

**Mission in the face of Pluralism, Secularization and religious Diversity –
an Indonesian Perspective.**

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The topic of mission in the face of pluralism, secularization and religious diversity is very interesting but also challenging. It is challenging because all the terms used, whether mission, pluralism, secularization or religious diversity can be defined and understood in different ways.

In my opinion, the right understanding of mission will determine how Christian mission is carried out. Mission that does not take into account the realities of society will be meaningless and difficult to practice. A social reality that is properly understood and taken into account is a precondition for the success of Christian mission.

I will explain this thesis by examples from the Indonesian context.

Indonesia is the country with most Muslims in the world. Based on the latest census of 2020, the population of Indonesia is 270.20 million. There are more than 1,000 different ethnicities and sub-ethnicities living in Indonesia. Because of the different ethnicities, there are about 700 languages and dialects in Indonesia. Approximately 88% of the inhabitants are Muslims, 6.11% are Protestant Christians, 3.18% are Catholics and 1.79% are Hindus, 0.61% are Buddhists, 0.10% are Confucians and 0.11% belong to other indigenous religions. Religion plays a major role and atheism is a taboo in Indonesia.

Although Indonesia is the country with the most Muslims in the world, Indonesia is no Islamic state. Indonesia is a Pancasila state. Pancasila means five arrows or principles as there are:

- 1) faith in the all-one God
- 2) comprehensive humanity
- 3) national unity
- 4) democracy
- 5) social justice for all Indonesian people

How is Christian mission understood in this pluralistic Indonesian society and in this Pancasila state?

In Indonesian society, mission is generally and simply understood as Christianization. This understanding comes from colonial times and is still communicated today by some Christians and by most Muslims. But with the understanding of mission as Christianization, people of other religions, especially Muslims, become insecure and resist it. Social actions and Christian services in society are thus often suspected of being insincere because their primary goal is to convert Muslims. Furthermore, Christians are assumed to disrespect other believers because they are fulfilling their mission to convert people who are already religious. With this understanding, Christian mission is a threat to people of other faiths. Mission is thus seen as a cause of conflict in society.

This is certainly an obstacle for Christians to provide their services in society openly, unselfishly, and effectively. This is true even though, under the concept Da'wa, actions have been and are carried out by Muslims as well, targeting people of other faiths in order to convert them to Islam.

There are clashes between religions in society, especially between Christians and Muslims. Religious intolerance in Indonesia can be regarded as the result of an "action-reaction

struggle." In other words, the Islamization and Christianization efforts of religious fanatics on both sides caused friction or contradictions that can and must be classified as intolerance. That is why there are frequent protests against the constructing of churches in many cities in Indonesia, because churches are regarded as the center of the mission.

Although the law states that freedom of religion is guaranteed in Indonesia, in practice the government also regulates the religious life in society. Unfortunately, religious minorities are not infrequently disadvantaged in the name of harmony. That is why many scholars, especially from the Muslim Reformative background, call for secularization in Indonesia. Secularization would separate religious and state affairs. Secularism is understood here as the separation of state and religion, so that the government does not cultivate a preference for any religion. The state/government should also not regulate the religion of the people. In short terms: the right to live and develop applies to all.

In a pluralistic society, a mission that emphasizes only the change of religion, or is understood in such a way, will certainly cause problems. Such an understanding of mission turns other people into objects. Opposition to it is understandable and should be taken seriously also by Christians.

Mission should be understood as the presentation of the presence (*praesentia*) of God. It seeks to represent the substance of Christian values in society and to advocate for the realization of well-being and peaceful living; in doing so, it must be attentive to the condition of security and well-being for all mankind and make every effort to achieve it.

This understanding of mission gives a place and appreciation to others. Those who are different are no objects to be subjugated, but co-workers who are also called by God to create peace and well-being. The goal of mission as the presentation of God's presence is the well-being of humanity/all creation itself, of Christians and non-Christians. Mission thus becomes an effort to bear witness to God's love in word and deed.

Such an understanding of mission, which does not understand other believers/people as objects, enables and encourages interreligious dialogue. Interfaith dialogue understood in this way will see other believers as collaborators in mission and involve them in addressing the diverse problems of our world.