

Being an Indonesian Christian: Exploration of a theology of nationalism in the history of the proclamation of Indonesian Independence on 17 August 1945

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Being an Indonesian Christian: Exploration of a theology of nationalism in the history of the proclamation of Indonesian Independence on 17 August 1945



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Despite the fact that the introduction of Christianity in Indonesia coincides with the arrival of Portugal and Dutch Colonialism in the 16th–19th centuries, Christianity in Indonesia could not be claimed as a colonised religion. This study emphasises the importance of Christianity as an integral part of the history of Indonesian nation-building. It also has significance and relevance for Christianity, and how people of different religions should live together in Indonesia. Using historical theology analysis, we argue that being Christian in Indonesia has theological meaning as God's work in Jesus Christ. God that has called and sent Christians to Indonesia has bestowed independence on the country, as a nation that accepts and recognises all people in their plural existences. At the end of the research, the authors emphasise that by understanding the independence of Indonesia as God's gift, Christians are to make Indonesia a theatre for glorifying God. They should do it by dedicating themselves to participate in togetherness with all citizens to build and develop this country in all dimensions of life. Therefore, various actions that discriminate against Christians deny the history of Indonesian independence, which accepts and recognises the equality of all citizens as a gift from God.

Contribution: This article contributes to constructing a theology of nationalism as a kind of contextual theology, which is based on the particular context of the history of the proclamation of Indonesian independence. It also enriches the interreligious theology from the Christian perspective on Indonesian history.

Keywords: being Christian in Indonesia; colonialism; nationalism; independence of Indonesia; work of God; salvation work of Jesus Christ.

Introduction

The study of Indonesian Christians as a reflection of a theology of nationalism emphasises two main things: firstly, the presence of Christianity is an integral part of Indonesian nationality and secondly, the relevance and significance of Christian presence in the nation's life since independence until now. These two goals are fundamental because if they are ignored, as Eka Darmaputera said, the churches in Indonesia will be internally irrelevant and insignificant externally. Internally irrelevant means that its presence is meaningless within the community itself. Externally insignificant means that the church presence is also not significant outside, and that its meaning is not felt amid the society (Darmaputera 2001:470).

Andreas A. Yewangoe, in his book *Tidak Ada Agama Negara* (No State of Religion), asserted that until now, the existence of Christianity concerning the Spirit of nationality is still being questioned. Does the Church or Christianity encourage a sense of nationality amongst the Indonesian people, especially amongst Christians, or do they ignore it and do not care? Questions like this are valid. The arrival of Christianity in Indonesia coincided with the arrival of colonialism and imperialism. However, it was later proven that many Christians, such as G.S.S.J. Ratulangie, B.W. Lapian, Walter Monginsidi and so on, took part in the Indonesian independence movement. It means that Christianity is not against nationality (Yewangoe 2009a:97–99).

In addition, there were also some groups, such as in Maluku, that rejected the idea of nationalism of Indonesia. They declared the rejection of the proclamation of Indonesian independence. In 1946, the leaders of the people of South Maluku who were members of the Great East Unity Party (PTB) made a speech in which, on behalf of the people of South Maluku, they rejected the national flag and Indonesian anthem. The speech was delivered to Indonesian officials in Makassar, namely Soekawati and Ide Anak Agung Gde Agung, members of the Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger (KNIL), and approximately 100 Ambonese in Makassar. The PTB leader gave the

same speech to approximately 500 Ambonese in a large meeting in Ambon, which was attended by KNIL, retired employees and teachers. However, the refusal was strongly influenced by the political policy of the KNIL, which did not want Indonesia to be independent. As part of Indonesian society, Christians in Maluku generally support Indonesian independence (Saimima 2020:158–160).

Indonesian Christians are an integral part of the nation. This assertion is important because it is not uncommon for doubts to arise from people of other faiths that Christians are only 'stowaways' on Indonesia's train. These doubts are often inherent in Christians, especially when faced with various difficulties and problems, such as difficulty in obtaining permission to build places of worship, experiencing discrimination, persecution, conflict, violence, terror, etc. Yewangoe (2009b) stated that such problems are indeed difficult to avoid in the dynamics of a plural society, especially when the issues of religion and nationality have not been interpreted constructively. Nevertheless, Christians must have and constitutionally recognised the main principle that all religious communities in Indonesia are equal as citizens and are an integral part of the nation (Yewangoe 2009b:6–7).

The idea of nationalism for the first time in the history of Indonesia was proposed by Soekarno in his speech on 01 June 1945, which was later recognised as the day of the birth of Pancasila, the national symbol of Indonesia. Soekarno put 'nationalism' at number one of the five Pancasila rows. Franz Magnis-Suseno interpreted the incident by emphasising that Soekarno realised that Indonesia was a nation with a diverse society living in the archipelago. Nationalism for Bung Karno was a heartfelt love for Indonesia, a sense of pride that 'we are Indonesians'; a sense of unity amongst different people, formed in the history of suffering because of colonialism and collective struggle. If the sense of nationality dies, the Indonesian nation would die, and the country would be destroyed. It is the Indonesian nationality that unites hundreds of tribes and communities of different religions (Magnis-Suseno 2007:185–188).

Yewangoe explained that Bung Karno's speech on 01 June 1945 also meant that the Indonesian nation, which was still in the making, could not exist if its diversity was not recognised. However, the reality today is that there is a problem with the sense and spirit of nationality. Indonesian society has become more intolerant of one another, where conflicts and violence between different religious believers are still rife; meanwhile, the government seems indecisive about protecting all its citizens (Yewangoe 2009b:8). If this reality is still allowed, will the Indonesian state be able to survive? (Yewangoe 2009b:8, 19). Is a sense of nationality still alive in the hearts of the Indonesian people? (Magnis-Suseno 2007:187).

This article does not explain the whole reality of nationalism in Indonesia but the main concern is to explore the meaning of being Christian in Indonesia. To explain it, we will focus on analysing the history of the proclamation of Indonesia on

17 August 1945, including the previous event when the founding fathers begin to formulate the basic constitution of the country. In this historical event, a theology of nationalism can be reflected in the meaning and relevance of Christian presence as an integral part of Indonesia. In the initial reflection, it is necessary to emphasise that the formation of the Indonesian nation is a natural and decisive work of God in Jesus Christ, whom Christians especially believe. God in Jesus Christ also actualised the work of salvation for the Indonesian nation to be freed from the shackles of colonialism.

There are two perspectives used to reflect on this theological idea. Firstly, theology in this article is understood as the answer. It was emphasised by T.B. Simatupang that theology is 'the answer' to God's natural and continuous action in Christ amid the realities of the Church's life, human beings and society (Simatupang 1984:17). Darmaputera (2001:3) reiterated this perspective that theology is an existential answer that involves all of our selves and concerns all of our lives to the real work of God in Christ for His creation in the world. The second perspective discusses the relevance and significance of Christianity by considering Indonesia as a theatre to glorify God in Jesus Christ. John Calvin, a prominent church reformer, asserted that the whole world is a theatre to display divine goodness, wisdom, justice and power. The world as a whole is the *theatrum gloria dei* (De Jong 2008:386). Ebenhaizer I. Nuban Timo defined Indonesia as a locus *theologicus*. The history of Indonesia's independence as a nation is a theophany site. God is present, and at work, to liberate this country, Christians are invited to glorify God by being an integral part of co-existence in the diversity of society to build Indonesia (Nuban Timo 2019:172). In other words, Julianus Mojau emphasised that the call of Indonesian Christians to glorify God is to care for the face of Indonesia that emanates from the heart, mind and emancipatory face of God, the Creator of history (Mojau 2019:126).

In contemporary theology – which pays attention to various theological developments throughout the 20th to early 21st centuries, it is realised that the worldwide patterns and contexts as the locus of theology are very diverse and broad (ed. Aritonang 2018:3). This article focuses on Indonesia's independence as a theological locus to emphasise the history of Indonesia's nationality as different from other nations. Simatupang said that the process of becoming the Indonesian nation was unique compared with other countries. Simatupang gave an example of India after independence, the country could not maintain its unity, split into India and Pakistan, then divided again into Pakistan and Bangladesh. Compared with Indo-China – Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, which split up into two opposing forces it is a miracle that Indonesia remains united (Simatupang 1984:4).

The central thesis of this article is that being an Indonesian Christian is the work of God who has bestowed independence for Indonesia as a nation that accepts and recognises the existence of all Indonesian people in their freedom to live together. We prefer to explore this thesis through historical

and theological analyses in qualitative research. Firstly, re-interpret the meaning of nationality. Secondly, to investigate and interpret God's work in the history of the proclamation of Indonesia as an independent nation and state theologically. Finally, ending with a theological reflection on the meaning and relevance of being a Christian in Indonesia today.

The meaning of nationality

The word nation comes from Latin and, when first coined, it clearly conveyed the idea of common blood ties. It was derived from the past participle of the verb *nasci*, meaning to be born. And hence, the Latin noun, *nationem*, connoting *breed or race*. But when introduced into the English language in the later 13th century, it was with the primary connotation a blood-related group. In the early 17th century, the word nation was also being used to describe the inhabitants of a country, regardless of the ethnonational population composition, thereby becoming a substitute for less specific human categories such as the people or the citizenry (Williams 1976:178).

As an ideology, nationalism is recorded historically in its use in 1775 (the First Partition of Poland), 1776 (the American Declaration of Independence), 1789 and 1792 (the commencement and second phase of the French Revolution) and 1807 (Fichte's *Address to the German Nation*). The initial idea of nationalism as an ideology emphasised two main things, namely freedom and sovereignty. People must be freed from coercion, be able to determine their destiny, be masters in their territory, control the various resources they have, feel bound in a fabric of unity and brotherhood (eds. Hutchinson & Smith 1994:4-5). John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith used Joseph Stalin's ideas to explain some of the general characteristics of the nation: a common language, a common territory, a common economic life or economic cohesion and a common psychological make-up. Stalin stated that they also served as a differentiator in addition to giving constitutive characteristics to a nation. Germany and Norway, for example, are not called nations because they do not have all the elements. Stalin emphasised, 'It is only when all characteristics are present together that we have a nation' (eds. Hutchinson & Smith 1994:19-20).

The concept of nationalism in the Bible is however, different. In the given historical references, the vocabulary of nationalism did not develop until the 13th century, and the idea of a national ideology was not used until the beginning of the 17th century. The period is far too distant from the era of Bible writing. In the Old Testament (OT), the Hebrew words for people are *am* and *goy*, whilst in the New Testament, it is called the Greek words *ethnos* and *laos*. These two groups of words were distinguished in Judaism. The plural *goyim* or *ethnoi* denotes foreign nation (gentiles) and *am* or *laos* refers to the Israelites as the holy people, which refers to God's people (Gn 11; Ex 19: 5, 6; 33:13; Dt 7: 6; compare Mt 24: 9, 14; 25:32; 28:19; Mk 11; 17; 13:10; Lk 21:24) (Kittel 1964:365, 369).

On the one hand, there are differences, but by using the creation creed that God is the creator of the world, then all people and all

nations are derived from God. This article also uses the same theological idea that God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right (Ac 10:34-35). Theologically, the nationalism of Indonesia is created and derived from God.

Finding the work of God in the history of Indonesia proclamation

The history of the national movement in Indonesia has its narrative with a long history. Tahi Bonar Simatupang explained that the wave of nationalism in Indonesia occurred as a reaction to Western colonialism and, at the same time, a continuation of the modernisation process that had previously happened in the West. Only by using modern ideas from the West, did the national movement succeed in liberating Indonesia from Western colonialism. The war against the colonial powers, which was still being carried out in the old ways, only ended in defeat. For example, Diponegoro fought the Dutch on Java but lost; colonial powers easily defeated the other wars led by Si Singamangraja in North Sumatra, Teuku Umar in Aceh and various regional struggles. When all people realise themselves as one nation, one language, and one homeland, with the strength of the Pancasila ideology and the 1945 Constitution, the unity of the people and their soldiers, supported by modern diplomacy, can eliminate Western colonialism from Indonesia, leading to independence (Simatupang 1984:7).

Formulating the basis of the state and its Constitution is essential. On both the foundations of this state, the being of all citizens, including Christian and all religions are recognised equally as citizens of Indonesia. During the Japanese occupation, the preparation for independence by formulating the state Constitution took place in a relatively short period between 1942-1945. Jan Sihar Aritonang explained that in this short period, several essential things happened. Firstly, the collapse of the power of the Dutch East Indies Colonial Government because of the attack and occupation of the Japanese army. Secondly, the process of formulating the basis of the state and the Constitution turned out to be loaded with certain religious content and interests. Thirdly, the political situation during the revolution or the turbulent struggle for independence, particularly from the colonial regime was unwilling to let Indonesia become an independent country (Aritonang 2006:208). To build a national theological reflection, the second event regarding formulating the basis of the Indonesian state became the focus.

The Indonesian national movement was initially a social, economic, cultural and religious (Islamic) movement, responding to the colonial ethical policy, but later it turned into a politico-ideological movement that opposed the entire colonial system. In the dynamics of the national campaign, there are two main groups, namely Islam and nationality, which have different visions of the ideology of an independent Indonesia. On the one hand, the Islamic group wants to make Indonesia an Islamic state and on the other hand, there is a

nationalist group that wants to make Indonesia a secular state without the intervention of any religion for the nation's goal.

The views of national groups were clearly expressed in Supomo's speech (1945):

Therefore I recommend and I agree with the position that wants to establish a united nation-state in the fulness sense as just described earlier, namely a country that will not unite itself with the largest group, but which will overcome all groups and will heed and respect the privileges of all groups, both large and small groups. Naturally, in this united national country, religious affairs will be left to the religious groups concerned. And naturally, in such a country, a person will be free to embrace the religion he likes; both large religious groups and small groups will feel one with the country. (Ngelow 2017:45)

What Supomo said represents the vision of a nationalist group that has the aspiration to build Indonesia as a united nation state. This aspiration not only points to the reality of the plurality of Indonesian society, which consists of various ethnic groups, religions and regions, but also to prevent divisions between these different groups.

Meanwhile, an unparalleled view from the Islamic side was put forward by Natsir in 1931:

The Muslims aim to seek freedom for Islamic freedom so that the rules and structure of Islam will apply for the safety and virtue of Muslims in particular and all creatures of God in general. Is this also the goal of their ideal? Those who from now on have declared a 'neutral' attitude towards religion, who from now on have underestimated and do not want to interfere in all matters relating to Islam. (Ngelow 2017:46)

Ngelow explained that at the first meeting of the Investigating Agency for Preparatory Work of Indonesian Independence (BPUPKI) on 28 May–02 June 1945, proposals were discussed regarding the basis of the Indonesian state. Compromise on the part of the nationalism and Islam also occurred. On 01 June, Soekarno delivered his suggestions, known as the 'birth of Pancasila' speech. Then, a new committee, Committee Nine, succeeded in making a gentlemen's agreement regarding the formulation of the concept of the Preamble to the Basic Law, which became known as the Jakarta Charter. This charter contains a version of Pancasila, which gives special rights to Muslims. The divine precepts are followed by 'seven words': 'with the obligation to carry out the Islamic law' (Shariat Islam) for its adherents'. The formula was accepted as the Preamble of the Constitution by the Preparatory Committee for Indonesian Independence (PPKI), the replacement body of BPUPKI, which was formed on 07 August 1945, despite Latuharhary's objections to the seven words (Ngelow 2017:48).

The struggle for independence was finally proclaimed on 17 August 1945, in Soekarno's house, Street Pegangsaan Timur 56 Jakarta, two days after Japan surrendered unconditionally to the Allies. At that time, the red and white flag was raised, accompanied by the national anthem, Indonesia Raya. The Republic of Indonesia was born (Aritonang 2006:253).

However, on the same day, Hatta was contacted by an officer of the Japanese Navy to convey the objection of Christians from Eastern Indonesia to the part of the formulation of the concept of the Preamble to the Constitution, which privileged the Islamic group. Quoted from Hatta's book of memories, that:

In the afternoon, I received a call from Nishijima, Admiral Maeda's assistant who asked, can I receive a Kaigun (Navy) officer because he wanted to bring up something crucial for Indonesia. The officer, whose name I forgot, came as Kaigun's envoy to inform him that the Protestant and Catholic representatives controlled by the Japanese Navy strongly objected to the part of the sentence in the Preamble to the Basic Law, which reads 'Divinity with the obligation to carry out Islamic law for its adherents. They admit that this part of the sentence does not bind them, only about the Muslim people. However, the inclusion of a provision regarding it on the basis that it is the subject of the Basic Law means discrimination against minority groups. If that discrimination were also stipulated, they would prefer to stand outside the Republic of Indonesia. (Aritonang 2006:254; Ngelow 2017:49)

This information was so crucial to Hatta that the next day, before the PPKI session, Hatta contacted several Islamic figures (including Ki Bagus Hasikusumo, Teuku Mohammad Hasan, Wahid Hasjim) to negotiate it to prevent national disintegration. Finally, it was agreed that the seven words would be three words, 'The One and Only'. Furthermore, the PPKI session also agreed to eliminate all provisions in the constitution that contained special rights for Muslims, for example, the provision that the President must be Muslim. According to Ngelow, this final formula is no longer a compromise between the National and Islamic groups, as is the formulation of the Jakarta Charter, but a compromise between the Christian (supported by the National side) and the Muslim side. With this formula, all religions within the independent state of Indonesia are recognised and given the same place, but specific religions do not form the basis of the state (Ngelow 2017:50).

Aritonang explained that the process of eliminating the seven words previously listed in the Jakarta Charter was not easy, although they were no longer debated at length in the PPKI session. There were two main reasons why Islamic groups accepted this decision. Firstly, the Islamic group realised the importance of national unity, especially amid the newly established Indonesian state. In addition, 'Believe in the one and only God' did not contradict the meaning of *tauhid* (oneness of God) in Islam. Secondly, the Islamic faction hoped that within six months after the proclamation a general election would be held. They believed that the declaration would be followed by the stability that supported the holding of elections. They were sure to win it, considering most of Indonesia's population is Muslim (Aritonang 2006:255).

In this historical phase, a national theological reflection on Indonesia and becoming an Indonesian Christian took root. John A. Titley even straightforwardly stated that God's absolute and decisive work was manifested at the moments when Pancasila was established as the philosophy of the state

and the constitution as the national constitution. Titaley referred to two historical facts. Firstly, there was BPUKI, which was given the task of preparing concepts regarding the philosophy, constitutions and form of the state. It succeeded in agreeing on the following ideas. The proclamation of independence designed by BPUKI would take place on 22 August 1945. The contents of the text of the declaration of Indonesian independence were considered a 'gift' from Japan. In the text, there were three mandates that the state must carry out: (1) independent Indonesia is a continuation of the previously existing independent nations (Sriwijaya and Majapahit), (2) independent Indonesia as part of Greater East Asia with Japan as chairman and (3) Islam has become a religion that has received special treatment from the state as seen in the Jakarta Charter. Furthermore, Article 6:1 of the 1945 Constitution affirm⁷ that the President is an Indonesian native and Muslim. In the third paragraph of the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, the concept of God used referred to the Islamic group's idea of *Allah* (God's names). The use of *Allah* showed that Indonesia's independence was a blessing from *Allah* from one particular religion, which resulted in other religions having to depend on that specific religious' deity. According to Titaley, if this scenario materialised, the state would deny the equality of all citizens before the law, politically and nationally (Nuban Timo 2019:169; Titaley 2013:146).

The second historical fact is the scenario of young people who want the proclamation of independence to be carried out as a form of rejection of the aroma of the proclamation as a Japanese 'gift' (Titaley 2013). The youth intended to make a statement of independence at Ikada Square, Jakarta, on 16 August 1945. According to Aritonang (2006:252), this wish was rejected by the older generation for fear of inviting conflict with Japan.

Unexpectedly, the two scenarios, both from the BPUKI and the youth scenario, did not happen. This proclamation took place on 17 August 1945. On 18 August 1945, a fundamental change also occurred in the abolished seven words in the first principle of Pancasila and impacted the adjustment of several articles in the 1945 Constitution. The word *Allah* in the third paragraph, on the suggestion from Ketut Pudja Oka, a member of PPKI, the preparatory committee for Indonesian independence, who come from Bali representative, replaced with the word of *Tuhan* (Divinity), without any objection from the trial participants. Reflecting this fact, Ebenhaizer Nuban-Timo, quoting Titaley, stated that becoming Indonesia was a sacred work in understanding panentheism. God does not only work in the Middle East, the West alone, India alone or America alone. God also performed to determine the history of the newly independent Indonesia (Nuban Timo 2019:170). In Titaley's (2020:51) view, God's theophany at this decisive moment aimed to uphold the values of equality between all groups and religions in the new nation of Indonesia.

The meaning of God's word, which is formulated as a substitute for the word *Allah*, does not need to be questioned.

With the formulation of the divine precepts, ample space is provided protected by the state so that the recognised religions can describe and develop their respective understanding of God. The substance of the seven words in the Jakarta Charter, according to Olaf Schumann, explained again by Aritonang, did not need to cause problems because it is automatically expected that members of every religious community, not just Muslims, obeyed their religious rules and sincerely believed in their teachings. In addition, the state is not authorised to supervise or impose an understanding and practice of certain religious teachings. According to Aritonang, Schumann's opinion seemed to be shared by Indonesian Christians in general until the early 21st century, when the issue of Islamic Sharia was brought to the surface again. That is why Christians have never agreed if the responsibility of religious communities is taken over or regulated by the state through statutory regulations (Aritonang 2006:256–257).

John A. Titaley explained that the concept of Divinity, both in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution and in the formulation of the first principle of Pancasila, was born from the awareness of Indonesian nationality. The Indonesian nation consists of Acehnese, Batak, Minang, Javanese, Madurese, Manado, Dayak, Ambonese and so on, who are Muslims, Christians, Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians and adherents of other faiths (Titaley 2013:87). The basis for understanding Indonesia itself is the reality of Indonesia, which is diverse but jointly recognises the existence of God's work that makes the Indonesian nation possible. Is God Almighty (third paragraph), whose Divinity is one and only (first precepts), contradicting God's belief in Christianity, Islam and other religions in Indonesia? Titaley argued no. Each religion is given space to live and practice its religious teachings in an attitude of life that respects the diversity that exists (Titaley 2020:57–58).

Tahi Bonar Simatupang reflected on the notion of theology that was born in the struggle to build an independent Indonesian nation at that time as a response that was contemplated in full awareness of the real and continuous action of God in Christ, in the midst of the reality of the Church, human beings and Indonesian society. Simatupang stated that in a situation full of struggle, Christians and the Church had not been able to formulate systematic theological thinking, but the answer was shown in the actions, involvement and statements of Christians both individually and in churches in Indonesia after 1950 (Simatupang 1984:17–18).

Some of the following Christian thoughts are examples of a theological reflection in response. Toduk Sutan Gunung Mulia studied law in the Netherlands and later attended the 1928 international mission conference in Jerusalem after returning to question the Christian mission in Indonesia. Is Christian mission merely a means of Western expansion? Is that mission already fighting for social justice and racial equality? Why are not many Indonesian Christians working with other Indonesians to shape Indonesia's future? There is

a powerful impression that the mission is no longer preaching the Gospel, the good news, but instead serving the colonial and capitalist order of life (Simatupang 1984:27).

Johannes Leimena, a founder of the Christian Student Movement in Indonesia, contributed to the formation of the Council of Churches in Indonesia (D.G.I.). In the perspective of mission theology, Leimena mentioned that the primary purpose of the church is to preach the gospel, serve the sacraments and so on. But the church is also a sign pointing to Christ as judge and saviour of man and society. The Church must judge the mistakes of social, economic and public life and the church must participate in the reform of society. In addition, the establishment of the Theological College, which began in 1934 in Bogor and then moved to Jakarta, played an essential role in the life and thinking of the churches in Indonesia, especially in the decades of national struggle. The aim of establishing the Theological College was to teach the theological heritage of the Western churches and educate students so that they could interpret the richness of the gospel into the realities of Indonesian culture and society. Dr. Th. Muller Kruger introduced the concept of 'theology in loco' to express these ideals (Simatupang 1984:29).

Simatupang also explained that Christians such as Leimena, Mulia, Tambunan, Latuharhary and others have contributed to laying the principles of state life. Religious freedom and equal rights and equal opportunities for all citizens are guaranteed, regardless of belief or ancestry. From a theological perspective as an answer, Christians and churches in Indonesia believe that the independence of the Indonesian nation is a gift from God and that all Indonesian Christians answer this gift with an obligation to continue to defend the freedom of the Indonesian country (Simatupang 1984:31–32).

This reflection of the theology of nationality from the history of the struggle to become Indonesia is in line with the theological ideas of independence echoed by Karl Barth. Freedom from a Christian theological perspective, which Christians should have, is freedom as the only gift from God through Jesus Christ, who came into the world and revealed God's will to make all human beings accessible. Barth affirmed that a free God loves all human beings in Jesus Christ and frees all humans in all areas of life – politics, social, economics, science, theology, Church and so on, so that humans can live in humanity that glorifies God (ed. Green 2003:2).

Become Christian of Indonesia

Where is the Church or Christian in the historical process of Indonesian independence and nationality? This question was asked by T.B. Simatupang when discussing the relationship between nationalism and the Church. Simatupang explained that the churches were in a somewhat ambiguous position in the early days of the independence movement. They are part of the Indonesian nation, rooted in it. At the time, the national campaign was still organised primordially; there were 'Jong Java', 'Jong Batak', 'Jong Timor' and so on. Young people

from various churches were free to enter and be active in these movements. Then, the national movement became a joint national movement, resultantly the idea of having one country, one nation and one language was born. However, the churches remain ethnically divided. Sometimes even nationalist Christians are considered by the Church to be no longer good Christians (Simatupang 1984:8).

Simatupang further explained that the Indonesian Christian student movement emerged in the Church's ambiguous attitude, which became a place to gather and organise actions for Christian students and youth who no longer cared about ethnic boundaries and different church membership. They succeeded in ending the separation between Christianity and nationality. It was from here that the Council of Churches in Indonesia was born. The struggle for independence and nationalism is a valuable experience for the involvement of Christians in Indonesia. Simatupang emphasised that if Christians were not involved in the history of this nation, their current position would be very different. The arrival of Christianity to Indonesia has something to do with the beginning of the Western expansion. But very soon, Christianity took root in Indonesian soil, developed its distinctive features and did not feel as adherent to a foreign religion (Simatupang 1984:6, 9). From the formation of the ecumenical forum of the Council of Churches in Indonesia in 1950, there was nationalism that the churches in Indonesia were called from and for their people (Ngelow 2017:283).

This idea is what is meant by being an Indonesian Christian. The identity of Christians is not a 'stowaway' on a train called Indonesia (Yewangoe 2009b). Christianity also does not originate from colonialism but comes from Christ, who Christians believe to be the Son of God who has called and sent His people into the world, and Christ works to liberate the world, including the Indonesian nation. At the same time, this meaning emphasises the relevance and significance of the presence of Christians to continue to be an integral part and to continue to be involved with all Indonesian people in the life of the nation and state. Being an Indonesian Christian has a meaning, as emphasised by Leimena, which is to be a true Christian and a true Indonesian citizen. In a tribute book of Leimena, the Leimena's idea about the significance of being a true Christian and citizen of Indonesia is explained, that:

In terms of love, loyalty, obedience to, and sacrifice for the homeland, nation, and state, a Christian is not and must not be less than other people; in fact, they should be an example to others as a lover of the motherland, a responsible citizen, and a true nationalist. Everything reflects love, loyalty, and obedience to God, with the meaning: *Soli Deo Gloria* (all glory only be to God). By doing so, he gave up all '*waardigheids complexen*', which might be caused by the tendency of other groups to consider him as a minority. (eds. Silaen, Sirait & Pieris 2007:26)

Regarding the perception of being a minority citizen, Leimena invites Christians to have a firm attitude that Christians are not a minority. From a constitutional perspective, they are not a second class citizen. They are a citizen who has the same rights and obligations as other

citizens (eds. Silaen et al. 2007:26). In the realm of freedom as it is today, if the rights of citizens for Christians are still limited, just because of their Christian identity, this action will not only deny the fundamental values of Pancasila but also show that the colonial process has not yet ended. Christians are still colonised in their own country by their own nation, Indonesia. Recognising freedom as a gift from the one and only God means recognising the freedom of every religious community to express their religious freedom and beliefs. Limiting, or denying it, is tantamount to denying the religiosity of the Indonesian nation itself (Titaley 2013:56).

This national theological perspective leads Christians to see Indonesia as a stage to glorify God, who is and continues to bring His peace to the earth of Indonesia. Christians who understand themselves as part of the entire Indonesian people, together with people of other faiths and the government, are God's partners to continue to fight for and defend Indonesia's independence. This responsibility is manifested, amongst other things, in fighting for justice, peace, human rights, harmony in life amongst religious believers, improving education and Indonesia's human resources and so on. The involvement of Christians in advancing the national energy of Indonesia is part of their calling to nurture the saving work of God in Jesus Christ, which is the foundation of the faith of every follower of Christ (Titaley 2013:59). Christian faith becomes relevant and significant if their faith relationship with Christ is continually related to their struggles and the context of their life as an integral part of the Indonesian nation (Singih 2000:7).

Conclusion

Being an Indonesian Christian is a historical fact that has theological meaning. Christianity did come together with the arrival of the Western nations who colonised Indonesia. However, soon afterwards, Christianity took root in the spirit of the Indonesian nation, and took part in the history of establishing the Indonesian nation as an independent state. The proclamation of Indonesian independence on 17 August 1945 and the stipulation of the 1945 Constitution and Pancasila as the philosophical basis of the Indonesian state, in this study, are interpreted as real and decisive works of God who liberated Indonesia. The Constitution and Pancasila give a guarantee to accept and recognises the reality of the diversity of ethnicities, religions, races and so on as the identity of the Indonesian nation. God's work of liberating the Indonesian nation from the perspective of Christian theology takes place in the work of salvation that has been done by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in the world. Furthermore, in the context of pluralism in Indonesia, Christians are called to be agents of peace by Jesus Christ, as the source of peace (Parihala & Busro 2020).

This theological reflection has an essential meaning for the identity of Indonesian Christians. Indonesian Christianity is rooted in Christ, who has called, sent Christians in the history of Indonesian nationality and does not originate

from the legacy of colonialism. It is also God in Christ who has blessed Indonesia as an independent country. The significance is that Christians should see Indonesia as a stage to glorify God. They do it by participating in togetherness with all citizens to build and develop this country on all dimensions of life. Various actions that discriminate against Christians deny the history of Indonesian independence, which accepts and recognises the equality of all its people with diversity as a gift from God.

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Authors' contributions

J.C.R. contributed to the conception of the research and guided the article from the start to the completion of the final article. Y.P. also contributed to the conception of the article, conducted research, analysis and wrote the final report.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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