

## **The availability of archives for church history in Indonesia**

**- Het Utrechts Archief - 7 – 9 April 2010**

### **Historical research for our churches – current situation**

*Two cases in Indonesia:*

*How to decide the beginning of a new church (GKI-case):*

*first baptism of a local? first Sunday service of the congregation? first consistory?*

A former student asking me: how to decide the foundation of a new church in the past. It was a different time and different rule than what we have today.

It is much easier for us nowadays to make a point of the institutionalization of a new church, than those of in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In most of our churches, according to our current regulation, the new congregation starts as a new and an independent congregation with the institutionalization of the first church council comes into being. But how far of our rule apply to the past? The parish where my former student works just wants to know how to decide how old the church is.

The best suggestion that I can offer to my former student was: there are three things that she may consider as the criteria to decide the foundation of a new church of the past. These three criteria could not be used together, since they serve for different interests.

She may choose the year of the first baptism of a local Christian. Should this is her choice then she would argue that the presence of first local Christian was indeed a starting point of the church. What came later are just logical consequences. *The first fruit*, you may say, as an important fact for the church.

However, she might choose the first Sunday service that happened among the first local Christians. Should she pick this one as the founding of a new church, this means that the community is far more important than a single believer. *The congregation come together* is the real representation of a new church, and not the first fruit of the missionary work.

And the last one is what already known to us: institutionalization of the first church council, the consistory. Should this one be her choice then it is clear that first fruit and first congregation are necessary steps for *the real new church* come into being.

As an Indonesian, my suggestion to her was: propose all of them and give your reason of each and every position, and let the consistory now decide which one they like the most. As long as you know what your choice is and how you come into your decision, it is good

enough for a young theologian and aspirant minister, since she know the complexity of the matter and able to put it forward in simple way.

*History crafted on a stone (GKP-case):*

*"De eerste steen gelegd Door Menno Th. Alkema 5 Juli 1899." Another former student asking what does that mean. A rhetorical question, actually he knows what it means.*

After I gave him a confirmation that he needed, he told me that that no one in the church can make any definitive and simple answer about that piece of the Dutch sentence. Even they do not know what that exactly means they believe that piece of information talking about the inauguration of the church (building). And this belief was confirmed with the municipality acknowledgement that the church is the oldest (Protestant) church building in Bandung.

He also told me interesting thing, that Alkema was remembered by the congregation mostly due to the fact that he was in charge for the construction of the church. Alkema made his way into the history of the congregation, while the first missionary, Geerdink was forgotten.

*In Indonesia Christians are crazy about history with regards of who, how and what was the first one. Our parishioners used to think that history is good occasionally. With more churches equipped with LCD Projectors and big screen, they love to see some pictures, and their celebrated past and heroes, with help from historical archives. I call this 'history in celebration.'*

*History for most of our fellow Christians is just **too** much talking about the past, while they are more concern with the current affairs in their surroundings. However there are still some who believe that searching clues from the past will help them to understand their current situation. My former students were asking me, that was a positive sign that they are not forget how to use history constructively.*

These two stories above showed how important for theologians to know how to work with historical materials. At our seminary (STT Jakarta) we are blessed at the moment with three historians (Aritonang, Soleiman and Apituley), and each of us working in our different fields and expertise. We introduced our (undergraduate) students to the work with archives if they interested to write their *scriptie* (undergraduate theses) on history.

It was not easy for them, but lucky for them in the past twenty years, Dr. Tom van den End, Dr. Chr. de Jong and others published compilation of some archives (and some with

translation into Indonesian). This indeed makes a difference than that of during my study years in 1980s.

For graduate and postgraduate students studying history, working with archives is a essential groundwork. Some documents are easy to come by, but most of the time documents are spread all around, within Indonesia, and even abroad. Some documents are well known and in good condition, others yet to be found. Some are already in published forms others keep in various archival institutions.

I want to share here my own experiences, as one working with archives and also as the one who has a responsibility to gather and to systematize Indonesian church history materials for the *Pusat Dokumentasi Sejarah Gereja Indonesia*. With the rise of internet and digital technology, we could save more (travel) time, (storage) space, and some other difficulties of older research project with archives had met. But still some skills and understanding are needed both of the researches and of the documentation centre, since all the data's need to be processed systematically. As far as my concern this systematic work can be arranged by putting the documents in certain order.

## How to put the documents in contexts

Where to find: Europe (Spain, Portuguese, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, UK), Indonesia, Japan, US; in churches-, cities-, and states-archives;

Archives in context: as historians we are aware that contexts have great influences on people and how they wrote down on events. Those contexts are: places, periods, connections, spirit and thought of a particular time, social and intellectual situation of a particular time and place.

To put the complexity of various contexts in a simple way I make 3 and 19 points of context of sources that can be found in archival works. Following list will give us some perspective.

### I. From periodical point of view

1. The late 16<sup>th</sup> to late 18<sup>th</sup> century: early Roman Catholic mission and churches under the VOC
2. The early 19<sup>th</sup> century up to Japanese occupation and Indonesia revolution in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century
3. The early 20<sup>th</sup> to present: the birth and development of Indonesia local churches and the ecumenical movement

### II. From sources point of view

#### a. In the first period

1. Churches, presbyteries (*classis*) and synods in late 16<sup>th</sup> to late 18<sup>th</sup> century Dutch Republic (and if possible of the Portuguese and Roman Catholic mission of the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century)
2. Gentlemen XVII, joined commission of the VOC and churches representatives for overseas churches affairs, both in the Netherlands;
3. Church in Batavia, Government and council in Batavia, local churches minutes (Semarang, Banda, Ambon, Kupang, etc.), officials correspondences to and fro the Netherlands churches and the VOC
4. Private letters, diaries, memories, etc of the people, church personnel and the government officers

#### b. *Zendingen archief*, and local sources (in the 19<sup>th</sup> to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century)

5. Mission boards and churches (and *classis*/presbyteries) in the Netherlands

6. Reports, correspondences of missionaries to his/her supervisors
7. Schools, hospitals and other institutions founded by mission boards in the Dutch East Indies
8. Private letters, diaries, memories, etc., of the missionaries, family members, mission boards officials
9. The Dutch East Indies government
10. Sporadic (*yet to be found*) occasionally mentioned of missionaries and their works by locals/indigenous in Indonesia (preferably from the Muslims and people of other faith)
11. Sporadic (*yet to be found*) records of early local Christians founded by missionaries
12. Remnants of Christians from the VOC era (the *Indische kerk*)
13. Japanese occupation documents (*still a huge gap in our knowledge on this*)

c. Recent developments

14. Local churches (from 1940s-present)
15. Mothers/sisters churches in the US, UK or Europe documentations on Indonesian young churches
16. National church council
17. Government documentations on churches and Christian movements in Indonesia
18. Islamic documentations/studies on churches and Christian movements in Indonesia
19. Theological faculties and seminaries studies on churches and Christian movements in Indonesia

*With 19 points of context to keep in minds, there are indeed many perspectives that could be developed in the history of Christianity in Indonesia. And as far as the sources are concern, those are scattered around in many institutions, governmental and ecclesiastical, secular one and religious one, of Christians' records and of Islamic or of other faith records, etc.*

*So to answer the question of availability of archives for history of Christianity in Indonesia, I would argue that there are more than enough materials to look into and to study with, both for Christians and Muslims, for theologians and other students of humanity studies, for the sake of local history and of broader interests, etc.*

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Jakarta & Utrecht, Maret – April 2010

[diterbitkan dalam Huub Lems (ed), *Mission History & Mission Archives* (Amersfoort, 2012),p. 84-88; ISBN 978 931 6005]