christians in this country.

But during the period of 2000-2004/5 PGI faced a serious crisis of leadership and trust. This was connected to the nominations in the 13<sup>th</sup> general assembly in 2000. At this assembly, through an abnormal (not to say amoral) process of nomination, Natan Setiabudi was elected as the general chairperson. This aroused a protest expressed in a press release by a group of church figures and activists.<sup>8</sup> In the press release it was stated that the process and result of the nomination jeopardized the future of the ecumenical movement in general and the PGI in particular, and was also contrary to the spirit of reformation that was blossoming in this country. Natan Setiabudi held the position although his term, together with the other executive committee members, was a bit shortened through an accelerated general assembly in December 2004 (instead of March 2005). But the conflict and disagreement between the General Chairperson and the General Secretary, two key persons in the PGI, only sharpened.

This non-conductive situation in turn brought PGI and the whole ecumenical atmosphere and performance to their nadir. PGI could not set up its operational program and could not give a verifiable financial report, including the use of funds from partners. Eukumindo, an ecumenical body in Europe representing PGI's church-partners in Europe from the 1970s, lost trust in the PGI and blocked the designated funds. With PGI's lack of accountability since the early 1990s, the *Departemen Partisipasi dalam Pembangunan* (Department of Participation in Development), a department in the PGI that used to manage a number of development projects run by PGI and its members, was closed down. In all events this case of internal conflict and distrust in the period 2000-2004 sank the PGI into deeper mire.

Christians and churches in and outside PGI have a big expectation that the result of the general assembly in December 2004, including the nomination and election of the new executive committee, with Andreas A. Yewangoe as the general chairperson and Richard M. Daulay as the general secretary, can recover strong leadership, trust and accountability. Time and history will be the witnesses of their success or failure. This, however, does not

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<sup>8</sup> Press Release: "Pernyataan Keprihatinan Komunitas untuk Reformasi Gereja mengenai Situasi Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia (PGI) dan Majelis Pekerja Harian (MPH) saat ini", 27 April 2000. This document was, among others, signed by S.A.E. Nababan, Eka Darmaputera, Septemmy Lakawa, Febry Tetelepta and Luhut M.P. Pangaribuan.

only depend on their strong cooperation and leadership, but also on the commitment of the churches together to continue and enhance the quality of the ecumenical movement.

### *(3) Financial Dependency on Foreign/International Partners*

In line with its growth and widening task to promote the ecumenical movement and spirit, DGI/PGI has needed more funds. Although DGI/PGI has appealed to its members to contribute an annual membership fee, even if all members paid duly and fully, this amount would still be very little compared to the mounting budget. There are, of course, a number of dedicated home supporters – e.g. business-people and the like – who have donated to DGI/PGI or other ecumenical bodies, but usually they give it incidentally but not for the regular budget. Regarding the approximately 20 foundations under the umbrella of PGI, there are a few that are already financially self-reliant, like the PGI Foundation for Health/Hospital. Some foundations are autonomous and raise their own funds, including from overseas. Some examples are *Yakoma* and *Yayasan Tanggul Bencana* (the Foundation to Handle Disaster). Some foundations were particularly founded to manage the endowment funds (formerly granted by some overseas partners) or a number of properties (like the guesthouse in Jakarta and the conference resort in Cipayung). These in turn provide some amount of funding to back up the program and regular expenses of PGI. From time to time, however, especially in the last ten years, the PGI had to rely upon the support or donations of its overseas partners to finance its programs. Meanwhile, PGI's financial condition and reports showed a serious deficit that needed overseas help.<sup>9</sup>

During the recent years, there was a growing consciousness that PGI has to go back to the basics – i.e., to foster and preserve the spirit and fire of the ecumenical movement, and not to act too much as a kind of a holding company. In line with a new *Undang-undang Yayasan* (Law of Foundation), gradual steps are being taken to reduce the number of foundations that have no direct link with the 'core business' of PGI, or that have potential to maintain their existence and task independent of the PGI. Soon after the 14<sup>th</sup> general assembly in 2004, PGI held a management and organizational assessment and capacity-building training to improve its performance and capacity. With these steps it was expected that PGI could show better accountability and credibility and also become more financially self-reliant in the future.<sup>10</sup> Thank God, since 2007, there have been some good signs indicating the improvement of the financial condition and consequently the recovery of trust of many partners and individual supporters.

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<sup>9</sup> See PGI's financial reports at the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> assemblies in 2000 and 2004, respectively, and the annual reports of *Sidang Majelis Pekerja Lengkap* (Central Working Committee Meeting).

<sup>10</sup> For these efforts in February 2005, PGI – helped by WCC and CCA – invited Leo Basyham (a management consultant hired by WCC) and Tony Waworuntu (one of the executive secretaries in CCA).

## II. Interfaith Relationship and Dialogue: Encounter of Christianity and Islam<sup>11</sup>

The encounter of the adherents of the two big religions in Indonesia started from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the field of politics there are more tensions and conflicts rather than peace and friendship. What happened many centuries in the past sometimes reemerged, because the past was recorded in the collective memory of the people and then currently re-actualized. For example, the killing of Sultan Hairun by the Portuguese on 28 February 1570 in Ternate was referred to when a bloody conflict exploded in the Moluccas (Maluku) in 1999-2003. The memory was also perpetuated in a monument built at the center of the city of Ternate. Another example, the assassination of the Moslem people in Banda islands in 1621 was also pointed out when the Moslem people burnt church buildings and killed many Christians during the conflict of 1999-2003. The trauma of the Crusades in Europe and Middle East during 1095-1292 also influenced the encounter, as was also seen in some cases outside Indonesia (cf. George W. Bush's statement soon after the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001).

During the long period of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia (1602/5-1942) there were uncountable cases of tension and conflict between Christians and Muslims. On the one hand, many Christian missionary societies saw Moslem people as the target of evangelization although they admitted that, compared to the adherents of tribal religions, it was very difficult to convert the Muslims to Christianity. On the other hand, the Moslem society perceived the Christian communities (mission societies, churches, Christian schools, etc.) as a threat and they gradually strove to make Indonesia an Islamic state. This struggle came to its peak at the end of the Japanese occupation (1942-45) when the Japanese military government promised to give independence to Indonesia. During the process of formulating the Constitution for an independent Indonesia, some Moslem figures strived to put Syariah Islam as the foundation of the state through a document called "Jakarta Charter" on 22 June 1945. This evidently failed but during the independence period (1945 until the beginning of 2000s), they persistently continued to put the Syariah into the Constitution. When it eventually failed, they tried to insert the Syariah in some legislation products (e.g. laws, government regulation). These attempts are based on the conviction that religion is not separate from the state.

Since 1996 up to 2005 the tension between Christians and Moslems increased, resulting in physical and bloody conflicts: e.g. burning of hundreds of church and school buildings, assassination of thousands of Christians (in certain regions it was avenged by the Christians by killing thousands of Moslems). Many analysts observed and concluded that those conflicts were not religious in essence, but no one can deny that there is also some religious element or sentiment. There have been a lot of attempts to end the conflicts, especially through inter-religious or interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Peace and Reconciliation as well as Conflict Resolution studies are being promoted. During the recent

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<sup>11</sup> The content of this section is mainly based on Djaka Soetapa's article in Jan S. Aritonang, ed., *Gereja di Abad 21 - 50 Tahun PGI* (Jakarta: Balitbang PGI, 2000), 165-216; and on a comprehensive inquiry into the encounter of Christianity and Islam in Indonesia that covers a period of almost 500 years, see Jan S. Aritonang, *Sejarah Perjumpaan Kristen dan Islam di Indonesia* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2004/3<sup>rd</sup> print 2006), ca. 700 pages.

years the physical conflict significantly decreased, but the tension and debate in legal and legislation field is still continuing. Apparently the tension is something perpetual, but in such a situation the churches are called to implement their calling to love as well as to re-visit their understanding and paradigm of propagating the gospel: not to Christianize but to bring good news through words and action.

What is the connection of this encounter with the ecumenical movement, especially in Indonesia? To answer this, we need to trace back to the IMC conferences (attended by Indonesian Christians) and the founding of DGI. Among the mission societies that participated in the International Missionary Conferences until 1938 there was a perception that the other faiths were objects of evangelization (i.e. to be read: Christianization). This perception was also inherited by the churches in Indonesia. No wonder then that in the mission era (before 1942) as well as in the period after Indonesian independence much tension was caused by such a perception. This tension, especially between Islam and Christianity, was intensified by the issue of the *dasar negara* (the foundation of the state): Islam or Pancasila. During the Japanese and 'Old Order' or Soekarno era (1942-1965) the tension and conflict were more in formal and official forums (BPUPKI/PPKI and the Konstituante).

Since the beginning of its existence, the DGI, with its members, already paid attention to this issue of inter-faith relationships, especially with Islam. In its first (founding) conference in 1950, one of the topics discussed dealt with the *Kementeriaan Agama* (Ministry or Department of Religious Affairs). A number of participants expressed their concern that this department would lead to Indonesia's becoming an Islamic state. In the second conference in 1953, one of the sections reported that there was a serious effort by certain Muslims to create an Islamic state where Islamic law would be applied (this was to repeat what they had attempted in 1945). Based on this report, the conference issued a resolution regarding religious freedom (referring to article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). This second conference also arrived at a conclusion that the Christians and the churches in Indonesia were always called to proclaim the gospel to other faiths with an understanding that the core and the secret of the gospel proclamation are love for God and love for fellow humans. A similar concern was also shown in the third conference in 1956, which affirmed a common consciousness and responsibility to see the whole country as an evangelization field.

Notwithstanding certain tensions in the inter-faith encounter, especially in Christian and Muslim relations, during the Old Order era there was a common impression that the relationship between Christians and the government was quite intimate. Soekarno put trust in a number of Christian figures in his government (although not all of them represented *Parkindo*, the Christian political Party), e.g. Dr. Johannes Leimena, Arnold Mononutu, and Dr. Ferdinand L. Tobing. Leimena, an outstanding *Parkindo* figure, even became the second Vice-Prime Minister and was several times appointed acting President. Soekarno also attended and gave a speech at several important church events, such as the third and the fifth conference of DGI in 1956 and 1964, respectively, the inaugural conference of the East Asia Christian Conference at Parapat, North Sumatra, in 1957 and in the centennial jubilee of HKBP at Tarutung-North Sumatra in 1961. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Christian (including Catholic) circle in 1963 endorsed a proposal to appoint Soekarno as president-for-life.



When Soekarno's regime ended and was replaced by the Soeharto's New Order, there was an expectation among certain Muslim circles that their place and role in the government would become greater. But then they were disappointed to see that so many Christian figures were given positions of trust in the cabinets from the very beginning of that New Order regime. Various causes triggered a number of open conflicts from 1967, including the bloody *Peristiwa Makassar* in 1 October 1967, and such motivated certain Muslim groups and figures to express their disappointment and objection to the strategies of Christians, including the so-called Christianization of Indonesia, soon after the abortive coup of 30 September 1965.

The rising tension between Christians and Muslims, caused by and following the Makassar incident, led the government to take the initiative to hold a *Musyawarah Antar Umat Beragama* (Inter-religious Consultation) in Jakarta on 30 November 1967, followed by a series of regional consultations in several cities. In the 30 November consultation, President Soeharto and the Minister of Religious Affairs, K.H.M. Dachlan, proposed a concept of 'religious harmony' that basically endorsed that religious propagation should not be directed to people already adhering to a religion, and should not raise conflict among adherents.<sup>12</sup> The Muslim side gladly hailed this proposal; they even provided a concept of a Joint Charter and Declaration of Islam and Christianity on Religious Harmony. The Christian side accepted most of the content of the concept except one clause, "not to make another religion's adherents a target of religious propagation", because they understood that this clause meant that Christian mission or evangelization or Islamic *dakwah* could only be aimed to deepen their own adherents' faith. The Christians (Protestant as well as Catholic, represented by DGI and MAWI [Council of Roman Catholic Bishops]) argued that the Christian religion is a missionary religion and all people have a right to choose and to change their religion.<sup>13</sup>

Consequently this consultation failed to get a consensus or to produce a code of ethics of religious propagation. The Muslim side reacted sharply to this failure. They blamed the Christians for the failure, since the Christians were intolerant. But the Christians did not accept this accusation; they agreed that improper tactics such as persuading, forcing, or giving some material aid should be prohibited, but they could not accept a situation in which they were prohibited from obeying the divine commandment to proclaim the gospel to all humankind. The tension caused by the failure of the consultation heightened when the Minister of Religious Affairs and the Minister of Internal Affairs issued the Joint Decision No. 1/1969, regarding the requirement for building places of worship. On the one hand, the failure of the consultation complicated future Christian-Muslim relations. But on the other hand, this consultation also motivated and encouraged both sides to work more intensively to know and understand each other. It became the starting point of a series of efforts and activities in consultations and dialog at local, regional, national and even international levels.

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<sup>12</sup> The religions recognized by the government are Islam, Christianity [Protestant], Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Local or tribal religions were later asked to choose and integrate themselves to one of these official religions.

<sup>13</sup> These inter-faith consultations are summarized in Aritonang, *Sejarah Perjumpaan...*, 389-93.

The rising religious tension, especially the Christian-Muslim relationship in the 1960s and the need to build a dialog, was felt not only in Indonesia but also in many other countries. At last, from 1970, a series of international dialogs was initiated or sponsored by various international institutions, including the WCC. For example, in 1970 an international religious dialog was held in Ayaltoun (Lebanon), attended by representatives of four religions (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism) and Indonesia was represented by Mukti Ali and Peter D. Latuihamallo.<sup>14</sup> A similar conference was held by the WCC in cooperation with two study institutions from England in 1976 at Chambesy, Switzerland, attended by two Indonesian representatives, H.M. Rasjidi and Ihromi.<sup>15</sup>

Hundreds of interfaith dialogues have been held from the beginning of the New Order era up to the current so-called Reformation era, especially between Christianity and Islam. There were also uncountable writings on this issue, irrespective of what the authors meant by dialog. There were even a number of interfaith institutions founded to handle this issue. But, as a matter of fact, conflicts, containing religious dimensions, and riots were rising, with accumulating effects. Therefore, it is not surprising that some critical questions were expressed: For what purpose are all these consultations or conferences of dialog? Are they not in vain and consuming time, fund and energy? Are they not just a mask or camouflage to hide certain intentions and plans of the respective sides that are frequently contrary to what they were addressing in such dialogs or forums? Some activists and protagonists of dialog replied that precisely because of the continuing conflicts and riots, we need and have to continue dialog to express our respective opinions, convictions, identities and feelings as well as to undertake self-criticism and introspection. It was, however, realized that many of the dialogs were initiated and sponsored by the government and had a political agenda behind them, so that it was difficult to arrive at a genuine and authentic dialog.

Since 1981, DGI/PGI has not only been participating in interfaith events; it has been holding a series of *Seminar Agama-agama* (Seminars on Religions), essentially a forum of interfaith dialog. Besides inviting participants and speakers from all the 'official' religions, this seminar also aimed to equip and to train students from a number of theological schools (especially members of *Persetia*, Association of Theological Schools in Indonesia) in interfaith knowledge and skills of dialog. Each seminar was held under a certain theme, e.g. "Review of Islam from various aspects" (1981), "The development of the Islamic movement and thinking in Indonesia" (1982), "Religion and Modernization" (1985), "Morality and Ethics in Nation-Building" (1987), "Environment and National Development" (1988), "Spirituality in Modern Society" (1989), "Religion and Economic Development" (1991), "Pluralism and

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<sup>14</sup> Mukti Ali, Minister of Religious Affairs in 1971-1978 (formerly professor of Comparative Religion at State Islamic Institute "Sunan Kalijaga" Yogyakarta), deserved the title of "Bapak Dialog" (father of dialog) in Indonesia. During his ministry the inter-religious relationship, especially Christian-Muslim, was quite conducive. P.D. Latuihamallo at that time was chairperson of the DGI.

<sup>15</sup> H.M. Rasjidi was the first Minister of Religious Affairs (1946 onwards) in his early thirties. He later became a professor at Indonesia University-Jakarta. He was very critical of a number of government policies suspected to have been influenced by Christians, such as the draft Marriage Law of 1973, and of certain maneuvering of Christians in the political field as well as in religious propaganda. Ihromi is a professor of Old Testament at Jakarta Theological Seminary and he comes from a Muslim background.

Democracy" (1992), "Religions and Cultural Challenge" (1994), "Religions towards the Third Millennium" (1996), "Religions, Violence and Peace in the Reformation Era" (1999), "Religion and Legislation" (2006-2007), and "Religion in the Wave of Globalization" (2008).

Closing his review of the seminars held in 1981-1999, Djaka Soetapa concluded that through these seminars it was shown that religions have the same agenda and concerns that are based on humanity and have a divine dimension. All religions have an aspiration to manage these agendas and concerns and therefore, if conflicts with religious dimension occurred, the religions deny and disappoint their own calling.<sup>16</sup> Although this series of seminars has not yet shown its real contribution towards promoting more harmony and mutual understanding, the PGI and its members persist in continuing their share of the responsibility to build and enhance a more conducive and healthier inter-religious relationship.<sup>17</sup>

### **III. Church-State Relationship (and Tension)**

As has been repeatedly shown, from the very beginning, implementation of the ecumenical movement and spirit – especially as carried out by DGI/PGI – frequently has something to do with the government. This is one of the consequences of taking over the task of the *Zendingsconsulaat* (Missionary Consulate)<sup>18</sup> as well as the policy of the government – at least until the middle of the New Order Era – that the DGI/PGI represented the Christian Protestant circle in dealing with the government. That was the reason why during the Old Order and until the middle of the New Order era one person from DGI/PGI (usually the chairperson) became a member of the *Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat* (MPR, People's Assembly).

Not infrequently the church-state relationship was very close and warm (we remember Soekarno). Even during the New Order era, which was marked by so many incidents and conflicts, the relationship was quite friendly, at least until the late 1980s. There were almost no large ecumenical and church events that were not attended and even officiated by government officers, who were also asked to give a speech. This habit or custom also occurred – and not infrequently in more striking form – in the Evangelical and Pentecostal circles. But there were also many cases that showed a high level of tension or even conflict between DGI/PGI and/or its members and the government. The HKBP case in 1992-1998 is one of the very striking examples, besides those involving the GKI Irian Jaya/Papua and the GKST Central Sulawesi around 1998-2004.

Like many churches and Christian organizations, DGI/PGI has frequently approached the government for financial contributions or donations. If not from the government institution

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<sup>16</sup> Soetapa's review and conclusion is summarized in Aritonang, *Sejarah Perjumpaan...*, 497-511.

<sup>17</sup> In 2005 PGI held a seminar on the theme, "Theodicy and Theology of Disaster," in view of the tsunami and earthquake in December 2004 and March 2005 and other "social disasters" like those in Papua and Poso-Central Sulawesi".

<sup>18</sup> This is an institution that represented missionary societies in dealing with the Dutch colonial government. Regarding this institution see M.C. Jongeling, *Het Zendingsconsulaat* (Arnhem: Van Loghum Slaterus, 1966).

itself, support was expected from the officers, especially those who were Christians.<sup>19</sup> This caused some difficulty on the part of PGI and its members' officers in showing and maintaining a critical stand. Referring to Simatupang's "tetra-words" – i.e. positive, creative, realistic and critical – the last word was frequently neglected. It is still a big question whether PGI and all ecumenical bodies, together with the churches in this country, will in the future have a boldness and toughness sufficient to keep a distance from those holding power, without becoming 'rebel priests', or continuing to rely upon the protection and backup of the government, while the government tends to be more Islamic. There is, of course, a probability that by building a close relationship with the government, churches and ecumenical bodies are also building a more harmonious relationship with other faiths, especially Islam. But many examples in the history of this country show that the Islamic circle in the government was not always from the moderate and inclusive line.

One of the very crucial issues dealing with the government concerns legislation. As we have seen, certain Moslem figures and organizations attempt to implement Islamic Law (*Syariah*) as the state foundation. When they failed to do that in the Constitution, they tried to insert the *Syariah* in many laws and legal products. Examples are with the Marriage Law of 1974, Law of Religious Jurisdiction of 1989, Law of National Education System of 2003, Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs and Minister of Internal Affairs concerning Religious Harmony and Construction of Worship Building of 2006, and the most recent Law of Pornography, besides some regional regulations [*Peraturan Daerah/Perda*]. PGI together with KWI (Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops in Indonesia) and many other Christian organizations from time to time strive to refuse legal products that are based on or only applied to a certain religion. Since the government considers Islam as the religion of the majority, in many cases the government accommodates their interest and aspiration.

#### **IV. Environmental Concern<sup>20</sup>**

DGI/PGI began to show its concern for environmental issues from 1970. This is in line with the WCC's concern, shown since its 4<sup>th</sup> general assembly in Uppsala 1968, and culminating in the 6<sup>th</sup> general assembly in Vancouver 1983, with the motto, "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation" (JPIC). This was highlighted through a special conference in Cipayung and in its seventh general assembly at Pematangsiantar in 1971. This environmental concern was related to the development program of the government, since development frequently brought destruction to the environs. The third CCS (Conference on Church and Society, Konferensi Gereja dan Masyarakat/ KGM) in 1976 had already reaffirmed that science and technology had to be used for the welfare, peace, justice, and sister/brotherhood of all nations and for the conservation of nature and the environment.

This concern was intensified during the 1980s as expressed in the 9<sup>th</sup> general assembly of DGI in 1980 and in the 4<sup>th</sup> CCS in 1984. The 8<sup>th</sup> Seminar on Religions in 1988 took the JPIC

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<sup>19</sup> Recent examples are donations for the 13<sup>th</sup> general assembly (a large amount was donated by a president director of a government bank) and for the renovation of the PGI office in Salemba Raya 10 Jakarta (from some retired generals who are still active informally in the government circle).

<sup>20</sup> A summary of this topic was prepared by Robert P. Borrong in Aritonang, ed. *Gereja di Abad...*, 147-54. A detailed description could be found in the minutes of various conferences and assemblies held by DGI/PGI since the 1970s.

theme seriously. The PGI even held a national consultation on JPIC at Salatiga, Central Java in 1989 as a preparation for the 5<sup>th</sup> CCS in the same year. After describing many cases of environmental destruction, this 5<sup>th</sup> CCS formulated the responsibility of the churches in Indonesia among other things as follows:

The churches together with all their members and networks ought to start solemnly accepting the responsibility as humans and fellow creatures to apply the Word of God i.e. to maintain the integrity of creation, justice and peace, as their attitude of worship. This assumes that the churches together with all their units are aware of their role to obey God's covenant that is simultaneously an invitation to all human beings and creatures and to accept the reconciliation made by the Giver of Life, Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup>

Following this statement, the CCS proposed to the PGI and its members a set program on Integrity of Creation, Justice and Peace, consisting of conscientization, confession of the sin of destroying the environment, Bible study on this theme, formation of working groups to handle and elaborate the issues related to the theme, building of networking with any groups or institutions that have the same concern, and initiating study and action on environmental issues. This statement and program proposal was discussed and sharpened further in the PGI's 12<sup>th</sup> general assembly at Jayapura in 1994. One of the concrete decisions of this assembly was to establish a special foundation with the main task of handling any kind of environmental destruction and disaster. The implementation of this decision was taken in 1996 by establishing the *Yayasan Tanggul Bencana*.<sup>22</sup>

This environmental concern was also inserted by Persetia into its program. In 1999 its Study Institute – in cooperation with the *Badan Penelitian dan Pengembangan* (Research and Development Unit) of PGI – set up a special syllabus on environmental concerns in the curriculum, with an expectation that every graduate of a theological school will have a strong environmental awareness that in turn will be applied and developed in their ministry among the people and the churches.

The PGI's 13<sup>th</sup> assembly at Palangkaraya in 2000 also pushed the churches and society to deepen their understanding and to enhance their action on human rights and environmental issues. This assembly even endorsed the PGI's setting up of a special unit to handle environmental issues, namely the *Badan Pemberdayaan dan Advokasi Lingkungan Hidup di Indonesia* (Unit of Empowerment and Advocacy of Environment in Indonesia), while it also underlined the program of Persetia regarding Environmental Education in the curriculum of theological schools.

The most fundamental theological concept of PGI and the church-members regarding this environmental concern is formulated in one of the Documents of Church Unity, i.e. the

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<sup>21</sup> *Visi Baru untuk Era Baru dengan Generasi Baru – Laporan Konferensi Nasional Gereja dan Masyarakat V, PGI, 18-21 April 1989, di Wisma Kinasih Caringin-Bogor* (Jakarta: Akademi Leimena PGI, 1989), 109.

<sup>22</sup> This foundation, although by incident split from PGI in early 2005, was trusted by overseas partners coordinated by ACT (Action by Churches Together) to participate in the recovery of post-tsunami disaster program in Aceh and Nias.

*Pemahaman Bersama Iman Kristen* (Common Understanding of the Christian Faith), chapter II: Creation and Conservation. How far this concept and the derived program is being implemented and has brought improvement to the environment in Indonesia, especially in this global warming process, is still to be discussed and observed. Unfortunately, up to the present moment the destruction of the environment and the exploitation of natural resources are still going on, and have even worsened through time.

## V. Information, Publication and Communication

From the very beginning there was a consciousness that the growth and progress of the ecumenical movement should be publicly and widely exposed and communicated, not only to the church and Christian circles but also to the whole nation. Therefore, already in the first conference of DGI there was a special commission to set up a plan by using radio broadcasting and printed mass media already available. DGI and its member churches intentionally used these media not only to give information about what they were doing but also to proclaim the gospel based on the consciousness and understanding that the whole nation or country was an open field of evangelization.

Until early in the 1960s the publications of DGI as well as of its members were very limited: in line with the still limited development of information and publication technology. Some of the struggles and thoughts discussed among the churches were published in the form of books or booklets by *Badan Penerbit Kristen*, a Christian publishing house already formed in 1946 while the churches prepared the founding of a national council or chamber. But since the mid-1960s – in line with the development of this country – there was remarkable progress. Some church figures, including those who were sitting in the structure of DGI, started a Christian newspaper called *Sinar Harapan* (Rays of Hope), besides continuing to use other printed media to publicize churches' and the DGI's activities, programs, statements and ideas. Parallel with this they also launched a Christian-flavored popular-science monthly, *Ragi Buana* (Yeast of the World) in 1967.<sup>23</sup>

Not long after the opening of the government TV broadcasting (*TVRI*) in 1962, DGI and the churches took a programme slot every Sunday afternoon, called *Mimbar Agama Kristen* (Pulpit of Christian Religion). In the course of time, through the regulation of the Department of Religious Affairs, DGI had to share this slot with other denominations, such as Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Adventist and Baptist. The sharing of this slot contributed to the enhancement of cooperation among these different churches.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, in the 1970s, DGI/PGI formed a special unit (then reconstituted as an autonomous foundation called *Yayasan Komunikasi Masyarakat, Yakoma*) to prepare and manage the TV program package, not only broadcast by TVRI but also by a number of private TV stations that have flourished since the 1980s. Yakoma has also provided various programs in the field of communication such as the training of TV-drama actors, writers, reporters, and the publishing of some

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<sup>23</sup> This *Reader's Digest*-style magazine lasted until the early 1980s, whereas a similar magazine, *Intisari*, from the Catholic-Gramedia-Kompas group, continues till this moment.

<sup>24</sup> After its disappearance for about 15 years, PGI started showing up again at TVRI every third Saturday afternoon since September 2008 with the support by 3XM [More Messages in the Media], a broadcast organization in the Netherlands.

books along with a bulletin named *Komunikasi*.<sup>25</sup> Since the late 1990s the content of this bulletin and the statements of Yakoma have frequently criticized the policies and decisions of PGI. This is only a small example within a huge and complicated complex of problems faced by PGI since then.

Since the 1970s, together with the opening of the Information Bureau, DGI/PGI has also published its official monthly, *Berita Oikoumene*. Actually this was expected to be a public magazine, but since it mainly contained reports of the activities of DGI/PGI and its members, or articles written by their leaders or thinkers for church consumption, and because it was not managed professionally, this magazine could not flourish. Occasionally, particularly during the era of external (national) and internal crisis, it faced many difficulties due to financial problems and could only resume business after some incentives from PGI's home or overseas supporters.

During the period of the 1970s to the 1990s, DGI/PGI also diligently published documents of its meetings, conferences, assemblies, and a compilation of its statements regarding various themes, through BPK Gunung Mulia or through its own office. These statements, including Christmas and Easter Messages and pastoral letters on certain issues or incidents, were usually circulated by mail to all members and many other Christian organizations. Since 1994 PGI also used Internet facilities and provided a website to communicate faster and more efficiently. Unfortunately this website was not handled professionally so that users could not regularly access up to date news or progress. Similar conditions are true regarding some other church or ecumenical communions. Fortunately there are many other Christian media or communication institutions or agencies, especially those managed by the Catholics, which are growing and showing significant progress in terms of quantity as well as quality.

Reviewing various kinds of media and methods used by DGI/PGI and some other church or ecumenical institutions, and how diligently they formulated beautiful statements, it appears that they should have been playing an important role in communicating Christian vision, mission and ideas to the whole nation, including a prophetic and priestly voice dealing with so many crucial issues and problems in this country. Surprisingly, or regretfully, there are still a lot of complaints that the DGI/PGI as well as the other so-called ecumenical organizations have not loudly sounded their voice; or that their voice is not clearly heard or effectively listened to and noticed by the people and the government.<sup>26</sup> Some observers argued that it is actually quite normal and natural, since the percentage of Christians is very small while the current society and government are dominated by Muslim or secular ideas. Moreover, the PGI and other ecumenical bodies have no power to make their voice or opinion and standpoint heard and followed by anyone. There must be,

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<sup>25</sup> More detailed information on Yakoma as well as the other foundations or working units under the umbrella of DGI/PGI can be found in the annual report or five-year report of DGI/PGI such as *Dari Salatiga ke Tomohon* (1980), *Dari Tomohon ke Ambon* (1984), *Dari Ambon ke Surabaya* (1989), *Dari Surabaya ke Jayapura* (1994), *Dari Jayapura ke Palangkaraya* (2000) and *Dari Palangkaraya ke Kinasih-Caringin-Bogor* (2004).

<sup>26</sup> This sort of complaint is frequently expressed in many Christian meetings and gatherings, even those held by DGI/PGI itself or together with some other organizations.

however, some other causes that make the existence and role of PGI and other ecumenical communions not very widely felt and meaningful.

### **Concluding Remarks: Any Ecumenical Vision?**

Yes, the churches in Indonesia, together with CCI/PGI and some other church/ denominational communions still have an ecumenical vision along with ecumenical spirit. But *ecumene* is not understood as uniformity or institutional unity. Rather it is understood as walking together, learning together in a never-ending learning process. *Ecumene* is also understood as *ecumene* in action and *ecumene* together with people of other faiths. Since we live (*menein*) in one home, i.e. this world (*oikos*) we can not live exclusively or treat people of other faiths as object or target of our 'evangelization' (read: Christianization). Together with them the churches in Indonesia are called and are aware of this calling to work and to make action together with people of other faiths. The government can be perceived as a hindrance for this calling, but can also be asked to work together for the improvement or recovery of the earth and the universe from the destructive process. The challenge for this calling and vision is very big and complex, but since we believe in and follow the Creator, Redeemer and Owner of this world, the churches in Indonesia, together with all churches and all people of faiths all over the world, will continue to march until the realization and fulfillment of the *ecclesia triumphant*.

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