Protestant Social Theological Thinking in Indonesia during the Era of Soeharto’s New Order

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Abstract
This article aims to discover and outline the social-theological thought of Protestant Christians during Soeharto’s New Order era. According to the findings of this study, Indonesian Protestants’ social-theological thinking developed into three paradigmatic types over thirty years (1967/68-1998). First, there is the paradigm of modernism, which is in line with Soeharto’s New Order agenda of political modernization and holds that the gospel of the kingdom of God could be consistent with the goals of Indonesia’s modernization agenda, which was seen as an implementation of the Pancasila’s ideology. Second, the type of liberation-related theological thinking that holds that the gospel of the kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth is a liberating power that frees real people from the political hegemony of Indonesia’s modernization agenda. Third, pluralist theological thinking holds that Christianity is not the exclusive agent of God’s liberating work in the context of Indonesia’s pluralistic culture.

Keywords
modernism, liberation, pluralist, Soeharto, New Order, Indonesia, Pancasila

INTRODUCTION

The New Order is an Indonesian governance system that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s as a response to poverty and political instability in the country. We know from Indonesia’s social history that the era leading up to the country’s independence in 1945 was not always smooth. Ideological tensions between the so-called Pancasila-related nationalism, communism-related nationalism, and Islamism-related nationalism had

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historically created political instability. At the same time, structural poverty as a legacy of colonialism was difficult to eradicate because the focus of the Soekarno government was more on political consolidation, due to regional rebellions, the rivalry with Malaysia, and tensions between political parties in parliament.¹

The Soekarno government, later known as the Old Order regime, failed to consolidate Indonesia’s socio-political and economic life in the face of this political and economic crisis. As a result, the events of the September 30th Movement of 1965 (G30S) erupted, which the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was accused of masterminding. The Provisional People’s Consultative Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Sementara Republik Indonesia/MPRS RI) rejected Soekarno’s special accountability report based on the uncontrollable political situation and structural poverty. This finally exacerbated Indonesia’s sociopolitical situation and brought Suharto to power as the second president of the Republic of Indonesia.²

Even though the transition of political power was fraught with controversy, most Indonesians looked forward to a new age of organizing a more politically and economically stable Indonesia. Without exception, Indonesian Protestant Christians were also very optimistic about this transition of political power. We note, for example, that the Council of Churches in Indonesia (Dewan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia/DGI) immediately convened the 1967 Church and Society Conference to provide theological support for the rise of the New Order government, which had a modernization agenda of Indonesian national development that was perceived as the implementation of Pancasila’s ideology.³

With such widespread support, the New Order government gradually consolidated into a hegemonic statism, culminating in the 1980s with the adoption of its single political principle. As a result, the New Order was unconcerned about structural poverty that was growing as Indonesia’s

national development was implemented. Furthermore, by prioritizing political stability to support its modernization agenda, which, in turn, was connected with the economic interests of the New Order’s cronies and military circles, this regime did not hesitate to silence critical voices by spreading horror stories of communism and political Islam. Every critical voice was always associated with communism or political Islam to suppress the growth of a civil society movement dedicated to emancipating Indonesians. This situation lasted until the New Order regime collapsed on May 20, 1998.4

This article places the study of Indonesian Protestant Christians’ social theological thinking in the context of Indonesian social history. The purpose of the article is to identify and critically map Protestant Christians’ social-theological thought in responding to the dynamics of Indonesian social history during the New Order, a period that is quite complex. This kind of mapping is important to avoid generalizing Protestant Christians’ social-theological thinking during that period. The article examines the writings of Protestant thinkers and theologians in 1967/68-1998 and is limited to some influential Protestant thinkers and theologians during this period, namely: O. Notohamidjojo, P.D. Latuhamallo, T.B. Simatupang, Eka Darmaputra, J.L.Ch. Abineno, Joseph Wyadatmadja, H.M. Katoppo, F. Ukur, Victor I. Tanja, Th. Sumartana, and Ioanes Rakhmat. It attempts to map the social-theological thought of some Protestant Christian thinkers by reviewing literature during the New Order regime. Through a paradigmatic lens, I will examine the operative beliefs and values of each type of Indonesian Protestant Christian theological system.5

**Modern Social Theological Thought**

One of the most prominent social-theological schools of thought of Indonesian Protestant Christians during the New Order was modernism. This school of thought was represented by O. Notohamidjojo, P.D.

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4 About political and economic dynamics as well as structural poverty and the politics of elimination during the New Order, see Ignas Kleden, *Menulis Politik: Indonesia sebagai Utopia* (Jakarta: Kompas, 2001), and Diantoro Bachriadi, *Merana di Tengah Kelimpahan* (Jakarta: ELSAM, 1999).

Latuihamalo, T.B. Simatupang, and Eka Darmaputra. While relying on Weberian social theory, these thinkers developed their social-theological thinking based on Indonesia’s modernization agenda of national development as the implementation of Pancasila’s ideology.\(^6\)

O. Notohamidjojo wrote extensively on the relationship between Christian faith and politics at the beginning of the New Order. In his book *Iman Kristen dan Politik* (Christian Faith and Politics, 1972), Notohamidjojo encouraged Indonesian Christians to participate in political affairs for the interests and welfare of the Indonesian people. In line with this idea, in 1974 he encouraged Indonesian Christians to participate in the politics of modernization of Indonesia’s national development. For Notohamidjojo, the national development launched by the New Order was nothing but a modernization process aimed at changing the Indonesian people’s traditional attitude toward life.\(^7\)

Theologically, Notohamidjojo sees the process of modernization in Indonesia as an effort to establish the kingdom of God in Indonesia’s social history.\(^8\) Notohamidjojo is very optimistic about human dignity in Pancasila-related democracy because of this understanding. While referring to Paul Ricoeur’s emergency ethics, Notohamidjojo interprets Romans 13:1-7 in light of the New Order’s promise to uphold Pancasila democracy in Indonesia. Even though Indonesian Christians are a minority, they can play a critical role in modernizing Indonesian society in the post–Old Order era. Christians can be a creative minority to improve the modernization of Indonesia. In other words, a creative minority serves as the Protestant Christian’s model of modernization amid the Indonesian Muslim majority.\(^9\)

P.D. Latuihamallo is also very optimistic about the New Order’s politic of social modernization in Indonesia. In 1975, he gave a scientific lecture on the topic of *Renungan Suci Pembangunan Modern* (A Sacred Reflection on Modern Development) to express theological support for Indonesia’s development as a process of social modernization. Like Notohamidjojo, Latuihamallo also believes that the modernization/development process

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in Indonesia must be placed in the perspective of the kingdom of God. According to Latuihamallo, the kingdom of God that has been revealed in history through Jesus Christ should also be seen in the social history of Indonesia, because God’s actions in that history fit God’s own form of action in entering Indonesia’s social history.

In Latuihamallo’s view, this theological belief has implications for Indonesian Protestant Christians’ understanding of Indonesia’s social history. History is no longer understood as a cycle as in the premodern understanding. History in the perspective of the kingdom of God is a linear history, a forward-looking history. This historical perspective will keep us active and eager for renewal and advancement.

Latuihamallo considers that development as a modernization process carried out by the government (the New Order regime), when perceived from the perspective of the kingdom of God, would truly liberate the Indonesians from poverty, suffering, and backwardness. Latuihamallo emphasizes that if development/modernization is perceived through the lens of God’s kingdom, social justice and human dignity will be central to any development strategy. To put it another way, the kingdom of God is the driving force behind Indonesia’s social modernization.

Besides Notohamidjojo and Latuihamallo, there are other theological thinkers very influential in Indonesian Protestant Christianity, one of whom was T.B. Simatupang. At the VII DGI General Assembly in Pematang Siantar (1971), Simatupang expressed his theological beliefs concerning the politics of social modernization in Indonesia. For Simatupang, Indonesia’s social modernization must be perceived as a national development based on Pancasila ideology. Simatupang believed that Indonesia’s development or social modernization represents a commitment to fulfilling Pancasila. If Indonesian development is defined as the comprehensive implementation


of Pancasila values, as Simatupang stated several times, then development is defined as the comprehensive implementation of Pancasila values. 14

Simatupang firmly believed that this developmental model has the greatest potential compared to other developmental models. He also firmly believed that basing the development process on the practice of Pancasila is the most appropriate method for bringing the Indonesian people and nation to initiate social modernization. 15

Simatupang’s theological understanding is closely related to his conviction that Pancasila is an ideology that upholds human values such as social justice, peace, and brotherhood among human beings. Simatupang also believed that if all principles of Pancasila are practiced and applied as a unified whole and complement one another consistently in a balanced way, and creatively, then national development in Indonesia will achieve success in bringing the Indonesian people and nation into the modern world—a nation that is prosperous, fair, and sustainable. These values do not conflict with the gospel of the kingdom of God. 16

Simatupang always encouraged Indonesian Christians to engage in Indonesia’s social modernization, which is considered as the implementation of Pancasila in a constructive, creative, critical, and practical way. Given the terrible experience of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) rebellions and the movement of political Islam, which wanted to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia, Simatupang avoided confrontation with the New Order administration. Simatupang also highlighted the ideological role of social modernization in this regard. 17

Different from T.B. Simatupang’s approach, Eka Darmaputera provided a cultural basis for the political theological beliefs of Indonesia’s social modernization. According to Eka Darmaputra, Pancasila as a modus vivendi contains the principle of inclusiveness that is not just a “historical-
political” principle but also a cultural principle. Using Geertz’s ethical-cultural analysis, Eka Darmaputera shows that the inclusivity principle of Pancasila can be derived from the customs of Indonesian traditional society. According to Eka Darmaputera, this principle can be found in the Tepa-seliro (ability to discern what others are feeling) philosophy or olah-rasa (ability to control emotion) and Slametan (communal feast symbolizing social unity) tradition among the Javanese people.18

Because of his conviction in this principle, Eka Darmaputera believed that Pancasila is the best alternative for the pluralistic Indonesian people and nation. Without Pancasila, the Indonesian nation will become a divided nation. The ideology of Pancasila is a cultural social glue. The inclusivity principle of Pancasila, which comprises the cultural logic of “baik ini maupun itu” (both/and), can be the most likely social adhesive for the pluralistic Indonesian society and nation. Therefore, Pancasila is Indonesian cultural wisdom that can guarantee the unity and integrity as well as the welfare of the Indonesian people and nation.19 Eka Darmaputera’s theological basis is the incarnation of God. According to Eka Darmaputera, God, by becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ, has entered human history and culture. If we can accept God’s incarnation in every culture, then why do we not accept Pancasila as a culture that can be a means of God’s incarnation, certainly without forgetting the transformative power of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Herein Eka Darmaputera agrees with some theologians that I mentioned earlier. He is also theologically convinced of the gospel of the kingdom of God in the process of social modernization. Pancasila’s emphasis on the inculturation of the gospel of the kingdom of God makes it difficult for Eka Darmaputera to avoid the absorption of the hegemonic culture of the New Order regime’s national development, which thereby makes the transformative power of the gospel of the kingdom of God ineffective in the hegemony of modernization politics in Indonesia.20

19 Eka Darmaputera, “Memahami Penerimaan Pancasila sebagai Asas Tunggal dalam Kekristenan,” as found in Martin Lukito Sinaga, ed. (Peny), Pergulatan Kehadiran Kristen di Indonesia: Teks-Teks Terpilih Eka Darmaputera (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2001), 280.
20 Mojau, Meniadakan atau Merangkul?, 103-119.
In addition to the social theologians I described earlier, we also encounter some Protestant Christian theologians who have developed liberation-related social theological thinking. They argue that the theological thought of social modernism needs to be supplemented by liberation-related social-theological thought amid the politics of social modernization of Indonesia’s national development. This liberation-related social theological consciousness is triggered by the increase of structural poverty in Indonesia’s development. These theologians include J.L.Ch. Abineno, Joseph Widyatmadja, H.M. Katoppo, and F. Ukur. The starting point of their theology is the victims of Indonesian national development, which was seen as the implementation of Pancasila ideology during Soeharto’s New Order era.

J.L. Ch. Abineno, who was also the Chairperson of the Council of Churches in Indonesia, at the 1976 General Assembly of the DGI VIII (SR-DGI VIII) in Salatiga sharpenly highlighted the reality of poverty as a manifestation of sin in the form of structural injustice or social injustice and oppression. In his lecture exploring the theme of SR VIII DGI, “Yesus Kristus Membebaskan dan Mempersatukan” (Jesus Christ Liberates and Unites), Abineno emphasized that God’s work in Jesus Christ is not only spiritual but also social and political, based on his interpretation of the Old Testament (for example, Ex 3:8, 13:3/Dt 5:6, Is 42:6-7) as well as the New Testament (for example, Lk 4:18-19, 7:22 and Mt 6:33, 11:4-5). He affirmed that Christ’s work applies not only to redemption and deliverance from personal sins, but also from everything caused by sin, namely, oppression, suffering, injustice, and so on. God’s work is universal because it is for all people (Ti 2:11). Along this line, Abineno describes God as the God who defends the poor, gives justice to the weak, and defends the rights of the oppressed. This preference of God has implications for the churches’ image and position amid Indonesia’s national development process, which negatively impacts the poor and weak and thereby worsens their condition. Churches in Indonesia, according to Abineno, have to become the messianic church, the church of the Messiah King. Consequently, the churches
in Indonesia must stand by the people who are suffering economically, politically, socially, legally, educationally, and religiously.  

Following Abineno, Yoseph Widyatmadja and F. Ukur also talk about the importance of theology, Christology, and ecclesiology that reflect real solidarity with the poor. Yoseph Widyatmadja, a theologian with formal theological education and at the same time a social activist, asked the churches in Indonesia that live amid the negative impact of Indonesian national development to start talking about liberation theology instead of development theology. This is because the term “development” has a restrictive meaning and application. According to Widyatmadja, church participation in national development is frequently restricted to combating poverty caused by natural or technical backwardness, whereas liberation has a broader meaning. Referring to Luke 4:18-19, Widyatmadja argues that the church must speak about the presence of Jesus Christ among the victims of Indonesian national development. In this context, F. Ukur, a theologian with formal theological education and a writer, calls on churches and theological schools in Indonesia to develop what he calls “Teologi Kejelataan” (Theology for the Commoner) amid national development that completely ignored poor people. This is a biblical-theological stance concerning the existence of the poor, disabled, and excluded in society.  

Aside from the male theologians mentioned above, a female Protestant theologian is also worth mentioning, namely, H.M. Katoppo. As a theologian and activist who fought for gender equality, Katoppo criticized the churches in Indonesia that often kept women anonymous in ecclesiastical assemblies. In her writings, including Asian Theology: An Asian Woman’s Perspective (1980) and Compassionate and Free: An Asian Woman’s Theology (1979), Katoppo strongly emphasizes the equality of men and women in church and society. According to Katoppo, denying women’s dignity and worth is oppression. This oppression can come from adat (traditional customs) and family as well as from exploitative political  

21 Mojau, Meniadakan atau Merangkul?, hlm. 19.  
24 Marianne Katoppo, Compassionate and Free: An Asian Woman’s Theology (Geneva: WCC, 1979), 6, 25, 91.
and economic forces. Along this line of thinking, it is vital to develop a more feminine image of God as the Other in the context of women’s emancipation. This image of God will provide more theological incentives for the processes of liberation and emancipation of Asian women in general and Indonesian women in particular.

In contrast to modernism’s theological thinking that avoids Marxist social scientific analysis in favor of Weberian social analysis, liberation-related social-theological thinkers are more inclined to use Marxist social scientific analysis in their theological thinking. This analytical framework helps them diagnose structural poverty in the context of Indonesian development. As a result, this way of thinking uses the real-life experiences of the victims of Indonesian national development as a starting point for doing theology. Another starting point is the real-life realities of Asian and Indonesian women, who are frequently subjected to domestication in both the church and society. In this connection, it should also be noted that Kattopo’s social-theological thinking, which advocates social reforms based on social movements that support social issues such as gender and ecological injustice rather than on social class struggles (for example, the labor struggle), bears some resemblance to Marxist social theory.

**Pluralist Social Theological Thought**

Proponents of pluralist social-theological thought argue that Christianity is not the “exclusive agent” presenting signs of the kingdom of God in this world, including in Indonesia. Christianity in Indonesia is only one of God’s agents in proclaiming his kingdom or government that upholds freedom, justice, peace, and unity in this world, including in Indonesia. Recognizing the existence of religious pluralism in Indonesia, the exponents of theological thought, although they do not mention it openly, seem to prefer developing their theological thinking in dialogue with the sociology of knowledge of postmodernism. The proponents


27 Cf. T.B. Simatupang, *Kehadiran Kristen*, 97-102, 142-152.
of this social-theological thought are, among others, Victor I. Tanja, Th. Sumartana, and Ioanes Rakhmat.28

Victor I. Tanja argues that the core of Christian ethics is love. As a result, God establishes fellowship with sinful humans based on this love. Because of his love, God calls humanity into fellowship with himself and with others. Love breaks down barriers and builds fellowship and brotherhood. Living in fellowship with God builds a sense of responsibility for the lives of our neighbors. We cannot live in peace and prosperity without other people as fellow beings. Tanja highlighted that we must see the existence of other people who are our neighbors, even those of other religions, as fellow family members of God who enable us to live a peaceful life. 29

As members of God’s family, living and cooperating with others is a social responsibility that is inherent to Christian faith and ethics. Christians should engage in dialogue and collaborate with others for the common good as a family of God. In this perspective, Tanja rejects the categories of “Christian and non-Christian.” According to Tanja, such a categorical framing will not allow good cooperation among adherents of different religions. This categorical framing implies an a priori rejection of the presence of adherents of other religions with the assumption that only Christianity or Christians have truth and goodness. The best categorical frame to express the difference between Christians and adherents of other religions is “Christians and other people.” In this categorical frame, according to Tanja, all the parties belong to the same humanity, who have the same hopes and dreams, which allows us to work together. 30

In this line, Christians (like the Israelites) must realize that their election is a call to service, and not because Christians have perfect righteousness. Christians are called to serve God, the owner of truth, through serving the world and their fellow humans. People of other faiths are also called to worship God. As a result, Christians and others, regardless of religious background, are equally called by God to collaborate to address social problems such as poverty for the glory of God alone rather than for self-

28 Mojau, Meniadakan atau Merangkul?, 404-406.
29 In Victor I. Tanja, Tiada Hidup Tanpa Agama (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1988), 79.
glorification. Furthermore, all parties are simultaneously under God’s judgment and justification.  

Meanwhile, Th. Sumartana held that a dialogue of action is insufficient. We must go further toward theological dialogue to prevent dialogue of action from being manipulated by power interests. Theological dialogue cannot be forced because it arises from a deep faith experience of God’s works for each individual. According to Sumartana, God can encounter humans in his way, beyond our understanding (Barthian-related Protestantism). If theological dialogue is a sharing of deep faith experiences, how can dialogue be manipulated by a regime, for example, with the issue of ethnicity, religion, and race (Suku, Ras, Agama, dan Antar Golongan/SARA)? Based on this conviction, Sumartana and some Islamic theologians, such as Gus Dur, defended Confucianism as a religion when the authorities questioned a Chinese couple who wanted to marry according to Confucian rites.

However, the pursuit of theological dialogue is not without obstacles. Sumartana considered that the biggest obstacle is trust in the esteemed figures of each religion, namely, Jesus and Muhammad. Indonesian Christianity, for example, does not appreciate Muhammad’s character as a liberator of the people from sociopolitical and economic ignorance. According to Th. Sumartana, the difficulty stems from a colonialist Christology (the inheritance of European missions) and a patristic ontology (Athanasius). Sumartana did not explain what he meant by the ontological Christology inherited from the church father Anthanasius. If we consider the context of Sumartana’s christological thought, Sumartana was referring to the orthodox Christology of the Athanasian confession of faith, which is a response to the Arian heresy.

31 Tanja, “Hidup dan Bekerja Sama dengan Orang Lain,” 72-75.
34 See Tony Lane and Runtut Pijar: Sejarah Pemikiran Kristiani (Jakarta: BPK Gunung, 1990), 26-29.
For Sumartana, this apologetic and polemical Christology does not help build a dialogical relationship with Islam in Indonesia, which is not interested in the divinity of Jesus Christ. Sumartana held that if we want to build a relationship with Islam within the framework of theological dialogue, the legacy of Christology needs to be deconstructed and then reconstructed into a new Christology. For this reconstruction, Sumartana proposed a liberation-related Christology drawing on the ideas of Knitter, Newman, and Sobrino with the historical Jesus and Judaism as a starting point. Indeed, the Christology of liberation that starts with the historical Jesus is not the only Christian Christology. This is where the difference lies between Christian and Islamic views about Jesus Christ. Islam only accepts that Jesus Christ was a human being and a great prophet, while for Christians, in addition to acknowledging Jesus Christ as a prophet and a human, he is also a manifestation of God. However, Sumartana anticipated that it would be difficult for this type of Christology to bridge Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia. He believed that Christians in Indonesia need to think about a functional social Christology in the context of the relationship between Islam and Christianity, which is still facing a number of theological humanitarian problems, such as structural poverty, under the authoritarian and repressive rule of the New Order regime.35

Ioanes Rakhmat supports Sumartana’s theological position. Like him, Rakhmat has tried to explore the possibility of “open doors” in the most crucial aspect of the christological heritage, namely, the uniqueness of Jesus as emphasized by the writer of the Gospel of John 14:6. In his article entitled “Ekslusivisme Yohanes 14:6—Apakah Penghalang bagi Bergereja yang Terbuka pada Banyak Amanat Agung” (The Exclusivism of John 14:6—What Are the Obstacles to Churches for Being Open to Other Great Commissions), Rakhmat uses modern psychological and sociological theories to conclude that the exclusivism of John 14:6 is not an obstacle to becoming a community of faith open to other great commissions because the text of John 14:6 was not formulated to deny God’s saving works and self-revelation in other religions. John’s Christian community could not have envisaged the Asian religions and therefore could not have excluded

Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and even tribal religions from God’s purpose. According to Rakhmat, the Bible does not mention today’s world religions as religions that do not come from God. The Bible only speaks about the wrath of God and the wicked who are impious, hypocrites, and are not truly following their religion.  

**CONCLUSION**

We might conclude from the foregoing analysis that there is no such thing as neutral theology and that any theological paradigm is inevitably partial. Theological thinking among Indonesian Protestant Christians during the New Order can be categorized into three paradigms. First, the paradigm of modernism’s social theological thought. This paradigm is represented by the social theological thinking of Notohamidjojo, Latuihamallo, Simatupang, and Eka Darmaputera’s conviction that the gospel of the kingdom of God is in line with the politics of modernization in Indonesian national development, which was perceived as the implementation of Pancasila ideology in the New Order era. From the sociology of knowledge point of view, this paradigm is closer to the sociology of Weberian social thought. The weakness of this paradigm is that the critical power of Christian theological thinking, which is rooted in the gospel of the kingdom of God—especially when we lose critical reasoning—can easily fall into merely being a political legitimacy tool for Indonesian social modernization which is hegemonic and exploits the Indonesian people ideologically: national development as the practice of Pancasila. The strength of this paradigm is that social-theological thinking can become a creative and innovative force for social development in Indonesia through the process of social modernization of the New Order. And this was especially important in the 1970s and early 1980s, when natural poverty was still dominant. However, in the 1990s, when structural poverty became more massive, this paradigm would only strengthen the structural

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power of the New Order’s hegemony and weaken the independence of the Indonesian people.

Second, the paradigm of liberation-related social-theological thinking represented by the thought of J.L.Ch. Abineno, Joseph Widiyatmadja, H.M. Katoppo, and F. Ukur develops theological values and beliefs that the gospel of the kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth cannot be equated with the politics of modernization in Indonesian national development, mostly because the this gospel is a liberation-related power that does not ideologically reduce the value of the human being. On the contrary, the gospel liberates all people from ideological powers that silence the people’s critical consciousness. Sociologically, this social-theological paradigm of knowledge is closer to the sociology of Marxian social thought. What is interesting about this paradigm is that it emphasizes gender equality, as is evidenced by the works of Katoppo as a new social movement in Marxist social analysis. The strength of this paradigm is to foster a critical awareness of the Indonesian people so that they can be critical of the authoritarian and hegemonic powers of the New Order. The weakness, especially in relation to Islam-Christian relations in Indonesia, is that it is sometimes full of tension and is exploited by political demagogues so that it can incite social riots in Indonesia as has happened in Halmahera and Ambon. This is especially true in the context of contemporary Indonesia, where populism and religious identity politics are increasingly prevalent.

Third, the pluralist social theological paradigm popularized by Victor I. Tanja, Th. Sumartana, and Ioanes Rahmat develops the theological thinking that sees God’s saving work, both personally and socially, transcending primordial religious ties, because God’s grace in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is at work universally. This paradigm is more influenced by the sociology of postmodernism. The strength of this paradigm is to help Christians in Indonesia develop dialogical social relations with people of different religions in Indonesia, especially with Muslims. Its weakness is that it can ignore the orthodox Christian faith.

The three paradigms above do not need to be mutually contradictory, because the three paradigms contain strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, we must view the paradigms as complementing one another. Post–New Order Indonesia is still struggling with natural and structural poverty as
well as disharmonious relations between people of different religions, especially Islam and Christianity, which are still suspicious of each other and at any time can lead to social violence in Indonesia. So heeding the three different but complementary paradigms will produce Indonesian Protestant theological thinking that is dialogical, liberative, and reconciliatory. This is a theological challenge to Protestant Christians in Indonesia, a theological call as well as an ethical imperative for Indonesian Protestant Christianity to transform Indonesia into a country that respects religious plurality as well as grounding the gospel of the kingdom of God as a power of social transformation.

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