



INDONESIAN CATHOLIC STUDENTS AND THEIR SOCIETY

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Indonesia, a tropical country in South East Asia, is a young nation. In this country composed of many islands, Christ's voice has also been heard. More and more young people are joining His young Church and, grounded in His principles, they are in the frontline, taking their full responsibilities as the Catholic leaders of tomorrow, building up a nation to which His faith and spirit will not be strange.

To gain a better understanding of the Indonesian Catholic student, one must also understand student society in general in Indonesia with its several student organizations.

The student world can be said to reflect the political world in Indonesia, which is a multi-party system. The country is governed according to the principle of party representation in parliament; the political parties (there are about 25) can be classified by their basic philosophies which are of three kinds: Nationalist, Religious and Marxist. The students, having already been involved in the revolution for independence - a revolution in which the students formed one of the frontiers in resisting the Dutch Government and for which many of them sacrificed years of study and often their lives - realized that their task was not yet finished after Indonesian independence had been recognized. And so, student organizations were established which, like the political parties of the country, were based on the three basic philosophies mentioned earlier.

Next, these students organized their groups into a National Union of Indonesian Students so that they might become more effective not only in improving academic courses but in taking an active part in developing their country as well. The Catholic students, almost the smallest minority in Indonesia were one of the founders of the National Union.

In the middle of our revolution for independence, the Catholic students of Indonesia strengthened themselves by forming a union, the PMKRI (Perhimpunan Mahasiswa Katolik Republik Indonesia - Union of Catholic University Students of Indonesia). When it was born, the PMKRI was composed of 4 branches, located in the four university cities of Djakarta, Bandung, Jogjakarta, and Surabaya. Now, after 10 years, it has 10 branches, growing with the increase in the number of universities. As a founder and member of the National Union of Indonesian Students which, in the international student world is

recognized as the legitimate representative of all Indonesian students, the PMKRI takes part in the policy-making of the students of Indonesia.

The basic philosophy of the PMKRI is: "Pro Ecclesia et Patria", For Church and Fatherland: Catholicism and Nationalism. We believe that these two allegiances cannot be in contradiction. We believe that to be a good Catholic, the student has a duty to be a good nationalist. By this we mean that Catholic students cannot be separated from their society, that they ought to feel a responsibility towards their nation; they ought to have a national consciousness, be aware of the fact that students have a special task and an important role in developing our country. Indeed, we feel it is a great privilege to be called "leader of tomorrow", but great as this privilege is, the responsibility of that status is even greater. We must prove to ourselves and to our people that it is worthwhile to give us this privilege.

According to this philosophy of "Pro Ecclesia et Patria", we organized our activities. The Djakarta branch, for example, has about 500 members. About 40% of these are non-Catholic. You may well ask why they joined us. Most of them say they have sympathy for our organization and its work. It is up to the PMKRI as a whole to help them find a fuller answer to the question of why they have joined us. Various religious activities are arranged for both Catholic and non-Catholic students and each year we find a couple of students who, having first joined as observers, become full members of Christ's Church.

In addition to "religious affairs", we have a section in charge of "educational affairs". Current problems of the country or government or teachings of the Church and how they can be applied to our society, are discussed at meetings arranged for this purpose. Indonesia is a young country and the desire for education is very great. Increasing numbers of students are attending the elementary and high schools and universities. Our greatest obstacle to education is the lack of teachers and buildings. Students have a responsibility to help their nation in solving this problem. The Djakarta branch set up a secondary school which has been operating now for almost 5 years and is completely administered by the students themselves. The teachers are also students. In this way, the students try to contribute something to solving the problem of the increasing numbers who desire education and the lack of teachers. The student is trained in this way to take on his responsibilities towards his people. He must use some of his study time and gets very low payment for this work.

Where do we get the money to run the school? This is a question we ourselves must answer time and again. It is obtained in many different ways. Other sections of the PMKRI, such as "cultural affairs", help us to obtain the needed money. For instance, cultural entertainment is organized and tickets sold. Besides developing the students' cultural talents, such programs also assist in giving the students a sense of responsibility towards their society.



The Church in Indonesia is a young Church, and it is growing. Indonesia counts about 80 million people. Of these, 989,047 are Catholic laymen. The 988 priests assisted by nuns and brothers brings the total number of religious to 2,937. This means that for every 1,100 Catholics there is only one priest. With an illiteracy rate in Indonesia of about 50%, it is indeed the students who ought to play an important role in assisting the government to build up the nation. And also in the smaller community of the Catholic Church in Indonesia, the Catholic student must prove that he has justified the trust placed in him as the Catholic leader of tomorrow.

The "Priok Ksi" is one of the activities which challenge the student to prove that he has realized the meaning of the basic principle - Pro Ecclesia et Patria. Priok, or rather Tandjonk Priok, is the name of Djakarta harbor. In this harbor area, too, one finds Christ's Church. The Catholics there are mostly migrants from Flores, one of the smaller islands of Indonesia, east of Java. Flores was one of the islands with a relatively high Catholic population but because it was not one of the richer islands, many people migrated and settled in Priok, especially after the war. They are mostly young people or young families with only a fourth grade education. Many of them, especially the women, are still illiterate. Although they live in a special area of Priok, these Catholics are scattered among laborers of other religions and ideas. Their way of living is not always as we like to see our laborers live. For more than a thousand Catholics there is only one priest. He asked assistance from the students in taking care of his parishoners. Could we refuse? Could we call ourselves Catholic students if we had said that we had no more free time, that we were too busy with our studies? And so every Sunday morning a group of students leaves the city and visits the people in this harbor area. It is arranged that a student goes only once every two weeks. These students assist the priest who cannot visit his parishoners regularly. They assist the priest so that these people will not lose contact with the Church. Here, the student gets the chance, if he wants to use it, to talk to these people about their needs and their everyday life. It is difficult to describe how grateful these people are for the Sunday visits. It is shown by their trust in sharing their problems with us. It is shown in their pride that the student wants to visit them and to understand their problems. Indeed, this fact must remind the student again and again that a great responsibility is waiting for him.

With the assistance of some alumni, the "Priok Aksi" has been able to set up a health center for the harbor area. Although it is just a small center, it is here that these people get their first medical help. Here again, the student faces his worst problem - money. Since there are no rich foundations to provide the nation with funds, as many students as possible must be involved in fund raising as a project. Since it is very difficult to raise money merely by asking for it, the students must find other means of obtaining it. They might give a cultural entertainment or sell special commercial products to large firms, for which they get a commission. From the students themselves we can hardly expect a material contribution. Many of them have to work for their tuition, room and board in addition to all the activities in which they are engaged. The most a student can give is part of his study time.

Some readers may wonder why the student should be involved in all these activities? Might it not be better if he finished his studies first and then gave all his time to his people? This might be better and more efficient in a country where there is a sufficient number of educated people. But in Indonesia where only 50% of the population is literate and only a small percentage well educated, we cannot afford to take this line of action. The student may take more time to finish his studies, but the time is not wasted - not for his people who need his assistance so desperately. Neither is the time wasted for the student. When they have finished their studies and begun their professional life, most of them agree that they have gained something most useful - an understanding, through experience, of what his society looks like, of what he can expect from it.

Because all our activities are on a voluntary basis, things are not always wonderful, easy or successful. But the contribution that the student makes, no matter how small, is always welcomed in our young Indonesia. We depend most of all on those students who have shown leadership capability. Theirs is the very difficult task of convincing their fellow students that it is a privilege to be a student but a privilege that brings with it a very great responsibility. A difficult task indeed, but with our Faith, we believe, hope and pray that more and more of our Catholic fellow students will become aware of the meaning of "Pro Ecclesia et Patria".

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