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Big Cities' Challenge to Christian Identity

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Abstract

Identity brings about positive values and demands commitment, but also potentially spreads seeds of conflict. Learning from identity as dynamically moving borders, from the phenomena multiple identity, and from discovering the meaning of religion, it is suggested, that Christianity views the so-called 'shaded-in area' or convergent area as a place for mutual enrichment, deepening Christianity as orientation, bringing about solidarity, and learning from another views to face the complex reality of the world.

Keywords

Identity, commitment, conflict, Christianity, moving borders, multiple identity, shaded, in area

Big cities, like Jakarta and Bandung, provide interesting *phenomena* related to identity. Like in the other big cities, there meet peoples from all around Indonesia so that culture meets culture, religion meets religion. In such situation emerge at least two phenomena: first, the hardening an identity that brings about conflicts and second, multiple identity (and therefore multiple belonging).

This phenomena will be seen together with religion as identity. Why? Religions – apart from the other factors (economy, social or political) as "trigger" of the conflicts - have intrinsically "a time bomb" if their claims for truth are misunderstood or religions are comprehended only as identity, but brings also positive values. This article is a reflection and would be an impulse to go further to reflect on religious identity among the changing situation.

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Identity, commitment and Conflict

In the 70's in Bandung city there were conflicts between young people, nevertheless in small scales. There were also in the last decade some conflicts between groups (or gangs) of motorcycles. Also some years ago there were many news in media about conflicts ("tawuran") inter-regions and inter-students from different schools.

Apart from another factors, like economy (poverty), social (broken home families), or may be political (exploited by some ideologies) those conflicts show the same pattern: we (or ours) and you (or yours): "Let us fight them, because they are not ours".

Behind these scenes play another and important dramas: dramas of identity and commitment. We as groups give someone identity; and "the member" offers his commitment. Some groups as ethnics and religions have initiation rite for someone who wants to enter the group. This could happen to some other groupings. At least through some reports one supposes, that such "initiation" takes place in the other groupings outside ethnics and religions. The main point is, that in through this they affirm the commitment as groups. As noted before, this commitment could be exacerbated by another factors so that conflicts between "identities" take place.

Multiple identity

Migrations bring encounters of the pattern of life: the pattern of life of the migrants and the inhabitant's one. But, then, because of these meetings the identity as expressed in a pattern of life shifts its borders. Katherine Tanner is in the opinion that an identity is hybrid because it brings the cultural material from the groups before and then mixes with the cultural material from another culture.[1] Another is the encounter of cultures through media. This kind of globalization brings one another nearer. Who can deny, that our world today becomes more and more "smaller"?

Therefore, it could emerge new identity, although not really new, or in the big cities emerges a multiple identity that we can see in the next example. Young peoples in Jakarta are big fans of Manchester United FC. Why aren't they supporter the local Football Club, like Persija (Jakarta

[1] Katherine Tanner, *Theories of Cultures – A New Agenda for Theology*, 114.

football club)? Are they not the inhabitants of Jakarta? Of course, they are Jakarta's inhabitants. Or young people drink in the Cafe after the work time. Are they not Indonesian? Why don't they go home to gather with their families like the traditional pattern? Of course, they are Indonesians. May be, they are different! Or some people gather for an autos club, apart from the ethnics to whom they belong. Do they stop being Javanese because now they are inhabitants of Jakarta or Bandung or another big Cities outside Java Island?

Positive value of Identity

The identity can be viewed from another perspective, i.e. positively, in state of looking identity only as trigger for conflict. The identity of a group could bring about at least solidarity, secure feeling, and orientation. This values are captured through experiences and observations.

Solidarity:

A catholic priest rode a Vespa (Italian brand of motorcycle). On the way was something wrong, and the motorcycle stopped. And then some Vespa riders passed by. They did not know the priest, but they offered help. Of course, there is a Vespa club. But, they certainly felt, that "we are the same".

Secure feeling

Migrant people, like Batak-people from North Sumatra known as people with solidarity. They have a sort of groups, led by adat (traditional norms) to gather, especially in main phase of life (marriage, burial, etc.). This may be happen also among other ethnic migrants, although not so strong as them. Why? May be grouping gives them secure feeling, to be protected.

Orientation

A Group, including ethnic, gives orientation for attitudes and behaviour, even values which are always referred. For example, someone says, "Are you not a Sundanese? Why are you so crude? We don't speak so as you speak to older people!".

Religion as Identity: Christianity

The phenomena emerged in the secular sphere emerges also in the sphere of religions as groups or communities. Religions offer also something like solidarity, secure feeling and orientation. Mutually, the members get a "seal" as member of the community, connected with commitment. The contrast between "we" and "you" would be hardened by the claim of the religion as "holder of the truth"; consequently they deny each other. "We" are not "you"; we are true, they are false.

Denying the other – at least in the Christianity - can be traced to the origin. Christianity claims, that – apart from the social context of the time, that forced them to say that language - the message comes from the founder self: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: … (Matt. 28:19-20). The gospel of John also divided two groups of human: the one who accepted Jesus as the light, and the other who denied Jesus (cosmos, Jews). Therefore, "we" and "you" are sharp distinct, even contrasted.

Indeed, we need here hermeneutics; and that is the main challenge for religions: hermeneutics. In order to avoid an anachronism, they need to discover the original experiences without absolutizing eternally what were experiences in different contexts, different space and time. Hardening or absolutizing brings with itself the danger of anachronism, and therefore conflicts, externally and also internally.

Historically and sociologically, a religion undergoes a long process, from original experiences to codification (like canon, credo and stabilization in institutional form, etc.), and certainly moves continuously through different space and time. This mean, that the original experience is "bundled" / wrapped up in formulations, rites, teachings, etc. In perspective of "power", André Droogers notes this changes in the context of mechanism of power. They who had authority made codification to safeguard the original experiences, although in the risk to estrange the original.[2] Apart from this judgement, it can be concluded, that absolutizing without hermeneutics would be dangerous. This act would be a forever reference to one point or one crystallized experiences that actu-

[2] André Droogers, "The Recovery of Perverted Religion", in M. Ter Borg/ I.W. van Henten (eds.), *Powers – Religion as a Social and Spiritual Force*, 29.

ally happened in a long time.

The danger would be more explosive if it mixes with the other external factors, as social, economy and political problem, which are not weaker potencies to bring out a conflict. Religion as a power (social and spiritual power) could be in danger to be used by another power. The "black and white" pattern of view would be a toy for another ideological power or used for another interest.[3] Conflicts of religions could be also neglected to beg the attention the religions who should give prophetic voice against non-human policy.

Multiple Religious Identity?

Viewing these phenomena, it raises the question: is it possible a multiple religious Identity? This question will be answered indirectly through three points: identity as a dynamic, discovering the meaning of religion, and religion as openness in certainty.

Identity as a dynamic

Phenomena multiple identity and multiple belonging describes actually, that an identity moves dynamically. Migrations of people to the big cities make the people change their pattern of life, and also shifts his identities border. In another words, the map of big cities make the people shift their identities borders; keep the element of the old one, but also get new elements.

But, the question is: has Christianity as group's identity a single and static identity? The combination between religious identity and another identity as ethnics and behaviour is not the issue here. One can be Javanese Christian or Dayak Christian. The main issue is: is it possible that someone belongs to some religions simultaneously? A multiple religious identity?

The answer could be "no". But before this final answer "no', it is something to consider, namely an identity moves dynamically, also "Christian" as identity. This can be traced through the whole history of the Christianity, in which two points are to be viewed: conflicts and inculturation. Droogers sees this tension from another point of view: appropriation and

3 Cf. Samosir, L., "Mozaik Yang Harus Serasi – Konflik Agama", in E. Kristiyanto/ W. Chang (eds.), Multikulturalisme – Kekayaan dan Tantangannya di Indonesia, 79-81.

protest: a religion stands and moves between appropriation and protest, between institutionalisation and prophetic. [4]

The kind of inculturation can be seen also in the beginning of Christianity. First, in Acts 15 we can see the problem of inculturation. Should non-Jews people follow the Jews laws to be Christian? There was a move in the identity! Second, this is expressed clearly in the epistles of Paulus. Paulus did not repeat literally the teaching, but "translated" it to the context in the local community, for example the conflicts in Corinth. There were moves in the identity. Also, Christianity as identity moves dynamically.

Should this continue where Christianity enter into the different regions, like Asia? Raimundo Panikkar, an Indian Theologian, provide his view on the shift of the identity of Christianity, or precisely the properness of the identity's shift. He describes symbolically in three names of rivers: Jordan, Tiber, and Ganga. Christianity was born in the Palestine, in the Jews spirituality (Jordan); then grew up in the western intellectual atmosphere (Tiber in Rome). Panikkar asks, if Christianity wants to go to Ganga which symbolically the regions (and cultures) outside the Jews Spirituality and Western Intellectuality. De facto, Christianity enters the Asia, Africa, Oceania, etc., that have different situations, different patterns of thinking. Should the identity of Christianity be determined only by the Jews and the West? [5]

Another point is the conflicts with heresy. But, did or does Christianity remain untouched by this challenges of heterodoxy? The renewals, like St. Francis in the late middle ages did – besides the heresy that protested against the richness of the Church but the poverty of the mass, shows that the Catholic Church changes positively. The protest and the inner renewal make the institution reflect the identity of the community.

It is too easy to say, that this issue of the shift of religious identity likes the shift of the package, but not the nucleus.[6] This can be compared with the opinion of Alfred Firmin Loisy, who says, that the gospel should be the seed that grows up as the Church. He denies explicitly the

[4] Ibid, 35.

[5] R. Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges – Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness", in J.Hick/P. Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness – Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religion*, 89-116.

[6] Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle- Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities*, 69.

view of Adolf von Harnack who wants to divide Christianity in "nucleus" and "package".[7]

Discovering the Meaning of Religion

Before entering into the reflection on Christian identity in context of religious plurality, here will be tried to discover the meaning of religion in short.

Is a religion a power holder or provider of Empowerment?

Religion is a power that could destroy. Mark Juergenmeyer researches the connection between religion and symbolic violence. The Phenomena of "cosmic war" can be legitimized as a form of resistance or oppugnancy against oppression which is against God's will. One destroys something (like incident at September 2001) as a form of dramatically oppugnancy that does not aim directly to the actual target (the WTC building as symbol of the money's controller). One is proud as a soldier who goes to war, although he would not be the winner. [8]

But, we have another one to compare. This is the experience of Catrien Notermans with the pilgrims to Lourdes, France, which becomes the object of an anthropological research. Notermans accompany of group of old and sick people. Most of them suffer more than 10 years. Notermans finds out, that after the pilgrimage the people get the special experience: empowerment. Why? They say, in the pilgrimage they were really accompanied and listened, not as in the daily life. They say, if they went to med. Doctor, they would get the same words, "I know what you will say"; and he gave them medicines. But, they did not feel as person. But, in this pilgrimage they could tell their sickness without interruption; they could remind their painful experiences, and in the end they could emotionally identify their suffering with the suffering of Mary. Notermans sees this transformative experience as empowerment, because after the pilgrimage the people can accept themselves and face their suffering.[9]

[7] Rossino Gibellini, *Handbuch der Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert*, 145-149; Alfred Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church* (trans. By Christopher Home), London: Isbister & Company Limited, 1903. In this book, especially in the Chapter on Church, Loisy does not agree with the opinion of Harnack in his book *Das Wesen des Christentums*.

[8] Mark Juergensmeyer, "Symbolic Violence: Religion and Empowerment", in M. Ter Borg/I. W. Van Henten (eds.), *Powers - Religion as a Social and Spiritual Force*, 40-41.

[9] Catrien Notermans, "The Power of the less Powerful"- Making memory on Pilgrimage to Lourdes", in M. Ter Borg/I. W. Van Henten (eds.), *Powers - Religion as a Social and*

Religion as orientation: as compass or sextant?

A religion could become an orientation, in the same manner as the secular groups become orientation for their members. But, the question is: as compass or as sextant? A compass points always toward the north, wherever we stay. Sextant used by the sailors is different. Sextant functions to make sure the position of the ship at that time by measuring the changing sky. Gerd Baumann prefers the statement, that a religion could be a sextant. This statement is based on another research on the Turks (moslem) in a village in the Turkey and the Turks (moslem) in the West. The result of this research is, that there is a difference between the act they did in the Turkey and the same act they do in the West. For example, they did the rite in their previous village as a part of their daily life there; but as immigrant they do the same rite as part of their religious act in the midst of secular world. Thus, there is a shift, and this shift depends on the context where they stay. [10]

Is religion a power to disperse or to bring solidarity?

A Religion is potentially a power to disperse, to bring exclusion. But, religion could also become an unifier, bring about solidarity, wherever. [11]

Religion as openness in certainty

The belonging to certain religion gives identity but also demands a commitment. One shouldn't go everywhere to enjoy the experiences for himself, like someone who can pay and can choose any restaurant or change to another restaurant which he likes. To know the other, even from the next distance, or like Pieris, to try to experience the experiences of another religious experiences may be wishful. There we can learn something; may be as reminder to see again what before was emphasized, but now neglected in our religion. [12]

Spiritual Force, 181-193.

[10] Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle,* 73

[11] Cf. This author's experience is written in Samosir, L., "Mozaik Yang Harus Serasi", 84.

[12] Cf. A. Pieris, "The Buddha and the Christ", in J. Hick/P.F. Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 175.

In other side, we should not identify commitment with exclusion; to commit does not mean to exclude and to deny the other. [13]

In my article "Sebuah Mozaik yang 'harus' serasi – Konflik Agama" ("A Mosaic which 'must' harmonious – Conflict of Religions") noted above, the main issue is, "Must the harmony be forced?" Why "must"? The forced harmony cannot be a really and genuine harmony. The harmony is born through long history, through long time encounters, through relationship in which one respects deeply the others, and not only in the surface. Therefore, such a harmony presumes a respect for the differences, and not avoids the differences. It is needed here also the sensitivity in order not to hurt the others. Regardless majority or minority, they can hurt each other.

The differences can shape something beautiful, like a colourful mosaic. The Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* nr. 250 says, that the interreligious dialogue should bring to the recognizing of the other religions, the deepening the faith of ourselves, and the mutual enrichment.

Therefore, commitment must be complemented with the openness. We can note the term *passing over* and the faith as *certain and open-ended*[14] from P.F. Knitter. The encounter with others can deepen and enrich each other if the encounter happens in sincerity.

The Christian Theologies of Religious Pluralism – although they contribute to the theologies area and offer "dialogue" as a method in encounter with others – are judged to neglect the differences. In their looking for the common (ground) one often takes out some "objects" from the context, from its totality. By doing that he ignores the possibility to learn from others. The differences should not be avoided, but must be seen as potency to enrich each other.

Précising the term, to enrich should mean to broaden the horizon in viewing the reality. The reality is very complex to be comprehend only from one point of view.

[13] Cf. Samartha, *One Christ – Many Religions*, 98-99.

[14] This term is used by P.F. Knitter in his book *No Other Name?*, 203.

Shaded-in area as public sphere: potency for mutual enrichment

We cannot speak about single identity anymore. Today we speak about multiple identity that surely have a convergent area, or a shaded-in area, where identities cross each other. In the big cities peoples from different identities be "united" in one or more shaded-in area because of their hobbies or their interests, not only because their religious belongings. The question is: Would it be possible, that this shaded-in area as the beginning for "greater" interests, so that this area such a kind of place to see the reality from difference perspective? That would be a mutual enrichment for the people in the shaded in area! May it should be what the Indonesian people say or imagine today: a public sphere[15].

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[15] For example, Synod of Diocese of Bandung, Indonesia, notes as topic nr. 15 'public sphere' as important place to present caritas Christi, to see deeper in the situation of society, to cooperate with others for the sake of bonum commune. *Hasil Sinode Keuskupan Bandung 2015*, nr.61-63, p. 46.

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