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Agustinus M. L. Batlajery

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The unity of the Church according to Calvin and its meaning for the churches in Indonesia

Agustinus M. L. Batlajery

ABSTRACT

Since the founding of the Council of Churches in Indonesia (DGI), which later changed its name to the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), a recurring question has been asked about what kind of unity the DGI/PGI intends to achieve. This issue was discussed by the General Assemblies, from the first in 1950 until the 10th in 1984, with various ideas being put forward. Some underscored the unity of structural organisations, whereas others emphasised our spiritual unity in Christ. It was only at the 10th General Assembly held in 1984 at Ambon that Indonesian churches discovered the answer they had been seeking all that time. The unity they sought was a shared understanding of Christian doctrine, mutual recognition and acceptance, and co-operation in working together to carry out their task and calling in Indonesia. In this respect, I believe that the view of Indonesian church unity conforms to Calvin's concept which does not stress organisational unity but rather spiritual oneness, oneness in Christ, and oneness in the basic principles of the faith, in recognising each other as having the true preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments. It is this kind of unity which has been expressed in the Five Documents of Church Unity (LDKG), later called Documents on Church Unity (DKG). The churches of Indonesia can learn much from the view of church reformer John Calvin.

KEYWORDS

Calvin; *Institutes*; church unity; catholicity; universality; ecclesiology; structural unity; spiritual unity; Indonesian churches

*'So much does this concern me, that, could I be of any service, I would not grudge to cross even ten seas, if need were, on account of it.'*¹

These words of Calvin's, from a letter written in April 1552 to Archbishop Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury, attest to his commitment to church unity and his sincerity in seeking it. Scholars who have devoted their attention to Calvin's ecumenism remember this statement and cite it in their work, as we may note from the articles and studies mentioned below:

Acknowledging Calvin's ecumenical significance, scholars have labelled him in various ways. Praamsma writes of 'John Calvin as an Ecumenical Figure',² and McNeill calls him

¹Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin*, vol. II, Letter No.CCXIV, 348: '*Quantum ad me attinet, si quis mei usus fore videbitur, ne decem quidem maria, si opus sit, ob eam rem traicere pigeat*', quoted in *Corpus Reformatorum*, ed., *Joannis Calvinii Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, vol. 14, 314, (hereafter abbreviated as CO 14, 314). Robinson, *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation*, 46; cf. Cadier, 'Calvin and the Union of the Churches', 127. Nijenhuis discusses this letter in his dissertation which was later published (Nijenhuis, *Calvinus Oecumenicus*, 1.20).

²See Praamsma, 'John Calvin as an Ecumenical Figure', 7.

‘an Ecumenical Churchman.’³ When Nijenhuis examined the contents of his letters about church unity, he concluded that ‘Calvin was a great ecumenical figure’ and entitled his dissertation ‘Calvinus Oicumenicus.’⁴ In view of Calvin’s extraordinary struggle to keep the reformed churches intact, Locher considers Calvin a ‘Defender of Ecumenism.’⁵ Meanwhile, Stauffer dubbed him ‘an advocate of Evangelical catholicity.’⁶ Hence, it is not surprising that Kromminga refers to him as the ‘apostle of ecumenism.’⁷

In his article entitled ‘John Calvin and Ecumenicity’, John Bratt claims:

Calvin was no mere theorist with respect to the ecumenical challenge. He matched word with action and geared his idealism to the realistic situation. Not only did he urge the other leaders to temper their differences and cultivate unity, he took the time amid an incredibly busy program to engage in ecumenical conversation and discussion.⁸

It is clear that Calvin had his own views about the unity of the Church. In fact, he did not just theorise about this issue but translated it into concrete action. In other words, he was idealistic about the unity of the Church and struggled to bring it to fruition. He is quite clearly to be seen as an ecumenist.

It is the purpose of this article to express Calvin’s theological-ecclesiological thinking about church unity and examine its meaning for churches in Indonesia which are on the path to the goal of unity. With that objective in mind, what is written here will begin with a discussion of Calvin’s views on church unity and then investigate what meaning can be drawn from this for churches in Indonesia.

Church unity according to Calvin

A full treatment of Calvin’s views on the unity of the Church would require an examination of the whole range of his works, not only of the *Institutes*. These works are numerous and also include Bible commentaries, letters, tracts, catechisms and sermons. Scholars now accept the fact that we cannot underestimate any of his writings, if we wish to study his thinking on any particular issue.⁹ But, given constraints of space, this article focuses on the *Institutes* alone, as fundamental to Calvin’s thought, and on which he based the development of his thinking in other writings.

In the 1536 *Institute*,¹⁰ Calvin’s view of church unity is expressed in article 2 entitled ‘Faith: Containing an Explanation of the Creed (Called Apostolic)’. There his teachings on church unity are incorporated into his teachings about the Church itself.

He emphasised the unity of the Church in explaining ‘First, we believe the holy catholic Church.’¹¹ The emphasis on unity is apparent in the use of the word ‘catholic’ (*catholica*). The Church is catholic or universal (*ecclesia catholica*). In essence this means that the Church

³See McNeill, ‘Calvin as an Ecumenical Churchman’, 379; see also McNeill and Hastings, *Ecumenical Testimony*, 13.

⁴Nijenhuis, *Calvinus Oecumenicus*.

⁵Locher, *Calvin Anwalt der Oikumene*.

⁶Stauffer, *The Quest for Unity from John Calvin to Isaak d’Huisseau*, 1–22.

⁷Kromminga, ‘Calvin and Ecumenicity’, 149.

⁸Bratt, ‘John Calvin and Ecumenicity’, 17.

⁹Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, vii; cf. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 7–11; Reid, *Theological Treatises of John Calvin*, 13; Hall, *John Calvin Humanist and Theologian*, 5–6.

¹⁰The writer has used the latest printing of the 1536 *Institutes* by Ford Lewis Battles in 1995 while referring to *Calvini Opera Selecta* 1926, hereafter abbreviated as 1536 Inst. and OS.

¹¹1536 Inst., 58; ‘*Primus credimus sanctam ecclesiam catholicam*’; OS I, 86.

is all encompassing and all inclusive, and is not limited by space and time. It exists in all times and in all places. In this sense, catholicity can be understood to mean that the Church is one.¹² In other words, the Church is essentially one because of its catholicity. Calvin understood catholicity as unity. If the Church is catholic or universal, which in this case means one, then it is impossible to divide it into two or three churches. There is only one Church on earth, one body of Christ of which Christ is the head. In him as the head, all of the chosen are united and grow together into one body. Calvin wrote:

Now this society is catholic, that is, universal because there could not be two or three churches. But all God's elect are so united and conjoined in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:22–23) that, as they are dependent upon one head, they all grow together (cf. Eph. 4:16) like the limbs of one body (Roman. 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12, 27).¹³

The oneness of the Church according to Calvin is based in Christ. It is Christ who is the Church's centre and foundation. Therefore it is Christ who unifies the Church, because he is the head who leads and rules over the Church, as is explained in the following sentences: 'Of it, Christ Our Lord is Leader and Ruler and, as it were, Head of one body' ... 'But all God's elect are so united and conjoined in Christ, ... are dependent on one Head ...'.¹⁴ In other words, unity in Christ had become extremely important for Calvin. Where there is Christ, so also there is the Church. Hence, Calvin emphasised two living signs or symbols of the Church: the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments. He mentioned these because, in his view, Christ is present in both of them. So, for Calvin, the emphasis is put on Christ as the head, the only head, of the Church which is his body. The head of the Church is not the Pope who rules in Rome. Therefore it can be said that Calvin's thinking about the Church from the very beginning was, in essence, 'Christ-centered'.¹⁵

Following his affirmation that the Church is catholic, Calvin explained its content and scope as including:

the whole number of the elect, whether angels or men (Eph.1:9–10; Col.1:16), of men, whether dead or still living; of the living in whatever lands they live, or wherever among the nations, they have been scattered ...¹⁶

The Church consists of God's elect,¹⁷ angels or men, the living and the dead, who live in different lands and nations. They are united in one Church, one community and one congregation of God. What Calvin wanted to emphasise here was the invisible dimension of the Church. The Church is not only real and visible to human eyes, but also invisible. The visible Church is not always the rightful Church. That is why he said that the elect, the angels and the dead are included in the meaning of Church. Calvin emphasised that there is no limitation of space and time for those who are called the Church. In every place and nation where the Church can be found, it is unlimited and not restricted to the territory of the Pope's authority in Rome. The Church could expand and go beyond the frontier of the Roman empire. It remains those who are called as the catholic Church with Christ as the head.

¹²Cf. Hesselink, 'Calvinus Oecumenicus Calvin's Vision on the Unity of the Church', 99–100. See also Hesselink, *On Being Reformed*, 87.

¹³1536 Inst., 58; OS I, 86: '*Haec autem societas catholica est, universalis, quia non duas aut tres invenire liceat, verum electi Dei sic Omnes in Christo uniuntur ac coadunantur ut, ...*'

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 49; Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 247.

¹⁶1536 Inst., 58; OS I, 86.

¹⁷OS I, 86: '*universum electorum numerum*'.

It is interesting to see Calvin's further explanation of this election. For him, God's elect as the Church were chosen simply on the basis of God's grace and kindness, and such election did not just happen but was done before he created the universe. The purpose of God's election was to ensure that all God's people could be gathered into his kingdom, 'according as, through divine goodness, they have been chosen in him before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), in order that all might be gathered into God's kingdom.'¹⁸ The emphasis here is given to God's freedom, meaning that the election which happened before the foundation of the world was simply done with God's blessing. God's elect were not only determined, but elected far before their time. Therefore, the principle of the establishment of the Church was God's justification, and his election was behind it. Quoting Romans 8.30, Calvin said: 'Those whom he has chosen from men he calls; those whom he has called, he justifies; those whom he has justified, he glorifies.'¹⁹ Thus for the first time, Calvin spoke about election and predestination.

However, the kingdom of God was not just manifested on earth simply in a visible Church: it also included the invisible Church. The unity of the Church was also a unity in faith, hope and love. Moreover, this unity was created by the same Spirit. In the same Spirit they were called to inherit eternal life. Hence, 'These are made truly one who live together in one faith, hope and love, and in the same Spirit of God, called to the inheritance of eternal life.'²⁰

Indeed the Church is essentially one and the only one. Such unity was clearly established in Christ as the principal and head. Therefore, from the time of the Church's establishment with Christ as the head, church unity was already in existence. We could say in this case that the unity of the Church is a gift from God. But Calvin clearly recognised that in reality the Church tends to separate because of place or location and doctrinal issues. Apart from affirming unity as the essential feature of the Church, in this way he also asserted that it was our duty to exert ourselves to make it become more evident that 'They also grow together into one body, being joined and knit together as are the limbs of one body.'²¹

He further clarified that the Church, which is essentially one, holy, because it was well maintained by God, was adopted to be a part of his body and was sanctified by him. The holiness of the Church has to do with God and his work, not with the people who rule the Church: 'It is also holy because as many as have been chosen by God's eternal providence to be adopted as members of the church, all of these are made holy by the Lord.'²²

Calvin, when writing on church unity, saw the manifestation of this unity in the celebration of the Holy Communion. He believed that to celebrate the sacraments meant praying wholeheartedly so that we are filled with love, peace and unity. Since Christ has only one body of which we are called to partake, it is necessary for all of us to be joined through participation in Holy Communion. This oneness is symbolised by one bread with many kernels of grain, expressing a mutual bond. Calvin reflected on it in these words:

Because Christ has only one body, of it he makes us all partakers, it is necessary that all of us be made one body by such participation. ... in this way we should be joined and bound together by such great agreement of hearts that no sort of disagreement or division may intrude.²³

¹⁸1536 Inst., 58; OS I, 86.

¹⁹ibid.

²⁰ibid.

²¹ibid.

²²ibid.

²³Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 56.

Calvin gave the impression that he was opposed to schism and division. He viewed the sacraments, particularly Holy Communion, as a way of evading these matters. It is understandable from this that Calvin wanted the Holy Communion to be celebrated frequently.²⁴

What Calvin wrote in the first edition of the *Institutes* was developed further in the later editions. Several assertions stand out.²⁵ If in the first edition, he views the Church more as 'the mystical body of Christ', in this second edition he emphasises 'the visible church', that is, the visible dimension of the Church. Here for the first time he uses the term '*ecclesia visibilis*' and distinguishes between the Church's two dimensions, the invisible and the visible. Hence, the unity that he spoke of was to be applied to the visible Church. The visible Church must therefore manifest its unity. Though the catholic and universal Church is a gathering of chosen people who come from various nations and are scattered in different places. Still, they agree on the truth of the gospel and are bound to one another by the same faith. This shared truth and faith is what unites them. Church unity thus lies in holding and agreeing upon one true doctrine or, in other words, the unity of fundamental beliefs.²⁶

Calvin justifies the view that it is only through the Church that salvation can be attained. 'There is no salvation outside the church,' he wrote, borrowing the words of Cyprian of Carthage and applying them to the visible Church. Calvin intended to emphasise here that breaking away from the Church truly meant leaving the salvation that God has bestowed on us. Therefore, it was necessary for Christians to join together and remain in the Church. In so citing Cyprian and applying his words to the visible Church, he wanted to emphasise the need to protect their unity. According to Balke, Calvin places great emphasis on the necessity of maintaining the unity of the Church, by taking Cyprian's words and applying them to the visible Church.²⁷ Calvin's intention, mentioned above, is evident in his description of the visible Church, as 'the mother of all believers'. As a mother who carries, gives birth, raises, and offers life, it is not appropriate to break away from her because she is the only one who can grant salvation.²⁸ By this, he also intended to assert the importance for anyone to become a member of the Church and not to become estranged. According to Calvin, the Church is the mother of believers, mother of all of us, and Christ's bride.

In accordance with the above, and quoting Augustine, Calvin clarified the difference between *I believe in the Church* and *I believe the Church*. As the Church was not the subject of our faith but only the object, the correct expression is *I believe the church*.²⁹ The Church is the way of salvation which always places itself under God's authority. The subject of our faith is God. Therefore, to God we should say I believe in God, not in the Church. To believe the Church means to be convinced that we are members and that our salvation is firm; it relates to Christ's firmness which does not allow the believers to be taken away from him, torn apart. He is convinced that the truth will stand firm for us as long as we stay in the Church's womb. To believe the Church means to be a member of it. Consequently, the Church and its unity must be consistently maintained.³⁰ As Calvin wrote:

²⁴Abineno, *Johanes Calvin*, 21.

²⁵The text of the *Institutes* used is McNeill, *Institutes of Christian Religion*. Because this version consists of four volumes, the quotes were taken by reference to these books. Hereafter the abbreviations Inst. I, II, III, IV are used followed by chapter, point and code. The codes are 'b' for the 1539 edition; 'c' for 1543 edition.

²⁶Inst. IV. i. 9 (b).

²⁷See Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 112.

²⁸Inst. IV. i. 4 (b).

²⁹Inst. IV. i. 2 (b).

³⁰Inst. IV. i. 3 (b).

How we are to judge the Church visible, which falls within our knowledge, is, I believe, already evident from the above discussion ... Wherever we see the word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institutions, there, is not to be doubted, a church of God exists (cf. Eph.2:20).³¹

Calvin consistently regards the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments according to Christ's institution to be the signs which could identify and unite the Church at the same time.³² Therefore he further mentioned that in this way we preserve for the universal church its unity, which devilish spirits have always tried to sunder. As Calvin seriously and consistently remarked, with reference to the unity of the church, any tendency toward separatism is to be rejected. 'For', he wrote, 'the Lord esteems the communion of his Church so highly that he counts as a traitor and apostate from Christianity anyone who arrogantly leaves any Christian society, provided it cherishes the true ministry of Word and sacraments.'³³ Separatism according to him is a satanic word: 'For there is nothing that Satan plots more than to remove and do away with one or both of these. Sometimes he tries by heaping contempt upon them to drag us away from the church in open rebellion.'³⁴ He further stressed that having Christ as the head is an absolute requirement for unity, using an illustration from Cyprian to explain church unity which is Christ-centred.³⁵ Hence, we cannot separate ourselves from the visible Church. Maintaining community with the visible Church is a command. This he stressed with the words:

Just as we must believe, therefore, that the former church, invisible to us, is visible to the eyes of God alone, so we are commended to reserve and keep communion with the latter, which is called 'church' in respect to men.³⁶

We can conclude that the ecclesiastical issue became fundamental in Calvin's endeavour to renew the Church. What needs to be asked is why he deliberately emphasised the unity of the church and highlighted this as the fundamental issue. Firstly it was provoked by the accusations levelled against him by those who opposed the Reformation. They accused Calvin of creating a schism in the church which was ruled by the pope. For his accusers, the pope, his institutions and canon law were the signs of the one Catholic Church. For them, the Roman church was the one and only church because of the pope and its institutions. To oppose the pope and his institutions meant to destroy the Church. However, the opposite was true for Calvin. He and all the reformers were confident of the existence of one Church. But the Church was not the pope. On the contrary, for Calvin the pope was the anti-Christ since he had taken over Christ and his position. Calvin claimed that the pope and his followers were not the Church but a faction. The pope and his associates could not be categorised as the Church. Calvin definitely disapproved of the understanding which claimed that the unity of the Church lay in their hands. For him, the issue of unity was not a matter of *successio apostolica*, but *successio doctrinae*, that is one true faith witnessing to Jesus Christ and confessing one body of Christ, where Christ is the head; to believe that there is only one head of the Church, who is Jesus Christ, not the pope, bishop or one of the

³¹Inst. IV. i. 7 (b); Inst. IV. i. 9 (b).

³²Cf. text at notes 14 and 15 above.

³³Inst. IV. i. 10 (b)

³⁴Inst. IV. i. 11 (b)

³⁵Inst. IV. ii. 6 (c)

³⁶Inst. IV. i. 7 (c)

church hierarchy. The Church is God's congregation, Christ's body that is headed by Christ himself. Such belief and confession is that which is based on the Bible.

Therefore the accusation that evangelicals wanted to build their own church was not true. Calvin still confessed the existence of the true Catholic Church as the Church, since it had the Word and the Sacraments. The main point at issue, however, was the claim that the pope was the head of the Church and even Christ's representative on earth, so that all should obey him. This kind of ecclesiastical concept was not in accordance with the testimony of the Bible. The right ecclesiology according to Calvin was the ecclesiology of the people of God or the kingdom of God, not the ecclesiology of the pope. It is obvious here that Calvin was anti-hierarchical. The unity of the Church was not found in the pope and his church or in his hierarchy or in canon law. The Church and its forms can be various, but in spirit, there is only one body. Additionally, the unity of the Church was not based on the bishop but was created through obedience to Jesus Christ, the head. Christ's body, for Calvin, was equated with the kingdom of Christ or the kingdom of God, which was God's congregation. And Christ's body or the kingdom of God was not the visible head in Rome but the invisible head in heaven. As such, unity in Christ was not a structural matter of the Church but a spiritual matter.

The significance of Calvin's view on church unity for the churches of Indonesia

Historically the Indonesian churches, established through the evangelistic efforts of mission societies and the old Protestant Churches, differed from each other in their characteristics and Christian traditions. The awareness of this situation eventually encouraged the ecumenical movement in Indonesia. We focus here primarily on how Calvin's view of church unity was employed in the ecumenical movement which led to the establishment of the Council of Churches in Indonesia (DGI). Next it is important to understand how ecumenism developed and what kind of unity emerged from one General Assembly to another up to the formulation of the so-called *Lima Dokumen Keesaan Gereja* (LDKG or Five Documents of Church Unity) which later changed its name to *Dokumen Keesaan Gereja* (DKG or Documents on Church Unity).

From the history of Christianity's entering into Indonesia, we can see that the churches in Indonesia showed a diversity in their traditions and theology. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the entire Protestant community in Indonesia converged under one church organisation, which was a Reformed (*Gereformeerd*) one. This organisation was under the leadership of the consistory in Batavia and had close associations with the *Vereniging Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) government. However, by 1714 there had also been a Lutheran congregation in Batavia which was forced by the colonial government to join the Protestant Church in 1854.³⁷ On the other hand, in 1835, the *Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft* began working in Kalimantan and succeeded in creating a number of congregations that did not belong to the Protestant Churches. The *Nederlandsch Zendeling Genootschap* (NZG) which worked in East Java also successfully started several congregations which later gained independence. Meanwhile, in other areas as well, a number of independent churches took shape. In the Minahasa (North Sulawesi) the NZG formed several

³⁷De Bruijn, 'The Lutheran Congregation at Batavia 1743–1800', 26; cf. Van den End, *Ragi Carita* 2, 381.

congregations which were annexed to the Protestant Church in 1875 due to the colonial government's purpose to have only one Protestant Church in Indonesia. As a result, until the 1940s, the Protestants in Indonesia were divided into two major groups, the Protestant Church on the one hand and the churches formed by missionary institutions on the other.³⁸ However, between 1934 and 1948 the Protestant Church in Indonesia broke up into four churches, thus ending its special status as a uniting forum in Indonesia. By the middle of the twentieth century, missionaries from various denominations in America and elsewhere entered Indonesia. In general, these denominations had Pentecostal and Charismatic traits. Consequently, an ecclesiastical diversity came about in Indonesia.

Ecumenical efforts toward unity were inspired by a spirit of nationalist unity which came about during the time of the Indonesian nationalist movement in the early twentieth century. The effect of the Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 was a revival of self confidence among colonised nations in Asia to fight for freedom from colonisation. For that, national unity was needed. Thus Asian nationalism grew and Indonesian nationalism with it, starting from regional gathering groups, which sporadically fought its battle, but in the end everything centred around Indonesian nationalism. All regional movements joined in the national movement with the aim of being freed from colonialism and of developing a modern Indonesia. Therefore, national unity was seen to be essential. This enthusiasm gave birth on 28 October 1928 to *Sumpah Pemuda* (The Oath of the Youth), which specifies 'One homeland, one nation, one language'.³⁹ In this oath the Indonesian youth expressed its commitment to free their nation from colonisation and become independent. This spirit of national unity and totality also infiltrated the churches. Churches born from single national ethnic backgrounds realised the importance of this unity and totality within their own church in order further to advance the Indonesian national movement.

Thus, attempts towards church unity started and were led until 1942 by Europeans, though Indonesians also carried out these attempts between 1942 and 1945; and the Japanese occupation forces also did so for political reasons. Finally, after independence in 1945, the Indonesian Christians themselves continued these efforts.⁴⁰ Regarding their early ecumenical efforts, it is important to mention the names of several pre-war ecumenical organisations. The *Christen Studenten Vereniging op Java* (The Christian Students Association in Java), formed in 1926, was a medium for university students from various churches and denominational backgrounds. In 1928 followed the *Christen Jonge Vrouwen Federatie* (The Christian Young Womens Federation). The rise of these groups was influenced by the spirit of nationalism as shown in the Oath of the Youth that unity is essential. The formation of the *Hoogere Theologische School* (Theological College) in 1934 provided opportunities for young people from different churches to meet, socialise and live together. However, all these forums were limited to bringing together individuals, not churches.

The first attempt to bring together churches and congregations began among the Chinese Indonesian Christians. They created a *Bond Kristen Tionghoa* (Association of Chinese Christians) in 1927 as a uniting forum for Christians in general and congregations specifically.⁴¹ Later, in 1939, a conference of churches and Protestant mission organisations

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Hartono, *Gerakan Ekumenis di Indonesia*, 38; cf. DGI, *Dua Puluh Lima Tahun DGI*, 12.

⁴⁰Van den End, *Ragi Carita 2*, 382–3.

⁴¹Ibid, 384; cf. Hartono, *Gerakan Ekumenis di Indonesia*, 33.

was held to discuss the formation of a National Christian Council (*Raad van Kerken en Zending in Nederlands Indië*). During the Japanese occupation, churches in the Central and South Sulawesi regions founded a uniting Christian forum called *Dewan Kristen Sulawesi* (Christian Council in Sulawesi) in 1942, pioneered by a Japanese navy chaplain, Revd. S. Miyahira. This regional council included the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Adventist Church, the Pentecostal Church, and even the Roman Catholic Church. Meanwhile, the Masehi Churches in Ambon-syu (*Geredja-geredja Masehi di Ambon-Syu*) joined together in 1943 as a Regional Church with the Roman Catholic Church, the Salvation Army, the Adventist and Pentecostal Churches. Then during 1946–1947 two councils were created which can be understood as Regional Councils of Churches, namely: *Dewan Permoesjawaratan Geredja-geredja di Indonesia* (The Deliberative Council of the Churches in Indonesia) formed in 1946 in Yogyakarta, which included six churches on Java; and a *Madjelis Oesaha Bersama Geredja-geredja Kristen* (Board for Mutual Efforts of the Christian Churches) which was formed in 1947 at the Malino conference held in Malino (South Sulawesi) and attended by all the churches from the Eastern parts of Indonesia. This Board had an office in Makassar and included the churches in Sulawesi and in Eastern Indonesia. It was these councils which actually initiated the Council of Churches in Indonesia.

Through various influences from several International Christian Conferences, such as the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1948 in Amsterdam, a Planning Committee was formed to found the Council of Churches in Indonesia. The suggestion to form a Planning Committee came from three public figures who were also pioneers in the formation of Church Councils or Commissioners in their own regions. They are Revd T. Sihombing of the Lutheran Batak Protestant Christian Church in Sumatra, Revd B. Probowinoto of the Reformed Churches in Central Java (GKJ), and Revd W.J. Rumambi of the Reformed Evangelical Protestant Church in Minahasa. They met in Jakarta on 23 January 1948, and then sent a letter to a number of prominent Christians and church leaders with the suggestion that they should set up a Planning Committee, which would arrange the formation of a Council of Churches in Indonesia.⁴² The task of the Planning Committee was to prepare material for the preliminary ecumenical conference, which was held from 6 to 12 November 1949, in Jakarta, and attended by representatives from 29 churches.⁴³ Then, that same month, Rumambi, who at the time served as General Secretary of the *Madjelis Oesaha Bersama Geredja-geredja Kristen* with lots of ecumenical experience, both nationally and internationally, sent a memo to the Planning Committee. The memo contained points of thought that were intended to provide guidelines to the Planning Committee in carrying out its work. In the memo he articulated the motivation behind the concept of a Council which had to cooperate closely with the International Missionary Council. He also stated the support from various groups, namely the Protestant Church in Indonesia and the so-called *Zendingsconsulaat* for the founding of such a Planning Committee.⁴⁴ The *Zendingsconsulaat* was created in 1906 as a representative body of all Protestant mission societies which were working in Indonesia.

⁴²DGI, *Dua Puluh Lima Tahun DGI*, 16.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁴Hartono, *Gerakan Ekumenis di Indonesia*, 66–7.

Then finally, the Council of Churches in Indonesia was formed. At Pentecost, 25 May 1950, 27 churches, mostly Calvinist, attended the meeting where that Council was launched as a forum for consultation and common efforts by the joint Indonesian churches.⁴⁵ The forming of the Council of Churches in Indonesia was announced in a manifesto, dated 25 May 1950, which states:

We, participants of the Conference for the formation of the Council of Churches in Indonesia, hereby declare, that the Council of Churches in Indonesia is already founded, as a place of consultation and common effort of the churches in Indonesia towards the unity of the churches in Indonesia, as stated in the constitution of the Council of Churches in Indonesia already decided by the conference on 25 May, 1950. We believe that the founding of the Council of Churches in Indonesia as an effort towards the implementation of God's message to His people, is simply God's grace. We trust this council into the hand of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. May God always keep its going out and coming in from this time on and for evermore, for the glory of the Lord in the world.⁴⁶

This founding formula displayed the uniqueness of the Council of Churches in Indonesia and set it apart from other similar councils in other countries, for the formation of a United Christian Church in Indonesia is mentioned as its clear and explicit aim.

Two of the significant figures mentioned above, Probowinoto and Rumambi, came from Calvinist churches. Hence the role of prominent Calvinists in the formation of the Council of Churches in Indonesia is significant. Chris Hartono has remarked that Rumambi's memo was highly valuable in its connection with the ecumenical movement in Indonesia, especially with regards to the pace of processing the existence of the Council of Churches in Indonesia.⁴⁷ Also during the formation of the Council of Churches in Indonesia, the Calvinist churches played an important role through their leader. In this respect, Aritonang's remark is important that one supporting factor for that role was the insights of the unity of the church inspired by Calvin, in a similar way as when the World Alliance of the Reformed Churches was formed in 1875.⁴⁸ If we look back to Calvin and Beza, both proposed the need to have meetings and discussions between the reformation churches in their time.⁴⁹

The name 'Council of Churches in Indonesia' was changed to 'Communion of Churches in Indonesia' (CCI) during the tenth assembly in Ambon in 1984. By 2016, the membership of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia had increased to a total of 88 churches.⁵⁰ The largest among them are Calvinist,⁵¹ the others Pentecostal and Evangelical.

⁴⁵NB: The churches which attended the opening conference of the Council of Churches in Indonesia were the Batak Protestant Christian Church, the Protestant Batak Karo Church, the Methodist Church in Indonesia, the Protestant Christian Church on Nias, the Evangelical Kalimantan Church, the Protestant Church in Indonesia, the Protestant Church in West Indonesia, the Pasundan Christian Church, the (Mennonite) Evangelical Church in Java, the Java Christian Churches, the East Java Christian Church, the Indonesia Christian Church in West Java, the Indonesia Christian Church in Central Java, the Indonesia Christian Church in East Java, the Bali Protestant Christian Church, the Sumba Christian Church, the Evangelical Christian Church on Sangir Talaut, the Evangelical Christian Church in Minahasa, the Evangelical Christian Church in Bolaang Mangondow, the Christian Church in Central Sulawesi, the Christian Church in South Sulawesi, the Protestant Church in South East Sulawesi, the Evangelical Christian Church in Halmahera, the Protestant Church in the Moluccas, the Mamasa Toraja Church and the Toraja Church. See Hartono, *Gerakan Ekumenis di Indonesia*, 77.

⁴⁶Ngelow, *Jalan Keesaan DGI*, 43; Aritonang and Steenbrink, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 833.

⁴⁷Hartono, *Gerakan Ekumenis di Indonesia*, 67

⁴⁸Aritonang, *Garis Besar Sejarah Reformasi*, 136.

⁴⁹See de Jonge, *Menuju Keesaan Gereja*, 60.

⁵⁰Data taken from the www.pgi.or.id

⁵¹See Bauswein and Vischer, *The Reformed Family Worldwide*, 220–70. There are 48 Reformed/Calvinist Churches belongs to the PGI except the GRRRI.

Unity in structure

If we observe the Indonesian churches' way of thinking about unity, we may see that there are two outstanding lines of thought. The first accentuates structure and is thus referred to as structural or organisational unity. This idea appeared for the first time during the sixth Assembly of the CCI in 1967 in the concept of *Sinode Oikumene Gereja-gereja di Indonesia* (SINOGI or the Ecumenical Synod of Churches in Indonesia). This idea, however, was coolly received by assembly participants and therefore failed. It resurfaced much later, just before the 12th Assembly of the CCI in 1994, offering a new and concrete structure called *Gereja Kristen Yang Esa di Indonesia* (GKYE or the United Christian Church in Indonesia/UCCI).⁵² The issue of structure was raised yet again during the 13th Assembly of the CCI in Palangkaraya in March, 2000. The CCI's journey up until then was regarded as incapable of translating the churches' goal of creating concrete unity into reality. It was even said that although its formation had been repeatedly 'studied' and 'attempted', the United Christian Church in Indonesia had not yet been realised. Some of the church activists who were ecumenically minded were not satisfied with the formula contained in the Basic Order of the CCI, and its members were encouraged to proclaim the formation of the United Christian Church in Indonesia (UCCI).⁵³ In fact, at that Assembly it was agreed that the outcome of the Document on Church Unity (DKG) was the formation of the UCCI. The churches struggled throughout the period 2000 to 2005 to agree the exact shape and form it would take for the churches. Churches in Indonesia were reportedly ready to actualise and proclaim the UCCI in Indonesia as a result of an encounter with the Lord.⁵⁴

Spiritual unity

The second line of thought accentuated unity as a sense of spiritual unity that is unity in Christ; in other words unity in confessing basic Christian faith and unity in mutual recognition and acceptance of each other. This kind of unity is expressed in togetherness for witness and ministry in Indonesia, and therefore, sometimes called functional unity. This form of unity was shown in the Five Documents of Church Unity (LDKG) as the decision of the 10th Assembly in 1984. These five documents are: The Outline of the Mission of Common Calling (PTPB), Statement on Mutual Profession (Understanding) about Christian Faith in Indonesia (PBIK), Charter of Mutual Recognition and Acceptance of the Member Churches of the CCI (PSMSM), Constitution of the CCI (TDPGI) and Towards Self-Reliance in Theology, Manpower and Funds (MKTDD). Later on it was included in the Document of Church Unity (DKG), in accordance with the decision of the 13th Assembly in 2000, when that Assembly changed the name LDKG to DKG. It is said that DKG was the culmination of all endeavours to give content and form to that unity up to the present.

In general we can say that the churches have felt quite satisfied with the DKG. Although the DKG have been agreed and accepted as the content and form of church unity in Indonesia, yet we cannot close our eyes to the rise of discontent here and there either, especially among theologians. In a situation such as this, it may benefit us to draw something

⁵²Titaley, *PGI dan LDKG Menuju Gereja Kristen Yang Esa di Indonesia*, 14–16.

⁵³Aritonang et al., *50 Tahun PGI Gereja di Abad 21 Konsiliasi untuk Keadilan, Perdamaian dan Keutuhan Ciptaan*, 305–6.

⁵⁴Ibid.

from the ideas of unity which Calvin put forth in his time with the awareness, of course, that his context differed from ours. What is important to say is that Calvin never set the establishment of a church organisational structure as the goal of his struggle for unity. He did not try to overcome diversity and disunity within the reformed church by proposing a church institutional structure that could be valid for everyone. He also never intended to formulate a 'church name' and then impose it upon the various existing reformed groups to appear as though there was only one church such as the 'Reformed Protestant Church'. In other words, church unity which was organisation-orientated was foreign to his thinking. He did not question the variety of church structures found in reformed church circles in various places. The issue of structure was never viewed as the basic question in the context of unity.

Attitudes and views like this, if attended to and pondered deeply, can be beneficial for the churches in Indonesia, for if we wisely turn our attention to the history of the church unity movement in Indonesia, we will note that emphasis on organisational structure as the goal of unity was never an urgent problem. This line of thinking was strong at the beginning, in the middle, and continues even after 50 years of ecumenism for the churches in Indonesia. But what has been the result? Has structural unity ever been achieved? Apparently not. Churches in Indonesia have never achieved one organisational structure for all. On the contrary when the idea was raised, it was not warmly received by the churches. Thus, the churches in Indonesia need to be wise about their own history. Moreover, when the concept of unity in the form of DKG for the first time was expounded in the 1984 Assembly, all the churches within the DGI accepted it warmly.

Conclusion

If asked what kind of unity would be more suited to the situation of the churches in Indonesia, in the author's opinion it would be unity like the Document on Church Unity (DKG). For in these documents an attempt was made to embody unity in the form of understanding the fundamentals of belief or the basics of the Christian faith. In other words, the unity of the church lies in the confession of faith, in the recognition of those matters most essential to the Christian faith. This is the kind of unity which is contained in the Common Understanding of the Christian Faith (PBIK) founded in the DKG. But also unity in terms of mutual recognition and mutual acceptance as embodied in the text of the Charter of Mutual Recognition and Acceptance (PSMSM), the other document of DKG. These two documents of DKG express a unity that is in line with the thinking of unity developed by Calvin. Therefore we can say that the path to unity for the churches in Indonesia up until the conception of the DKG has not deviated from the direction and the path to unity which was developed by the 'spiritual father' of the Protestant Churches, John Calvin. Unity like that described in the Documents of Christian Unity is suitable for the churches in Indonesia.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Agustinus M.L. Batlajery has been a lecturer in Systematic Theology at the Faculty of Theology of the Indonesian Christian University in the Moluccas (UKIM), Ambon, Indonesia, since 1986. His

doctorate, from the Free University in Amsterdam (2010), was entitled, ‘The Unity of the Church according to Calvin and it’s Meaning for the Churches in Indonesia.’ His published works include: ‘Calvin and Servetus: a Case of Violence and Calvin’s involvement’, in Dirk van Keulen and Martien E. Brinkman (eds), *Studies in Reformed Theology, Christian Faith and Violence 2* (2005); and, with Th. van den End, he was editor of *Ecclesia Reformata Semper Reformanda* (2014).

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