

Christian Art and Architecture in Indonesia in the Twentieth Century: Rooted in Local Images and Buildings

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Abstract

In this global era, identity has become an important topic. This research presents the identity of Christian art in Indonesia as represented in visual art and the architecture of church buildings. Catholic missionaries introduced Christian visual arts through education in schools, boarding houses, and religious instructions. Thereafter, the perceptions of the Indonesian faithful were expressed through paintings and sculptures. There are three periods of the development of such expressions: (1) during the colonial era, (2) after the formations of the local artists who were sent to study abroad, and (3) the modern era. Each of these periods has its own expression.

Keywords: church history, Christian art, local identity, Christianity in Indonesia, Indonesian art

Between July and August 2011, there was an exhibition and an auction at Bazaar Art Jakarta,¹ intended as a fundraising for the production of the film *Soegija*. This was a film on the life of Mgr. Albertus Soegijapranata, SJ, who was the first bishop native to Indonesia and also a national hero. I mention this event in this paper on Christian art in Indonesia for three reasons. First, Soegijapranata had a concern for culture and Christian art, and he counted among his friend acclaimed artists, painters, and sculptors. Even the first president of Indonesia, President Soekarno built rapport with him through offering a work of fine art as a gift.² Second, among the artists

¹ The exhibition was titled “The Silent Diplomacy: A Catalogue” and took place at Sri Sasanti Gallery, Jakarta, between July 25 and August 6, 2011. The auction was held at the Bazaar Art Jakarta on August 7, 2011. Both events were organized by Sri Sasanti Syndicate.

² During this time, capital city of Indonesian Republic was Yogyakarta. President Sukarno presented a gift to Mgr. Soegijapranata, SJ, a copy of painting of the Nativity by an Italian artist. See: G. Budi Subanar,

whose paintings and sculptures were on the exhibition and auction, there was an artist, named Gregorius Sidharta, who was sent to the Netherlands in the 1950s to study fine art. Third, some of the paintings and sculptures at the Bazaar were Christian art objects.

Nowadays, it is not difficult to find discussions of Indonesia Christian art on books or articles. Like Asian Christian art, Indonesian Christian art can be defined with reference to “ecumenical art,” indigenous art throughout Indonesia, local artists and their production and appreciation.³ There is possibility for expanding the meaning of the term “Christian art” based on the artistic tendencies found within Indonesian. Among relevant publications on the topic, a notable recent article is “Christian Art in Indonesia” by Küster, Steenbrink, and Sudhiarsa, which provides an overview of the policy of the bishops of the Dutch East India in the early twentieth century, then goes on to explore several individuals and centers of Christian art in Indonesia of the twentieth century.⁴

In telling the story of Christian art within the current of Indonesian church history, this paper will proceed from a different perspective. It will focus on how appreciation appears, and then, on the creative processes of several notable artists and their expressions in their arts (products). The problem that this paper deals with, in other words, is how Christian art in Indonesia, from the missionary period to recent time, *shows* its existence, and how the Indonesian artists expressed their passion through paintings, sculptures, and architecture. This paper will begin with a periodization of Christianity and Christian art in Indonesia and presentation of notable artists and their works of each period. This will be followed by an interpretation of the works and some important motifs found therein.

Periodization of Christianity in Indonesia

How has Christian art in Indonesia developed alongside the Catholic

Soegija: Catatan Harian Seorang Pejuang Kemanusiaan (Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 2012), 197–99.

³ Patricia Pongracz, “Religious or Aesthetic Lessons? The Bible Illustrated by Asian Artists,” in *The Christian Story: Five Asian Artists Today*, by Patricia Pongracz, Volker Küster, and John Wesley Cook (New York: Museum of Biblical Art, 2007), 12–27.

⁴ Volker Küster, Karel Steenbrink, and Rai Sudhiarsa, “Christian Art in Indonesia,” in *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, ed. K. A. Steenbrink and J. S. Aritonang (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 925–49.

Church in Indonesia?⁵ How might this development be periodized? What might be the notable trace or artefacts of Christian art from each period? I propose that broadly three periods can be discerned in the history of Indonesian Christian art.

First Period

Because it lies between India and China, Indonesia became one of the transit places for the merchants or the missionaries before they reached China. Christianity had already come to Indonesia in the seventh century, according to the historical notes of the Arabic historian Shaykh Abu Salih al-Ramani, who records that there had been Christian communities on the northwest coast of Sumatra.⁶ In the same document, it is written that in Fansur, a harbor city on the northwest coast of Sumatra, there were churches of *Nasara Nasathirah* (Nestorian), one of which was dedicated to “the Holy Virgin Mother Mary.”

The Nestorian Church that spread in Sumatra came from Chaldea, near present day Iraq. Y. Saeki notes another source, which indicates that the Nestorians had come from China, whose traders had taken Bantam in Java as a transit port. There were relics with Chinese characters found in Java.⁷ However, those early Christian communities did not persist.

⁵ This section reproduces sections from the author’s doctoral dissertation: G. Budi Subanar, *The Local Church in the Light of Magisterium Teaching on Mission: A Case in Point: the Archdiocese of Semarang-Indonesia* (Rome: Casa Editrice L’universita Gregoriana, 2001).

⁶ Shaykh Abu Salih al-Armani, a historian and Muslim scholar from Egypt, wrote about Christian traditions since Kalifah Abdallah al Mamun, son of Harun al – Rashid, in 833. He wrote *Tadhakkur fiha Akhbar min al – Kana is wa’l Adyar min Nawahin Misri w’al Iqtha’ aihu*. It was a list of churches and convents of the Egypt and the outer lands’ Provinces. It noted that there were 707 churches and 181 convents spread throughout Egypt, Nubia, Abbyssinia, West Africa, Spain, Arabia, India and Indonesia. Another document from Mar Abhd’ Isho (Ebedyesus), a Metropolitan of Chaldea’s Church, 1291-1319, wrote a list of dioceses of Chaldea in Asia. It consisted of the dioceses on the islands and in the hinterlands of Dabghagh, Zabag or Zabaj was a name of Java and Sumatra, and of Sin and Masin a name of China. See: Jan Bakker, “Umat Katolik Perintis Di Indonesia,” in *Sejarah Gereja Katolik Indonesia*, vol. 1 (Ende: Arnoldus, 1974), 19–40.

⁷ Yoshiro Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China* (Tokyo: Toho Bunkwa Gakuin, 1951), 463.

Second Period

In the 16th century, the Catholic Church was under the Portuguese colonialists. The Roman Catholic Church began in Indonesia with the arrival of the Portuguese in Malacca in the Malay Peninsula in 1511 and continued to spread to eastern Indonesia in 1522. Francis Xavier played a key role during this phase of Christianity Indonesia (and Southeast Asia more broadly). He was sent by King João III of Portugal, but at the same time was appointed by the Vatican as a papal emissary, a legate or *nuncio*, with the explicit order to visit all islands, provinces, and countries where there are Christian communities.

In May 1542, Francis Xavier landed in Goa. Upon hearing that in Makassar, Celebes Island (Sulawesi), there were local people who were well disposed towards Christianity and that the islands of Indonesia promised to yield a bountiful harvest (for the church, that is), Francis Xavier, before continuing his journey to Japan, made a detour to Indonesia. In order to visit Celebes, he spent his time in the Moluccas. He visited the Portuguese and native Christians in Central and North Moluccas. He had prepared for his visit by translating some prayers into the Malay language. He stayed in the Moluccas for fifteen months from January 1546 to June 1547, and made visits to several islands in the archipelago.

From 1547 to 1682, there were expeditions of Jesuits (consisting of ninety-two members) in the Moluccas and Celebes. There are three volumes of *Monumenta Missionum Societatis Iesu*, namely volumes XXXII, XXXIX, and XLIII, which describe the situation and preserve all of the documents of this period. The success of the missionaries was often bound to the stability of the Portuguese power—even though the lifestyle of the Portuguese colonialists and traders did not exactly serve as a good example of the Christian life.

The Dutch came to the Moluccas in 1602. When the Dutch East India Company was founded, it was given full administrative, judicial, and legislative authority for this part of the world. A governor general was sent there in 1608 and was instructed to acquire, for Holland, a monopoly on all East Indian trade. By 1619, the foundations for Batavia on Java's north coast were being laid, and soon, Batavia became the headquarters for the Dutch East India Company. Meanwhile, a power struggle ensued between the Dutch and Portuguese colonialists had an impact on the Catholic missions, too. The last notable outcome of the struggle was in 1677, when the Dutch expelled the Portuguese and the Catholics from Siau, in the north

of Celebes. A treaty was signed between the Netherlands and the King of Siau. The treaty then became the basis of the policy adopted in all parts of the Dutch East India. The formulation of the treaty is as follows:

In the kingdom of Siau, the king and all the successors promise not to permit religion except that of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands... All rosary, statues, and all things will be put aside, thrown away, and burnt... To ensure the promises above, the King of Siau and the successors shall not allow here in Siau, and anywhere else where the followers of the pope, priests, teachers, and the lay person associated with the Roman Catholic Church to enter, dwell, and live. The king and the successors will expel them and give them no permission, and if they are stubborn (the king and the successors) will exercise force to expel them or punish them publicly as troublemakers.⁸

Third period

In 1806, the Catholics in the Netherlands gained religious liberty from the government. This new situation had an impact on the Indonesian archipelago as well. On May 8, 1807, Pope Pius VII appointed Nelissen as Prefect Apostolic. But it was only from 1826 that the area of the jurisdiction of the new Prefect Apostolic became clear: part of *India Orientalis Belgica*. On September 20, 1842, there was a new decree from Rome explaining the new status of Vicariate Apostolic. From 1807-1923, there were successive Apostolic Prefects and Apostolic Vicars: three Apostolic Prefects and five Apostolic Vicars.

In 1807 there were only two priests for the entire archipelago. In 1842 there were seven priests, including an Apostolic Prefect, who were authorized with a *radicaal*, an official letter of the government which gave authorization for someone to work as a government officer. Then, Mgr. Groof came with four other priests without *radicaal*. On the one hand, Mgr. Groof had to fight against the restrictions of the government. On the other hand, he had to face internal problems because there were only some of the priests that were leading exemplary lives. Some of the faithful led what might have been considered morally questionable lives—there were many illegitimate children, polygamies, and beliefs in superstition.

Facing the challenges of the situation, the Catholic Church in 1809 began to build orphanages in several cities in Java. In 1862 the Ursuline Sisters came to Indonesia and built schools, and so too did the Brother's Congregation

⁸ Quoted from the unpublished lecture note, "The History of the Church in Indonesia," by F. Hasto Rosariyanto, S.J., Faculty of Theology, Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Originally in the Indonesian language.

of Aloysius Oudenbosch, which also provided education. Outside Java, the problems were similar. Those were problems of polygamy, slavery, and particularly in Flores, intense rivalries between clans and tribes.

Carrying out missionary activities in the very wide area with diverse sorts of problems, the Dutch missionaries did not manage to leave behind too many lasting artefacts, neither as buildings nor as works of visual art. This made tracing the spread of Christian art among the faithful in Indonesia of the nineteenth century difficult.



Fig. 1: A girl's school in Semarang around the year 1930. Source: Claverbond

Christian art in the first half of the twentieth century

There are three points from which to begin a discussion on Christian art in Indonesia during the early twentieth century. First, visual art and building at schools (education institutions) run by missionaries among the native. Second, the construction process of the Sacred Heart Temple, at Ganjuran, Yogyakarta, built by the Schmutzer Family. Third, the two notable artists, namely FX Basuki Abdullah, a painter, and G. Sidharta, a sculptor, who were sent by the Catholic mission to study fine art in the Netherlands. From these three points, this paper will examine how Christian art in Indonesia come into its existence. And afterwards, how Christian art spreads and increases through the expressions of the artists shall be discussed.

Traces from the Christian education system among the natives

Education among the Christian natives started at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Muntilan and Mendut, Central Java, there were board-

ing schools for the natives—boys' schools were run by the Jesuits, and girls' run by Franciscaines Sisters (OSF). Besides intellectual knowledge and skills, the Jesuits and the Franciscans introduced various Christian virtues and habits to the students. In the facilities in boarding schools—the chapel, refectory, and dormitory—there were various statues and paintings (of Jesus, Mary, the Holy Family, the Stations of the Cross) which encouraged the students to respect and appreciate Christian art and artifacts (representation of the heavenly figures).

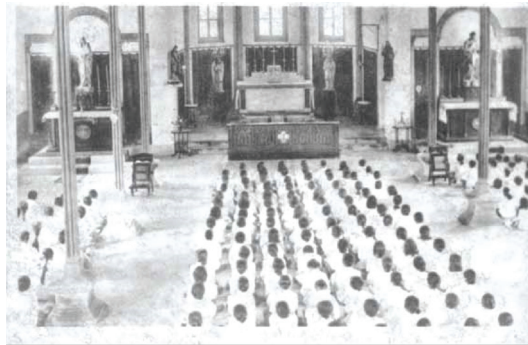


Fig. 2: Sekolah Mendut, around the year 1910

The alumni of these boarding schools sometimes became teachers in Catholic-Christian schools in various areas. They married each other and started new Christian families. It was from the first generation of the native Christian teachers and families that the respect attitudes and appreciation of Christian art were shaped and spread among the people.⁹ The presence of Christian art artefacts created a visual experience regarding those various (heavenly) figures on the tradition of the church. Still, at this time, the heavenly figures still tended to replicate European Christian imagery.

Adaptation of J. Schmutzer and friends

It was the efforts of Josef Ignaz Julius Marie Schmutzer, who erected the Sacred Heart Temple at Ganjuran, Yogyakarta in 1924, that marked a new phase of the adaptation of Christian art. Schmutzer's Sacred Heart Temple was inspired by the styles of Hindu and Buddhist temples. Besides the temple, Schmutzer created various statues of the Holy Trinity, Virgin

⁹ According to the testimonies of J. Sastradwidja, a student of F. van Lith, SJ, dating from January 1926, the picture which was hung in the pastory in the Muntilan complex.

Mary, angels, and Stations of the Cross, which adopted local Javanese aesthetics. These works of Christian art were executed together with some local artists.

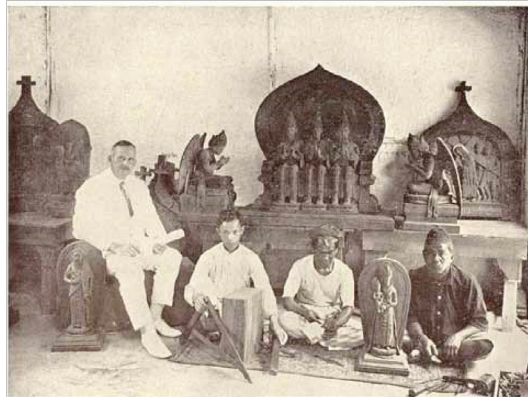


Fig. 3: Schmutzer with a team of artists working on Ganjuran in the year 1924. Source: *Europeanisme of Catholicisme*

In defense of his efforts, Schmutzer published articles in European magazines, but his major work was a fascinating book on Christian art that was provocatively titled *Europeanisme of Catholicisme*¹⁰—which translates to *Europeanism or Catholicism* in English. Schmutzer presented Christian art that had already existed among the locals. He put photographs of various artefacts: on batik style, on sketches, and *wayang*—shadow puppet made of leather. But those existing works were two-dimensional: painting and drawings. When Schmutzer and his friends made sculptures, they had transferred Christian art into the three dimensional.

Pope Pius XI, in 1925, organized an exhibition of Christian art from the mission world. The Dutch East India bishops (mission bureau) sent various artifacts, objects from various areas in Indonesia, to the Vatican Museum.¹¹ Among them were some photographs of churches in Java, Sumatra, and Celebes.¹² Even today, in the Vatican Museum, there is still an altar of the Sacred Heart from Ganjuran, Yogyakarta (see Fig. 4).

¹⁰ J.I.J.M. Schmutzer and J. J. ten Berge, *Europeanisme of Catholicisme* (Utrecht: De Gemeenschap, 1928).

¹¹ See Küster, Steenbrink, and Sudhiarsa, “Christian Art in Indonesia.”

¹² See Celso Costantini, *L'arte cristiana nelle missioni* (Rome: Tipogr. poliglotta vaticana, 1940).



Fig. 4: Altar of the Sacred Heart in the Vatican. Photographed by the author in 1995.

Indonesian artists who studied abroad

There were two notable Indonesian artists who studied in the Netherlands in early-to-mid 20th century. They were sent by the missionary foundation.

FX Basuki Abdullah

FX Basuki Abdullah was famous as a painter of palaces in Thailand, Philippines, and Brunei Darussalam. At the beginning of his career, between 1935-1937, he was sent by the missionary foundation to study at Koninklijk Academie van Beeldende Kunsten, a *hogere technische school* in Den Haag (The Hague).¹³

¹³ Solikhin Salam, *Biografi R. Basoeeki Abdullah, Sang Maestro* (Jakarta: Keluarga Basoeeki Abdullah, 1994).



Fig. 5: Basoeki Abdullah, *Maria*, 1937

During his studies in the Netherlands, he created some paintings. Among the famous ones is Mary Mother of the Blessing, based on a reading of the Lady of Revelation (Fig. 5). A lady with a Javanese costume (*batik* cloth and *kebaya* shirt) above the area of volcanic mountains (rice field, river, coconut palm trees). He made this painting in two series. The second one, there is snake on the top of the mountain (the first appearance was in the 1935 issue of *Claverbond*. The second one in a leaflet on missionary activity in Indonesia). The first painting is still in the Berchmanianum, a former college and residence of the Society of Jesus that is now used by Radboud University, in Nijmegen, Netherlands.



Fig. 6: Communion of the Saint, Painting of the church of Boro as background

Abdullah also painted the Nativity. In front of Mary and Joseph, and the angels, the Infant Jesus lied on the top of (flower) lotus. In another work, he painted the Community of the Saints: Holy Trinity, Mary, and the people of God who were on the move to the eternal place. Another painting (Fig. 6) showed that the artist took the photograph of the church in Boro, Central Java, as one of his inspirations, for palm trees in the background.

These paintings showed that Abdullah crossed the border from the European symbol on the Christian art. Abdullah's *Lady of the Revelation Book* does not contain stars and moon, as the classical European depictions. For Abdullah, The Lady was presented on the volcanic-mountainous area that is Indonesia. On the Nativity, the Infant Jesus born not in the manger, nor in the cave, as the European style image. Instead, the Infant Jesus lied on the top of lotus. In the oriental belief, it is the symbol of wisdom, eternity. Just like the statue of Sidharta Gautama or depictions of various Hindu deities. The landscape of palm tree and rice field was a typical of *Mooi Indie* style of which Basuki Abdullah was a part.

On the other side, while Abdullah was commissioned to make fresco at the Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Semarang, Central Java, at the Jubilleum of Blessed Mary (1950), he painted Visitation of Gabriel Angel and The Coronation of Mary (Fig. 7). He painted the figure of Mary with European style. Nowadays, the fresco is not at the place.



Fig. 7: Jubileum Maria. A work by Basuki Abdullah at Randusari Church Semarang

Gregorius Sidharta

Gregorius Sidharta was a painter and sculptor. Previous to studying abroad, he painted—copied—a series of station of the cross at St Francis Xavier Parish in Yogyakarta, in European style.

Between 1953 and 1957, he studied in Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, Netherlands. In 1958, He made a Sacred Heart sculpture at Kalasan Parish which generated controversy for its unorthodox presentation of Jesus. Whereas in classical European Christian art, a Sacred Heart of Jesus presents Jesus donning a red robe and long hair, Sidharta's sculpture presented a common person with short hair and simple outfit (see Fig. 8). For most of his career, he was a lecturer at the art department of the prestigious public university, Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB). As a Christian artist, he elaborated various forms of the cross (Fig. 9).¹⁴

There are also other artists who have had similar experiences as Abdullah and Sidharta, elaborating certain symbols from Christian art. Their efforts were constrained by and caught in tension between personal experiences being part of a catechetical paradigm.

¹⁴ See "A Homage: G Sidharta Soegija dalam Seni rupa Indonesia," Asosiasi Pematung Indonesia, 2010, pp. 27, 46-47, 90-91.



Fig. 8: A Sacred Heart of Jesus, work by Gregorius Sidharta

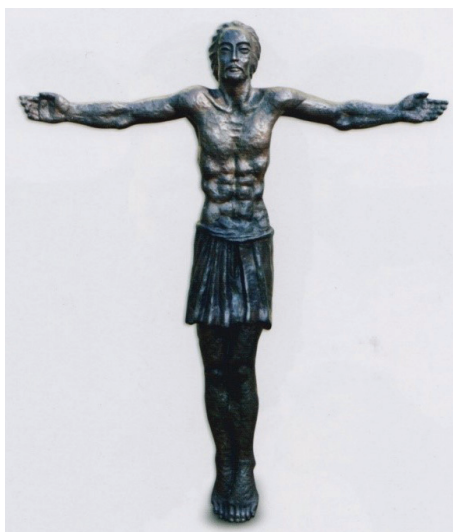


Fig. 9: A Crucifixion work by Gregorius Sidharta

The development of Christian art in Indonesia afterwards

This period is the phase after the first half of the twentieth century. There are some Indonesian artists, mainly from Java and Bali, who left their characteristic traces in Indonesian Christian art.

The Encounter of experience, passion, and faith

Since 1950, there was already a special academy of fine art in Yogyakarta. The Indonesian Christian art in the twentieth century often came into existence through creations of artists who studied at the academy. But it there were important contributions from the artists who were autodidacts. All such artists have their own character that was shaped by the diversity of their personal experiences, skills, and varying choices of symbols and means of expression.

In various publications on Christian art in Indonesia,¹⁵ some authors (already) mentioned some notable (and young) Indonesian artists. There is a movement called Asian Christian Art Association (ACAA) that started in 1975, which became a conducive to the development of the creative process and appreciation of Christian art in Indonesia. Similarly, there was a catechetical center in Yogyakarta, which developed Christian art in Indonesia, through commissions, exhibitions, and residency programs for artists.

From those movements and personal experiences of the artists, we can discern some Indonesian Christian artists with their own distinct characters. Their paintings show how they extrapolate their personal experiences and express them in their artistic production. I divide this discussion into two parts: first based on the personal characters who represent various generations, second based on special themes.

Some notable artists

There are some notable personalities mainly associated with different decades: seventieth, eightieth, ninetieth, and new millennium.

Bagong Kussudiardjo, an artist of the 1970s

Bagong Kussudiardjo actually was a performance artist (a dancer). His

¹⁵ Ron O'Grady and Masao Takenaka, *Bible Through Asian Eyes* (Auckland: Pace Publishing, 1991); Patricia Pongracz, Volker Küster, and John Wesley Cook, *The Christian Story: Five Asian Artists Today* (New York: Museum of Biblical Art, 2007).

career started in his youth. His international experiences started in the early seventies when he studied modern dance under Martha Graham in the United States. He created various dance choreographies. Afterward, he started to paint. There is a special character in his expression, namely, movements and the daily experience of biblical tales. His identity as the faithful and a dancer translated into particular movement styles on his canvas.

I Nyoman Lungsir, an artist of the 1980s

Among the Balinese Christian artists, some names are mentioned frequently: Ketut Lasia and I Nyoman Darsana.¹⁶ These two artists of Balinese Christianity have different backgrounds. Ketut Lasia was a protestant, trained by a missionary institute. I Nyoman Darsana had various international exchanges.

In contrast to both, I Nyoman Lungsir was firstly a simple farmer. He expressed his personal experience on his paintings. Prior to starting a work of painting, Lungsir performed special rites. He withdrew from daily chores, underwent fasting, and then read the Bible. Only then he began working on realizing his imagination on the canvas.¹⁷



Fig. 10: Ketut Lasia, The Lord's Supper

¹⁶ O'Grady and Takenaka, *Bible Through Asian Eyes*, 10, 88–89; Pongracz, Küster, and Cook, *The Christian Story*, 56–61.

¹⁷ Gelar Karya Kalpika 97, Catalogue of Painting Exhibition at the Hilton International Jakarta, 16-22 November 1997, pp. 28-29; 49.



Fig.11: Nyoman Lungsir, Kitab Wahyu



Fig. 12: Nyoman Lungsir, Yesus Mengajar, 1997

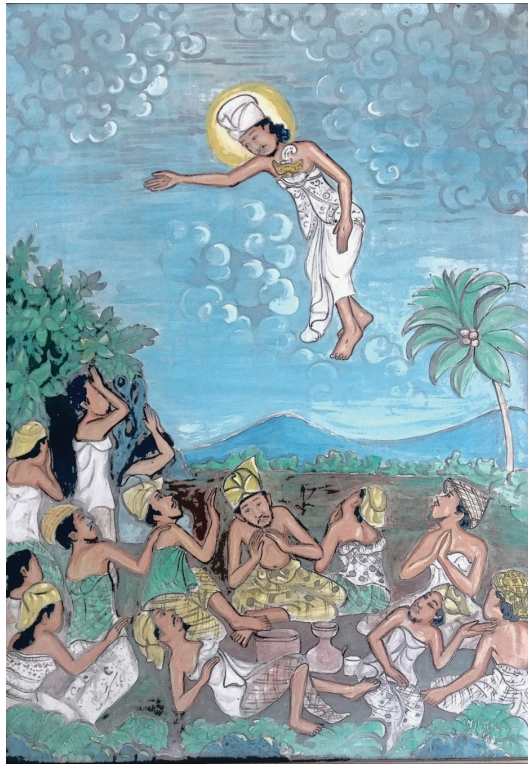


Fig. 13: Nyoman Lungsir

Formulating his difference with Ketut Lasia, Lungsir presented on his canvas Jesus as the Resurrected One. The costume of Lasia's Jesus was that of an elaborate Balinese *pedanda*—traditionally worn by a person of honor—in white and an *udeng* or cloth hat (see Fig. 12 and 13). This was different from the presentation of Jesus by Ketut Lasia, who presented Jesus as a simple person with simple clothes (Fig. 10). Besides, as a Catholic, he made the object of Blessed Virgin Mary (Fig. 11). From the Lady of the Revelation, he presented a lady with angels in various positions. A pair of angels as guardians bringing kris (tradition dagger), a pair of angels as prayers with bid hands, and a pair of angels as worshipers hold flowers.

Sigit Santosa, an artist of the 1990s

Sigit Santosa has held a number of personal exhibitions, but there is none in which religion was a central theme. Nonetheless, many of his paintings explore religious symbolism. He would put theologically-loaded

Latin or Greek words on the canvas. Among such words are *accipite et manducate ex hoc omnes* [Take this, all of you, and eat] (Fig. 14), *mandylion* (a painting not made by human hand). The artist shows how he creates his paintings based on his passion, daily experience in the light of the Christian faith. It is a kind of mockery of his daily experience.



Fig. 14: A work by Sigit that appeared on the Catalogue of exhibition and an auction at Bazaar Art Jakarta 2011

Tommy Tanggara, an artist of the new millennium

Tommy Tanggara is an artist who continuously made exhibitions on similar themes with heavy religious, particularly Christian, undertones.¹⁸ He conveys experiences of those who were the victims of the tragic 2005 tsunami in Aceh and the death of his wife while giving birth to their only child.³⁶ His personal experiences swung from traumatic into the hopeful spirit based on the Covenant of Love.

¹⁸ Personal correspondence. Also see the following catalogues: “Yaa ... itu!!” Pameran Tunggal Tommy Tanggara, Museum dan Tanah Liat, Yogyakarta, 2005; The Covenant of Love Solo Exhibition, CG Artspece, Jakarta, 6-14 December 2008; Hey God, Solo Exhibition, Sangkring Artspace, Yogyakarta, 1-9 September 2009.

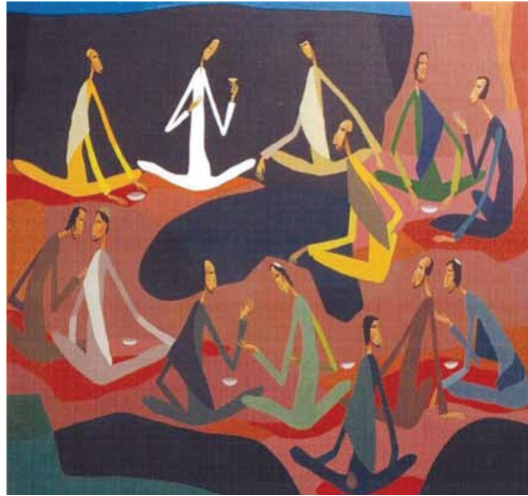


Fig.15: A work by Tommy Tanggara

Wisnu Sasangka, an artist of the new millennium

Wisnu Sasangka combines various aspects of his faith, his intellectual background, and his residence experiences in many international exchange programs.¹⁹ An aspect I should highlight about the artist: as a young Indonesian Christian, Wisnu witnessed the chaotic situation when churches were on fire. He then expressed, artistically, this personally traumatic experience in an optimistic tone. There are stairways to heaven within his traumatic memory.²⁰

¹⁹ Wisnu Sasongko, *Think on These Things: Harmony and Diversity* (New Haven: OMSC Publications, 2007).

²⁰ Sasongko, 15.



Fig. 16: Wisnu Sasongko

Some notable themes

The crucifixion

In Christianity, the crucifixion is one of the central moments of redemption. Such an important motif has been explored by countless artists of renown, such as Salvador Dali who looked at it from a very different perspective. Among Indonesian painters, there are Bagong Kussudiardjo in the style of batik, and also Edi Sunaryo, who made some paintings on the theme of crucifixion. There is also an important Muslim artist, Ugo Untoro, who explored crucifixion—literally body and the cross—in various modes. His work expresses someone who brings burden, torment, and pain, even though Untoro himself proposed that there is also humor which lies behind the apparent “seriousness” of his works. Untoro refers to Pau; Gauguin’s Yellow Christ

(1889) and Andrea Mantegna's San Sebastian (1457-59) as his inspiration.²¹



Fig. 17

The Last Supper is another moment of redemption. This theme is more popular than the crucifixion., perhaps because there is a concept of *slametan* in Java and Bali that shares some links to themes of redemption and salvation. There are various artists who explore this link. There is an artist from Papua who put his painting on a tree bark (Fig. 18). Similar to the Last Supper is Noah's Ark, which is the symbolic expression of the moment of redemption in the Old Testament. In the context of political situation after the fall of Suharto in 1998, there were non-Christian artists, such as Robby L and Agung Suryanto, who explored the symbolism of Noah's Ark in their works titled, respectively, "Fantasy Nuh RI" and "Noah's Ark."²²



Fig.18

²¹ Catalogue of "Solo Show by Ugo Untoro," Nadi Gallery, Jakarta, June 18 – 30, 2009

²² See *Pancawarsa Reformasi Indonesia*, Indofood Art Awards 2003.

The Pelican

In the classical Christian art, the pelican becomes a symbol of sacrifice. The symbolic depiction is that of a pelican bird giving contents of her stomach to feed her children, the young pelicans. There are two or three expressions in the churches of Java and Bali wherein this symbol becomes an object that shows how traditional artists responded and expressed through their art products.

The episcopal stick is one of the specific regalia of the bishop, which includes his mitra (*soli deo*), his necklace and ring, and his episcopal stick. The episcopal stick of Semarang Archbishop shows the pelican bird that is synthesized with the style of the Javanese Garuda. This combination retains both respect and honor and the spirit of sacrifice of the pelican bird. The creator is an unknown artist. It was adapted from an article in the Claverbond magazine (a Catholic mission magazine), then was developed as a three-dimensional object.



Fig. 19.

Like the episcopal regalia in Semarang, there is a pelican bird in the tabernacle at the Church of Tuka.²³ But the latter has an aspect of the Balinese style. There is also a pelican bird at the altar of Ganjuran, in a traditional floral style (Fig. 20).

²³ Denpasar”, in: Sejarah Gereja Katolik Indonesia, Vol. 3a, MPM Muskens (ed.), P. Patriwirawan, SVD, “Sejarah Gereja Katolik di wilayah Keuskupan, Ende, Penerbit Nusa Indah, 1973, p. 1399-1424 (p. 1424)



Fig. 20: Personal photograph on the year 2001

Figure of Blessed Mother Mary on Pieta

During his lifetime, Michelangelo created various forms of Pieta, the most famous one of which is at the Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican. There are some artists who took the Pieta as their creative object. How was Pieta adapted by the Indonesian artists?



Fig. 21: Pieta by J. Custers. Source: Europeanisme of Catholicisme

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a Dutch artist named J. Custers who represented the Pieta in the Javanese style (Fig. 21). Custers' version of the Pieta replicated the posture of more famous European counterparts, but he had put a *kebaya* cloth on the Blessed Mary and a traditional hat on Jesus. Afterwards, there were three notable Indonesian artists whose paintings took the Pieta as an inspiration.

Herjaka created a series of station of the cross with *wayang beber*, a traditional style. One of them is the Pieta (Fig. 22).²⁴ He represents the figure of Jesus and Mary in wayang and batik style, drawing in a very lyrical rhythm, and decorated parallel lines. Second, there is Pius Sigit Kuncoro (Fig. 23).²⁵ He represented the figure of Jesus and Blessed Mary based on the model of the classical representations. Next to them, there are two traditional (Javanese) clowns who need to be perfected. The title is “Penyepuhan Peradaban” (Perfecting of Civilization). The third artist is Agung Kurniawan (Fig. 24). He represents the Pieta, the relation of Blessed Mary and Jesus as part of daily experience, a common and close relation between a mother and child. This relation is instantiated everywhere, including, as depicted in one of his paintings, inside public transportation—as a mother who cares to her son who is ill.



Fig. 22: Herjaka

²⁴ A copied of original documents. It was discussed in the early of 2006. In 2015, it is executed as the station of the cross at Gamping Parish, Jogjakarta, Central Java.

²⁵ Catalogue of “Rereading Drijarkara: Education, Nationalism, and Humanism”, Eduart Exhibition, Universitas Sanata Dharma, Desember 2008-January 2009.



Fig. 23: Sigit Kuncoro

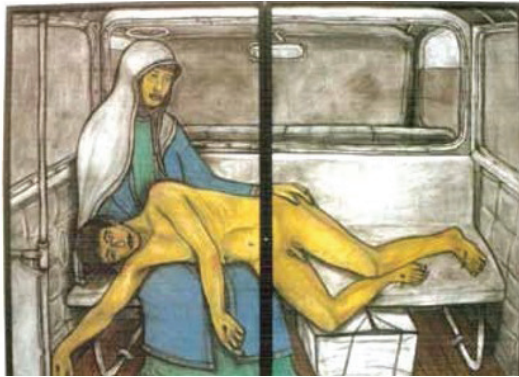


Fig. 24: Agung Kurniawan

Figure of Angel

An angel is a special figure for artists. There are countless churches in Italy with various expressions of the figure.²⁶ How does the figure of angel reveal itself as it goes through the Indonesian tradition? In particular, how might a woman artist in Indonesia respond to the figure of angel?

There are artists who have taken the angels as an important figure to be presented. In addition to the churches in Bali, and in Ganjuran, there are also cover of a special magazine published in the 1930s (*Tamtama Dalem* magazine 1933-1934) that presented figures of angels, in both the traditional style and the European style.

²⁶ Giulietta Bandiera, *Guida insolita ai misteri, ai segreti, alle leggende, alle curiosità e ai luoghi dell'Italia degli angeli* (Rome: Newton & Compton Editori, 2000).

I bring to attention a more recent artist specializing in puppets, Ria Lestari, who elaborates the figure of angels in her artistic expression. In 2013, Lestari was involved in a residency program in the Philippines. During the residency, she explored and developed her figure of angels. Among her inspirations was the experience of prayer. This relates with time. Then, it represents into “*Menggunting doa*” (Cutting the prayer). A figure of angel as a heavenly creature as mediator of faithful act is what Lestari depicts, in relation to her conviction of the power of prayer and the discontinuity of attentions. In her works, there is always an effort to cut and send the prayer on various moments.

Wayang Wahyu – Shadow puppet of Revelation

Starting in Solo, Central Java around 1960, Timotheus Wignyosubroto, a Javanese member of the Fraterum Immaculatum Conceptionis (FIC), organized artists to create figures of Old Testament (such as David) and the New Testament (such as Jesus) on the medium of the traditional shadow puppet. These puppets were called *wayang wahyu*.²⁷ Afterwards, the artists used the puppets on shadow puppet performances of various biblical stories, accompanied by the Javanese orchestra, or *gamelan*.

Thereafter, it became a movement among the Christian faithful. There were priests, members of religious congregation and orders, as well as lay persons who became *dalang*, the narrator and puppeteer in *wayang* theater. One performance takes three to four. Nowadays, there is a forum (WhatsApp group) where these artists discuss central figures of the biblical stories and organize performances.

Christian architecture in Indonesia: A spirit of openness

There are various periods where the church buildings in Indonesia were constructed. The first was at the early of the twentieth century, or perhaps even before. This was the period when the church buildings were part of colonial complexes. The second period, around 1930s, was the period wherein churches were constructed for endogenous Christians. The third period was after the tragedies of 1965. Under the Suharto regime that came to power at that time, every Indonesian citizen was obligated to embrace one among

²⁷ Joachim van der Linden, *Donum Desursum: Anugerah Dari Atas: Kongregasi FIC Di Indonesia, 1920-1980* (Salatiga: Kongregasi FIC Indonesia, 1993), 319–20.

five officially-recognized religions. The number of the Christian population increased—because Protestant and Catholicism were two of the five recognized religions. Therefore, there was construction of new church buildings.²⁸ The period is when the urban centers in various parts of Indonesia developed, which led to more churches to be erected.²⁹

A notable name in this history of church architecture in Indonesia is YB Mangunwijaya, a diocesan priest of the Semarang Archdiocese. He studied architecture in Germany, in the mid-60s. He built some churches in Semarang and Jakarta, the Major Seminary of Makassar Archdiocese, and several convents, including the Trappistine in Gedono, Central Java.

There are some key ideas that influenced Mangunwijaya's architecture.³⁰

Functionally, a church is a liturgical place, a place of rites. Mangunwijaya creates the church space as a place in which resides the possibility of communication with the Transcendental One (a vertical relation), and with the horizontal relation, as the plane of the social. In the symbolic area, in one side, a place for rites will materializes the holy one. At the same time, he presents a room as a place to unite/gather and pray. In its universal aspect, a church represents the Catholic church, with the Catholic symbols: the altar, sacristy, and a space for the faithful. It has reference to the biblical tradition (Old and New Testaments). It facilitates a networking with other Christian/Catholic communities (collecting money, etc.).

In the local sphere, the situation of the faithful needs to be taken into account, and the society as the context. In these areas, there are already the heritage from the ancestor.

The liturgical activity as faith expression needs a rite, also needs a sacred place, namely church building. Renewal of the Vatican II stressed the Eucharist as the Centre of the Church, then it created new liturgical rites. Previous to the Vatican II, greater stress was on the sacred time. But the liturgy of post-Vatican II was not necessarily at the church, instead the Eucharist could be managed in various places.

²⁸ Subanar, *The Local Church in the Light of Magisterium Teaching on Mission*, 363–363.

²⁹ Gregorius Budi Subanar, "Memberdayakan Hubungan Paroki dan Lembaga Pendidikan Katolik di Masa Krisis. Suatu Program yang Plausibel dalam Komunitas Basis," *Jurnal Orientasi Baru* 13 (2000): 152–65.

³⁰ YB Mangunwijaya, "Mencari Bangunan Gereja Di Jawa Tengah," in *Sejarah Gereja Katolik Indonesia: Pengintegrasian Di Alam Indonesia IV*, ed. M.P.M. Muskens (Ende: Arnoldus, 1974), 190–99.

Those are the principal points that directed YB Mangunwijaya when creating various churches in Central Java and Jakarta. He also inspired young architects, Yori Antar, Eko Prawoto and some others, who went on to build churches in cities across Java. One of Yori Antar's perspectives is that the architectural building is symbol of honesty, historical record of civilization and a monument. An architectural building should revive its environment. Through the construction of the building, Yori Antar believed that people would be invited to pray—and not exclusively Christians.

Nowadays, through networks on social media, appreciation of the architectural building of a Church could be shared widely with the people of Indonesia. For instance, *Wisata Gereja* (Church Visit) has been active on Instagram in spreading images of the churches and encouraging visits.

Conclusion

I conclude with some points that should be highlighted from the discussions so far.

1. The first two periods of Christianity in Indonesia, there are few artefacts that have lasted until now. As is in Indonesia's maritime culture, most of buildings were made of wood. Therefore, the artefacts are difficultly to find.
2. The development of the 20th century, as the development of Christianity in Indonesia spread through the education institutions and system, there started an appreciation towards the Christian image (art) among the faithful. There could not be creation without appreciation.
3. In Europe, the twentieth century Christian art was already in various positions and undergoing renewals, while in Indonesia, it had just started at that time. In the period of artistic creation, there were various local artists that tried to adapt, extrapolate, and deformate the European style of Christian images by combining them with the traditional image from the environs of indigenous culture.
4. The point above is not only a problem of expression, nor is it just about aesthetics. But it also pertains to belief, or conviction. Regarding the special themes: between the crucifixion—with ideology, or conviction of redemption—and the pelican or pieta—ideology of sacrifice—the concept of sacrifice (Pelican Bird, Pieta) is more familiar than redemption for the Indonesian artists. Therefore, the Pelican and Pieta were more favored than the Cross, which appeared in the works of art later on.

5. Similar to the point above, there is a difference of theological perspectives or personal beliefs. This translates into a difference between expressions. For instance, I Nyoman Lungsir took another symbol than Ktut Lasia and Nyoman Darsana. There is semiotical difference.
6. As an influence of post-colonial tendency, there is a tendency to put inside the works that which is lacking or absent. When FX Basuki Abdullah was in the Netherlands, he put Blessed Mary as a heavenly figure as a figure from the East. While, on the paintings of the Visitation and the Coronation here at the local cathedral, the artist put Blessed Mary as a heavenly figure as a western style.
7. Generational differences: The artists from the older generation had a standpoint of detachment. They tended to treat a work of visual art as if were an object of faith. While the artists from younger, newer generations intensively expressed their personal involvement, the spirit of participation, in their paintings. There is a sense of embodiment of the daily experience in the works of the latter.
8. Institutional position: Those of the older generation tended to show the structure of hierarchy—detachment, instruction, managerialism. While the new generation wished to show a more egalitarian structure—genuine, fresh, openness, caring.
9. Instead of staying within the circle of only the Christian faithful, because the biblical stories also exist in the Qur’anic stories, there were some stories that become popular ones. Among those is Noah’s Ark. It became a central theme when there was a festival on visual art celebrating the Indonesian *Reformasi*, a political sequence that began in 1998 with the fall of Suharto (Indofood Art Awards 2003). There are some artists (Robby L, Agung Suryanto) who used the allegory of Noah’s Ark to inspire their creation. The similar theme is used by the Christian artists in Indonesia (such as Soeparto, “Noah’s Ark” and Hening Purnamawati, “Bahtera Nuh” [Fig. 25]), as well as in Asia (Solomon Raj, “The Ark of Noah”). Related to this case is Ugo Untoro’s creative process. Although he is a Muslim, he gets inspiration from the Christian themes of Gauguin and Mantegna. They stimulate Untoro, who has intensely created a series on crucifixion (Fig. 26).



Fig. 25: Hening Purnamawati, “Bahtera Nuh”



Fig. 26: An exhibition of Ugo Untoro’s series on crucifixion.

The artists who are Christian struggle to realize in daily experience their Christian faith. Their daily experience thus becomes the source to be put onto the canvas, or other some other medium. Their modes of expression vary. They can be serious, sarcastic, or humorous. The product of such efforts constitutes Christian art in Indonesia that we have today.

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