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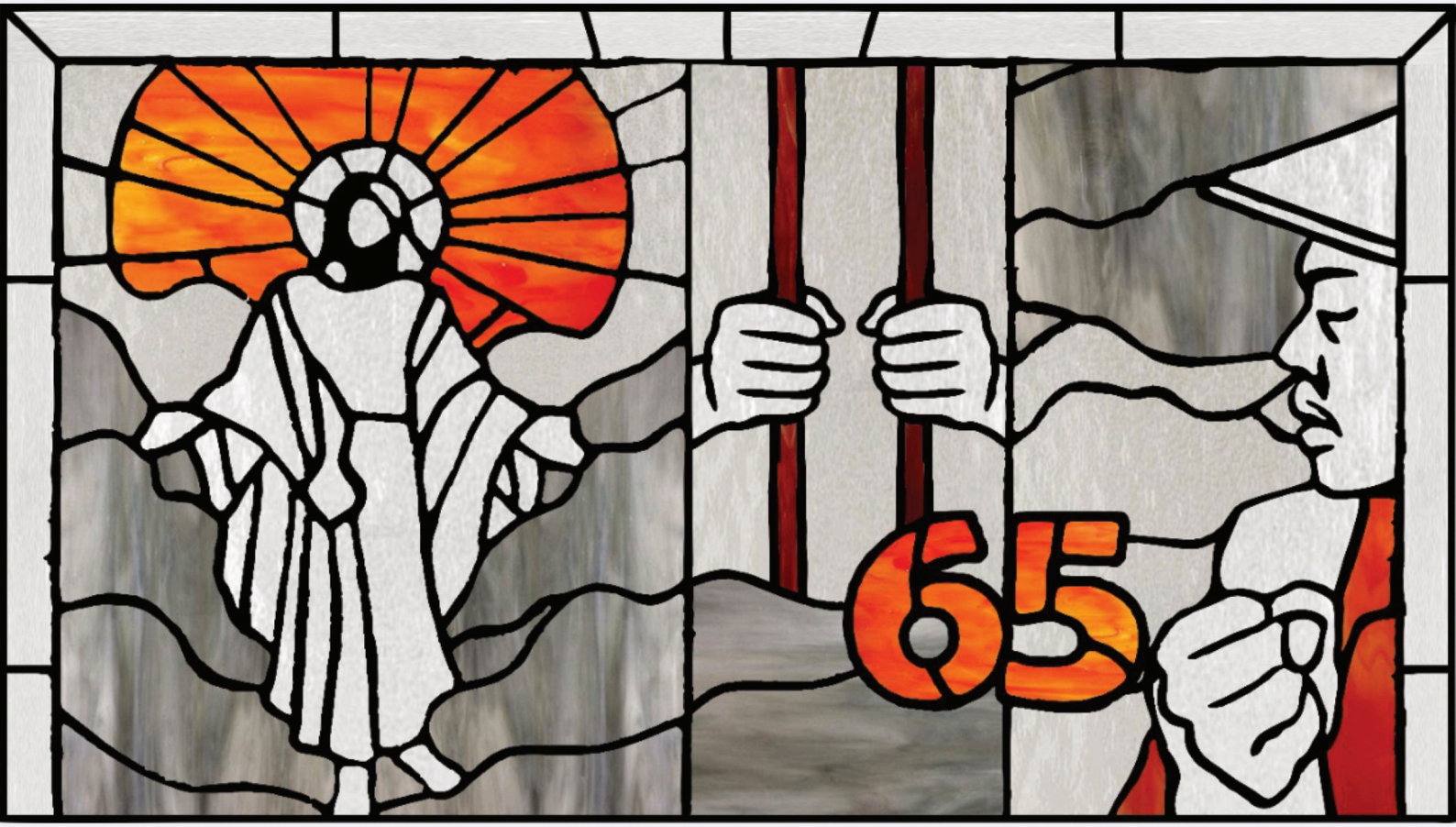
Religious Alliances and Conflicts in the Shaping of National Identity



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Catholics and Communism in Indonesia:
Religious Alliances and Conflicts in the Shaping of National Identity

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Catholics, Democracy, and the Indonesian Leftist Movement

The Catholic Church in Indonesia's political dynamics after independence

The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945, marked a critical turning point, leading to Japan's surrender and the end of its occupation across Southeast Asia, including the Dutch East Indies. This transition allowed Allied forces to enter on August 14, 1945, and liberate internees and prisoners of war who had endured years of harsh confinement under Japanese rule. Catholic missionaries were among those who suffered under this occupation, facing imprisonment, forced labor, and restricted religious practice. Even after liberation, missionaries found themselves amid widespread poverty and social upheaval, lacking the resources to rebuild and support communities devastated by the war. This period of recovery exposed tensions within the Catholic Church itself, illustrating an ideological split that paralleled the broader socio-political landscape of Indonesia: some Catholics joined with emerging nationalist movements for Indonesian independence. In contrast, others stayed loyal to the Dutch colonial government. These internal divisions within the Church reflected the broader ideological contestations across Indonesian society, as nationalists, religious groups, and leftists each sought to influence the formation of a new national identity.

For those who supported the new Republic, they called the members of the guerrilla "*pemoeda*" (youth), stressing that they constituted the future of the nation. On the other hand, those loyal to the Netherlands considered this group extremist. However, it is important to note that not all those who participated in guerrilla warfare were referred to as "*pemoeda*." The guerrilla forces included people of various ages and backgrounds, including older individuals and experienced military personnel who also played crucial roles in the struggle for independence (Anderson, 1972: 70, 77-78; Reid, 1974: 39). These participants came from different social, political, and ethnic groups, and sometimes there was conflict among them, reflecting a wide array of personal and collective interests. This post-1945 period marked a time of external rebuilding and a profound internal reckoning for the Catholic Church as it was caught between its traditional loyalties and an evolving political landscape and had to navigate these competing pressures.

After their release, several Dutch missionaries regained their positions of authority within the Catholic hierarchy, displacing indigenous priests. Differing views between those who supported Indonesian independence and those who opposed it intensified internal tensions. For instance, Stanislaus Sutopanitro, an

Indonesian diocesan priest dispatched to Medan in 1947, faced challenges in working alongside Dutch colleagues who strongly disagreed with his pro-independence stance (Steenbrink, 2015: 13). In addition to internal strife, external perceptions also complicated matters for indigenous priests, as the Catholic Church, much like during the Dutch colonial period, faced accusations of collaborating with Dutch forces. Historically, the Dutch colonial government resented Roman Catholic missionaries while favoring Protestant missionaries in the Dutch East Indies. Despite this historical antagonism, the perception that the Catholic Church aligned itself with Dutch authorities during the independence struggle prompted suspicion and criticism from Indonesian nationalists. This perceived association raised questions about the Church's allegiance to the new republic and shaped a complex dynamic within the broader Indonesian independence movement.

Mgr. Albertus Soegijapranata (1896-1963), the first indigenous bishop of Indonesia, who was elevated to the archiepiscopate in 1961, justified joining the movement for Indonesian independence in 1945 and provided insight into the elements that influenced his decision. He discussed the nature of the independence movement and stressed that the nation's aspirations were innate and would endure regardless of their involvement, which could be the potential repercussions for the Church if Catholics abstain from participating in the independence movement (Subanar, 2000: 237-238). To affirm his position, he publicly stated: "100% Catholic, 100% Indonesia." However, he initially used the word 'patriot' in his opening speech at the Second Catholic Community of Indonesia's Congress (Kongres Umat Katolik Seluruh Indonesia, KUKSI) in Semarang on December 27, 1954. This choice of term underscored his commitment to the nation, emphasizing that patriotism and religious faith were not mutually exclusive but complementary in Indonesia's struggle for independence (Subanar, 2012: 18). This statement can be related to the issue during Japanese imperialism, which labeled Catholics as un-nationalistic. On the other hand, Pieter Jan Willekens, a Dutch Jesuit who served as Vicar Apostolic of Batavia in the Dutch East Indies and worked closely with Mgr. Soegijapranata, remained neutral despite his deep concern about Islamic domination (Van Klinken, 2003: 175-187; Steenbrink, 2015: 11).

The chaotic situation of the *Bersiap*[1] period left the indigenous society in a state of high alert, making them deeply suspicious of anything associated with the Dutch. Those perceived as supporting Dutch sovereignty became targets, often facing attacks, arrests, or fatal violence. However, even after the *Bersiap* period ended in 1946, sporadic acts of violence persisted, fueled by unresolved tensions and lingering suspicions within the community. As an example, members of Pemuda Hizbullah, an armed group active during the Indonesian War of Independence and initially formed by the Japanese authorities, suspected Father Sandjaja, a diocesan from Magelang and Herman A. Bouwens, a Jesuit seminarian from the Netherlands of concealing information related to the Dutch. This suspicion tragically led to their assassination on December 20, 1948 (Subanar, 2005: 72). The facilities of the Catholic school in Muntilan, Central Java, were likewise destroyed and set ablaze by the same group (Subanar, 2005: 73). Although, several Indonesian Catholics were also engaged in guerrilla warfare, with figures like Ignatius Joseph Kasimo, who had been involved in the Catholic political movement since the Dutch colonial period (Soedarmanta, 2011: 55; Andryanto, 2023).

In March 1945, the Japanese authorities established the Committee for the Investigation of Preparation for Independence (Badan Penyelidik Usaha-usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan, BPUPKI), a 38-member organization tasked with preparing the initial phase of Indonesia's independence, including the Constitution. The 38 members appointed a nine-member committee (Panitia Sembilan) to draft the initial document. They went on to create the Jakarta Charter, which served as the foundation for the preamble of the Indonesian Constitution. However, in the preamble of the Jakarta Charter, the phrase "an obligation for Muslims to abide by Islamic law" (*dengan kewajiban menjalankan syariat Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknya*) was added. This addition was based on the premise that Indonesian Muslims played a crucial role in liberating the country (Elson, 2009: 111). The inclusion of the phrase thus created a clear division among committee members and sparked a broader ideological conflict. On one side were the proponents of a secular state, who argued that

[1] "*Bersiap*" is a term used by the Dutch to describe a turbulent period during the Indonesian National Revolution that ensued after World War II. The Indonesian word "*bersiap*" translates to "prepare" or "be ready." *Bersiap* is also often referred to as the period during Indonesia's war of his era extended from August 1945 to March 1946.

the new nation should not be based on any particular religious laws to ensure equality for all citizens, regardless of their faith. They believed that a secular framework would promote national unity, prevent religious discrimination, and respect Indonesia's pluralistic society, which includes significant non-Muslim populations. On the other side were those who supported the integration of Sharia law, believing that the legal and moral principles of Islam should have a place in the nation's constitution (Elson, 2009: 116).

This ideological clash highlighted the complex dynamics of Indonesia's diverse society and the challenge of creating a unified national identity. For many Muslims, this was seen as a compromise. In contrast, Christians, especially those residing in eastern Indonesia, expressed concerns that implementing Sharia law could transform the country into an Islamic state (Mujiburrahman, 2010: 113). The secularists feared that the formal incorporation of religious laws could lead to the marginalization of minority groups and disrupt national cohesion. Christian nationalist groups from Eastern Indonesia opposed the seven words, perceiving them as discrimination against religious minorities. They have even stated that it would be preferable to form their own country outside the Republic of Indonesia if those words were not removed. Both Protestants and Catholics dispatched a delegation to Muhammad Hatta to convey their reservations. Sukarno and Muhammad Hatta, who would later become the first Indonesian president and vice president, were concerned that imposing Sharia law could marginalize non-Muslims (Elson, 2009: 120). Consequently, fearing the potential divisions it could create within the emerging nation, Hatta encouraged Muslim members of the BPUPKI to remove these seven words. This concern became particularly pressing as the Jakarta Charter was proposed on June 22, 1945, two months before Japan's surrender and three months before the first Allied landings in Java and Sumatra in September and October. Anticipating the arrival of Allied forces, national unity became a priority. Considering the risk of alienating eastern Indonesia, Muslim members eventually accepted.

Sukarno proposed substituting the seven words with "[belief in] the one and only God" (Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa) to establish Indonesia as a deistic rather than an Islamic republic (Madinier, 2016: 143). The "Committee of Nine" (Panitia Sembilan), a group formed within the BPUPKI, drafted this adjustment in response to concerns over religious inclusivity in the new nation (Mujiburrahman, 2006: 109-110). Later, in 1968, the Catholic magazine *Peraba* published several articles criticizing the arguments of Jakarta Charter supporters. In one such article, the Catholic Party contended that the Jakarta Charter never had the force of law because it was merely a draft Preamble to the 1945 Constitution. Moreover, the Catholic Party referenced Sayuti Melik, a member of the PPKI, who asserted that no evidence existed indicating the Committee of Nine had ever signed the draft Preamble formulated on June 22, 1945. Furthermore, only Mohammad Yamin designated this draft as the Jakarta Charter. Consequently, the Catholic Party argued that the PPKI's decision to remove the seven words was justified (Mujiburrahman, 2006: 109-110).

Meanwhile, in November 1945, Mgr. Soegijapranata supported the establishment of the Committee for Helping People (Komite Penolong Rakyat) in Semarang. He encouraged Indonesian Catholics to engage in social activities, aligning with the principles of Catholic social teaching, particularly "the option for the poor." During the same year, a Catholic youth movement called Angkatan Muda Katolik Republik Indonesia (AMKRI) was founded with the motto "Pro Ecclesia et Patria" (For the Church and the Fatherland), highlighting its nationalistic orientation. Later, in 1949, it changed its name to become the Catholic Youth (Pemuda Katolik, PK) (Steenbrink, 2015: 170). Another significant youth organization resulting from the merging of three student unions in Yogyakarta was the Catholic University Students' Union of the Republic of Indonesia (Perhimpunan Mahasiswa Katolik Republik Indonesia, PMKRI), established in 1947. Its mission evolved to transform into a national union representing Indonesian Catholics. Subsequently, following the Indonesian 1965-66 events, PMKRI played a pivotal role in the anti-communist movement, with its members assuming influential positions within the government of Suharto, Indonesia's second president (Estrelita, 2021).

After the failure of the Linggajati Agreement on November 15, 1946, and the subsequent Dutch attack on Republican forces on July 21, 1947, Mgr. Soegijapranata called extensively upon the Vatican to send a delegation to Indonesia, bolstering Indonesia's diplomatic position. Furthermore, Mgr. Soegijapranata's decision to relocate from his episcopal seat in Semarang, a city with strong European ties, to Yogyakarta had significant symbolic implications. This move, given that Semarang had initially been selected as the seat of

the apostolic vicariate to maintain distance from the Muslim monarchies of Central Java, represented a deliberate separation from the colonial sphere. His actions contributed to the Vatican's early, albeit unofficial, recognition of the new Indonesian Republic (Wibowo, 2024: 147-148). In late 1946, the Vatican contemplated assigning a special envoy to Jakarta. Bishop Visser of Purwokerto endorsed this proposal, believing that the Vatican's global stature would enhance Catholic influence in the deliberations on the new Constitution. However, he insisted that a Dutch representative be designated. The Dutch Prime Minister, Louis Beel, who was also a Catholic, concurred with Visser, although he had reservations about it being interpreted as Vatican support for an independent Indonesia. In 1947, the Vatican appointed Georges-Marie-Joseph-Hubert-Ghislain de Jonghe d'Ardoye as the apostolic delegate to Indonesia, who later met with President Sukarno, demonstrating the Vatican's endorsement of the government of the Republic of Indonesia (*The Diary of A. Soegijapranata* in December 1947, as cited in Subanar, 2005: 79).

On January 4, 1946, as the Dutch offensive intensified in Jakarta, Sukarno discreetly relocated the government to Yogyakarta. To maintain proximity to the Indonesian government and establish direct lines of communication with the nation's leadership, on February 13, 1947, Mgr. Soegijapranata relocated the primary Catholic mission from Semarang to Yogyakarta. When the Dutch commenced their withdrawal following the general strike of March 1, 1949, Mgr. Soegijapranata initiated efforts to secure a role for Catholics in the government. Together with Willekens, they showed their support for the union of various Catholic parties by participating in the congress organized by Kasimo (Steenbrink, 2015: 161). Subsequently, seven regional Catholic parties agreed to merge into a single entity, forming the Catholic Party (Partai Katolik, PK). The consolidation of these parties held political significance in the struggle for Indonesia's unity, which remained a challenge despite the nation's hard-won independence. Another result of this congress was the preparation of the Catholic Party for the 1955 elections. This marked the first instance of the Catholic Party's participation in the 1955 general elections, which consisted of two separate phases: the election of members of the parliament (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, DPR) on September 29 and the election of the members of the Constituent Assembly on December 15. In a significant achievement, the Catholic Party secured seats that surpassed the Catholic quota, and Kasimo was appointed a minister in various cabinets under President Sukarno (Andriyanto, 2023).

The concretization of a multi-religious state

During his presidency, Sukarno emphasized the significance of Pancasila as a unifying ideology for the nation (Wibowo, *op.cit.*: 142). Mgr. Soegijapranata shared Sukarno's perspective and supported Pancasila as Indonesia's fundamental ideology. In 1954, he asserted that Catholics should endorse the Pancasila, aligning their beliefs with the principles outlined in the Ten Commandments (Muskens, 1979: 210 as cited by Madinier, 2016: 398). The PKI also declared their endorsement of Pancasila and successfully garnered substantial popular support from various segments of society, such as peasants, factory workers, and artisans. As they gained increasing political influence, they exerted more pressure on religious groups. The PKI, which maintained close ties with Sukarno, persuaded him to detain individuals deemed counterrevolutionaries who were seen as potential threats to the young nation.

This led to the arrest of several anti-communist religious leaders who were outspoken in their opposition to both the PKI and Sukarno's policies. One prominent figure affected by this tension was Buya Hamka, an influential ulama elected to the Constituent Assembly in the 1955 elections, representing the Masyumi party. Hamka was actively involved in revisiting the foundation of the state, aligning with Masyumi's political stance, which opposed Communism and rejected Sukarno's Guided Democracy. These ideological differences intensified Hamka's strained relationship with Sukarno, leading to his eventual imprisonment on suspicion of plotting against the government (Ward, 1970: 12-14). Similarly, Harold L.B. Lovestrand, an American evangelist, became embroiled in political tension in West Papua (then West Irian) in the 1960s. He was detained on August 7, 1965, by Indonesian authorities who suspected him of sympathizing with separatist movements in the region, notably the Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka, OPM) (Lovestrand, 2017). This period saw heightened scrutiny of foreigners, as anti-communist sentiment surged amid growing separatist conflicts and strained Indonesia-U.S. relations. Such arrests illustrate the intricate interplay between

religion and politics in Indonesia. These actions reflect the broader Cold War context, where allegations of subversion and counter-revolutionary activities were frequently employed to suppress dissent. This situation highlights how the endorsement of a unifying ideology like Pancasila could serve as a genuine effort to foster national unity and as a strategic tool for political maneuvering.

Additionally, various other societal groups in Indonesia also employed similar efforts, using ideological endorsement to maintain their position within Indonesian society. For instance, to counterbalance communist domination, Mgr. Soegijapranata and John Dijkstra, a Jesuit, suggested forming a Pancasila-based association that could encompass workers, farmers, and fishermen. After the second congress of the Catholic community of Indonesia (Kongres Umat Katolik Seluruh Indonesia, Kuksi) in Semarang, Central Java, in 1954, a series of professional associations were founded with a foundation rooted in Pancasila principles. These organizations encompassed Ikatan Petani Pancasila (Pancasila Farmers Association), Ikatan Buruh Pancasila (Pancasila Labor Association), and Ikatan Para Medis Pancasila (Pancasila Medical Professionals Association) (Steenbrink, 2015: 479-480; Madinier, 2016: 398). As a result, the center for Pancasila Unions, the *Biro Sosial Pancasila* was established in Semarang. Mgr. Soegijapranata regularly encouraged laborers and farmers to form associations based on Pancasila. At the Socio-Economic Conference of the Vicariate Region of Semarang for Workers and Farmers, held in Mertoyudan, Magelang, from December 30, 1958 to January 2, 1959, Mgr. Soegijapranata said:

> "What greatly draws our attention at this Conference is how we can participate and contribute to the improvement of our society by organizing sellers, traders, workers, laborers, employers, and even farmers into an organization founded on Divinity, Humanity, and compassion, as a contribution to the welfare of the Nation, Homeland, and State. Through this approach, we hope to establish a Catholic society that encompasses all levels of society, one that is well-organized and advanced spiritually and physically as preparation for establishing the Hierarchy" (Subanar, 2016: 140).

Another form of response was proposed by Josephus Gerardus Beek (1917-1983), a Dutch Jesuit priest who received Indonesian citizenship in 1955 and significantly influenced young Catholics. After establishing "Realino," a Catholic boarding house for students (both Catholics and non-Catholics) attending various universities in Yogyakarta, Central Java, in the 1950s. Beek continued his work in 1959 by moving to Jakarta, where he was appointed as the national secretary for the Sodality of Our Lady in Indonesia. In Jakarta, he became increasingly concerned about the perceived communist threat to Indonesia, particularly to the Catholic community. As secretary, he began organizing ascetic and ideologically charged retreats for his youth groups. His strong personality and pronounced anti-communist stance led to tensions with other Jesuits in Indonesia, resulting in a year-long sabbatical in England in 1960. Upon his return, he was assigned to lead an "Information Bureau" responsible for informing Indonesian bishops about socio-political developments to help shape pastoral decisions (Madinier, 2022: 14). In the mid-1960s, he developed "Kasebul," an acronym for "*kaderisasi sebulan*" (one-month cadre training). Based in Jakarta, this initiative offered an intensive one-month leadership training program that combined ideological formation and physical exercise. Its goal was to shape the next generation of Catholic elites capable of promoting Catholic values, resisting communist ideologies, and exerting influence across broader societal and political spheres in Indonesia (Soedarmanta, 2008: 180-181). Ultimately, this program undeniably succeeded in forming loyal Catholic leaders who were also militant anti-communists. He gathered around him a small group of ambitious young Catholics who organized a powerful anti-communist front involving civilians and the military during the 1965 crisis (*IndoPROGRESS*, 2016).

The PKI and religious frictions: shaping Indonesia's political landscape

Since gaining significant support in the 1955 elections, where the PKI became one of the largest political parties in Indonesia, the party continued to grow in influence into the early 1960s (Pauker, 1969: 5). By this time, the party had gained more power and feared other political parties and military leaders that they would take over the country. The Christian political parties—both Protestant and Catholic—had their concern: being

an oppressed minority. Hence, it is no surprise that Catholic leaders and politicians found themselves compelled to formulate a plan to preserve the place of Christianity within society. Given the context, Catholics displayed a heightened steadfast opposition to Communism. This inherent need for a strategic approach stemmed from their concern about the potential influence of Communism on society, particularly given its divergence from their religious and ideological beliefs (Wanandi, 2014: 32, 45, 52).

Mgr. Soegijapranata, known for his pro-nationalist position, along with other bishops, announced their criticism of Communism and Marxism. Mgr. Soegijapranata, in particular, took a clear political stance against the political concept of Nasakom (based on nationalism, religion, and Communism) proposed by Sukarno (Gonggong, 2012: 117-118), even though he remained close to Sukarno (Steenbrink, 2015: 162). The term *Nasakom* is an acronym derived from the Indonesian words NASionalisme (nationalism), Agama (religion), and KOMunisme (Communism). Sukarno first introduced the idea of Nasakom in 1927, drawing from diverse theories and religious traditions, including Marxism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. He initially developed it as a synthesis reflective of Javanese cultural traditions and aimed at reconciling various revolutionary ideologies with Indonesia's colonial context. However, Nasakom only became central to Sukarno's political vision in the late 1950s, as he sought to unify Indonesia's diverse political factions under a single ideological framework. Sukarno believed that the amalgamation of nationalism, Islam, and Marxism would establish the foundation for Indonesia's struggle for independence, thus fostering national unity and stability within a country characterized by its diverse political, cultural, and religious landscape (Wibowo, 2018: 116).

However, despite its theoretical inclusivity, Nasakom encountered significant opposition from various groups, including religious leaders such as Mgr. Soegijapranata, who viewed the integration of Communism as incompatible with their beliefs and values (Wardaya, 2012: 1055). This opposition was also rooted in concerns over the potential suppression of religious freedom. On the other hand, the Catholic political party led by Kasimo—with whom Mgr. Soegijapranata formed the All-Indonesia Catholic Congress—joined the modernist Muslim Party, Masyumi, in the late 1950s to openly show its rejection of Sukarno's Nasakom concept (Steenbrink, 2015: 162). Their concerns were not unfounded, as the PKI's rising political influence led to increasing obstacles for the Indonesian Catholic Church and other Christian denominations in carrying out their missionary work. This strategic partnership between the Catholic Party and Masyumi was rooted in their shared objective of safeguarding religious freedoms and countering the growing influence of Communism within the Indonesian government. Both parties viewed Sukarno's Nasakom concept, which sought to integrate nationalism, religion, and Communism, as a threat to religious autonomy and a move toward state-endorsed socialist policies. This opposition to Nasakom highlights the ideological rift between groups advocating for a pluralistic, religiously inclusive state and those aligning with socialist or communist ideals in Indonesia's early years of independence.

Subsequently, in the early 1960s, the communists aimed to take control of American-owned properties (Mortimer, 1974: 187). Moreover, the PKI and its affiliation, the Peasants' Front of Indonesia (Barisan Tani Indonesia, BTI), actively promoted and organized initiatives that rallied farmers to reclaim land occupied by *hajjis* or those who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca. They argued that many *hajjis* had manipulated the land reform law to gain rights, so the land should be returned to the people (Aidit, 1964: 58-59). However, the reclaiming of land from *hajjis*, who were seen as exploiting land reform laws for personal gain, raised questions about whether it was an act of social justice or a tactic to galvanize support from rural communities. This move can also be viewed as undermining the socio-political influence of religious figures who often held significant sway in rural areas. On January 13, 1965, in Kanigoro Village, Kediri, East Java, the communists singled out orthodox Muslims, including teachers and students, resulting in fatalities, and proceeded to set fire to mosques, religious schools, and residences (Sulistyo, 2011: 153-154). However, it is also important to note that this violence ended in previous confrontations between communists and Muslim factions, forming a part of a broader pattern of sectarian violence in Indonesia. These incidents were part of a broader pattern of sectarian violence in Indonesia during the early to mid-1960s, marked by ideological struggles between the PKI and Islamic groups, growing political instability, and a deepening divide in Indonesian society. This contributed to societal polarization and further unrest, culminating in the anti-communist purge of 1965-1966 targeting the PKI and its affiliates.

In contrast to the Catholic party—which disagreed with Sukarno's close relations with the PKI—the Protestant political party, Partai Kristen Indonesia (Parkindo), decided to remain close to Sukarno. Parkindo, led by Johannes Leimena, was more concerned about the Islamic groups' intention to reinstate the seven words on Islamic law in the constitution—with the obligation to apply Islamic law for its adherents. Therefore, Parkindo chose to approach Sukarno because they wanted to ensure that the Pancasila remained the basis of the state and maintained the guarantee of religious freedom (Aritonang & Steenbrink, 2008: 201-202). On the other hand, Natsir and Kasimo, two individuals with contrasting religious beliefs and ideologies, were united in their staunch opposition to President Sukarno's Nasakom concept and the inclusion of the PKI in the government. Natsir, the founder and leader of the Masyumi political party, espoused Islamist political principles and was a key advocate for establishing an Islamic state during the Constituent Assembly debates held from November 10, 1956, to July 2, 1959. In contrast, Kasimo, a co-founder of the Indonesian Catholic Party, strongly upheld Pancasila as the foundational ideology for the state within the Constituent Assembly. Despite their ideological differences, it is worth noting that both individuals had once shared similar political views (Feith, 1962: 134-145; Lev, 1966: 45-48). Moreover, recognizing the growing influence of Communism, the Bishops' Conference of Indonesia (Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia, KWI) issued a Catholic manifesto in 1955, which included a call to combat Communism and elevate Pancasila as a bulwark against its spread.

The PKI's support of Islam *abangan*, or the unorthodox facet of Islam, further exacerbated the pre-existing tension between orthodox Islam, or *santri*, and *abangan*, which often combines syncretic elements from indigenous beliefs. The *abangan* group staunchly advocated for the freedom of religion and belief, asserting their right to practice their faith, as provided in Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution. The *santri* group, however, held that Indonesia needed to uphold and reaffirm the monotheistic principle. They saw this as essential to maintaining the purity of the Islamic faith in the nation (Mursalin, 2019: 115). The PKI's alliance with the *abangan* segment of Islam strategically amplified the ideological rift between the *abangan* and *santri* groups, which reflected broader socio-religious conflicts within Indonesia. By endorsing the *abangan*'s syncretic practices, the PKI positioned itself as a direct challenge to the orthodox *santri*'s vision of a more homogenized Islamic identity.

In October 1954, the Indonesian government established an Interdepartmental Committee for the Supervision of Spiritual Belief in Society, known as the Panitia Inter-Departemen Pengawas Aliran Kepercayaan Masyarakat (Interdep-Pakem). This committee was tasked with creating the legal framework to define religion legally and regulate these movements (Mursalin, *op.cit.*). Apart from Islam and Christianity—specifically recognized through both Catholicism and Protestantism—many diverse religious beliefs were compelled to reevaluate and adjust their doctrines to meet the government's criteria for *agama* (recognized religions) rather than remaining classified as *kepercayaan* (traditional beliefs). Achieving the status of formally recognized *agama* required alignment with the state's monotheistic requirement. Following significant theological revisions, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism were eventually identified as official religions, or *agama*, rather than informal *kepercayaan* (Mursalin, *op.cit.*). The establishment of Interdep-Pakem highlights the state's attempt to mediate and control the religious landscape, shaping national identity and maintaining social order while reinforcing the dominance of recognized religions and marginalizing indigenous spiritual practices and heterodox religious currents. This intervention effectively pressured various religious groups to conform to the state's ideological preferences, significantly impacting political and religious policies on spiritual practices to gain state recognition. In other words, the tensions between religious groups reflected societal divisions that were not merely religious but also political and cultural, influencing how different groups interacted with the state and each other. For the Catholics as a minority, witnessing these divisions necessitated navigating their position in Indonesian society, advocating for tolerance and unity while also safeguarding their religious interests in a rapidly changing socio-political landscape.

In the aftermath of the 1965-66 genocide, a significant number of indigenous religious followers, as well as those who identified as *abangan*, chose to convert to Christianity. While some conversions occurred in the immediate aftermath, others took place more gradually, beginning in 1969 and continuing throughout the 1970s (Willis, 1977: 5). Their motivations for conversion were multifaceted, often driven by practical

considerations. Another driving factor behind these conversions was the lingering fear of potential accusations of communist sympathies (Willis, *op.cit.*: 21; Nugroho, 2008: 173), which were intertwined with suspicions of atheism (Nugroho, *op.cit.*: 176). This shift served as a means of distancing oneself from communist associations at a time when such affiliations could lead to persecution or death, illustrating the fluidity of religious identity in response to socio-political pressures. In addition, people turned to Christianity due to their perception of many Muslims being involved in the violent anti-communist movement (Nugroho, *op.cit.*: 177). Additionally, this fear intensified with the 1967 policy requiring individuals to indicate their religious affiliation on identity cards, probably increasing the pressure to conform to a recognized religion. The perception of Muslims as primary actors in the anti-communist violence further fueled these conversions. Consequently, individuals sought safety and solidarity in religious communities perceived as less complicit in the violence. The conversions were not merely acts of faith but also strategic moves for self-preservation and socio-cultural alignment.

This widespread conversion subsequently precipitated tensions and conflicts between the followers of Islam and Christianity. Hence, there was a significant shift in the attitude towards the Christian community, and the perception of Pancasila changed, shifting from being seen as an opportunity to being perceived as a conspiracy crafted by a minority to deny the rights of the Muslim majority (Madinier, 2022: 12-13). The shifting perception of Pancasila, from a unifying state ideology to a supposed tool of minority conspiracy, highlights the fractures within Indonesian society and reflects the broader struggle for dominance as well as recognition in a society where religious identity is tightly interwoven with political power.

Catholics and Religious Groups' Contestation under the New Order Regime

A common enemy: Communism

Following the assassination of six Indonesian army generals on October 1, 1965—by a so-called group *Gerakan 30 September* (G30S) (Thirtieth of September Movement)—the PKI was accused of being behind the plot (Adam, 2009: 180). Under the pretext of restoring order, Major General Suharto's military forces seized control and assumed power. Acting under his directives, the military decided to exert simultaneous authority by targeting individuals accused of involvement in the G30S and their family members. The military assumed that family members of those associated with the communist movement were potentially influenced by communist ideology. Consequently, they instituted monitoring and educational measures to free them from communist teachings (P. De Blot, personal communication, October 14, 2019).

The military raised concerns about the resurgence of Communism, often described as a formless entity or invisible communist forces. This led to a gradual shift in Indonesian politics toward tighter control and authoritarian rule. Furthermore, the government, now under military oversight, imposed restrictions on press publications to regulate public access to information (Estrelita, 2010: 44-45). Propaganda campaigns were launched to emphasize the collective responsibility of communists, including the publication of a white paper authored by Nugroho Notosusanto, the Director of the Historical Center of the Armed Forces, aimed at reinforcing their version of history (Madinier, 2014: 198). This period witnessed a growing trend in Indonesian religious and political circles that strongly emphasized anti-Communism. Massive arrests resulted in the tragic deaths of around half a million individuals suspected of having communist affiliations (Cribb, 1991: 12).

Waves of anti-communist movements, at times marked by violence, swept across the nation. Numerous groups participated in these anti-communist efforts, including the Union of Catholic University Students of the Republic of Indonesia (Perhimpunan Mahasiswa Katolik Republik Indonesia, PMKRI) (Van Klinken, 2015: 30; Raillon, 1984: 20); the Indonesian Students Action Forum (Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Indonesia, KAMI); and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), one of the leading Islamic organizations (Fealy & McGregor, 2010: 37-38). On October 22, 1965, in response to the turbulent circumstances, the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Semarang, C. Carri, SJ, issued a letter prohibiting all clergies and religious leaders from

participating as the interrogation team formed by the army (Carri, 1965; Subanar, 2005: 149). Throughout the period of mass arrests and massacres in 1965-1966, the Indonesian Catholic Church remained steadfast in its opposition to the violence associated with the anti-communist movements. On January 6, 1966, Justinus Darmojuwono, SJ, then serving as the Archbishop of Semarang at that time and later appointed Cardinal in 1967, urged Indonesian Catholics to avoid engaging in violent actions (Darmojuwono, 1966).

In the late 1960s, the role of religion underwent a strengthening process within Indonesian society, as the New Order regime promoted religious values as part of its political strategy. This transformation was further solidified by the introduction of the 1965 anti-blasphemy law, which was later complemented by two decrees issued by the Provisional People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Sementara, MPRS). Decree No. XXV, in particular, mandated the dissolution of the PKI and the prohibition of Communism, Marxism, and Leninism. Concurrently, Decree No. XXVII mandated the inclusion of religious subjects in the curriculum of all educational institutions, from elementary schools to universities. Both decrees were promulgated on July 5, 1966, marking the start of their enforcement (Mursalin, 2019). In addition, in 1967, the government included the "religion" column on national identity cards, encouraging people to choose one of the recognized religions (Asril, 2014). In 1968, during his inaugural address to the Council of People's Representatives (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, DPR), President Suharto emphasized the importance of these two measures–Decree No. XXV's prohibitions of communist ideologies and Decree No. XXVII's mandate for religious education—is an essential strategy to prevent any potential resurgence of the PKI.

The impact of being accused of being a communist or sympathizer after the 1965 tragedy in Indonesia could result in violations of the civil and political rights of the person concerned. Anyone accused of being a communist or sympathizer could be imprisoned, tortured, or executed. These charges also resulted in the violation of many people's civil rights, including the right to freedom of expression, association, and religion. In addition, charges of being a communist or sympathizer also resulted in severe consequences for those accused, including loss of employment and social status. The gradual expansion of the scope of the 1965 blasphemy law permitted recognized religious authorities to monitor and restrict minority religious movements that deviated from the officially sanctioned orthodoxy. This allowed mainstream religious groups to pressure minority sects and beliefs seen as heterodox or challenging established religious doctrines, reinforcing a uniform interpretation of each recognized religion within Indonesia's framework (Crouch, 2013: 98-99). In parallel, the New Order regime sought the support of religious leaders to assist in its campaign to eliminate the communist insurgents (P. De Blot, personal communication, October 14, 2019; Sutopanitro, personal communication, March 18, 2020). With the support of anti-communist elements within society, the Indonesian military embarked on a massive campaign of violence that resulted in the deaths of thousands of Indonesians, and many of those rounded up were detained and subjected to abuse and mistreatment in prison. Political prisoners accused of Communism were also deprived of necessities such as food, health care, and clothing. This tumultuous period plunged the nation into a crisis of crimes against humanity, ultimately paving the way for the emergence of new social and political movements.

The military-led government requested the participation of religious institutions, including the Catholic Church, to nominate representatives for a committee tasked with assessing and categorizing individuals accused of having communist affiliations. This measure of anti-communist program thus allowed religious institutions to enter the public system, including the carceral system. The government initiated an indoctrination program, namely Santiaji, for political prisoners who had been charged with Communism that included teachings from the national ideology "Pancasila" as well as religious instruction. The Santiaji (short for Santapan Hati dan Jiwa) program, which stands for "nourishment for the heart and soul," sought to assist political prisoners in rejecting communist ideology and the importance of believing in God (P. De Blot, personal communication, October 14, 2019).

Subsequently, based on the clerics' suggestion, the military agreed and formed a team called the Mental Operation Team (Operasi Mental, Opstal) that visited all the prisons and exiles (P. De Blot, personal communication, October 14, 2019). The team consisted of a chairman, always from the Indonesian army and with the rank of major or captain, and three or four leaders from the Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic communities. They were called the Spiritual Muslims (Rohani Islam, Rohis), Spiritual Protestants (Rohani

Protestan, Rohprot), and Spiritual Catholics (Rohani Katolik, Rohkat) (Sutopanitro, personal communication, March 18, 2020). The clergies had been deeply involved in the Indonesian government's program to eradicate Communism. They worked closely with the military and other government agencies to root out the communist activity and played a role in the anti-communist purge by helping to categorize suspected communists. In some cases, they administered last rites to those who died in prison and those who were executed outside of prison. However, in addition to participating in prison assessment teams, Catholic priests also participated in running "re-education" camps by providing spiritual guidance to political prisoners. As the purge continued, the Catholic Church began to shift its focus from political involvement to engaging in social support for those affected by the events of 1965.

The Catholic shift toward social support

In a report authored by Herbert Feith (1968) titled "A Blot on the New Order's Record: The Fate of 80,000 Political Prisoners in Indonesia," it is outlined that food shortages were used to justify executions, which occurred without any legal due process. Furthermore, a considerable number of individuals plunged into poverty as they were stripped of all their belongings and suffered the loss of family members, with women becoming widowed and children left orphaned. Moreover, those who were eventually released found themselves labeled as traitors to the nation, severely hindering their ability to secure employment. Many former political prisoners resorted to changing their identities in a desperate attempt to find work, while some were trapped in this predicament with no viable recourse.

Paul de Chauvigny de Blot, a Jesuit, while serving as part of the Gajah Mada University inspection team on October 15, 1966, highlighted in his report the importance of offering religious education to political prisoners as a means of freeing them from communist ideology. Nevertheless, he also argues in his reports that employing violence against political prisoners would not serve as an effective deterrent against the resurgence of Communism. In fact, it could inadvertently provide the PKI with an opportunity to regain influence by appealing to those who have been oppressed by the authorities. Furthermore, he emphasizes that religion may not be used as a healing method, especially for those with a strong ideology of Communism. Faced with this situation, De Blot suggested in his reports to the government to develop a more humanitarian program or treatment for political prisoners accused of being communists and their families. In 1969, Justinus Darmojuwono, the first Indonesian to be a cardinal in Indonesia, took the initiative to develop the "Cardinal's Social Program" dedicated exclusively to political prisoners throughout Indonesia —of any religion— accused of being communists and their families (Aritonang & Steenbrink, 2008: 709). Henceforth, with the agreement of military power, the Catholic Church would provide daily support to political prisoners and their families, regardless of their religion. This strategy proved to be socially valuable given the conditions of confinement and effective in terms of religious recruitment.

However, there were different opinions towards the anti-communist movement. As mentioned, Beek formed a leadership group, Kasebul, a militant group with loyal young Catholic leaders (Mujiburrahman, 2006: 139). This raised a lot of controversy among Catholic priests, such as De Blot and Adolf Heuken, a Jesuit based in Jakarta. De Blot testified that Beek's program could lead the country into a religious conflict and that he preferred to work side by side with Islamic or other religious groups to help political prisoners and their families, regardless of religion (P. De Blot, personal communication, October 14, 2019). Beek was close to General Suharto's leading advisors, General Ali Moertopo (1924-1984) and General Soedjono Hoemardani (1919-1986). Thus, he had the chance to play a key role in secretly developing the doctrine of the "New Order," the military regime led by General Suharto (Mujiburrahman, 2006: 139-140). Later, in 1971, some of Beek's former students established an Indonesian think tank called the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), which continues to exist today, although it has undergone significant ideological and structural transformations.

Catholic growth revives opposition between Muslims and Christians

In 1978, the Minister of Home Affairs issued a decree officially recognizing only five religions, with Confucianism excluded from the list. The matter was settled on January 27, 1979, during a cabinet meeting, where it was firmly established that Confucianism did not qualify as a religion (Chambert-Loir, 2015: 79). Following the Indonesian government's announcement, the Minister of Home Affairs issued a decree in 1990 reaffirming the recognition of only five official religions in Indonesia. Consequently, it mandated that all Indonesians adhere to one of these five official religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Millions of Indonesians who adhered to traditional beliefs and those who faced accusations of sympathizing with the PKI opted to embrace Christianity as their faith (Aritonang & Steenbrink, 2008: 207). As a result, the size of the Christian population has increased dramatically (Nugroho, 2008: 174-175; Willis, 1977: 193). For instance, the annual report of the Archdiocese of Semarang indicated that in 1964, the number of Catholics within their jurisdiction was 103,195. Although Semarang primarily consisted of a Muslim population, there was a significant surge in the Catholic population, rising to 234,135 by 1973. This substantial increase signified an influx of individuals converting to Christianity (Subanar, 2005: 151).

In his research, Avery T. Willis explains that the similarities between the religious practices of Javanism and Christian culture, which remained tolerant of traditional customs, facilitated conversion to Christianity (Willis, 1977: 34). Willis also shows that choosing one of the official religions reduced the risk of being accused of Communism. The military supported these religious indoctrination programs and opened the door for religious groups to visit each inmate once or twice weekly (*Idem*, 21). Teguh, a former political prisoner released from Buru Island in 1978, explains that he converted to Catholicism because he found that Catholic priests had a more understanding approach when meeting political prisoners. For the same reason, several political prisoners decided to become Catholics while in prison. Some remained Catholic and became active in local church activities after release (Pertiwi, 2017). Some even converted their families to Christianity and participated in evangelization and prison ministry (Willis, *op.cit.*: 21), even today.

This process described earlier, involving support for political prisoners accused of being communists as well as culminating with interfaith conflicts and shifts in the significance of religion on the political scene, shows that the historical trajectory of the Indonesian Catholic Church has reoriented from supporting the anti-communist policies of the New Order to rejecting state violence against communists. The gradual realization of the massive violence against civilians reoriented the church to a humanistic vision, leading to the setting up of a program of support for political prisoners accused of Communism. The Cardinal's Social Program, initiated by Cardinal Justinus Darmojuwono, was gradually extended in 1969 to benefit prisoners of all faiths throughout the archipelago, with support from international funding. The program helped prisoners by providing them with food, clothing, financial assistance, correspondence with families, and education for their children until their release in the late 1970s. This vital support offered with a fraternal and open attitude towards all prisoners without religious discrimination has radically increased conversions to Catholicism in territories traditionally considered as Muslims. However, it gives the impression of an ambiguous positioning of the clerics involved in the program, who simultaneously made compromises with the military regime. In addition, the issue of conversion to Christianity has raised the suspicion of several Muslim factions against Christian humanitarian activities by being accused of forming part of a Christianization project aimed at dominating the country (Nugroho, 2008: 205).

Furthermore, some Muslim groups hold the belief that Christian organizations have an advantage in disseminating their teachings due to financial support from international Christian donors (Human Rights Watch, 2013: 32). Consequently, this situation further exacerbated the existing tensions between Islam and Christianity. In the eyes of many Muslims, the church's safeguarding of former PKI members was perceived as an opportunistic maneuver amid the ongoing political turmoil. Some Muslims even speculated that this mass conversion might have received support from the New Order government, partly aimed at countering the communists while diminishing the influence of Islam (Shihab, 1998: 173-174). Some even suspected it was a government strategy to keep Islam out of the political arena (Aritonang & Steenbrink, 2008: 206).

This can be comprehended in the context of the New Order, where they grappled with two forces: the PKI and Islam. Following the eradication of the communists, Islamic political parties, against their initial hopes, did not experience a surge in influence after the fall of the PKI. On the contrary, General Suharto

exerted stringent control over them, eventually compelling the Islamic parties to merge politically under a single entity known as the United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, PPP). However, this situation evolved during his final years in power, as Suharto initially suppressed and simultaneously bolstered Islamic organizations as a political force. Over time, the state started to align itself more closely with these organizations, increasingly identifying itself as the custodian of Islam (Human Rights Watch, 2013: 12). The proliferation of Christianity was perceived as an offense to Islam, resulting in episodes of violence against Christians.

Despite the government's monitoring of Muslim groups, occasional acts of violence by militants targeting religious minorities persist. For instance, in the early part of 1967, Muslim extremists launched assaults on Christian properties in Meulaboh, Aceh, Makassar, Sulawesi, and Jakarta, justifying their actions as a response to "Christianization." In Makassar, on October 1, 1969, Muslim students, under the leadership of the Islamic Student Association (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam, HMI), carried out attacks on nine Protestant churches, four Catholic churches, a monastery, a theological college, a Catholic student dormitory, and two Catholic schools. At that time, the HMI Makassar was led by Jusuf Kalla, who would later assume the position of Indonesia's vice president in 2004 (Human Rights Watch, *op.cit.*: 12; Mujiburrahman, 2006: 29-40). This attack served as a catalyst for several days of anti-Christian unrest. In November 1969, the Indonesian government organized a series of interfaith meetings to ease these tensions (Mujiburrahman, *op.cit.*: 38-39).

This meeting resulted in the issuance of the 1969 Joint Decree on the establishment of the house of worship (Surat Keputusan Bersama, SKB) No. 1/BER/MDN-MAD/1969. The decree, titled "Concerning the Implementation of the Task of Government Officials to Ensure Order and the Undisturbed Practice and Development of Religion by Its Adherents," was issued jointly by the two ministers responsible for houses of worship in Indonesia: Mohammad Dahlan, the Minister of Religion, and Amir Machmud, the Minister of Home Affairs. This decree empowered local authorities to mandate that any place of worship could only be constructed with the approval of a local official, often the governor. It also stipulated that, when deemed necessary, the head of the government could seek input from religious organizations and ulama before allowing the construction of a religious building (Human Rights Watch, *op.cit.*: 32). Daoed Joesoef, Minister of Education and Culture and a devoted Muslim, voiced his concerns to Suharto about the 1969 ministerial decree, stating that it could potentially be used as a "legal pretext for radical sects" to discriminate against minorities and create inequalities among Indonesian citizens (Joesoef, 2006: 743-747). Despite his protest to Suharto, this decree persisted and thus contributed to new tensions in the following years. This decree was later revised and replaced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs Decree No. 9 of 2006 and the Ministry of Home Affairs Decree No. 8 of 2006. The updated decree, titled "Regulation of Duties of Regional Head and Deputy in Maintaining Religious Harmony, Empowering the Forum of Religious Harmony, and Constructing Places of Worship," provided a more detailed framework for maintaining religious harmony and regulating the establishment of houses of worship.

Post-Reformasi: Religious Instrumentalism and Conservative Reinforcement

In contemporary Indonesia, the influence of the New Order era persists, notably through the enduring presence of its anti-communist cultural legacy. Despite the fall of the regime in 1998 and the installation of democracy and its parliamentary mechanisms, the military and the police have remained strong institutions of all the presidencies that have succeeded the dictatorship (Laksmana, 2009; Mietzner, 2021: 12-13). Even today, the ruling elites originate, for a significant part, from the high ranks of the old regime. They have retained power and control over the country's wealth. They have also maintained habits of government that favor a certain control and instrumentalization of religions.

The ghost of the PKI (*hantu PKI*) is a recurring fear in post-Suharto Indonesia, which, as historian Asvi Warman Adam from the National Research and Innovation Agency (Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional, BRIN) in July 2020 explains, is used to eliminate government critics (Setiawan, 2020). For example, in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, accusations that the PKI was the mastermind of the G30S were used to attack civilian presidential candidates. For instance, when Joko Widodo (Jokowi) was nominated as a presidential candidate by the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia

Perjuangan, PDI-P) in 2014 and made a promise to resolve past human rights violations, including the 1965 tragedy (Rahman, 2014), he was accused of being a descendant of the PKI. In response to allegations connecting him to the PKI, Jokowi firmly asserted that his family practices *Hajj* and labeling him as a PKI member is an insult to his nationalism (Teresia, 2014). A 2021 survey by Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) on "Public Attitudes Toward Pancasila and the Communist Threat" found a strong correlation between fears of the rise of the PKI and electoral choices (Adriansyah, 2021).

Today, Catholicism's arenas of expression in Indonesia are increasingly constrained by the expansion of the dominant Muslim discourse. As in many other countries, radical Muslim activism has grown since the 2000s, evident in the cyclical increase in terrorist attacks claimed by Islamist groups and the implementation of religious laws in the public sphere. This shift in Indonesia's religious landscape has historical precedents. In 1990, former President Suharto sanctioned the formation of the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia, ICMI) under the influence of Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, then Minister of Technology and Research and a trusted advisor. ICMI served as a counterbalance to the influence of Christian groups, notably the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), which had previously worked closely with the government by providing political and economic analysis (Shihab, 1998: 8; Wanandi, 2012: 238). In 1991, former President Suharto, adopting the name Haji Mohammad Suharto, embarked on a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, to align his administration more closely with Islam and safeguard his public image. This pattern of responding to public scrutiny with religious gestures has persisted in the post-Reformasi era, following the fall of Suharto in 1998. In 2016, Jakarta's governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), a Christian leader in predominantly Muslim Indonesia, was imprisoned following allegations of disrespecting Islam during a campaign speech. More recently, in 2019, President Jokowi made his pilgrimage to Mecca following accusations of atheism. These events highlight that even top-level figures remain susceptible to pressure from radical Muslim activism.

Epilog

During the period of Indonesia's struggle for independence, the Catholic Church faced internal divisions. Some members supported the nationalist movement for freedom, while others remained loyal to the Dutch colonial government, creating ideological tensions within the Church. After Indonesia's independence, Mgr. Albertus Soegijapranata played a significant role in aligning Catholicism with the nationalist cause, advocating the principle of "100% Catholic, 100% Indonesia," thereby promoting the idea that Catholics could be both fully Indonesian and faithful to their religion. Under the New Order regime, the Catholic Church actively participated in the government's anti-communist measures while simultaneously providing social support to victims of political violence, reflecting an ambiguity between collaboration and humanitarian action. However, social actions by churches during this period led to a significant rise in conversions to Christianity, including Catholicism, which in turn heightened tensions with Muslim groups who suspected the Church of promoting a Christianization agenda. These dynamics often contributed to interfaith conflicts and further entrenched religious-political divisions in Indonesia that remain until today.

On January 11, 2023, President Jokowi officially recognized 12 grave human rights violations from Indonesia's past, as highlighted in the assessment report of the Human Rights Violation Non-Judicial Resolution Team (Penyelesaian Non-Yudisial Pelanggaran HAM, PPHAM)—and on the same day, instructed former Coordinating Minister of Political, Legal, and Security Affairs, Mahfud MD, to implement comprehensive measures to ensure the fulfillment of victims' rights and prevent future human rights violations. Among the atrocities recognized were the mass killings following the September 30 Movement in 1965–1966 (Galiartha & Ihsan, 2023). It is noteworthy that former President Jokowi was the second Indonesian leader to publicly acknowledge the 1960s bloodshed, following the late former President Abdurrahman Wahid's apology in 2000. However, critics contend that Jokowi's acknowledgment needs more attention to government accountability. Usman Hamid, executive director of Amnesty International Indonesia, called for legal action against the perpetrators, stressing the imperative of accountability (U. Hamid, personal communication, June 9, 2022). Andreas Harsono of Human Rights Watch observed that

while Jokowi acknowledged the atrocities, he did not explicitly admit the government's role or commit to pursuing accountability measures (Ng, 2023).

Moreover, the Special Consultative Assembly Decree No. 25 of 1966 (TAP MPRS XXV/1966), which bans the PKI and prohibits the spread of communist, Marxist, and Leninist ideologies, remains in effect despite calls for its revocation. In the early 2000s, former President Abdurrahman Wahid proposed repealing the decree, viewing it as a barrier to national reconciliation (Fealy & McGregor, 2010: 37-38). However, no action was taken to revoke it. Critics argue that the decree is frequently used to suppress government critics and perpetuate the communist stigma. Franz Magnis-Suseno, a Jesuit who supports Wahid's proposal, contends that the decree legitimizes the association of Communism, obstructing efforts toward national reconciliation (Siagian, 2000: 18-19). Despite these calls, the Indonesian government has reaffirmed its commitment to maintaining the decree. During a meeting with Indonesian 1965 exiles in Diemen, the Netherlands, on August 27, 2023—a visit reportedly aimed at "encouraging the return"—former coordinating Minister of Political, Legal, and Security Affairs Mahfud MD stated that the government would not repeal the regulation. Mahfud further emphasized that the severe human rights violations of 1965 were not limited to the PKI affiliates, noting that victims included individuals outside of the PKI (*Antara*, 2023).

Nevertheless, despite the Church's intricate role in the anti-communist process and its social support for political prisoners accused of being communists, as well as former political prisoners and their families, this debate is evolving without the voice of the Catholics. Some members of the Muslim community have perceived the Church's actions as drawing undue attention, which may have contributed to its reduced visibility in the political arena. Moreover, reports indicate that Christian communities, including Catholics, have faced challenges, such as church attacks or closures (Human Rights Watch, 2013b; *BBC News*, 2021). Despite these obstacles, minority Catholic groups continue to engage in social outreach efforts, including combating human trafficking in Batam Island and East Nusa Tenggara (Nusa Tenggara Timur, NTT), fostering economic development along the banks of Code River in Yogyakarta, and providing educational support for marginalized communities in Kapuk, Jakarta. Even as a political minority facing rejection from some factions with stricter interpretations of Islam, these initiatives have been undertaken in collaboration with moderate and tolerant Muslim groups committed to the core principles of Pancasila. However, such efforts remain limited in scope and lack sufficient financial support. This engagement with vulnerable populations reflects the broader reality for the Indonesian Catholic Church: shaped by a history of revolution and dictatorship, it now finds itself on the periphery of an emerging democracy where Islam plays a central role. In this context, the Church must rely on its historical legacy of social justice, focusing on supporting the poor, marginalized, and victims of systemic injustices to maintain its spiritual influence in Indonesian society.

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Catholics and Communism in Indonesia: Religious Alliances and Conflicts in the Shaping of National Identity

This article outlines the key phases of the transformation of the Indonesian religio-political landscape, beginning with the aftermath of World War II as well as colonial emancipation and continuing to the present landscape, marked by the enduring legacy of the previous authoritarian regime's era in 1998. As a competing force challenging the traditionally dominant Muslim religion, the Indonesian Catholic Church employed various strategies to establish itself and gain influence at every level of society. The diverse initiatives and internal debates within the Catholic Church eventually made it a direct observer and participant in the construction of the Indonesian state. In response to the growing influence of the Communists in the 1950s, Catholics and Muslims joined forces to safeguard their place in Indonesian society. The collaboration between these religious groups persisted throughout the subsequent anti-communist movements in 1965-1966.

However, in the following decades, this partnership between Catholics and Muslims became increasingly strained. On the one hand, the Catholics extended support to political prisoners accused of communism and made concessions to those in political authority. On the other hand, the Catholic Hierarchy appeared to maintain an ambiguous relationship with the new military regime led by Major General Suharto, commonly referred to as the New Order (1966-1998). This paper elucidates the ambiguity in Indonesian Catholics' official stance, religious discourse, and actions, which raises inquiries into how the Catholic humanitarian initiatives represented the evolution of religio-political issues in Indonesia. It examines these developments through the lens of the contemporary Catholic community, which has been a direct witness and participant in the interplay between the state and religion in Indonesia's ongoing religious and political discussions.

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