

2. **Against Christianisation**

Like a snowball, the discourse on Christianisation versus religious freedom discussed in the previous chapter continued to build up in the following decades, and the state became more closely involved. In 1967 Muslims in Meulaboh argued that they could not tolerate a newly built Methodist church because the majority of people living there were Muslims; then in 1969, the Government issued a decree in which this religious regionalism was accommodated. Lukman Harun's Parliamentary Questions in 1967 demanded that the Government control foreign aid for religious institutions; and in the same year, during the Inter-religious Consultation, the Muslims argued for the restriction of religious propagation to those outside the recognised religions. More than a decade later, in 1978, these two Muslim positions were translated into Government decrees. Finally, in 1967 the Muslims in Makassar opposed the General Assembly of the DGI; then in the early 1970s, the Islamic groups opposed the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) that was to be held in Jakarta in 1975. In their reactions to these cases, as in 1967, the Christians consistently argued for religious freedom. Besides these continuing problems, a rather different issue emerged in 1981: the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) produced a fatwa prohibiting Muslims from attending common Christmas celebrations. This fatwa eventually resulted in tensions between the Government, the MUI and the Christians. In this chapter, I shall discuss these cases in some detail.

1. **The Restriction on Establishing New Places of Worship**

In September 1968, the Catholic magazine, *Peraba*, reported that a Protestant church in Asahan, North Sumatra, and a storage room of a Catholic school in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, were burned, probably by Muslims. With regard to the case in Samarinda, it was reported that the Muslims around the school made a statement, saying that any new building (place of worship, school, clinic, dormitory) sponsored by a certain religion should not be established, unless it was endorsed by the society in the area.¹ The Samarinda case apparently did not attract much attention from the Government and politicians in Jakarta.

Some months later, however, on 28 April 1969, a similar case happened in Slipi, Jakarta. Muslims attacked and burned a newly built church

of GPIB (Gereja Protestan Indonesia Barat). When the Muslim leader Muhammad Natsir was questioned about the incident, he said that it should be understood by looking at the causes. For him, the cause was nothing but the Christianisation programmes directed at the Muslim community, one of them was to build churches in Muslim majority areas. He explained further that in Slipi, there were already five churches for 350 Christians found among 35,650 Muslims living in that area. This was why, he said, the establishment of the GPIB church did not receive permission from the Governor of Jakarta. The Muslims, therefore, protested, but there was apparently no measure taken by the authorities. The Muslim feeling of powerlessness, he said, eventually led to the physical attack. Natsir acknowledged that the attack was against the law, but for him this should not have happened if the Christians had not broken the law of the Government.² In contrast, *Peraba* quoted the Protestant newspaper, *Sinar Harapan*, reporting that the attack was actually planned in a meeting of 100 people one day before. Thus, besides criticising the late responses of the security forces to the incident, *Peraba* accused the attack of being similar to that of the Communist tactics of unilateral action. Last but not least, the Christians demanded that those who were responsible should be judged by the law.³ Indeed, the Government reacted to the case. It was reported that after the incident, the police arrested two activists of Anshor, the traditionalist Muslim youth organisation, as suspects, and a few months later, the Government dismissed two army officers, one was a Muslim and another a Christian, because of their connections with the Slipi incident.⁴

After these similar incidents since the Meulaboh affair in 1967, the Government finally decided to regulate and control two important religious activities that had become the polemical issues between the Muslims and the Christians: religious propagation, and the establishment of new places of worship. The Minister of Home Affairs, Amir Machmud, and the Minister of Religion, Mohammad Dachlan, issued a joint decree, dated 13 September 1969, dealing with these two issues. The decree says that the Government will not hinder any effort to spread religion as long as it does not contradict the existing law and public order. The decree authorizes the regional Government to control both the manner and content of religious propagation. It is also explained in the decree that religious propagation (1) should not lead to inter-religious conflict; (2) should not be carried out through intimidation, deception, force or threat; (3) should not break the law, nor endanger security and public order. The decree also authorizes the regional Government to control the establishment of new places of worship, namely

that people will not be allowed to build a new place of worship unless they get permission from the Governor or the subordinate authorized officials. To give permission, he or she should consider three things: (1) the view of the head of the Department of Religion in the region; (2) the city plan; (3) the situation and condition of the region. In addition, if it is needed (*apabila perlu*) the authorized official can ask the opinions of religious leaders and organisations of the region. Finally, if there is an inter-religious dispute because of religious propagation or the establishment of a place of worship, the local Government should act as a just and neutral mediator. In case of suspected crime in the dispute, the settlement of the case should be brought to the legal authorities.⁵

The decree can be seen as a combination and modification of the Christian view of religious propagation, and the Muslim position on the issue of establishing new places of worship. In line with the Christian view, the decree does not restrict religious propagation only to those outside the recognised religions, but also, in accordance with the Muslim demand, the decree stipulates that to give permission for establishing new places of worship, the authorised state official must take into consideration the 'situation and condition' of the region. Moreover, the official is recommended to ask the opinions of religious leaders and organisations of the region. In practice, this recommendation has become a necessity, and therefore, it has been difficult to erect a place of worship in an area where the majority of people do not belong to that religion. In general, however, the decree reflects the logic of 'law and order' of the New Order's Government. The Protestant magazine, *Ragi Buana*, published a full text of the decree and explained the Government's logic: "In order to maintain the unity and integrity of Indonesia and to avoid conflicts that could hinder the acceleration of modernization, the Government took an important step to overcome this problem through a joint decree of the Minister of Home Affairs and the Minister of Religion that is expected to be a guide for the policies on religious matters in Indonesia."⁶

Nonetheless, the publication of the decree in *Ragi Buana* did not result in the Christians being happy with it. About one month later, the DGI and MAWI issued a joint memorandum criticizing the decree. Again, the main argument in the memorandum was for religious freedom.

Having examined the stipulations and articles of the joint decree and heard the voices from the regions telling of confusion and anxieties about the possible effects in enacting these regulations, we are of the opinion that the joint

decree of the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Home Affairs could *open the possibility* that the freedom of every citizen to follow his or her religion, to perform the rituals based on his or her religion and belief, and to develop religion in accordance with the teachings of one's religion *will not be guaranteed: in other words, it opens the possibility of prohibiting or refusing permission for something that is related to Human Rights.*⁷

In addition, the memorandum stated that the decree was not clear regarding the authority of the regional Government whether it refers to the province, district or sub-district authority and whether the regional Government had a total authority on the issue or it still depends on the central Government. Last but not least, the memorandum argued that because the decree touches the fundamental issue of Human Rights, according to the Indonesian legal system the ministers did not have the authority to make such a decree. Both the DGI and MAWI finally asked the Government to review the decree.⁸

Actually, the Christians' main objection to the decree was to the regulations on the establishment of new places of worship. Ever since, the Christians have been in difficulties in establishing new churches, especially in Muslim majority areas. To solve the problem, the Christians sometimes used a house as a place for conducting the divine service. This strategy, however, did not always work because sometimes Muslims around the house also protested. In May 1975, the Minister of Home Affairs sent a telegram to all governors explaining that, based on a report of the state intelligence, there were disputes between Muslims and Christians in two places in Jakarta because the Christians made use of a house for divine services, while the Muslims opposed this activity because the majority of people living in the environment were Muslims. The Minister of Home Affairs then instructed all governors to persuade people not to use a house as a church because it might disturb security. On the other hand, the telegram also instructed the governors to take security steps to avoid possible excesses. The ambiguity of the telegram eventually led to different interpretations. The Department of Religion in certain provinces held that the telegram meant that the Minister of Home Affairs prohibited people from using a house as a place of worship. In reaction to this issue, the General Directorate of the Protestants of the Department of Religion in Jakarta sent a letter to all Departments of Religion in the provinces stating that the telegram was not intended to prohibit people from worshipping in a house, but to persuade them not to make a house a place of worship. Nonetheless, this interpretation was then

annulled by another telegram of the Minister of Home Affairs to all governors explaining that what was prohibited was to “to make use of a house as a church”, while gatherings of Christians in a house for familial purposes was not prohibited.⁹

Despite these telegrams, and because of the difficulties in getting permission to establish new churches in Muslim majority areas, the Christians still often used a private house or rented a hall for services and sometimes even established a new church without permission, and the Government usually did not react unless security was disturbed due to Muslim protests. In this respect, the Muslims often referred to the decree to justify their opposition to church buildings.¹⁰ In 1996, when a systematic attack on churches in Situbondo, East Java, occurred, Muslims said that only 3 out of 24 targeted churches had legal permission to operate.¹¹ In reaction to this criticism, the Christian leaders sent a letter to the President, asking him to withdraw the decree based on the argument that it was against religious freedom.¹² Moreover, some Christian leaders questioned whether the existing mosques also had legal permission. In other words, for the Christians, the implementation of the decree tended to be discriminatory.¹³

In fact, the decree also caused difficulties for Muslims living in a Christian majority area to establish a mosque. Gerrit E. Singgih said that where the Christians are a majority, “even in some parts of Java, for instance those who live in Christian villages in East Java, they act like Christians in a *Christian* country. In those villages, they do not allow Muslims to buy houses or lands, much less to erect mosques.”¹⁴

While the Christians sometimes mentioned the Muslim difficulty in order to justify their opposition to the decree,¹⁵ the Muslims concerned with Christianisation hardly talked about it, probably because they were used to thinking as a religious majority or perhaps for them it was a lesser evil compared with allowing Christians to build new churches more freely in Muslim majority areas.

The large number of denominations and the lack of ecumenism among the Protestants have also been among the reasons behind the emergence of new church buildings. Gerrit Singgih observes that Christians usually demanded the Government provide a church in a national housing area (Perumnas) but if there were two different denominations of Christians living there, they did not want to share the church, and so another denomination carried out their service in a house that would later on be transformed into a church. For Singgih, it is understandable if non-Christians saw this phenomenon as a “bad sign of trying to dominate the religious scene” and

if the Government did not give permission for the establishment of this “metamorphosing church.” He also observes that in some Perumnas areas one could find two church buildings of two different denominations standing side by side and even having the same service hours. On this, Singgih lamented: “What a bad advertisement for Christian fellowship and ecumenism! If Christians cannot get together to respond to their situation, how much more can they get together with the non-Christians?”¹⁶

2. **Muslim Opposition to the WCC Assembly of 1975**

During the New Order period, a person who played a central role in the Indonesian Council of Churches (DGI) was T.B. Simatupang. As a young man, T.B. Simatupang joined the Dutch colonial army and had his education in the Military Academy at Bandung from which he graduated in 1942. Later in the same year, he was captured by the Japanese and subsequently joined the nationalist movement. After the proclamation of independence in 1945, Simatupang was involved in the fight against the returning Dutch. Simatupang reached the peak of his military career when he was appointed Chief Staff of the Armed Forces in 1951. Nonetheless, in October 1952, he had a strong disagreement with President Soekarno and since then was gradually removed from the army leadership. He was eventually pensioned off in 1959 at the very young age of 39.¹⁷

One day in the early 1960s, Tudung Sutan Gunung Mulia (1896-1966),¹⁸ the founding father of three important Christian institutions: the Indonesian Council of Churches (DGI), the Indonesian Bible Society (LAI) and the Indonesian Christian University (UKI), visited T.B. Simatupang in his house. On this occasion, Mulia asked Simatupang to participate in the DGI activities. Simatupang agreed and ever since started his new career within the DGI. His involvement in the DGI was dealing with the issue of the relationship between church and society, an issue that was to become his main concern for the rest of his life. For this issue, the major question was, according to Simatupang, how to bridge the gap between theological thought and social realities. Since 1962, Simatupang had been involved in the conferences on church and society, both at national and international levels. In 1964, he was invited by the World Council of Churches (WCC) to stay some months in Geneva to prepare for an international conference on that theme.¹⁹ Simatupang chaired the section on politics when the conference was successfully held in 1966 in Geneva. It seems that after his involvement in the Geneva conference, Simatupang had become well known among the WCC function-

aries. In the fourth Assembly of the WCC held in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1968, Simatupang was appointed a member of the central and executive committees of the WCC.

It was very likely that the close relationship between Simatupang and the WCC was one of the reasons why Jakarta was chosen to be the place for the fifth Assembly of WCC (planned to be held from 23 July to 8 August 1975). According to Simatupang, in a meeting of the executive committee of WCC in Sofia in 1970, there was a discussion on where the next Assembly of WCC was to be held. Because the previous Assembly took place in Europe (Sweden), the executives wanted the next Assembly to be held in Asia. The success of the second Assembly, held in New Delhi, India, 1961, was also the reason why the committee wanted to have another Assembly in Asia. In India the delegates for the Assembly had the opportunity to see the world of Hinduism, and it was expected that in the next Assembly they could see another world, the world of Islam. The first choice was Lebanon, but after considering the political situation in the Middle East, the committee decided to drop it. One of the members of the executive committee from India, M.M. Thomas, asked, "Why not in Indonesia?" Then everybody agreed and Simatupang had no choice but to try to find the possibility of holding the Assembly in his country.²⁰

When Simatupang came back to Indonesia, he asked the NU leader, Idham Chalid, about the Assembly and the latter responded positively. Simatupang also came to see Soeharto, and the latter also welcomed the Assembly. According to Simatupang, Soeharto suggested that some of the delegates of the Assembly should stay in people's houses so that they could enjoy the spirit of cooperation among Indonesian people inspired by Pancasila. In August 1972, the representatives of the DGI, Lutheran World Federation and World Alliance of Reformed Churches met Soeharto in the Netherlands to talk about the Assembly. In response to them, the President said that Indonesia would be honoured to be the host of the Assembly. One year later, by the end of August 1973, the WCC confirmed that the Assembly would be held in Jakarta and decided to provide \$1, 211,700 for it.²¹

Based on the positive responses, Simatupang started preparing all the matters related to the Assembly. Since mid December 1973, Simatupang released the details of the planned programmes of the Assembly to the public. The programmes included not only the meetings of the Assembly, but also other programmes such as film shows, music, puppets, drama and dance. All delegates were also invited to attend a religious service at the opening ceremony of the Assembly, and Sunday services held in different

churches in Jakarta. The DGI expected about 3000 delegates and 500 foreign journalists to come. They would stay in humble hotels in Jakarta and travel by bus like ordinary people. To do this, they would be guided by their respective 'adopted families' in Jakarta. This 'assimilation' was expected to help the delegates understand the uniqueness of the unity in diversity of the Indonesian people and their high religious tolerance. T.B. Simatupang also explained that these programmes were not intended to be a show of force at all.²²

Furthermore, the DGI had prepared some ideas to respond to the theme of the Assembly: "Jesus Christ as Liberator and Integrator." According to the DGI, these two themes of liberation and integration were very relevant to the condition of Indonesia. The DGI argued that Christianity in Indonesia had liberated people from primitivism, feudalism and colonialism. With regard to the New Order's development programmes, based on the Christian liberation perspective, Christians should have a positive, creative, but critical and realistic approach. The Christian liberation, therefore, does not only mean liberation of souls, but also from injustices and abuses of power. This liberation could not be enacted without the unity and integrity of the people. The DGI should develop an ecumenical movement among its members and non-members, with the Catholics and with all Christians all over the world. In addition, based on the Pancasila, the DGI should develop cooperation with the people of other faiths in Indonesia, including the Muslims. Again, this cooperation should be based on religious freedom guaranteed by the state. However, it was also noted that any religious propagation should not be through methods that were against human dignity and the noble values of religion.²³

Despite of the Government's endorsement and the relevance of the Assembly to Indonesia according to the DGI's arguments, the Muslim leaders could not tolerate the Assembly. Commenting on the planned programs of the Assembly, the Muslim magazine *Panji Masyarakat* said that although T.B. Simatupang denied that the Assembly was a kind of show of force of the Christians, "for the Muslims who are very weak now, it is felt that it is a show of force."²⁴ In May 1974, the reformist Muslim organization, Muhammadiyah, sent an official letter to the President, asking him not to allow the Assembly because "it will bring about widespread anxieties among the Islamic community."²⁵ In June 1974, there were similar protests from the reformist Muslim students, PII, and the traditionalist ulama of the major Islamic boarding school, Jombang. In addition, the *Rābita al-Ālam al-Islāmī*, (the Muslim World League) that carried out an international meeting on *da'wah* in Mecca

in April 1974, also sent a letter to the President voicing the same objection.²⁶

The political climate from the end of 1973 to the second half of 1974 had probably contributed to the negative Muslim reactions. As we shall see in Chapter 4, by the end of 1973, there was a debate on the Marriage Bill in the Parliament. For the Muslims – despite the compromise that was finally reached – the proposed bill, which in some aspects contradicted Islamic law, was a conspiracy of the Christians and certain army officers of the regime to attack Islam. Less than a month after the Marriage Bill affair, serious riots occurred in Jakarta on 15 January 1974 (later popularly called ‘Malari’, an acronym of ‘Malapetaka 15 Januari’). On that day – the day of the visit of the Japanese Prime Minister, Kaukuei Tanaka, to Jakarta – the students protested the Government policy on foreign investment, which in their opinion only benefited those in power and their cronies. Some observers explained that the Malari affair was strongly related to internal army rivalries. However, the regime, through the voice of Ali Moertopo, the Personal Assistant to the President, eventually pointed his finger at the critical civilian groups. He claimed that the incident was created by the agents of the former Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI) and the Muslim reformist party, Masyumi. Based on this one-sided accusation, the Government closed several newspapers, including *Abadi*, the newspaper of the Muslim reformists.²⁷ Ali Moertopo’s alliance with the Catholics in the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) had convinced the Muslims that this was partly an army-Catholic conspiracy against the Islamic group.²⁸

The WCC Assembly and the Muslim Discourse on Christianisation

Within this political context, what were the Muslim reactions to the Assembly? The Muslims considered it a provocative and aggressive movement of the Christians against the Muslims in Indonesia. Again, the term “Kristenisasi” (Christianisation) was at the very centre of the Muslim discourse. Some prominent Muslim intellectuals, especially the modernists, wrote articles and even a booklet about the danger of Christianisation and the necessity of strengthening Islamic propagation programs (*da’wah*) in cooperation with the Muslims of other countries.

Djarnawi Hadikusuma, the prominent Muhammadiyah leader and the former chairman of the reformist Muslim political party, Parmusi, wrote a long article entitled “Christianisation in Indonesia: Its Strengths and Weaknesses.”²⁹ For Djarnawi, Christianisation means “to christianise people massively by all possible efforts so that customs and relationships in society

should reflect the teachings of Christianity. This kind of society will pave the way for the spread of Christianity. In the end, the spiritual and social life of people would be directed from and centralized in the church."³⁰ Djarnawi explained further that Christianisation in a political sense was, "attempts to produce laws, regulations, actions or attitudes of the political authorities that open more opportunities for the spread of, or benefits for that religion (read: Christianity)."³¹ Djarnawi's definition of Christianisation clearly echoes the political atmosphere described above, especially the Muslim's perception of the army-Christian conspiracy against Islam. Djarnawi, however, did not directly relate the Assembly of the WCC to Christianisation. He only said that the WCC Assembly was against the principle of religious harmony, that is, the principle of mutual understanding, hence not holding a religious Assembly "in a place where the majority of the people adhere to a different religion."³²

Mohammad Natsir, another reformist Muslim leader, also wrote an article in which he alluded to the WCC Assembly. Natsir claimed that the DGI had produced a map in which Indonesia was divided into different areas of missions to be carried out by the churches under the DGI. Perhaps, Natsir said, in the coming Assembly of the WCC in Jakarta, the plan of the Christian missions would become clearer. With reference to the Christian newspaper, *Sinar Harapan*, 10 January 1973, Natsir explained that Christian missions had developed a new approach, that is, of socio-economic development. For this, an organization called The Council of Church's Participation in Development (CCPD) had been established and Indonesia was one of the targets of the CCPD's programmes. For the development programmes in 1973 – again with reference to *Sinar Harapan*, 25 May 1973 – Natsir said that the International Christian Aid had provided \$ 150,000 and the WCC gave \$200,000. Natsir argued that it would be very naïve not to think of the development programmes as a means to convert people. After the Inter-religious Consultation in 1967, he said, there had been a 'free fight for all' and 'survival of the fittest' in the field of religious propagation in Indonesia. In this regard, how could Muslims compete with the Christians, "how could a cart compete with an express train?" he said.³³

Muhammad Rasjidi, another prominent Muslim reformist leader, wrote a booklet in response to the plan for the Assembly under the title: *The Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Jakarta 1975 is a Challenge to the Islamic World*.³⁴ The introduction to the book – written anonymously by a person representing DDII – clearly reflects both the Muslims' fear of Christianisation and their political frustration towards the regime at this period. The

DDII author explained that according to the Indonesian Christian media, the Assembly would be attended by thousands of delegates from 82 countries. The delegates would not only visit Jakarta, but also other places such as Medan, Bali, East Java and Central Java. For the DDII author, Indonesia was chosen to be the home for the Assembly because it was related to the Christian programmes to convert Muslims in that country. The DDII author then referred to an article, published in *The Washington Post* of 7 September 1973, saying that the Assembly in Jakarta would be an opportunity for other Christians to witness the success of Christian missions in Indonesia.³⁵ Finally, the DDII author did not forget to express that, while the Muslims did not have a public voice anymore, the Catholics still had *Kompas* and the Protestants still had *Sinar Harapan*. As noted above, the Muslim reformist newspaper, *Abadi* was banned by the Government soon after the Malari affair in 1974.

Besides the introduction, the content of the book is interesting. Rasjidi started with a sketch of the modern development of Christian theology describing two important modern theological trends in Christianity: liberalism and neo-orthodoxy. For Rasjidi, the liberal views that Jesus is not God but a great master, that there is no original sin and that the Bible contains some inaccuracies but as a whole it has a very valuable historical meaning, all of these are very close to Islam. The neo-orthodox views, however, reaffirmed what the liberals had negated and therefore, were opposed to Islam. Besides Karl Barth, among the proponents of neo-orthodoxy, according to Rasjidi, was Hendrik Kraemer. Again, Rasjidi referred to Kraemer's book, *Christianity in a Non-Christian World* that was originally written for the International Mission Conference in Tambaran, India, 1938. Rasjidi explained very briefly several other similar conferences and indicated that the WCC was one of the results of a Christian ecumenical conference held in Utrecht, 1938. Nonetheless, because of the Second World War, the first Assembly of WCC was postponed to 1948, and took place in Amsterdam. Based on this analysis, Rasjidi concluded that if the WCC Assembly declared that it dealt with social problems such as human rights, education and health, these were actually a pretext for the real aims of the neo-orthodox theology, that is, to convert others to Christianity. Therefore, instead of receiving social aid from the WCC, Rasjidi preferred the other neutral institutions under the United Nations such as WHO, FAO and UNESCO.

Rasjidi explained that there were 'wise liberal Christians' in the West who warned the WCC not to hold the Assembly in Jakarta because it would disturb the relationships between Muslims and Christians.³⁶ Rasjidi also wondered whether the proposal for the Assembly in Jakarta had come originally

from the DGI rather than the WCC. If that was the case, he said, then it should be related to the psychology of the convert who, according to Stephen Neill, considers “the old world as the world of evils” and “wishes not to turn back in any way to be associated with that which to him is evil through and through.” Rasjidi then suggested that instead of following the psychology of converts, it would be better for the DGI to go after “the wise liberal Christians” in the West. Last but not least, Rasjidi said, “the ink has not dried up yet to write protests and the tears are still dropping to counter the Christian efforts to impose a marriage law containing a lot of things against Islamic teachings in September last year. Now, we are faced with a new problem: Jakarta has been chosen to be the place for the WCC Assembly, 1975.”³⁷

Within the Muslim circles, the discourse on Christianisation was soon paired with the discourse on Islamization or *da’wah*. By now, the Indonesian Muslims had developed stronger relations with the Muslim Middle East. In 1973, Mohammad Natsir was appointed to be a General Advisor to the Secretariat of the *Rābīta* and this was soon followed by his appointment to be the head of the *Rābīta* office in Indonesia.³⁸ As has been said, in May 1974, *Rābīta* held a meeting in Mecca dealing with *da’wah* issues. Besides Mohammad Natsir of the DDII, Rasjidi and H.M. Sanusi of the Muhammadiyah were among the Indonesian delegates who came to the meeting.

In June 1974, there was a Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Islamic Countries that took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. On this occasion, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman announced his *da’wah* project, started by establishing a huge building of 26 floors in Kuala Lumpur. The *da’wah* programmes were organized under an organization called the Body for the Advancement of Islam in Malaysia (Pertubuhan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, PERKIM). Abdul Rahman’s project received significant supports from other Muslim leaders, especially those of the Arab Middle East. It was reported that the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, Sayed Omar al-Sakkaf, donated \$ 50,000 and Abdel Ati al-Obeidi, the Foreign Minister of Libya, donated \$16.5 million for Abdul Rahman’s project. Commenting on the *da’wa* project in Malaysia, an Indonesian Muslim author, Rusydi, the son of HAMKA, said that the development in Malaysia was in contrast to the situation in Indonesia where not the Muslims but the Christians who were going to celebrate the success of their missionary activities in the Assembly of the WCC. Rusydi accordingly suggested that the Indonesian Muslims should follow the steps of their neighbour.³⁹ It is noteworthy that between 1971 and 1973 the Indonesian Association of Muslim Students (HMI) and the Indonesian ‘ulama significantly contributed to the *da’wah* courses for

Malaysian students.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, it seems that in 1974, for the Indonesian Muslim youth like Rusydi, Indonesia had been left behind by Malaysia in the field of da'wah.

On the other hand, there was also an International Congress on World Evangelization from 16 to 25 July 1974, in Lausanne, Switzerland. An Indonesian Christian magazine of the DGI reported that ninety Indonesian Christian delegates came to the congress. It was also reported that in his speech at the opening ceremony of the congress, the American evangelist, Billy Graham, suggested that Christian missions should be based on the Bible and this issue should be discussed in the next Assembly of the WCC in Jakarta.⁴¹

The Murder of an Anglican Church Minister

Apart from the more positive discussions on da'wah and mission, an incident occurred on 29 June 1974. An Australian minister of the Anglican Church, Eric Constable, was killed at night when he was staying in a guest-house of the Anglican Church in Jakarta. There was a controversy over the motives behind the violence. According to the official report of the police, the motive behind the killing was purely criminal. It was said that the killer wanted to rob Constable who had \$ 500,000 in cash with him. Both the Anglican Church and the Australian embassy in Jakarta, however, denied this account. Furthermore, one of the suspects later identified as Hasyim Yahya was not a poor man. He was a director of a company belonging to his family.⁴² So what was then the real motive behind this? In his account of the failure of the Assembly, Simatupang also mentioned the case with the following remarks: "it was said that the killing was a signal that similar incidents would happen more if the Assembly were held in Jakarta."⁴³ To my knowledge, however, there was no Muslim writer who endorsed the violence in this period. Rusydi's article in *Panji Masyarakat* tended to believe that the case was a robbery based on the assumption that foreign ministers coming to Indonesia often brought a lot of money. Accordingly, he said, if Constable had \$ 500,000, one could imagine further how much money there was in the hands of hundred of foreign ministers working in Indonesia!⁴⁴

Nonetheless, more than two decades later, a Muslim hardliner, Adian Husaini, the general secretary of KISDI (the Indonesian Committee for the Solidarity with the Islamic World), an organization close to DDII, claimed that in 1997, he met Hasyim Yahya in Mecca, a place where the latter escaped from Indonesia. According to Adian, Hasyim was a humble and religious person and calmly told him about the incident. Hasyim explained to Adian that the main reason behind his violent action was his resentment towards the

perceived aggressive Christianisation indicated by the Marriage Bill affair and the planned Assembly of the WCC in Jakarta. According to Adian, based on some consultations with certain ulama, Hasyim believed that Christianisation is analogous to or even worse than physical attack on the Muslims and therefore, physical retaliation against a missionary is religiously justifiable.⁴⁵

The Cancellation of the Assembly in Jakarta

The Muslim protests and the killing of the Anglican minister had pushed the DGI into a very difficult position. The DGI finally decided to talk directly to both traditionalist and reformist Muslim leaders. Simatupang then made the appointments with the Muslim traditionalist politician, K.H. Masjkur and the Muslim reformist leader, M. Natsir. In his meeting with Masjkur in the Parliament office, T.B. Simatupang started with a formal question: "Was the DGI still in the borders of its rights to invite the WCC Assembly to Jakarta?" Masjkur answered, "The problem is not about right, but how to find something good for all of us." Masjkur continued, "It often occurs that when we are angry at our parents, we hit our younger brother." Having heard this point, Simatupang concluded that the Muslim protests were actually directed not against the DGI but the Government. With this idea in mind, Simatupang went to the house of the leader of the Muslim reformist, Mohammad Roem. Roem had been waiting there along with Rasjidi, but M. Natsir was absent. According to Simatupang, although Rasjidi explained about the Muslim fear of Christianisation, the meeting was very friendly. Nonetheless, there was no substantial change with regard to the Muslim objection to the Assembly.⁴⁶

Was the objection of the Muslim leaders to the Assembly only an expression of their anger at the Government, as Masjkur said? I think it is only partially true because the Muslim fear of Christian missions was real, although this was exacerbated by the Muslim political frustration towards the regime.

In any case, having contacted the Muslim leaders, Simatupang also met with President Soeharto on 27 July 1974. After this meeting, it was clear to the public that Soeharto also wanted to cancel the Assembly in Jakarta.⁴⁷ In order to save the face of the Government, however, thanks to Simatupang's diplomacy, it was the WCC rather than the Government that formally cancelled the Assembly. The decision was made in a meeting of the central executive committee of the WCC in Berlin, 12 August 1974 with the hope that "on another occasion in the future the WCC could enjoy the hospi-

tality of the Indonesian church and nation."⁴⁸ Commenting on the failure of the Assembly, Simatupang bitterly quoted a saying of the Irish Republican Army, "It is better to have fought and lost than never to have fought at all."⁴⁹ Thus, the Christians were actually disappointed, but they could do nothing to avoid the cancellation.

In his Address to the Nation on 15 August 1974, Soeharto also alluded to the cancellation of the Assembly. He said that he was relieved by the cancellation of the Assembly. In the beginning, he said, the Government thought that the Assembly was a sign of trust and appreciation of religious tolerance of the Indonesian people. However, he explained further that the Government also wanted the Assembly not to be harmful to the national unity and stability. Thus, "if the Assembly could disturb the current national stability, then it should be held at another appropriate time." Soeharto also suggested that Indonesian society should be careful of certain rumours triggered by religious zeal because religion was a sensitive issue. To play with the issue of religion, he said, was like playing with fire that finally would burn one's self. Last but not least, Soeharto did not forget to say that to maintain inter-religious harmony, "religious propagation should not be directed to the people who already have religion."⁵⁰ Thus, as we can see, Soeharto consistently promoted the idea of political stability as the most important goal for the Government, even if it was achieved at the expense of religious freedom.

What was the response of the Muslim leaders to the cancellation? HAMKA, the Muslim reformist leader also expressed relief that the Assembly was cancelled. He hoped that this decision could be a good start for the Indonesian Christians to develop their tolerant attitude towards Muslims. He said further that religious harmony in Indonesia could actually be achieved and had been only disturbed by the coming of foreign missionaries.⁵¹ In contrast, the editorial of *Suara Muhammadiyah* said that the cancellation of the Assembly was truly a relief for the Muslims, but it did not mean that the Christians had become tolerant to them. The editorial also quoted a DDII activist who said that, the cancellation of the Assembly should be followed by stopping Christianisation activities in the country!⁵² In short, the cancellation of the Assembly did not significantly change the negative attitude of the Muslim leaders towards the Christians.

3. **Control of Religious Propagation and Foreign Aid**

So far we have discussed the Government's accommodation of two Muslim demands: the restrictions on building new churches in Muslim majority areas and the cancellation of hosting the WCC Assembly in Jakarta. Nonetheless, there were two other Muslim demands since 1967 not yet considered by the Government: to control foreign aid as it was demanded by Lukman Harun's plea in Parliament, and to restrict religious propagation only for those outside the recognised religions as had been debated during the Inter-religious Consultation. The debates on these two issues on both national and international occasions continued in the 1970s, and the Government finally took the initiative to accommodate the Muslim demands in 1978.

The Debates on International and National Occasions: 1972–1976

In 1971, Abdul Mukti Ali was appointed to replace Mohammad Dachlan as the Minister of Religion. As a scholar interested in comparative religion, Mukti Ali was the first Minister of Religion who initiated inter-religious dialogue as a Government project. On the other hand, he was also concerned with the issues of religious propagation and foreign aid.⁵³ In July 1972, the WCC organized a Muslim-Christian dialogue in Broumana, Lebanon. There were 42 Christians and Muslims from 20 countries in this meeting, and among them were Mukti Ali and P.D. Latuihamallo of the DGI. One of the important issues discussed in Mukti Ali's paper for the dialogue was the issue of foreign aid for religious institutions. In contrast to Lukman Harun who suggested in 1967 a Government control of the aid, Mukti Ali said:

I should like to suggest that the churches in the western countries also give aid to the non-Christian religious communities which constitute the majority in most developing countries. If such aid is only given to the Christian churches tensions will arise because of the unequal development of religious life in these developing countries.

The issue of religious propagation was also discussed in the dialogue, but Mukti Ali did not touch on it explicitly in his paper. On the final day of the dialogue, the participants produced a Memorandum. It was stated in it that religious freedom should be guaranteed for any religious minority, but at the same time it was emphasised that in doing religious missions, "proselytism should be avoided, whether by a majority intent upon pressing a minority to conform, or whether by a minority using economic or cultural

inducements to swell its ranks." In addition, in line with Mukti Ali's suggestion on foreign aid, the Memorandum stated that: "We welcome the emerging willingness for religious communities' gifts of material and practical aid to be channelled not through a particular religious community but given for the whole community, wherever the need is greatest."⁵⁵ As we shall see, the memorandum was to become one of the reference documents in Muslim-Christian controversies in Indonesia.

Mukti Ali's concern with the issue of religious propagation was more explicitly stated in his speech to the national Christmas celebration in Jakarta, 1972. He said that it was "not possible to invite people who already have religion to convert to another religion, either by force or by giving material inducements."⁵⁶ When I asked about this issue, Mukti Ali said that for him, to restrict religious propagation only for those outside the recognised religions could effectively prevent inter-religious conflicts.⁵⁷ Thus, although Mukti Ali was known as a promoter of inter-religious dialogue, some people believed that he was in fact also concerned about Christianisation.

We have already quoted above that President Soeharto, in his comments on the cancellation of the WCC Assembly in Jakarta during his speech on 15 August 1974, also stated the importance of the restriction of religious propagation. Later in his speech to the Eighth Assembly of DGI in Salatiga, July 1976, Soeharto said that "religious propagation should not disturb the stability of society" and "the efforts to increase the number of followers and to establish places of worship should not create disturbances in society." He also suggested that foreign aid for religious institutions should be carried out through the Government in order to make sure that it was "used appropriately."⁵⁸ After Soeharto's speech, the next day, the Protestant newspaper, *Sinar Harapan* quoted Cardinal Darmojowono who said that to lead people who did not have religion yet (those outside the recognised religions) to have religion was hypocrisy because it implied that people were forced to have religion and therefore, they would become insincere converts.⁵⁹ With regard to the issue of foreign aid, the DGI Assembly asserted that foreign aid for churches in Indonesia was an expression of the universality of Christian faith and ecumenism.⁶⁰ This seems to be an implicit rejection of Soeharto's suggestion that the aid should be carried out through the Government. Thus, the Christians obviously opposed the position of the Muslims and Soeharto on these two issues.

On the other hand, having noticed the Christian negative reactions, the Muslim leaders also made sharp comments against the Christians. Muhammad Natsir said that he could not understand Darmojowono's state-

ment because there were missionary activities in Kalimantan to convert those who did not yet have a religion. Natsir claimed that there were 45 airstrips for the operation of helicopters and airplanes of the Christian missionaries in the region.⁶¹ Another Muslim leader, HAMKA, cynically stated that if Cardinal Darmono considered the missions to convert those who did not yet have a religion was hypocrisy, then one might conclude that the real aim of the Christian missions was to convert Muslims, while the missionary activities carried out to those who did not yet have a religion were simply a pretext. Darmono's statement and T.B. Simatupang's rejection of Government control of foreign aid, for HAMKA, indicated that the Christians felt strong vis-à-vis the Government. The spirit of Muslim jihad, he said, now was apparently found among the Christians!⁶²

Besides the debates on the issues in Jakarta, just one month before the DGI Assembly in Salatiga, the WCC in cooperation with two co-convenors, David Kerr, the Director of the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations in Birmingham, and Khurshid Ahmad, the Director of the Islamic Foundation, Leicester, organized a conference on Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah, held in Chambésy, Geneva, 26-30 June 1976. The conference was actually a meeting of Muslim and Christian leaders, especially the representatives from Asia and Africa. Among the invited participants, there were two Indonesian representatives: the Muslim reformist, Muhammad Rasjidi and the prominent Christian scholar and Rector of Sekolah Tinggi Teologi (The Academy of Theology) Jakarta, Ihromi.

On the normative and theological basis, both Christian and Muslim speakers in the Conference acknowledged the missionary character of their respective religions.⁶³ Nonetheless, if we look at the papers and discussions of the conference, we shall find that the major issue was Christian missionary activities among Muslims rather than the opposite. In fact, Lamin Sanneh, who presented a paper on Christian experience of Islamic da'wah in Africa, only discussed the historical development of the propagation of Islam and Christianity among the pagans in Africa rather than Islamic da'wah among Christians.⁶⁴ This was in sharp contrast to the Muslim perception of Christian missions in Indonesia and East Africa described in the papers of Mohammad Rasjidi and Ali Muhsin Barwani respectively.

In his paper, Rasjidi described in detail his resentment at what he saw as Christian abuses of social services (*diakonia*) to convert Muslims such as giving money and food to the poor Muslims, and building new churches, schools and hospitals in Muslim majority areas.⁶⁵ In response to the Muslim criticism of *diakonia*, Arne Rudvin argued that if we look at the New Testa-

ment, *diakonia* is actually considered secondary to evangelism. However, modern missions tend to institutionalise and internationalise the *diakonia*, and the Christians had “too often succumbed to the temptation to make these institutions means of influence or of evangelisation.” For him, this was unacceptable because “If we have any ulterior motive for our service, however good, *diakonia* is no longer an expression of *agapé* but becomes a propaganda instrument.” Thus, he said, “I believe our Muslim brethren have a right to blame us for this.”⁶⁶

While Rasjidi’s paper criticised the abuses of *diakonia*, Barwani criticised the Christian missionaries who cooperated with colonial power to attack Islam in East Africa. For Barwani, although East Africa had already obtained independence, it was still controlled by the colonialists, “not colonialists from abroad but people belonging to the Christian minority group, people who are the products of the colonial era of the missions and who still enjoy their blessings.”⁶⁷ The discussion on colonialism then touched Indonesia as well when a Muslim scholar, Ismail R. al-Faruqi made a sharp comment: “I personally do not agree to discuss with anyone who argues that there is no neo-colonialism today in, for example, Indonesia. And what concerns us very much here is the linkage between the missionary movement and neo-colonialism.” Ihromi, the Christian representative from Indonesia, immediately reacted: “But we Christians in Indonesia feel a deep sense of solidarity with our Muslim fellow-citizens. We would like to see the growth of a sense of single citizenship shared by Muslims and Christians in Indonesia. You seem to disregard this when you accuse all the Christians in Indonesia of being in the hands of neo-colonial powers.”⁶⁸

The Christians, on the other hand, criticised the Muslims with regard to the issue of religious freedom. Rudvin said, “Surely one of the main reasons for the negative attitudes between Muslims and Christians is the treatment meted out to converts, probably on both sides. In Pakistan, I would go so far as to say that a convert in a major city will survive with his life, but probably not so in a village. ” He then suggested that, “we as Christian and Muslim leaders should tell those for whom we are responsible not to abuse converts, not to ostracize them from the family nor from society, making them lose their inheritance, their jobs, etc.”⁶⁹ The Muslims’ answer to the question was that in Islam there is freedom to convert. The prohibition of conversion from Islam should be understood as a political idea. Al-Faruqi argued that conversion out of Islam was not tolerated during the Madinah period because conversion at that time meant: “joining the polytheistic camp of Makkah which was in a constant state of war against the Muslims.”

In the case of Indonesia, Al-Faruqi tended not to allow freedom to convert for Muslims because “what we have heard [i.e., from Rasjidi’s paper] about the situation confronting Islam in Indonesia is like a re-enactment of Madinah and Makkah.”⁷⁰

The Christian concerns with religious freedom and the Muslim resentment of colonialism and the abuses of *diakonia* were all finally covered in the statement made on the final day of the conference. It was stated that, “the Christian participants extend to their Muslim brethren their full sympathy for the moral wrongs which the Muslim world suffered at the hands of colonialists, neo-colonialists and their accomplices.” With regard to religious freedom, it was stated, among other things, that “the Muslims as well as the Christians must enjoy the full liberty to convince and be convinced, and to practice their faith...[and] that an individual is perfectly entitled to maintain his/her religious integrity in obedience to his or her religious principles and in faithfulness to his or her religious identity.” On the abuses of *diakonia* and the distribution of foreign aid, the conference “strongly urges Christian churches and religious organizations to suspend their misused *diakonia* activities in the world of Islam.” Moreover, “the conference urges strongly that all material assistance donated by outside churches and religious organization henceforth be distributed wherever possible by the Governments and local communities of people for whom they are intended, respecting the dignity and integrity of the people concerned.”⁷¹

The statement of the Conference quoted above could be a good foundation for creating better Muslim-Christian relations. Nonetheless, it is often the case that a well-formulated statement on paper does not work in reality at all. Further, neither the participants of the conference nor the WCC had any formal political authority to implement the stipulations of the statement. So, what was the significance of the conference? In the case of Indonesia, the conference, or more precisely the statement of the conference, has been referred to by both Muslims and Christians when a controversy on religious freedom and foreign aid emerged in the following years. In addition, after their return from the conference, both Ihromi and Muhammad Rasjidi almost immediately published accounts of the conference in the Christian and Muslim media respectively. Rasjidi and Ihromi, however, had different if not contradictory interpretations of the meaning of the statement of the conference.

In his account of the conference published in *Berita Oikoumene*, Ihromi did not touch the issue of religious freedom directly. He just emphasized the concept of citizenship for all Indonesians regardless of religion and ethnic-

ity. As has been noted above, Ihromi had a discussion on this issue with al-Faruqi. According to Ihromi, he explained to al-Faruqi and the other participants that the Indonesian word 'warga' and the term 'warga negara' used in the Indonesian Constitution contributes a deeper dimension to the concept of citizenship. The word 'warga' for Ihromi also means 'keluarga' (family) and therefore, the term 'warga negara' means that all Indonesian citizens are one family regardless of religious and ethnic background. In addition, there were at least two other important points in Ihromi's account. First, in the opening of the statement of the conference, it is said that: "In recognition that mission and da'wah are essential religious duties in both Christianity and Islam..." For Ihromi, this statement is very important because it acknowledges the integrity of the religion in question, that is, both Islam and Christianity are missionary religions. As we shall see, this part of the statement of the conference was to be frequently quoted by the Christian intellectuals when the Muslims tried to restrict missionary activities only for those outside the recognized religions. Second, Ihromi also touched the issue of *diakonia*. He said that on the fourth day of the conference, he explained to the participants that the Christians themselves would be the first to feel humiliated if people converted to Christianity only because they were hungry and needed some rice or homeless and needed a shelter from the Christians. Ihromi explained further that in order to avoid "cheap accusations" of the misuse of the *diakonia* (an implicit criticism of Rasjidi's paper in the conference), it was decided in the wording of the statement to put the clause "respecting the dignity and integrity of the people concerned."⁷²

Unlike Ihromi, in the Muslim magazine, *Media Dakwah*, Rasjidi made a more complete report of the conference by giving a summary of the presented papers, translating the whole statement of the conference accompanied by his personal comments.⁷³ Rasjidi's personal comments appear to be the most interesting part of the account. Commenting on the words of the statement that "the Muslims as well as the Christians must enjoy the full liberty to convince and be convinced", Rasjidi said that this is a true way to do the da'wa or mission because it suggests that one's conversion to a religion is not because of material temptation nor to enter school and get education but because he or she has been convinced by the truth of the beliefs of that religion. As we shall see, this comment is quite different from the comments of the Christians who used the statement to argue that religious propagation cannot be restricted only to those outside the recognized religions. Similarly, it is mentioned in the statement that, "the conference was grieved to hear that some Christians in some Muslim countries have felt themselves

limited in the exercise of their religious freedom and have been denied their right to church buildings.” To read this statement from the Indonesian case, particularly for the Christians, one should remember at least the controversy on the Methodist church in Meulaboh in 1967 and the joint decree of 1969. In contrast, commenting on the statement, Rasjidi said that the incident, according to Bishop Kenneth Cragg, occurred in Afghanistan, but there was no convincing evidence about it. It was said, according to Rasjidi, that the church was built without permission from the Government and that there was no Christian living in the area. Because of the lack of evidence, Rasjidi said, the statement used the word ‘to hear.’ Rasjidi then jumped to another case that during the war in Cyprus, the Greek Christians destroyed more than 100 mosques, while the churches in the area controlled by the Muslim Turks were not disturbed at all. Besides commenting on the issue of religious freedom, Rasjidi also commented on the issue of *diakonia* mentioned in the statement. He said that it was for the first time that the Christians acknowledged that there were abuses of *diakonia*. Rasjidi also welcomed the stipulation of the statement that any foreign aid for religious institutions should be distributed through the Government in order to prevent the abuses of *diakonia*.

Alamsyah's Attempts at Reconciliation with the Islamic Groups

The Indonesian elections in 1977 and the session of the People’s Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, MPR) in 1978 had proved that the Islamic groups, in the words of an observer, had become “the principal opposition force.”⁷⁴ The Islamic party, PPP, despite its small number of representatives compared to the Government’s party, Golkar, had made a walk-out protest against the Government’s accommodation of Javanese Mysticism (Aliran Kepercayaan) in the Mainlines of State’s Policies (Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Negara, GBHN) and the Government’s proposal on the Guidelines for Internalisation and Application of Pancasila (Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila, P4). Both reformist and traditionalist Muslim leaders, inside and outside the PPP, were united in opposing the Government’s accommodation of the Aliran Kepercayaan because they were afraid that it could be developed to be one of the recognized religions. The Muslim efforts to prevent Javanese Mysticism from gaining an official status had actually started in the early 1950s and they were relatively successful. Nonetheless, fortune had come for the mystical proponents when the MPR dominated by Soeharto’s supporters, decided to include the Aliran Kepercayaan in the GBHN of 1973.⁷⁵ There were Muslim protests against it, but

not as strong as in 1978. Perhaps, because of stronger Muslim opposition, although the Aliran Kepercayaan was not eradicated altogether from the GBHN of 1978, the Muslim concerns were also accommodated. It was stated in the GBHN that the Aliran Kepercayaan was not a religion and should not be developed towards establishing a new religion.⁷⁶ In addition, the Muslims could not accept the Government's concept of the P4 – that was to become the primary text for civic indoctrination – because it elaborated the values of Pancasila as guidance for personal and individual life. According to the Muslims, this interpretation of Pancasila would not only intervene in the religious sphere but also overshadow the responsibility of the state to implement the Pancasila values demanded by the Constitution.⁷⁷ In this case, the Muslim protest did not bring significant change.

On one evening of early March 1978, in the private residence of President Soeharto in Cendana Street, Jakarta, Alamsyah Ratu Perwiranegara was in a serious conversation with the President. Soeharto explained to Alamsyah the current tensions and controversies during the session of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR). Soeharto was worried about the increasing Islamic opposition to the Government and wanted Alamsyah to be the Minister of Religion to deal with the problem of how to accommodate the Islamic groups. In the beginning, Alamsyah was hesitant to take the job, but he eventually decided to do so.⁷⁸ Before becoming the Minister of Religion, Alamsyah was known as one of the prominent army Generals close to Soeharto since the beginning of the New Order. He previously held some important political positions: as the Coordinator of the President's Personal Staff (1966-1968); the State Secretary (1968-1971); the Indonesian Ambassador to the Netherlands (1972-1974); and the Vice Chairman of the State Advisory Council (1975-1977). Because he came from a military background, in the beginning, some Muslims were not happy with him and he was even blackmailed on the first few days of his work in the Department of Religion.⁷⁹

Nonetheless, after several months in office, Alamsyah had successfully established warm relationships with important Islamic political leaders and showed his willingness to accommodate certain 'Islamic interests.' One of Alamsyah's often quoted sayings to win the heart of the Muslims was to explain to the public that it was unfair to say that Muslims were anti-Pancasila, because "Pancasila was actually a gift of the Muslims to the Indonesian state." In addition, after a two-hour meeting with the President, Alamsyah explained to the public that the Aliran Kepercayaan would not be administered by the Department of Religion but by the Department of Education and Culture because, as the GBHN stated, they do not constitute a distinc-

tive religion.⁸⁰ Alamsyah's moves were relatively effective to win the heart of the Muslims who regarded him as an 'Islamic General' in contrast with other Generals like Soedjono Humardhani and Ali Moertopo, known to be close to Javanese Mystical groups and the Catholics; and General T.B. Simatupang, the leader of the Protestants in the DGI.⁸¹

Another move of Alamsyah that attracted public attention was his policy on Islamic da'wah. With the support of Soeharto and the Commander of Security and Order, Soedomo, Alamsyah tried to loosen the Government's control of Islamic preaching throughout the country. Previously, especially in the period close to the 1977 elections, da'wah activities were considered a security issue. Any Muslim gathering had to have permission from the civilian and military authorities, or at least to inform them 24 hours before. The main reason was because the Government was unhappy with the Islamic preachers who often criticized the Government's policies in their speeches. On May 1978, Alamsyah issued a decree regarding Islamic da'wah. It is mentioned in the decree that Islamic da'wa activities do not need prior permission from the Government authorities. However, the decree also mentions that the da'wah should not endanger national stability, national development, Pancasila and the Constitution of 1945.⁸² Given the ambiguity of the decree, the Muslim responses were rather cautious. In general, however, the Muslims looked at the decree as a signal of the Government's accommodation of Muslim aspirations, especially because da'wah was not considered a security issue anymore and was returned to its 'original' place, the Department of Religion.⁸³

In an interview with a leading Muslim magazine, *Panji Masyarakat*, in October 1978, Alamsyah explained openly that what he tried to do with the above moves was to establish a harmonious relationship between the Government and the Islamic groups. He offered an explanation that sounds like a political compromise between the regime and the Islamic groups. He said that both the Islamic groups and the Government should know what each of them disliked most and expected most. According to Alamsyah, what the Muslims disliked most was to consider Aliran Kepercayaan a distinctive religion, while what the Government disliked most was to find anti-Pancasila people among religious believers. What did each group most expect? According to Alamsyah, what the Muslim groups expected most was that religious preaching should not be strictly restricted, while what the Government expected most was that religious groups, in cooperation with the Government, should help maintain political stability and enact development programmes. The Government had already given what the Muslims wanted, and now they should in return give what the Government wanted.⁸⁴

The 'give and take' relation between the Government and the Islamic groups seems to be what Alamsyah means by harmony between Government and religious groups, an element of his concept of 'the triad of harmony.' The other two are harmony among different religious groups or the so-called 'inter-religious harmony' and harmony among different groups of the same religion or 'intra-religious harmony.'⁸⁵

Alamsyah's Decrees of 1978: Taking the Steps Further

What were Alamsyah's policies on inter-religious harmony? In August 1978, Alamsyah issued two controversial decrees, one on religious propagation and another on foreign aid for religious institutions. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, these two issues had been at stake since 1967 and Alamsyah himself was very much involved in organizing the Inter-religious Consultation in that year. We have already mentioned that the Minister of Religion before Alamsyah, A. Mukti Ali, was also concerned with these two issues but – probably due to his weak political position – he did not take any radical step. Now, Alamsyah, without further discussions with the religious leaders, issued two decrees in which he clearly favoured the Muslim positions on these two issues. The decree no. 70 stipulates that religious propagation is *not* allowed (1) to be directed to the people who have another religion; (2) to use money, clothes, medicine etc. as a means to convert people; (3) to be carried out by spreading pamphlets, books, bulletins and magazines to the houses of people who have another religion; (4) to be carried out by a door-to-door visit to the houses of people who have another religion.⁸⁶ As has been noted, the people who already have religion are the followers of one of the recognized religions. Thus, the followers of native religion are excluded.

With regard to the foreign aid for religious institutions, Alamsyah's decree no.77 mentions that any form of aid (personnel and/or material) given by a foreign Government, organization or individual to a religious institution should be based on the agreement or recommendation of the Minister of Religion. The decree also stipulates that religious institutions should provide education and training programmes for Indonesians to replace foreign religious workers working in the country. The programme should be started at the latest after six months following the issue of the decree and finished in two years at the most.⁸⁷

According to Alamsyah, the decrees were Government policies that did not need any formal support from religious groups. He argued further that positive or negative reactions to the decrees were acceptable in a dem-

ocratic state but they would not necessarily influence and change them.⁸⁸ Alamsyah also explained that his policy on religious propagation was actually a follow up of what President Soeharto had suggested in his speech on 30 November 1967 to the Inter-religious Consultation and in another speech on 15 August 1974 before the Parliament. In addition, Alamsyah also referred to the speech of the Commander of the Armed Forces and the Minister of Defence, M. Panggabean (a Protestant) in a seminar in Aceh, on 28 October 1974 and the speech of the Chief Commander of Security and Order, Admiral Soedomo (also a Protestant) in Banyuwangi on 20 December 1975. All of them suggested that religious propagation should be based on the rules mentioned in the decree no. 70.⁸⁹

Alamsyah also explained that the decree on foreign aid for religious institutions was not intended to hinder foreign assistance to religious institutions. The decree simply required that the Government should know “who receives the aid, from whom and for what.” He believed that this transparency would help eradicate suspicions among religious groups.⁹⁰ He argued further that other countries had already adopted the same policy, and Indonesia was rather late. Last but not least, Alamsyah also referred to the Statement of the Conference on Islamic Da’wah and Mission in Chambésy, 1976, which also recommended the same policy.⁹¹

Of course, the Muslim leaders were happy with the decrees, and the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) released a statement supporting the decrees on 9 September 1978. Only a few days later, the Indonesian Hindu Association (Parisada Hindu Dharma) and the Indonesian Buddhist Association (Perwalian Umat Budha Indonesia) also expressed their support for the decrees.⁹² What did the Muslim leaders say about the decrees? HAMKA, the head of the Indonesian Council of Ulama, said to the press that the regulation on religious propagation was significant to prevent radicalisation of the Islamic community. He explained that religious propagation carried out through a door-to-door visit could lead to fatal results because “for a fanatical Muslim, it is permitted to kill such a missionary.”⁹³ Further, Nuddin Lubis, a Muslim politician of the Islamic party, PPP, also extended his agreement with the decree on foreign aid for religious institutions, although he assumed that the regulation would be primarily used to control Saudi Arabia’s aid for the Islamic educational institutions.⁹⁴ Lubis’ statement apparently contained some truth because, as has been mentioned earlier, since 1973, Mohammad Natsir was appointed to be the head of the *Rābita* office in Jakarta and so Muslim foreign aid from the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, was probably channelled through Natsir.

Christian Opposition to the Decrees

On the other hand, the Christians, both Protestants and Catholics, as one could expect, reacted negatively to the decrees. The DGI and MAWI even sent a letter to President Soeharto dated 24 August 1978 asking him to withdraw the decree no. 70 and then another letter dated 14 September 1978 asking the President to withdraw the decree no.77. Both the DGI and MAWI also asked for an audience with the President, but the latter never replied to this request. Nonetheless, they succeeded in arranging a meeting with the Vice-President, Adam Malik, the State Secretary, Sudharmono, the Minister of Social Welfare, Surono and the Minister of Religion himself.⁹⁵ The Christian objection was also declared to the public through a joint press release of the DGI and MAWI on 15 September 1978. The press release also explained that the DGI and MAWI had sent two letters to Soeharto asking him to withdraw the decrees. The press release was not only published in the printed media but also broadcast on radio and television.⁹⁶ In addition, on 28 September, the DGI and MAWI organized a joint team of six to make a critical review of the decrees and the team finished their work on 13 October 1978. In addition, from 19-21 October 1978, all functionaries of the DGI and 51 representatives of the churches outside the DGI, including the evangelical group, held a special meeting in Jakarta to discuss the same issue. The meeting finally published a message for the Christians in which the participants declared that they supported the joint action of the top leaders of the DGI and MAWI to oppose the decrees and invited the Christians to strengthen cooperation and ecumenism.⁹⁷

If we look at the Christian arguments described in the work of the team of six, the main issue for the Christians was still religious freedom with strong emphasis on: (1) freedom to preach religion to other people of different religion, (2) freedom to convert or to change one's religion, and (3) freedom to cooperate with those who share the same faith anywhere in the world. As we have discussed, this interpretation of religious freedom was not new among the Christians. Nonetheless, the Christians also developed new arguments to support their interpretation. In general, they argued that the decrees were unconstitutional because they were not only against the religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution of 1945, but also against the P4, the interpretation of Pancasila that had been recently ratified by the MPR but not referred to in the decrees. In addition, they also referred to the Muslim-Christian joint statements at the international conferences organized by the WCC. As has been discussed above, both Muslim and Christian

intellectuals from Indonesia participated in the conferences in Broumana, 1972 and Chambésy, 1976. With regard to the issue of religious mission, the Broumana memorandum said, "while accepting that both religious traditions have a missionary vocation, proselytism should be avoided" which was parallel with the statement of the Geneva conference: "in recognition that mission and da'wah are essential religious duties in both Christianity and Islam..." and "the conference upholds the principle of religious freedom recognizing that the Muslims as well as the Christians must enjoy full liberty to convince and to be convinced." The Christians argued that these statements clearly indicated that preaching religion is an essential religious duty for both Muslims and Christians and therefore, *the target of mission* cannot be restricted. What should be done, therefore, was to restrict not the target of mission, but the ways through which the mission was carried out. Thus, in principle, the Christians did not have any objection to the point of the decree prohibiting religious mission carried out through material inducements because this was a wrong way of doing mission. In addition, the Christians were also worried that the restriction of the target of religious mission stipulated in the decree also meant a prohibition to *change religion*. In response to the Government's control of foreign aid, the Christians said that this was problematic, because the Church has a universal character transcending state boundaries. In this regard, unlike their argument for the freedom to preach religion, the Christians avoided referring to the statement of the conference in Chambésy, 1976 that clearly recommended that religious aid should be distributed through Government. Last but not least, the Christians also objected to the time limit given by the decree to train ministers and priests because, they said, priests and ministers could not be trained in only two years.⁹⁸

Actually, in September 1978, the Christian criticisms of the decrees had been generally reported by the press before the Team of Six had finished their work. For instance, a leading Indonesian magazine, *Tempo*, already published the responses of the Christian leaders like T.B. Simatupang of the DGI, Leo Soekoto of the MAWI and the Christian politician, Sabam Sirait.⁹⁹ In addition, Ihromi published an article in *Sinar Harapan* in which he referred to the statement of the Conference on Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah quoted above and said that Rasjidi was one of its participants. According to Ihromi, the statement clearly asserted that, "da'wah and evangelisation could not be separated from the integrity of Islam and Christianity" and therefore both Muslims and Christians "must enjoy the full liberty to convince and to be convinced."¹⁰⁰

Muslims' and Government's Responses

The Christian criticisms certainly triggered reactions, especially from the Muslims. Muhammad Rasjidi, for example, wrote a long article to respond to the Christian criticisms. As we have mentioned above, for Rasjidi, the right to convince and be convinced meant that everybody has freedom to choose a religion after being convinced by the truth of that religion. Thus, for him this statement had nothing to do with freedom to propagate religion by the means of social services. In this respect, it seems to me that for Rasjidi, there was no Christian mission in Indonesia that did not use social services to convert people. Similarly, according to Rasjidi the statement that mission is "an essential religious duty" should not be understood in a vacuum. In other words, religious mission should be understood within a specific context where the mission is carried out. The Christian objection to the decree meant that for them "this world was a vacuum space and so the Christian missionaries could enter it at will," he said. In fact, he said further, "the Government's decree no. 70 was intended to maintain the security of the developing nation, not to oppose a religious principle." In addition, Rasjidi argued, if the Christians said that the regulation not to preach religion to other people of a different religion *implicitly* meant a prohibition against conversion, then for the Muslims, the Christian objection to the regulation *implicitly* meant that the latter wanted to Christianise the Islamic community. Last but not least, Rasjidi quoted a paragraph of the Document of the Vatican Council II in which the Catholics indicated their open attitude and respect towards Muslims. Rasjidi eventually concluded that, "both the Catholic Church in the Vatican and the WCC had a more lenient attitude than the DGI and MAWI... Religious freedom understood by the MAWI and DGI as the right to Christianise Islamic communities is a great mistake at which the whole world would laugh."¹⁰¹

Besides the Muslims, the Government also responded to the Christian criticisms. On 10 October 1978, after a meeting with Soeharto, Alamsyah said that the President instructed him to continue with the application of the decrees. On that day, Alamsyah also provided explanations of each of the two decrees that in a way was also a response to the Christian criticisms.¹⁰² According to the explanations, to maintain national unity, security and development, the propagation of religion is not allowed to be directed to people who already have a religion. In addition, to be a more independent nation, the Government would try to reduce its dependency on foreign aid, including aid for religious institutions. Nonetheless, there are some positive points mentioned in the explanations: (1) the Government would

not intervene in the freedom of anybody who voluntarily decides to convert to another religion or who wants voluntarily visits or listens to a religious preaching of any religion; (2) although the Government prohibits the use of material gifts such as food, medicine, cloth etc. to convert people, it would not prohibit the social services developed by religious institutions like schools and hospitals because they are considered a concrete realization of religious teachings and participation of religious groups in the national development.¹⁰³ In addition, it was also explained that the Government's agreement or recommendation stipulated by the decree did not mean that foreign aid for religious institutions should be given physically to the Government. It only means that the Government should know "who receives what, from whom and for what."¹⁰⁴

The explanation of the decree seemed to be relieving for the Christians, though not satisfying. This was particularly indicated by the positive comments in the press release of the MAWI, dated 16 November 1978.¹⁰⁵ In general, however, the Christians still could not accept the decrees and demanded that the Government withdraw them. In their official response to the explanations of the decree, they said that national unity and development should not be opposed to the freedom of religion because according to the P4, religious freedom is a fundamental human right that is not given, but should be protected, by the state. Thus, what should be developed was not to restrict that freedom but how to use the freedom responsibly. They argued further that as far as the explanation of the decree was concerned, the Government still restricted the freedom *to preach religion*, even though the freedom *to change religion* was protected.¹⁰⁶ In addition, in their response to the explanation of the decree on foreign aid, the Christians re-emphasized the universal character of the Church. They said, the decree could not be accepted because it indicated a Government's intervention in the internal affairs of Christian institutions.¹⁰⁷

The Government Final Position: the Joint Decree of 1979

The controversy was not over yet. Instead of withdrawing the two decrees, on 2 January 1979, the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Home Affairs issued a joint decree concerning religious propagation and foreign aid for religious institutions. In general, the stipulations of the joint decree were similar to those of the two previous decrees. In his account, Alamsyah tried to show that the joint decree was not intended to displace the previous two decrees, but to strengthen them.¹⁰⁸ They were strengthened because in the joint decree the authority to control the application of the decree lay in

the hands of Governors at provincial level, and Mayors at district level, while other related Departments, including the Department of Religion at both levels, were under their coordination. Similarly, foreign aid did not only need the recommendation of the Department of Religion, but also the agreement of the Coordinating Committee for Foreign Technical Cooperation (Panitia Koordinasi Kerjasama Teknis Luar Negeri, PKKTLN). There was, however, a significant difference in the joint decree: the time limit for replacing foreign missionary personnel in the previous decree was removed.¹⁰⁹ This was probably an accommodation of the Christian objection to the time limit (i.e., two years) mentioned in the Alamsyah's decree on the foreign aid.

On 9 January 1979, the representatives of the religious groups were invited to a meeting with the Minister of Religion, the Minister of Home Affairs, the Coordinator Minister of Social Welfare and the Cabinet Secretary to talk about the joint decree. As had happened before, all religious representatives agreed with the joint decree but the Christians (the DGI and MAWI) asked for more time to review it.¹¹⁰ The DGI and the MAWI then made a joint review of the decree dated 14 January 1979. Probably because the Christians now realized that the Government really wanted to proceed with the regulations, they did not ask the Government to withdraw but to revise it. First of all, they suggested that in the light of the issue of the joint decree, the previous two decrees should be suspended. With regard to the issue of religious propagation, the Christians found that there was a contradiction in the decree because while it was stated that the joint decree was not intended to restrict the efforts to develop and propagate religion, at the same time it specified some restrictions. Again, the Christians suggested that the restriction of the target of religious mission (only for those outside the recognized religions) in the decree should be eradicated, because what could be restricted was not its target, but the ways of carrying out the mission. Therefore, they suggested more or less the following formulation: "Religious propagation may not be carried out by methods contradicting the freedom and dignity of human beings and the majesty of religion such as giving money, food etc. as a means of persuasion; and spreading pamphlets etc. to people who do not want to accept them; and paying a door-to-door visit to the people who do not want to welcome it." With regard to foreign aid, the Christians said that because it was something new for them and for the PKKTLN, they hoped that there would not be bureaucratic difficulties. The Christians also explained that foreign aid for developing and propagating religion is not the same as aid for technical programmes and therefore they suggested that the Government should formulate a new and

suitable regulation for the application of the decree. Last but not least, the Christians warned that the Government control at the province and district levels should not contradict religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution of 1945.¹¹¹

Again, as a support to the joint decree and response to the Christians, Rasjidi wrote a long article on religious freedom. Rasjidi argued that in modern western history there were two different ways to protect religious freedom: the European way of 'jurisdictionalism' and the American way of 'separatism.' The difference is, while in jurisdictionalism the state pays attention to religious activities, in separatism, the state does not interfere in religious affairs of the people unless they break the law. Both ways, argued Rasjidi, have the same goal: to guarantee the equality of religious groups before the law and the state. The difference was only because of different historical settings and experiences. In the article, Rasjidi also analysed the Documents of Vatican Council II, especially the decrees relating to mission and non-Christian religions (*ad gentes* and *nostra aetate*) and concluded that it was much more progressive than the attitude of the Catholic Church previously, but at the same time the Church was still trapped in the idea that it is only through Jesus and the mediation of the Church that one can attain salvation. Accordingly, the zeal to Christianise the whole world is still strong in the Catholic Church. Similarly, Rasjidi quoted at length the statement of the conference in Chambésy, 1976 and praised the Christian opposition to proselytism using the social services. On the other hand, Rasjidi said, according to the report in *Ecumenical Press Service*, 15 June 1978, by the beginning of 1979, one billion dollars had been collected for the project of evangelisation in the world through social activities coordinated by the WCC. Thus for Rasjidi, given the real threat of the Christian mission, there was no better way to maintain inter-religious harmony than to support the application of the joint decree of the Ministers of Religion and Home Affairs. In terms of religious freedom, for him, the decree was parallel with the European jurisdictionalism.¹¹²

It is noteworthy that foreign Christian missionary groups also broadcast the controversy on the decrees in their media. In Germany, the *Asia Lutheran News* described the decrees as the Indonesian "Anti-Mission Law" that banned people from changing their religion.¹¹³ Likewise, in Switzerland, Eduard Abel, the press secretary for the Swiss Mission Society wrote: "the decrees probably represent a concession to traditional Islam which... made considerable gains at the last elections. Certainly, Indonesia cannot be governed today without taking account of the wishes of the Muslims.

Behind these wishes, the idea of an Islamic state according to the law of the shari'a is gaining strength, and this idea is being actively supported by influential Arab states." In another article, he wrote, "it is hoped, not only for the sake of the Christians but for peace and the future of all people in this huge Indonesian archipelago that the Suharto Government will be able to restrain Islamic aggressiveness..."¹¹⁴ A European Muslim convert, Ahmad von Denffer, responded that the foreign Christian accounts were false and likely to create a scary image of Indonesian Islam in the West. He also translated the decrees into English and published them, primarily as information for the Muslims in the world.¹¹⁵

The Implication of the Decrees

Despite the national and international criticisms and counter-criticisms, the Government, especially President Soeharto, seems to be firm that the policy was on the right track and timely. But, why did the decrees appear in 1978 and not before? As has been noted, the two previous Ministers of Religion, Mohammad Dachlan and A. Mukti Ali, did not make any decree dealing with these two controversial issues. Why did Alamsyah do so? I think it was probably not because of the "inexperience of the new minister" as A.G. Hoekema tried to guess.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, I think it is rather an exaggeration to say that "these decrees symbolized a victory for Muslims in their long struggle to impose Islamic ideas of religious freedom on the national and legal system," as Hyung-Jun Kim described.¹¹⁷ Apart from the fact that the stipulations of the decrees are similar to the Muslim ideas developed in 1967, there was no indication that they were a direct outcome of their political struggle, let alone their victory. In other words, the initiative appears to have come from the Government rather than the Islamic groups. I think if we go back to the political situation in 1978 and Alamsyah's appointment described above, the decrees could be seen as one of the Government's efforts towards reconciliation with the Islamic groups.

Nonetheless, there was another side to the decrees: Alamsyah probably used them to oppose the Muslim discourse on Christianisation. Alamsyah said that the discourse came from certain Muslims who wanted to vent their anger on the Government and to get support from the Muslims in the Middle East. On the other hand, argued Alamsyah, the Christians also tended to exaggerate the success of the Christian mission in the country in order to gain more financial support from the West. According to Alamsyah, the discourse on Christianisation had created a bad image of the Indonesian Government in the eyes of the Muslims in the world, especially in the Middle

East. Therefore, he tried to convince the Muslim leaders in the Middle East, including the leaders of the *Rābīta al-Ālam al-Islāmī* that Christianisation in Indonesia was an untrue story.¹¹⁸ I believe that one of his ways (not the only way) to convince the Arab leaders was to tell them about the decrees. In a paper probably presented to an international Muslim audience, Alamsyah said that, his decrees could successfully reduce the tensions and social unrest caused by Muslims' negative reaction to the efforts of Christian missionaries to convert Muslims by various means, "particularly through material and financial aid."¹¹⁹

Nevertheless, apart from Alamsyah's relative success in repairing the image of Indonesia at the international level, the discourse on the threat of Christian missions in Indonesia both at the international and national levels did not recede. The Islamic Foundation in Leicester, for instance, published at least three booklets on Christian missions in Indonesia, two of them by a German Muslim convert, Ahmad von Denffer, published in 1981, and another by an Indonesian author, Rifyal Ka'bah, published in 1985.¹²⁰ In this regard, it is interesting to know how the latter sees the decrees. As has been mentioned above, in 1979 the Islamic Foundation published the work of Ahmad von Denffer explaining the controversy over the decrees and translating them into English. After some years following the issue of the decrees, in his work, Rifyal Ka'bah said, "according to a Christian source, the two decrees remain on the books, and only a few foreign missionaries have been forced to leave the country."¹²¹

In fact, from the very beginning, there is an indication that the Muslims were not sure about the effectiveness of the decrees. In his talks to the Muslims during the controversies over the decrees in 1978 Mohammad Natsir said that the Muslim groups should participate and not totally rely on the Government to secure the application of the decrees.¹²² Natsir's warning was not entirely unrealistic because the decrees were to be loosely implemented by the Government. In subsequent years, the Muslim groups, especially the reformists, recorded many cases related to the practices of Christian missions that, in their opinion, broke the regulations of the decrees and the Government did not pay serious attention to them.¹²³ In his recent work, a Christian author, Jan Aritonang, also acknowledged the loose application of the decrees.¹²⁴ It should be noted, however, that the loose application of the decrees was not only because of the indifferent attitude of the Government, but also because the decrees do not have full legal force. This has been the main reason why some of the Muslims concerned with Christianisation have demanded that the decrees should

be elevated to the level of law ratified by Parliament, and Alamsyah also suggested the same idea.¹²⁵

Despite the loose application, what was the impact of the decrees on religious groups, especially the Christians? It seems that the effect of the regulation on foreign missionaries was almost immediate. In November 1979, the secretary of the MAWI, Leo Sukoto, explained to the press that 400 out of 1000 foreign Catholic missionaries were ready to apply for Indonesian citizenship.¹²⁶ Perhaps, this was the most possible step to take by the Catholic Church at that time: to change the formal status of the foreign missionaries instead of replacing them with indigenous Indonesians. According to Steenbrink, the application for citizenship was more successful than before but at the same time, visa applications for new workers had to face more difficulties than before.¹²⁷ In contrast, the Protestant Churches of the DGI generally did not have the same problem because they had been mostly run by Indonesians, even though to carry out the projects of social services and development, they were still financially dependent on foreign funding.¹²⁸ Despite the regulation, to my knowledge, there had been no serious obstacle for the churches to receive financial foreign aid, particularly for development (*pembangunan*) reasons.

What was the effect of the regulation on religious propagation? Perhaps, one way to answer this question is to see what was *not* covered in the DDII's accounts of Christianisation in the period after the decrees. Besides covering a large number of cases related to the alleged abuses of social services for proselytism by the Christians, the accounts hardly mention door-to-door visiting. Given the extreme sensitivity of the DDII to missionary activities, the absence of door-to-door visits in the accounts could be an indication of the effect of the decree.¹²⁹ In 1984, the Government banned all publications of the Children of God sect, but there is no clear indication that the ban was one of the results of the application of the decree as Steenbrink assumed.¹³⁰

4. **Muslim Opposition to Common Christmas Celebration**

On one of his morning Islamic lectures (*kuliyah subuh*) on the Radio of the Republic of Indonesia (RRI) in 1974, HAMKA received a question from one of his listeners: what was the appropriate attitude of Muslims if they were invited to celebrate Christmas by their Christian neighbours? Due to the lack of time, HAMKA could not answer the question directly on the RRI, but later he had a written answer to the question published in his magazine,

Panji Masyarakat. In his answer, HAMKA explained that it was acceptable for Muslims to say “Merry Christmas,” to Christian neighbours as an expression of religious tolerance, but they were not allowed to participate in the celebration itself. He compared Christmas with ‘Idul Fitri for the Muslims: the Christians often sent “Happy Idul Fitri” cards to their Muslim friends but never participated in the Idul Fitri prayer in the mosque or square. For HAMKA, the most fundamental reason why a Muslim is not allowed to participate in a Christmas celebration is the theological belief behind Christmas that contradicts the Islamic fundamental faith (*‘aqidah*). For the Christians, Jesus is the Son of God crucified to save sinful human beings; while for Muslims Jesus is only a human being who happened to be one of the prophets sent by God. In other words, to maintain the purity of faith, a Muslim is not allowed to participate in a Christmas celebration. It seems for him, the prohibited participation includes not only attendance but also to be a member of the organizing committee of the celebration. HAMKA also explained that, even for the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, there had been controversies among the Islamic scholars. HAMKA quoted Ibn Taymiyah who said that the celebration of the birth of the Prophet is a religious innovation (*bid‘a*) that was never carried out by the pious early generation of Islam. In Indonesia, according to HAMKA, the Islamic reformist group, Persatuan Islam, followed Ibn Taymiyah’s view, while another group, Muhammadiyah could accept the celebration insofar there was no heterodox veneration of the Prophet in the celebration. Accordingly, HAMKA argued, if to maintain the purity of Islamic faith certain Islamic scholars prohibit Muslims from celebrating the birth of their own Prophet, then they must be forbidden to celebrate Christmas because its underlying belief contradict that of Islam.¹³¹ HAMKA eventually concluded that, if a Muslim participates in a Christmas celebration, then there are only two possibilities: (1) the Muslim is a nominal Muslim who does not understand the teachings of Islam; (2) there is a powerful Christian who can utilize his or her power to force Muslims to participate in the celebration under the pretext of Pancasila and “if this successfully works, they will make propaganda abroad that the influence of Christianity in Indonesia is going deeper. Therefore, new aid will come repeatedly.”¹³²

MUI’s fatwa on Common Christmas Celebration

The above 1974 fatwa of HAMKA on Muslim participation in Christmas celebration did not trigger any controversy at all. In 1975, the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) was established and HAMKA was appointed to be its first general chairman.¹³³ About five years later, on 7 March 1981, the

MUI issued a fatwa on the same matter. This fatwa was more elaborate and argumentative than that of HAMKA, but the conclusion was similar.¹³⁴ It was mentioned in the fatwa that the MUI was concerned with some Muslims who had recently participated in Christmas celebration because of their wrong assumption that Christmas celebration and the celebration of the birth of the prophet Muhammad were the same. The fatwa was, therefore, aimed at guiding Muslims to the right religious path. According to the fatwa, Muslims are allowed to cooperate with non-Muslims on worldly affairs but not to mix their belief with that of non-Muslims. In view of that, some Qur'anic verses were quoted to explain that for Muslims, Jesus is only a prophet and that the Christian belief in the Incarnation and the Trinity is not acceptable. It was argued that Christmas celebration cannot be separated from the Christian belief in the nature of Jesus and therefore to participate in the celebration for a Muslim *implies* or at least *can lead to* syncretism and impurity of the Muslim belief.

But, was it possible to participate in the celebration without harming one's Islamic faith? Perhaps, to anticipate this question, the fatwa refers to the idea of *shubha*, something that cannot be clearly identified as religiously lawful or unlawful, a grey area between the two. Because it is an unclear area, if one enters it, one may enter the forbidden part. It is better for a Muslim, therefore, to avoid entering that area because according to a *hadith*: "anybody falls into a *shubha*, falls into a religiously forbidden action (*harām*)."¹³⁵ In addition, an Islamic legal maxim was also quoted: "the prevention of harms should be given a priority over the search for benefits," (*dar' al-mafāsīd muqaddam 'alā jalb al-masālih*). Perhaps, this legal maxim was quoted to argue against the arguments that there are good things if a Muslim participates in a Christmas celebration. The fatwa was concluded with an assertion that it is *harām* for Muslims to participate in Christmas celebration.

Unlike HAMKA's fatwa in 1974, the MUI's fatwa soon triggered tensions, especially between the MUI and the Government. There were at least two interrelated reasons why the Government was unhappy with the fatwa. First, it was worried about the rigid and inflexible stipulation of the fatwa that might disturb relations between Muslims, Christians and the Government. Second, the Government was annoyed by the unexpected circulation of the fatwa in society. According to Syukri Ghozali and E.Z Muttaqin, the chairmen of the MUI, besides the request of the Islamic community, the fatwa was originally requested by the Minister of Religion for internal use as a matter to be discussed with other religious groups before a pub-

lic policy was made. Unfortunately, the fatwa leaked out to the public and naturally the Minister was angry.¹³⁵ On 27 March, the MUI sent the fatwa to its branches in the provinces throughout Indonesia. The fatwa was also published in *Buletin Majelis Ulama* No. 3 (April, 1981) that was only printed in 300 copies. The fatwa, however, reached many people, including journalists. In a meeting between Minister Alamsyah and the leaders of the MUI on 23 April 1981, the Minister explained that he felt pushed into a corner by the circulation of the fatwa and therefore would like to resign. In response to Alamsyah's remarks, HAMKA said, "It is illogical for the Minister to resign. I am the one who is responsible for the circulation of the fatwa, therefore, I will resign."¹³⁶ On 5 May 1981, the national daily *Pelita*, published the fatwa, but the next day, the same newspaper published a decree – dated 30 April 1981 and signed by HAMKA and the General Secretary of the MUI, Burhani Tjokrohandoko – explaining that, based on the consultation with the Minister of Religion, the MUI decided to withdraw the fatwa from *circulation*. It was also explained in the same letter that a Muslim was only prohibited from participating in ritual practices of a Christmas celebration.¹³⁷

The decree was probably a compromise between the Government and the MUI. Nevertheless, it triggered some questions in society, especially among Muslims. Did the decree mean that the MUI withdrew its own fatwa? The answer could be positive because in the decree, only participation in ritual aspects of the Christmas celebration was prohibited, while in the MUI's fatwa the prohibition seems to be absolute. Because many questions emerged concerning the decree and its relation to the status of the fatwa, HAMKA made a press statement – dated 7 May 1981 and published in some national newspapers – in which he explained that the decree only withdrew the *circulation*, not the *validity* of the fatwa.¹³⁸ Following the press release, HAMKA explained in an article that the fatwa was quite reliable because it was produced by the ulama from different Islamic organizations in the country. The problem was, he said, that the Minister of Religion expected it only for Government's information, not for the public. According to HAMKA, although the Government had the power to prevent the circulation of the fatwa, it could not invalidate the fatwa itself. He also explained that, based on some information from the Christians, Christmas celebration was a ritual practice. This was in line, he said, with the attitudes of the Ministers of Religion in the past to assign only Christian officials to attend Christmas celebrations.¹³⁹

Thus, by the explanation, HAMKA clearly reaffirmed the absolute prohibition stipulated by the fatwa without directly invalidating the decree.

This also indicates that HAMKA could not cooperate with the Government anymore. Accordingly, on 19 May 1981, he publicly declared his resignation from the chairmanship of the MUI. But, why should he make a compromise if he was ready to resign? In his letter of resignation read in a closed meeting of the MUI, HAMKA explained that the MUI was still needed in Indonesia and through the compromise he wanted to secure the existence of the MUI.¹⁴⁰

Responses to the Controversy of the Fatwa

There were at least two important issues discussed among the Muslims following the conflict between the Government and the MUI. The first was to question the independence and role of the MUI in relation to the Government. The MUI was created by the Government in 1975 as an organization representing different leaders (usually not the top leaders) of the existing Islamic organizations in the country. There was unwillingness among the ulama to accept the Government's proposal, but they finally agreed, hoping that the MUI could function as a bridge between the Government and the Islamic community.¹⁴¹ In an article written a few days after his resignation, HAMKA explained that his involvement in the MUI was based on a sincere intention to serve Muslims and the country. Therefore, he said, when he was asked to be the General Chairman of the MUI in 1975, he proposed one condition: he would not be given a salary and pension by the Government. He realized, he said, the General Chairman of the MUI was not the same as muftis in Islamic countries who were paid by the Government. By this explanation, HAMKA probably wanted to show his relative independence from the Government.¹⁴² Indeed, according to the reformist Muslim leader, Mohammad Roem, HAMKA's reluctance to receive a Government salary was his political strategy to assert that an Islamic scholar could not be bought.¹⁴³ This self-assertion was also indicated by another article of HAMKA after his resignation. He wrote a story of Imam Anas Ibn Mālik (d.795), the founder of one of the four Sunni schools of law. The story was about the attitude of the Imam to the ruler (*khalīfa*) of the Abbasid Dynasty who invited him to be the mufti in Baghdad and asked for his permission to make his work, *al-Muwatta*, the second authoritative religious text after the Qur'ān and therefore, its copies would be multiplied and distributed to the regions ruled by the dynasty. The Imam refused both offers and decided to stay and teach in Medina to his death. For HAMKA, this was an ideal example of an Islamic scholar's relationship to a ruler. He said, "if we read the biographies of Islamic scholars, we would be embarrassed to be called an Islamic scholar, because we are too far from that ideal."¹⁴⁴ As has been said, despite his concerns with the independ-

ence of the ulama, HAMKA and some others like him still hoped that the MUI could function better in the future.¹⁴⁵ HAMKA passed away just about two months after his resignation. If he had lived longer, he would have been annoyed to witness some cases in which the MUI could not avoid but to be silent if not a legitimising voice for the Government's interests.¹⁴⁶ In fact, the fatwa on common Christmas celebrations was the only case in which the MUI was opposed to the Government during the New Order.¹⁴⁷

The second Muslim discussion was on the MUI's fatwa itself. There were various criticisms of the fatwa during the controversy and most of them based on socio-political arguments, rather than scriptural or religious arguments. It should be noted here that the fatwa was also a response to a social phenomenon, namely, the growing practice of celebrating common Christmas celebration (*Natal Bersama*), especially at Christian schools and Government offices. This common celebration did not only include the Catholics and the Protestants, but also the Muslims. It was reported in certain media that some Muslim students at certain Christian schools were obliged to participate in Christmas celebrations in various ways: from giving financial support and singing religious songs to acting in a play as Mary, Jesus etc. during the celebration. Some Government offices also often organized common Christmas celebrations with non-Christians in those offices were involved.¹⁴⁸ It was also not uncommon that the President, Ministers and other high-ranking officials were invited to come to Christmas celebrations, even though they were Muslims. For the MUI, this growing culture would lead to a negative impact on Muslim faith and therefore, could not be tolerated. In this regard, the MUI's fatwa can be seen as an absolute opposition to the existing social phenomenon.

In contrast, for Minister Alamsyah, the MUI's fatwa was too rigid by ignoring the socio-political reality of Indonesia. He said, we should remember that Indonesia is a religiously plural society; and to attend a religious celebration of another religion was a positive act to enhance the unity and integrity of the nation. He also argued that one could maintain one's religious faith and at the same time participate in a religious celebration of another religion but only in non-ritual aspects of the celebration. Samudi Abdullah, a Muslim author, responded rather positively to Alamsyah's view. He tried to find a compromise between Alamsyah's idea and the MUI's fatwa. For him, what was prohibited in the fatwa was *participation* not *attendance* at a Christmas celebration. For him, the participation included singing carols, dancing and praying, while attendance means: "just sit, keep silent and eat if a meal is offered."¹⁴⁹ Nonetheless, to draw a clear distinction between

the ritual and non-ritual was not as easy as a Muslim like Samudi expected. S.A.E Nababan, the General Secretary of the DGI, explained that for Protestants, the ritual and non-ritual in a Christmas celebration could not be separated. In contrast, J. Riberu of the MAWI explained that for the Catholics, it was a ritual or cult only if there was a Eucharist, that is, a priest offering a Mass. Beyond that, including burning candles, was not a cult.¹⁵⁰

Another criticism of the fatwa came from Abdurrahman Wahid who was a prominent columnist at that time. In his column, he covered both issues: the position and authority of the MUI and the nature of the fatwa. For him, the MUI was created to be no more than a mediator between the Government and the Islamic community and this was the basic problem for the MUI. Because MUI's leaders were appointed by the Government, not by the Islamic community, its authority was unclear. He asked, if the MUI "was intended to be able to formulate a framework of decision making by itself, why did the top leaders of the existing Islamic organizations not become representatives in it?" With regard to the second issue, Abdurrahman Wahid said that the inflexible nature of the fatwa was a result of religious thought based on absolute postulates. It would be unfortunate, he said, if other religious groups also had the same exclusive view and consequently a Muslim who wanted to participate in a Christmas celebration should go secretly (because he or she was afraid of the MUI) but when the Muslim arrived at the place of the celebration, he or she would be expelled by the Christians! Abdurrahman Wahid eventually suggested, instead of dealing with the Christmas issue, it was better for the MUI to concentrate on more fundamental problems of society such as how Islam could help fight against poverty and ignorance; and the answer to this question should be detailed and concrete.¹⁵¹

Abdurrahman Wahid's criticism of the fatwa, no matter how strong it was, did not provide clear alternative religious arguments, nor direct responses to the social issues described by the proponents of the fatwa.¹⁵² This was the reason why the criticism did not force the proponents of the fatwa to develop new arguments. For instance, Hasan Basri, one of the MUI's chairmen, said that Abdurrahman Wahid did not understand the problem. Hasan Basri claimed that there had been some cases in certain regions where Muslims were invited and even forced to participate in a Christmas celebration. He said, as a response to this phenomenon, the fatwa was made to guard the purity of Muslim belief.¹⁵³ Similarly, Iqbal Abdurrauf Saimima said that the fatwa was not about religious absolutism, but to guard a fundamental belief of Islam. He then referred to the statement of S.A.E Nababan of the

DGI who said that in a Christmas celebration, the Protestants did not separate the ritual and non-ritual aspects. Finally, Saimima argued that Abdurrahman Wahid's suggestion that the MUI should provide detailed and concrete answers to the social problems of poverty and ignorance went too far because MUI was an organization of religious scholars, not technocrats.¹⁵⁴

Alamsyah's Circular on the Celebration of Religious Days

Apart from the Muslim polemics on the fatwa, Minister Alamsyah wanted to proceed with his plan to talk to the leaders of all religious groups about the issue under a more general theme: "celebrations of religious feast days." This issue was then discussed in the *Wadah Musyawarah Antar Umat Beragama* (Forum for Inter-religious Consultation), a surrogate of the *Badan Konsultasi Antar Agama* (Body of Inter-religious Consultation) of 1967 that had no noticeable activities after its establishment. Since May 1979, Alamsyah had tried to revive the 1967 body through a series of discussions between the Government and the representatives of five recognized religions and about one year later, on 30 June 1980, the *Wadah Musyawarah* was finally established.¹⁵⁵ Alamsyah then urged the *Wadah Musyawarah* to discuss the above issue and after several preliminary meetings, on 25 August 1981, all religious representatives in the Forum signed an inter-religious decree on the celebrations of religious feast days.

There are some important points stated in the decree, but as a result of negotiation and compromise, sometimes we may find unclear wording or an ambiguous meaning of a sentence. It was stated that, "the celebrations of religious feast days are basically held and attended by the followers of the religion in question, but it is normal if a follower of another religion respects them (*turut menghormati*) according to the principles of familial, neighbourly and cooperative relations, as far as it does not contradict the teachings of one's own religion." The word 'respect' was likely chosen as a compromise between those who allowed one's participation and those who did not. Another crucial point in the decree was that every teacher "is urged to equip him/herself with religious knowledge in order to ensure that the spirit of harmony among students would be established, as far as it does not reduce their respective religious convictions and beliefs." Perhaps, this statement was also a compromise between the Muslim representatives who wanted to prevent Muslim students at Christian schools from being involved in any Christian religious feast days and the Christian representatives who tried to find a more moderate solution. Last but not least, there are two recommendations mentioned in the decree, one for the Government offi-

cials and another for the leaders of social institutions. It is suggested in the decree that the Government should pay attention to the need of religious life for all religious groups based on the principle of justice. If a Government official attends a religious ceremony of another religion, he or she should be “passive but respectful.” It was also suggested that leaders of social institutions should provide the same opportunities for the people under their leadership to celebrate their respective religious feast days. They were also urged neither to enforce nor to prohibit their subordinates from performing the celebration and not to mix the beliefs and practices of different religions in that celebration.¹⁵⁶

Christian Opposition to the Circular

According to the constitution of the Wadah Musyawarah, any decision made in the organization is morally binding and at the same time it becomes a recommendation for the Government.¹⁵⁷ Accordingly, only one week after the decree was signed by the representatives of religious groups, Minister Alamsyah sent a circular (*surat edaran*) on the celebrations of religious feast days, dated 2 September 1981, to the high officials of the state, including the ministers, the speaker of the Parliament, the Commander of Security and Order, the Police Chief Officer and the Governors of the provinces.¹⁵⁸ The circular soon triggered controversy, especially between Minister Alamsyah, some members of the Parliament, the Islamic leaders and the Christian leaders of the DGI and the MAWI. The circular was controversial mainly because it tried to differentiate clearly between the ritual and non-ritual aspects of every celebration of religious feast days. For some of the Members of the Parliament and the Christians of the DGI and the MAWI, the circular was a kind of state intervention in internal religious affairs of the people and therefore, it was against the Constitution, the P4, and Soeharto’s speech on the working session of the Department of Religion a few months before. In response to the criticism of the circular, on 23 September 1981, Alamsyah explained that in his consultation with the President one day before, the President suggested that the circular should not be linked with anything but the goal of achieving the unity and prosperity of the nation. He said that the circular was not intended to intervene in people’s internal religious affairs, but to avoid the possible negative effects of religious celebrations that might endanger the integrity of the nation.

The DGI and the MAWI, however, were not satisfied with Alamsyah’s explanation. In their basic thoughts delivered to the Government, the Christians explained that the circular did not have a legal and constitutional

basis. They argued that the circular consciously or unconsciously opened the door for the application of the Jakarta Charter (in which the application of the shari'a is prescribed) and this "contradicts the New Order's commitment to the Pancasila and the Constitution of 1945 in a pure and consistent manner." In short, the circular disturbed the certainty of law within the state. "Accordingly, the circular directly destroys the prestige of the Government altogether because the character of its content is threatening (=enforcement of will) that really contradicts the basis of Pancasila Democracy."¹⁵⁹

In addition, for them the circular did not have moral force, because it contradicted the inter-religious decree on the celebration of religious feast days. In this regard, they mentioned at least four important points: first, as has been quoted above, the decree said that, "the celebrations of religious days are basically held and attended by the followers of the religion in question..." In the circular, the word "only" is inserted as follows: "the celebration of religious feast days is basically only held and attended by the followers of the religion in question..." The circular, however, does not cut out the rest of the statement of the decree that opens the possibility for anybody to 'respect' a religious celebration of another religion. For the Christians, however, the insertion of the word 'only' really matters because it gives the impression as if the Government wanted to regulate and intervene in the rituals of religions. Second, it was mentioned in the decree that Government officials are urged to pay attention to the religious need of their subordinates based on the principle of justice and their presence in a religious celebration of another religion should be passive and respectful. This statement is different from that of the circular because the circular only mentions that "if a Government official attends a religious celebration..." and does not mention the recommendation that the Government should pay attention to the religious need etc. Third, it is mentioned in the decree that every teacher is "encouraged to equip him/herself with religious knowledge..." while in the circular it is stated that, "those who are responsible for schools and teachers..." The difference is, while the decree only indicates the teacher as a profession, the circular clearly puts the teacher in a school context. This means, for Christians, the Minister of Religion infiltrated the area of authority of the Minister of Education.¹⁶⁰ Finally, in the circular there is suggestion for those who want to perform a religious celebration to consult with the Government official and religious leaders of the region; this is not mentioned in the decree at all. For the Christians, this gives the impression that a Government official can regulate religious worship.¹⁶¹

Accordingly, in a meeting with Alamsyah on 26 September 1981, the Christians demanded that he arrange another session of the Wadah Musyawarah to discuss the issue. Alamsyah replied that he would invite the religious representatives to the session in two weeks. On the other hand, there had been support for Alamsyah's circular from some members of the Parliament and the leaders of Islamic organizations, including the reformists of the Muhammadiyah and the traditionalists of the Nahdlatul Ulama.¹⁶² In response to the Christian demand, the MUI sent a letter to the Minister suggesting that such a session was not needed anymore.¹⁶³ In the end, the session of Wadah Musyawarah never took place.

Rusydi, the chief editor of *Panji Masyarakat*, wrote an article as a response to the controversy about the circular. He said, the circular was a normal matter because it was the duty of the Government to protect the beliefs of the people. To support the circular, Rusydi then repeated the argument underlying the fatwa on Christmas celebration, i.e., according to the reports received by the MUI, some Muslims had been persuaded and even forced by the Christians – sometimes by using authority and power – to attend a Christmas celebration. In contrast, he wondered: Was there any case where “a Christian was forced to attend Idul Fitri or Friday prayer?”¹⁶⁴ In line with Rusydi, one of the chairmen of the MUI, Hasan Basri said that there was nothing in the circular contradicting the inter-religious decree as the Christians claimed. For him, the circular was not an intervention in religious worship because it was just a guide (*petunjuk*) regarding celebration of religious feast days. Sulaiman Fadli, a Member of Parliament even suggested that the Government upgrade the status of the circular to be a joint decree of Ministers. For the Muslims, the Christian negative reactions were evidence that the Christians considered the circular as an obstacle to their interest to develop an under-cover Christianisation campaign through common Christmas celebrations.¹⁶⁵

As the time for Christmas celebration in 1981 came closer, the DGI and MAWI sent a joint letter to the Commander of Security and Order, Soedomo, explaining that despite the controversies, both the DGI and MAWI would tell the Indonesian Christians that Christmas celebrations would be held as usual.¹⁶⁶ The DGI and the MAWI also published a joint message for Christmas, in which they encouraged the Christians to be involved in contributing to future development of the country, establishing national harmony, living a humble life and respecting the dignity of human beings. Although this message did not touch directly on the current controversy, it tried to describe the birth of Jesus as both astonishing and frightening. King Herod

was astonished and extremely frightened to hear the Good News (Matthew 2:2-3) because he felt that his position was threatened. In addition, many people refused the news of the Birth of Jesus that was certainly beyond reason (Philip 4:7), namely that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The message eventually asserted that Christmas is the Good News of the Birth of Jesus Christ, God, the Saviour for all nations (Luke: 2:10-12).¹⁶⁷

1993: The Fatwa Reintroduced

As we can see throughout our discussion on this issue, the controversy seems to have hardened the existing mutual suspicions between the Muslims and the Christians. About twelve years later, in December 1993, the top leaders of four Islamic organizations, Achmad Azhar Basyir of the Muhammadiyah, Ilyas Ruchiyat of the Nahdlatul Ulama, Anwar Haryono of the DDII and Hasan Basri of the MUI, issued a joint statement on Christmas celebrations, not only addressed to the Muslims but also to the Christians and the mass media. For the Muslims in general, the statement suggested to them that they should be faithful to the MUI’s fatwa of 1981 on common Christmas celebrations, while Muslims who happened to be Government officials should follow the guidance of Alamsyah’s circular. The statement also recognised the right of Christians to celebrate Christmas, but at the same time it suggested that they should not make the Christmas an extravagant and glamorous show because this might trigger social jealousy and disturb the integrity of the nation. Finally, the statement also persuaded the mass media to be aware of the fact that the majority of their clients were Muslims; and in view of that, they were expected to produce a proportionate and appropriate coverage and presentation of Christmas celebrations.¹⁶⁸

How did the Islamic leaders explain the joint statement? Hasan Basri and Ilyas Ruchiyat said that they primarily wanted to remind Muslims who might forget the fatwa or even did not know of it. This meant that, as HAMKA had previously explained, the validity of the fatwa was still maintained, although its circulation was withdrawn. Hasan Basri explained further that he hoped that Christians would also respect the Muslims by not inviting them to Christmas celebrations. On the other hand, he said that it was allowed for Muslim Government officials to attend a Christmas celebration but not to participate in its rituals.¹⁶⁹ The Muslim leaders also explained that recently, Christmas had been celebrated in luxurious and glamorous ways by certain people and this should be avoided in order not to trigger social jealousy. Moreover, they were concerned with the printed and electronic

media that often published and broadcast programmes during the period around Christmas that were not in line with Islamic ethics.¹⁷⁰ The latter issue seems to refer to the increasing pop culture, especially in urban areas, to celebrate Christmas and the New Year (with more emphasis on the latter). But why did the statement appear in 1993, not before? Perhaps, this was related to the development of national politics. Since the 1990s, when his relations with certain influential army generals had become weak, Soeharto decided to be allied with the Islamic groups.¹⁷¹ Within this context, the Muslim leaders seemed to be confident enough to publish the joint statement.

If the Muslim leaders felt it necessary to remind Muslims about the fatwa, does it mean that it did not have any influence on society? As early as 1981 following the controversy on the fatwa and the circular, a Catholic magazine explained that the Christians became sceptical and feared to invite Muslims to Christmas celebrations, although it was previously a common practice. In a village in the Yogyakarta province, it was reported that a Catholic had passed away and the Muslim neighbours made a visit of condolence to the Catholic family. Surprisingly, when the priest came to perform the ceremony for the dead, all of the Muslims decided to leave because they did not want to participate in a Catholic ritual. According to the magazine, a similar case had never happened before in that village.¹⁷²

Conclusion

The Muslim discourse on Christianisation apparently reflects what an observer said that the Islamic groups in Indonesia were a majority with a minority mentality.¹⁷³ The political marginalisation of the Islamic groups during the first two decades of the New Order helped create this mentality, that is, the Muslim feeling of being weak in relation to a very powerful enemy, particularly the ruling army. In this context, within the discourse on Christianisation, the Muslims expressed their feeling of being weak and powerless as against the religious expansion of the apparently powerful Christians supported by foreign aid. The logic of this discourse is that the state should protect the weak through certain regulations. For the Government, to fulfil the Muslim demands was apparently much easier than making other more significant political concessions. Moreover, the Muslim demands run parallel with the New Order's attempts to put all social forces under state control and to neutralise anything considered harmful to political stability. On the other hand, based on religious freedom, the Christians consistently opposed the state policies. Partly due to the Christian protests, in practice, the regula-

tions have been only loosely implemented by the state. The state's ambiguous position finally left the controversy unresolved and it could resurface at any time.

We have also seen that the discourse on Christianisation versus religious freedom was developed by Muslim and Christian leaders respectively through public media and meetings. Given their influential positions in their respective religious communities, we can be sure that the effect of the discourses on society was significant. In other words, the antagonistic discourses helped increase distrust and suspicion between the two religious groups. Likewise, although the MUI had no authority to force people to follow its fatwa prohibiting Muslims from attending Christmas celebration, some accounts suggested that it had actually influenced people.

Thus, after the fall of the New Order, the problems continued to develop. In 2002, there was a discussion in the Department of Religion on the possibility of having a Religious Harmony Law. This idea was nothing but an effort to enhance the legal status of the decrees to the position of law ratified by Parliament. In October 2004, a group of Muslims barricaded a Catholic school in Cileduk, Jakarta, because it was used illegally for religious services, and for the same reason, 23 churches have been closed by Muslims in West Java in September 2005. On the other hand, voices condemning these actions and arguing for religious freedom and tolerance were also heard among the Christians and some Muslims. The stage is not closed yet; and the game is not over.