

# Strengthening harmony based on local wisdom in multi-ethnic, religion and culture in Moluccas: *a theological perspective*

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**Abstract**— The issue of harmony has becoming an important issue in public speaking particularly after big riot in Moluccas more than ten years ago. As a matter of fact, harmony is not quite new issue in the Moluccas society, religion and culture. People have been living in harmony for centuries since their ancestors and putting this value as cultural value within their life style. Harmony not only among an inclusive group but beyond ethnic, religion and cultural background. This value has been known as not only cultural value but also religious value. It means that in creating and strengthening harmony among people of a society, cultural approaches and religious or theological perspective can be used. This article wants to expose both of these approaches towards the issue of harmony as an important issue in Moluccas context especially. Therefore, it is important to pay serious attention towards cultural and religious values in the efforts to solve disharmony problem in the Moluccas.

**Keywords**— *harmony, local wisdom, cultural value, theological perspective, Moluccas*

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the public issues in Indonesia generally and even in the Moluccas especially nowadays is about harmony. How people from different religions, ethnics and cultures can live together in harmony. This issue become important because some radical groups from Moslem communities who are trying to show their power by pressuring other religions and government. In Moluccas particularly this issue becomes urgent because of the bad experiences which relates to the social conflict in the past.

From national perspective people as a whole are speaking about *Pancasila*, Human Rights and tolerance as basis for harmony. But in the local level, as in the Moluccas, local communities even the church and religious communities are speaking about harmony as a value they have in their own culture. As a matter of fact, harmony can be found in several kind of local wisdom in the Moluccas. Therefore, questions are arising which can be discussed: What kind of local wisdom in the Moluccan culture that are emphasizing harmony? Can we develop our theology by using local wisdom we find in the culture? How do the Christian faith or Reformed theology deal with this issue? These questions of course are related to how far Reformed theology do respect and appreciate cultural values by placing it in its theology.

In deliberating these questions, in this paper I will begin with a description about cultural values regarding harmony in Moluccas culture. Furthermore, it is important to show how Reformed theology do respond to culture. And finally how Reformed theology can deal with the issue of harmony based on local wisdom as public theology.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The elaboration of this article is based on literature review. Selected scientific papers and books review about issues related to the topic are utilized as its basis of knowledge.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

### A. *Harmony as cultural value in Maluku local wisdom*

In Moluccas culture there has been well known what is called harmony culture based on kinship. What is meant by harmony culture based on kinship is social relationship between people of two or more villages because they feel themselves as having kinship relationship even though their religion, ethnic and island are different among themselves [1]. This is a kind of harmony across religions, ethnics and islands. Types or forms of this kinship are well known as *Gandong*, *Bongso*, *Adi-Kaka*, and *Pela*. *Gandong*, *Bongso*, *Adi-Kaka*, *Pela* are terms to be used to state kinship not individually but inter-villages (at list two villages) which is bound by sacred 'customary oath'. By this customary oath, they received each other as kinship. These four kind of local wisdom bind people of the villages in their interaction. They believe that betraying to this bounding can caused penalty in the forms of trouble, sickness and even the death.

#### 1. *Gandong*

*Gandong* is a term used in Ambonese Malay means womb (of a mother). *Gandong* representing kinship between persons of the same womb or between people of different villages who regard themselves coming from the same origin (mother). They look at themselves as brother and sister by birth. From this side they see themselves having common possession together, living together, protecting and helping each other. This kind of relationship took place between two villages without considering religious background they have. They call each other as *gandong*. The villages of *gandong* will always express

strong appreciation among them, and also show tendency to help and to protect each other in all of their circumstances.

## 2. *Bongso*

In Ambonese Malay, *Bongso* is a term refers to the youngest son or daughter of a family. The last child of the family both man and women is called *bongso* (or *bungsu*). *Bongso* is a bounded relationship between persons (man and women) or relationship between two or more villages who look at and calling each other as *bongso*. In Moluccas culture the youngest boy or girl of a family become beloved child. All family loves him or her very much and he or she is protected by the parents, brother and sister. The *bongso* related villages call each other as *bongso*. This brotherhood goes beyond border of island, ethnic and religion. People of these *bongso* villages practice mutual love, help and protection like brother and sister of a family.

## 3. *Adi-Kaka*

*Adi-Kaka* is a term used to refer to a close personal relationship between two or more both man and women or relationship between two villages as relatives of a family as same as brother and sister. They look at themselves as 'full younger sibling' (same mother and father), a nuclear family. A younger brother village (*Adi*) will calls another village as 'older sibling or cousin' (*Kaka*), and on the contrary, the older sibling village will calls another village as 'younger brother'. This '*Adi-Kaka*' relationship can be created across island, so including villages of another islands. But even also across religion (Moslem and Christian). In Central Moluccas for example, people of Nusalaut Island that are Christian calls people of Ambalau Island which are Muslims as *Adi* and on the contrary. As *Adi-Kaka* relationship of the people of these islands living in mutual protection, helping and loving each other.

## 4. *Pela*

The word *Pela* is originated to the word *pela-pela* which means brotherhood. This word is being used in the customs and traditions of Nuaulu tribe in Seram Island called *Uli Siwa*. In the beginning this word referred to brotherhood among young men and women who are involved in *kakean* ceremony, a ceremony to which the young men and women were educated during such a period and trained to be adult. These young men and women must see themselves as brother and sister even though they are not coming from the same parents. Later on the word *pela* is used more widely than this. It is used to refer to relationship between people of several villages that regard themselves as kinship. They look at themselves as having brotherhood relationship. This *pela* took place across islands and religions between two or more villages. For example, *pela* between Batu Merah which is Moslem village and Passo as Christian village. In daily interaction people of *pela* villages calling each other as *pela*. This two villages are living in the same island that is Ambon Island. But there are also *pela* between Christian village Ouw in Saparua Island and Moslem village Seit of Ambon Island. Moreover, *pela* can take place between Kei ethnic in Southeast Moluccas and Seram ethnic in the eastern part of Central Moluccas.

Based on the above explanation, we can say that by practicing these four local wisdoms in their daily life the Moluccans can live together in harmony within variety of ethnic, island, and religion. *Gandong, Bongso, Adi-Kaka, Pela* are cultural ways of life in which the Moluccans can keep harmony and tolerance among them and avoiding conflict. Therefore, harmony is very valuable to them. Maintaining harmony is a cultural duty. Brotherhood, loving each other, protecting each other and helping each other are all for the sake of keeping harmony. They realize the differences among them by religion, ethnic and island. But all these differences cannot become obstacle for building relationship to one another. Therefore, it is said that harmony culture in the Moluccas expressed strong spirit of helping each other beyond religious boundaries and stressing religious harmony.

## B. *Theological perspective on culture*

What I mean by theological perspective here is the reformed theology on culture. In connection to this, the thinking of some reformed theologians will be exposed. I want to begin this part by quoting the view of Daniel J. Adams about contextual theology in his book entitled *Cross Cultural Theology Western Reflections in Asia* [2]. According to him, contextual theology is characterized first by a serious consideration of culture as a matrix of theology and what this means for ones total worldview and way of thinking – meta-theology in the fullest sense of the word. Second, it is generally biblical in emphasis, so that much of the actual theologizing consist in pointing out relationships between the biblical worldviews and the worldviews of non-western culture. Third, contextual theology makes a conscious attempt to re-root the Christian faith into each unique culture and restate Christian theology in the philosophical categories and thought forms of each culture. Finally, it stress the particular as opposed to the universal – expressing what God means in a given historical and cultural context as opposed to speaking generally about such universal categories as creation, sin, redemption, or eschatology.

For me public theology is also contextual theology. So as contextual theology, public theology must also considering culture as matrix of theology and attempting to re-root the Christian faith into each unique culture etc. In this sense Reformed theology must also pointing out cultural issues in its public theology.

But the question is what is meant by culture in Reformed theological thinking? Henry Meeter explains that the dictionary defines culture as being "any act of cultivating, or the resulting state of being cultivated". What this cultivation means? It signifies "training" any discipline, any refinement, which results in improvement, whether of plants, animals or human beings. One can speak of culture of plants, of animals, of flowers, of bees, etc. In a more limited sense, however the word "culture" is restricted to human culture. We than have in mind "any cultivation of human beings which results in their improvement, enlightenment, and discipline acquired by mental and moral training, civilization, refinement in manners and taste. The word therefore, has a very broad application [3].

He further stated that the great contents of culture, or rather its tools, are therefore never the mere mechanical and chemical powers of nature but science, art, technique, ethics, law, the state, always some product of the human mind. It rather the activity of human mind applied to the force of nature, and bringing creation by the use of these human powers to higher and nobler levels. Culture, in a word, is the fulfillment of the command given to man, the king of creation, by his Maker, in the Garden of Eden: "Have dominion over the earth and subdue it" (cf. Gen. 2). Culture is the execution of this divinely-imposed task. We as Calvinists have in a way the most difficult, but also the most biblical position to defend. Wherever culture has developed something worth-while, whether in Greece, Rome or among total unbelievers anywhere, it is the fruit of what God did among these peoples, contrary to their sinful natures. Sin, if left to itself, will not build up, but destroy God's creation. Wherever, then, these fruits of God's common grace appear it is our duty to make thankful use of them, to the honor of God and to the advancement of His Kingdom.

Furthermore, as Christian we are in duty bound to help in this cultural task of the world. We may not withdraw ourselves. For to us today comes the command: "Replenish the earth, and subdue it." While many in cultural society have frequently adapted the fruits of culture to wrong ends, and opposed Christianity, culture itself often helps Christianity along. Think of the way in which culture aided in the days of the Apostles to spread the Gospel. Think of the way in which the cultural advantages of Paul and his helpers aided them in meeting the people to whom they brought the gospel, or the advantages they received in their work from developed roads, the one language, which all spoke, numerous benefit from the political administration, etc. Note how Calvin insisted that those who studied for minister at Geneva should first have a broad cultural training, as he himself had had. When this cultural advantages are spurned it often turns out to the detriment of the Christian cause.

I think as a Reformed theologian, Meeter have given a positif thinking toward culture. In his opinion quoted above we can note that he emphasized at list three positive attitudes toward culture. First, he placed the mental and moral training, and even the civilization in the understanding about culture. It is results of cultivating human beings. From this point of view I think local wisdom of any culture has its place. We can say that local wisdom is a part of mental and moral training and civilization. Second, something valuable in human culture wherever we find is the fruits of what God did among those peoples. It is the fruits of God's common grace. Therefore, we are in duty to make the best use of them to the honor of God and to advancement of His Kingdom. From this point of view I want to say that local wisdom of culture is the fruits of God's work. We should use it in developing our theology. Third, culture can be used to help Christianity to spread out the gospel. Culture is beneficial for Christianity. Cultural values can helps the church to realize its mission and work on it. From this point of view I would say the local wisdom can become basis for the witness of the church. Regarding harmony in the

Moluccas, the churches in the Moluccas must really aware of this.

The positive thinking towards culture in the Reformed theology have been stressed even by W. Stanford Reid in his article "Calvinism as a Cultural Force". According to him, Calvinism has a positive attitude toward culture [4]. In the last part of his article he stated that if one stands in the line of Calvin, it is not necessary to view human cultural activities in contrast to a presumed sphere of divine activity. Culture may be viewed as an aspect of human activity, indeed in distinction to nature, but not independent of divine law, the divine plan, and divine calling. Human cultural activity may be viewed as a responds to God's calling, even as all of life is, and may be judged as to whether it is carried out in accordance with His Creator-will. What is required is a reconstruction of the idea of culture, which views it within the context of devine revelation, the context within which it becomes meaningful. Human cultural activity, carried on in obedience to God's law is an expression of His will.

The positive attitude toward culture from Reformed thinking is clear. That is why I. John Hesselink tried to correct those who interpreted Reformed tradition in a wrong way when it relates to culture. In his book entitled "On Being Reformed Distinctive Characteristics and Common Misunderstandings", he mentioned that there are at list twelve misunderstandings about the Reformed. For misunderstanding ten it is said that: "That to be Reformed means to be indifferent or opposed to the so-called "worldly realm of culture, economics, and politics and be concerned only about the salvation of the souls"[5]. This is not true, said Hesselink. To him, historically, Reformed Christian have taken this mandate of their Lord seriously. Therefore, they have seen the world not only as a realm of the evil one but also as the sphere in which God is seeking to bring about a kingdom that comprehends more than individual Christians, or even the church. This is why Reformed Christians often speak of a "life and world view".

The other reason for him is the facts that there are many Reformed theologians addressed culture in their theology. Started from Calvin he move on to Abraham Kuyper, Geraldus van der Leew, Calvin Seerveld, Nicholas Wolterstorff, George S. Heyer, A.A. van Ruler, Thomas F. Torrance, Herbert Richardson. They spoke on cultures in many ways.

### *C. Building public theology based on Maluku local wisdom*

Time and space are limit for us to explore widely and completely on this topic. Here, I will only stress some principles theological points that must be considered if we want to build public theology on harmony based on local wisdom in Moluccas culture.

#### *1) Local wisdom as the fruit of God's work*

Local wisdom is the way of life in a cultural society which is established by the ancestor in order to organize interaction and relationship between people of a cultural society. People keep and practice it in their life because the wisdom is valuable for them. It is a result of cultivating human being to become civilized. The Moluccans keep and practice local wisdom in honor to their ancestor. From this point of view we are

convinced that God has been working through the ancestor both before and after they heard, knew and started to believe in God. Therefore, God has revealed himself to the Moluccans before they got acquaintance with Abrahamic religion, through various cultural identities in their tribal religion. In other words, God has been working through the ancestor, placed them as witnesses like a cloud standing around us. Therefore, we must pay homage to them and learn good things they taught bearing in mind that they are in accordance with the will of God. But we don't worship them anymore.

A Reformed theologian in Indonesia, Ebenhaizer I. Nuban Timo, stated that God has been existed and worked within the culture, history and religion of a society for their goodness or benefit. It means that there is no culture, history and religion standing out of God's providence. He quoted and interpreted Romans 8:28 and John 1:10 to support his opinion [6]. So, harmony that we found in local wisdom *Gandong, Bongso Adi-Kaka, Pela* is the fruit of God's work to the Moluccans. Developing theology on harmony as public theology can be done by considering and the use of local wisdom of the Moluccas culture. However, the public issues can be addressed theologically by the Reformed if a deep anthropological studies on local wisdom of culture can be done.

### 2) *Changing attitude towards culture*

Just as mentioned by Hesselink, many Christians have concluded that they should withdraw from the world (realm of culture) or opposed it strenuously as the realm of the devil. One hears from many Reformed/Presbyterian Christians that we should get out of politics, avoid controversial social issues, and stick to the proper business of the church, namely, preaching the gospel for the purpose of saving souls. Some Reformed Christian must changing their mind on this matter. That the values we find in local wisdom of culture not always are in contradiction to the Christian faith or Reformed faith. Customs and traditions in certain meaning are in the will of God. Looking to the Bible, however, we must paid sufficient attention to Jesus' high priestly prayer as in the Gospel of John that God as heavenly Father not take his disciples out of the world. They are not of the world but are in the world. Jesus sends them into the world (John 17:15-17).

### 3) *Considering harmony in local wisdom and the Bible*

As harmony is founded in the local wisdom, even in the Bible. Harmony is also to be Christian values in the Bible. The Bible speaks on harmony in many ways: harmony for unity (Psalm 133:1), racial harmony (Acts 10:34-35; Romans 2:9-11), harmony with other fellow believers (1 Corinthians 1:10), etc. Of course there are many other Bible verses related to harmony we can refer. God created ethnic and cultural diversity and other fellow believers for his glory (Isaiah 56:6-8). This Bible texts can become basis for public theology on harmony.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

The issue of harmony has becoming an important issue in public speaking particularly after big riot in Moluccas more than ten years ago. As a matter of fact, harmony is not quite new issue in the Moluccas society, religion and culture. People have been living in harmony for centuries since their ancestors and putting this value as cultural value within their life style. Harmony not only among an inclusive group but beyond ethnic, religion and cultural background. This value has been known as not only cultural value but also religious value. It means that in creating and strengthening harmony among people of a society, cultural approaches and religious or theological perspective can be used. This article wants to expose both of these approaches towards the issue of harmony as an important issue in Moluccas context especially. Therefore, it is important to pay serious attention towards cultural and religious values in the efforts to solve disharmony problem in the Moluccas.

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