COUNTER-COMMUNITY AS MORAL COMMUNITY: THE CHURCH'S CONTRIBUTION TO PUBLIC CIVILITY

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Abstract:
Indonesia is a home of various religions and traditional beliefs. However, from the time before the fall of the New Order in 1998 up to now the coexistence of followers of different religions cannot be said to be without problems. The 2004 Indonesian Bishops' Conference's pastoral notes reflect the worry that the peaceful coexistence among different religious followers is failing. Nevertheless, the document's dominant node is expressed in positive attitude and hope. The Indonesian Bishops' Conference encourages all Christian communities to develop themselves into 'counter-communities'. This article is aimed at discovering the relevance of the idea 'counter-communities' to the problems of coexistence of different religious followers in the Post-New-Order era, which now has been marked with prejudice and mistrust.

Keywords:
religious plurality ● *Catholic Church* ● *counter-community* ● *moral theology* ● *public civility*

Mistrust and Community Building

Christians in Indonesia are a minority living among the major group. Although the majority of religious followers are the Moslems, Indonesia is not an Islamic state, in the sense that Islamic laws become state laws.

From the time of Indonesia's independence up to the time before the fall of the New Order, religious plurality was not a problem although tensions among communities of different religions often emerged. However, right before the end of the New Order era, inter-religious conflicts occurred. In the last few years, there have been a lot of intolerance cases directed towards the religious minorities, and not only towards Christian minorities, but also towards Islamic minorities.

In Indonesia, religion is like an individual's second identity. Membership in a religious community is regarded important for everyone, because from this membership one may receive a full recognition as member of a social group.[1] In Indonesian cases, tensions and conflicts among religious followers need to be seen from a socio-political perspective, because religion is an effective tool to mobilize the mass, for both the constructive and destructive purposes.[2] This is true not only in the post-independence era. Matti Schindehütte shows that religion was already used as a mass mobilization tool in the pre-independence period.[3] Besides the potential to mobilize the mass, religion also has critical functions. The authoritarian New Order regime saw the critical functions of religious communities, and tried to put them under its control. One of the ways taken by the regime was by clandestinely playing the "friend and enemy politics".[4] This means that at one time the regime was deliberately close to a certain religious group in order to incite suspicions from other religious group. In the 1970's, Soeharto as the power holder of the New Order regime, put Christians or Catholics in strategic positions in the bureaucratic and economic administration, while he tended to put pressures upon the Moslems. This move caused the Moslems' suspicion towards the Christians. Later in the 1990's, Soeharto reversed the positions, as if now he sided with the Moslems. The late Y.B. Mangunwijaya, a diocesan priest, a writer, and a social activist, saw that the inter-religious conflicts and violences against Christian groups and particularly the Catholics were among others because of this situation. "In the New Order, the Catholics were hiding below the authorities' arm-pits...", writes Mangunwijaya.[5]

The effect of the "friend and enemy politics" was the growing suspicion among the religious groups, particularly between the Moslems and the Christians. The levels of suspicion varied in accordance with the locations and the political conditions. Nevertheless, two things can

be observed: (1) Religion is still a political commodity, and (2) the trust between the Moslems and the Christians in Indonesia is quite fragile. In the mean time, trust to "the others" is the main condition to develop a peaceful coexistence of the religious followers in a plural society like Indonesia.

The fall of the New Order regime in 1998 was a new page in the history of Indonesian people. On the one hand, people were liberated from the authoritarian and repressive regime. On the other hand, the regime had left a legacy of mistrust among the followers of different religions. Five years after the fall of Soeharto and his New Order, the Catholic Church realized the ongoing stagnant situation, that is, there was no significant change in the coexistence situation of the followers of different religions. The bases for their coexistence – trust, among others – seemed to have weakened. In its 2003 pastoral notes, the Indonesian Bishops' Conference called this situation a destruction of the *public civility*.[6]

What can be done by the Church communities in the collapse of public civility? To confront the destructive mindsets and behaviors in the society, there was a proposal to develop an "alternative culture" or a "contrast culture". "Alternative culture is a mindset and a behavioral pattern which serves as a rival/contrast for the mindset and the behavioural pattern generally adopted in the society."[7] Conceptually, the alternative or rival culture serves as an internal power which encourages people to choose and to develop a new mindset and a new behavioral pattern.[8] While this is not taken only by one or two persons, the 2004 pastoral notes in this section mention about the "alternative communities", namely, those living up the particular values in contrast to the values generally adopted by the society. "Alternative communities" are imagined as groups of individuals who, due to their lived-up excellent values, act and behave differently from the values generally adopted by the public.[9]

Mgr. Ignatius Suharyo, currently the Archbishop of Jakarta, refers the image of "alternative communities" to the idea of "creative minorities" highlighted by the historian Arnold J. Toynbee.[10] Toynbee observes that human civilization has been colored by the history of ups and downs, and that the history of humankind has been saved by small groups of people he calls "creative minorities". Their success in saving human civilization has been due to their firm moral values. After the era of Soeharto's regime

which was laden with corruption, collusion, and nepotism, Mgr. Suharyo often talked about "rival cultures" or "counter-communities" in various occasions.[11] Under this theme, he wants to invite the Catholics to observe what have been happening in the society. Although not always in line with the Gospels, they are often adopted by the Catholics, because they have been "going public" (becoming common, customary, or banal), such as the culture of violence (both physical and verbal) and injustice (including illegal fees, corruption, and bribery), materialism, consumerism, and the likes. Those have become common habits and even parts of the culture, which means that such are ways people generally live and behave. These have automatically led people's behavior, by preventing them from being thoughtful in their decisions and actions. When the society is leading towards destruction, there need to be small groups of people who can act as agents of change.

Although it was launched more than ten years ago, the idea of "alternative community" or "counter-community" is still relevant to the Catholic Church, which now is facing the problem of "trust and mistrust". The Catholics tend to understand the term "counter-community" as an inward movement, by developing small groups of Catholics who can see (in the sense of interpreting and evaluating) the world in the Gospels' perspective. This is like developing an "elite Catholic group". Nevertheless, in the context of religious diversity in Indonesia, the term "counter-community" must be understood differently. A counter-community must be a plural community, and for this purpose I would like to elaborate the term and to interpret it in the context of religious pluralism in Indonesia.

The Origin of the Idea

The term "counter-society" was first used by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their book entitled *The Social Construction of Reality*, which was first published in 1966.[12] In their work, the two sociologists develop a theory on the sociology of knowledge. The central concept introduced by Berger and Luckmann is that individuals and groups interacting in a social system create concepts or mental images of their actions upon others, and that those concepts are eventually habituated in the roles performed by an actor in relation with others. For example, a man's role is as a father or the head of the family, while a woman is a mother, a teacher is a trainer as

well as an educator, while a religious person is a moral teacher, and so on. If those roles are available for other members to take and to perform, the interaction becomes institutionalized. In this institutionalization process, meaning is attached to the society. One's knowledge and conception (and conviction) of reality stick to the institutions in the society. Therefore, reality is socially constructed and becomes the "life-world" or *Lebenswelt*.

Berger and Luckmann explain that basically living in a community is dialectical in its nature. On the one hand, society is the product of interacting individuals who create and institutionalize the social roles. On the other hand, however, the individuals who perform the roles found in the society eventually become the products of the society. One's way of thinking and behaving is the product of one's processes in performing the roles available in the society.

The term "contrast community" appears in the section where Berger and Luckmann explain how a community can last and survive. Previously, it has been mentioned that in the institutionalization process, meanings are tightly stuck to the roles as shown in the above examples. The role of a man as the head of a family is an example of interpreting a married adult male's role. Very often the roles or social positions in the society are maintained with legitimation. For that purpose, a symbolic universe is created for the existing social structure. A symbolic universe is a set of convictions everyone knows, which aims to make the institutionalized structure remain logical and acceptable to everybody. Religious systems (both which are simple and complicated) are parts of the symbolic universe. However, it can happen that a symbolic universe is no longer considered able to perform its functions. Therefore, movements arise in established insitutions. In the *universe*, there are also *sub-universes*. In the beginning, these movements are initiated by a figure who develops concepts and definitions, which are different from the widely-accepted existing concepts and definitions. After the different concepts are socialized and objectivated, *counter-societies* arise.[13] Therefore, the concept of counter-society appears in the theory of social changes, which start with the change of the interpretation of social roles.

Since the 1980's, the term "contrast/alternative community" has been accepted and used by the Church. In the United States, Stephan Mott furthers Berger and Luckmann's concept with the term "counter-

community", while Stanley Hauerwas uses the term "community of character". In Germany, two Bible-scholar brothers Gerhard and Norbert Lohfink use the term "*Kontrastgesellschaft*" or "contrast-society". In this article, I refer to Stanley Hauerwas's ideas. Hauerwas, a Presbyterian moral theologian, shows the relation between morality and community. Morality has a communal dimension, and the description of an "alternative community" or a "rival community" shows certain moral demands from the community to build.

Hauerwas's Community of Character

The idea of counter-community in the reflection of Hauerwas, a moral theology lecturer at Duke University (previously at the University of Notre Dame), can be found in *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethics*.[14] In comparison to Mott's reflection on rival community, Hauerwas does not quote much from Berger and Luckmann about "counter-society". However, Hauerwas's thoughts on moral theology are in line with Berger and Luckmann's. In the opening sentence of the introduction, Hauerwas directly reveals his objectives in writing the book, namely to re-strengthen the Church's social significance as a distinct society with special integrity in herself.[15] What makes the Church a 'distinct' society can be found in Hauerwas's reflection on stories, characters, and communities.

To understand Hauerwas's reflection on "community of character", one needs to have a glimpse of the reflection method Hauerwas has developed in his moral theology. He puts emphasis on characters and virtues. The base of the two is not abstract philosophical or teological conceptions, but moral formation through narrations of stories and the community. The morality we now live up has been formed by stories developing and developed in the society. In the Indonesian culture, people are familiar with the fabel "A Mousedeer Steals Cucumber" or the story of "White Onion and Red Onion". In India, people know the epoch of Mahabaratha. Not only in the stories containing encouragement to develop certain virtues or behavior (attitude) that morality has been formed, but morality has also been formed by the "community stories". Fabels or stories are tools to convey moral teachings. However, what Hauerwas means with the terms "story" and "narrative" is more complex.

Christians have been formed with the story of Jesus Christ. The story has been conveyed and interpreted from generation to generation. According to Hauerwas, Christians do not develop their moral argumentation from theological principles, but by giving witness on formative realities of the stories they tell. The story is that God acts in the history of humankind through Jesus Christ. The apostles experience changes in their life when they encounter Jesus. After his resurrection, the essence of their evangelization is Jesus Christ himself. People who listen to their stories and accept them let themselves changed by the stories. Behind the transmission of the stories, there is conviction on truth. This truth is not reduced to the formulation of concepts, but is found in narrative forms. Moral theology or ethics developed by Hauerwas puts a lot of attention to the special narrative in the history of the Christian community as revealed and experienced in the community itself.

According to Hauerwas, morality is not primarily found in individuals who freely make moral decisions. For him, the ability to make right decisions is a learnable skill, and not a basic right or a status. In fact, we are not always able to make the right decisions, for example, when we are stricken by tragedy. Christian morality should teach Christians that there are some decisions which they are not able to make. A Christian mother who decides not to have abortion because she has learned how valuable a life for a Christian community is a person who can freely make decisions. The question for her is not what she must decide based on information at her disposal, for example, that she knows all information on the medical effects of abortion or abortion rules, but that she wants to be like what is told in the stories that have formed her life. Opposing abortion for her is not a choice, in the sense that she cannot decide to abort her pregnancy, because if she did, she would destroy her character and identity. Only a *virtuous person*, namely, one who has learned the skill to live properly and with integrity, can satisfactorily make the right decisions and knows better what decisions to make in a real critical situation. This is a narrative ethics – moral competence and faith habitus learned in a community of believers – and it is not a decisionist ethics, which is primarily autonomous decision, but primarily it is an autonomous and personal decision based on the available information, which has encouraged one's behavior.

Here, it is necessary to conclude what is understood as narratives or

stories and characters in Hauerwas's moral theology. In his opinion, moral theologians pay a lot of attention to moral principles and evaluation that they fail to see the importance of stories or narratives for living with morality. A common model in moral evaluations is as if there were only one way (viewpoint, principle, formula, etc.) to lead a morally good life. In fact, there is some kind of intentionality which has made our way of thinking and acting show a particular 'theme' or pattern.[16] Our moral experience shows that "our theme" decides what are permissible and impermissible to do, and this does not originate from fragmented abstract principles. Human actions are always driven by this life orientation or intentionality. The 'drive' to act morally is heavily colored by one's life orientation or intentionality. "Our character is the result of our sustained attention to the world that gives a coherence to our intentionality."[17] Where our attention to the world goes is formed and filled up (actualized) by the stories told to us. Our character is formed based on the rules, metaphors, and stories which are combined to produce a design or a unity of what must and what must not be done in our life.[18] Therefore, there is a strong relationship between stories and characters. Characters are built in accordance with the story that we follow, and the stories provide specific contexts. We are assisted in ordering our life by stories. In Hauerwas's moral theology, Christianity can be seen as a set of metaphors and coherent stories, which form a Christian's understanding about the nature of his or her world.

To clarify the image of "community of character", we will have a look at a historical experience in a small village in Southern France mentioned by Hauerwas. The village is called Le Chambon-sur-Lignon.[19] When the Nazi was ruling Germany during World War II, the residents of Le Chambon smuggled the Jews who were in fear escaping arrest and deportation to concentration camps. Meanwhile, other villages surrounding Le Chambon did not want to take the risk of saving the persecuted strangers. Why did Le Chambon residents have the courage to do so, while not anyone of them was a Jew? This was inseparable from the role of André Trocmé and his wife, Magda. André was a pastor of a Huguenot Protestant church. He took the position to oppose the Nazi, but with no violence. However, the determinant of Le Chambon residents' attitude was their long history as a religious minority that once were persecuted. Based on this identity, they were aware of what they had to do when the persecuted strangers

(the Jews) came for help. Le Chambon residents saw the Jews as God's oppressed people. Their attitude did not emerge spontaneously, neither was it taken based on consideration on the existing facts. This was not only because of the appeal of Pastor André, a pacifist, who had an anti-violence attitude. Their action was the reflection or expression of character which had been developed through several generations. Le Chambon as a community of character learned how to develop their spirituality, how to enact their history, and how to say their prayers. This community had practiced character building throughout so many generations, regardless whether the results were visible or not.[20]

Le Chambon is a community of character and this congregation as a group has virtues. Hauerwas views that virtues are divine qualities (originating from God), which we learn from our community of faith, a tradition which has grown and developed these virtues, and a place where an individual can learn the skills of how to perform them. For Christians, this can be considered as the fruits of the Holy Spirit given to the Church. When the believers practice in performing virtues, the Church will be empowered to attain the goals entrusted by God. These virtues can exist and can be implemented only when there is a sufficient unity and adequate story for one's life. Virtues are formed not only when one makes right decisions. Virtues are skills learned and developed in the process of character building. To be moral means to practice in performing these virtues.

In Search of a Counter-Community

Hauerwas's idea of a "community of character" is to strengthen the Church's social functions and roles as a 'distinct' community due to her moral integrity. There is a temptation among the Catholics to view their communities as special or elite groups. This view can turn into an exclusive attitude. However, if they look further, the idea of a "community of character" reflects the correlation between communal practices and communal identity. Identity can be obtained not from formulas of principles, but from the stories or narratives. Therefore, action is a reflection of identity lived up by the group or community.

One can further reflect on the relevance of this "counter-community" to the reality of religious pluralism in Indonesia. As a developing country,

Indonesia is facing the problem of social injustice, namely, the increasing gap between the rich and the poor. Rampant corruption practices make public service ineffective and inefficient. Consequently, the poor do not receive their rightful service. On the other hand, there is another challenge, namely, the fragility of the relation among the followers of different religions, particularly between the major religion and the minorities. This situation has arisen because of the manipulation of religions for political interests. Until today, religious issues can be easily used as political commodities. To receive supports from the majority, politicians often exploit religious sentiments. To overcome suspicion from the majority, the Catholic Church must have an inclusive attitude. The Church should develop the so-called basic human communities,[21] and here the idea of "counter-community" has its relevance.

A counter-community is a moral community consisting of members of various religious backgrounds. In Hauerwas's reflection, a moral community is a virtuous community, namely, a community that learns the competence of how to lead life properly and with integrity. This community must develop praxis, that is, communal habits and actions which are practiced based on moral choices and considerations. Because this praxis is a reflection of identity, it is necessary to build a community identity. Hence, this is a challenge for the Catholic Church in building and developing basic human communities, for such communities cannot be built or formed only to solve social problems such as social injustice, poverty, and environmental crisis. Such communities can form identity by building common narratives.

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Endnotes:

1   "A religion", as defined by Clifford Geertz (1965), "is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." See Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System", in *The Interpretation Of Cultures: Selected Essays* (London: Fontana Press, 1993) 90.

2   Cf. Susanne Schröter, *Christianity in Indonesia. Perspective of Power* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2010).

3   Cf. Matti Schindehütte, *Zivilreligion als Verantwortung der Gesellschaft* (Hamburg: Abera Verlag, 2006).

4   Cf. Franz Magnis-Suseno, "Spannungsfeld Religion, Kultur und Entwicklung. Fallbeispiel Indonesien," in *Interreligiöse Solidarität im Einsatz für die Armen*, eds. Johannes Müller/Michael Reder (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007) 65-81; mainly 69-72.

5   Y.B. Mangunwijaya, *Gereja Diaspora* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1999) 210-211.

6   Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia (Indonesian Bishops' Conference), *Nota Pastoral. Keadaban Publik: Menuju Habitus Baru Bangsa* / "Pastoral Notes. Public Civility: Toward a new Habitus of the Nation" (Jakarta, 2004).

7   2004 Pastoral Notes, Nr. 15.

8   *Ibid.*, Nr. 16.

9   The 2004 Pastoral Notes gives the following example. When society is offered the praxis of "the strongest, the winner", the Church shows through words and actions that "the low class, the weak, and the displaced must be prioritized". ... When the community members are directed to worship money, the Church needs to provide witness by spreading the news that God is solidary and generous ... When the society is conditioned to reach goal by justifying any means, the Church needs to develop in herself the culture of peace (2004 *PN*, Nr. 18).

10   Mgr. I. Suharyo, *The Catholic Way. Kekatolikan dan Keindonesiaan Kita* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2009) 134.

11   Cf. Mgr. I. Suharyo, *Refleksi 10 Tahun Menjadi Uskup Mgr. I. Suharyo: Jejak Langkah Dasa Warsa Mengemban Tugas Pelayanan sebagai Uskup (1997-2007)*, special supplement, pages A-C; *Surat Gembala Mgr. Ignatius Suharyo dalam Rangka Kepindahan ke Jakarta*, 13 October 2009.

12   Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowlegde* (London: Penguin Books, 1966) 145.

13   "Consequently, sub-universe requires sub-societies as their objectivating base, and counter-definition of reality require counter-societies." Berger & Luckmann, *loc. cit.*

14   Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981).

15   *Ibid.*, 1.

16   Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. J. Berkman/M. Cartwright (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2001) 168.

17   *Ibid.*

18   Cf. *ibid.*, 169.

19   Hauerwas, *ibid.*, 344. For a complete description of Le Chambon, see. Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

20   Cf. Bruce C. Birch & Larry L. Rasmussen, *Bibel und Ethic im christlichen Leben*, original title: *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1993) 157.

21   Cf. 3rd FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Plenary Assembly), Bangkok, 1982.