IN SEARCH OF A CHRISTIAN PUBLIC THEOLOGY
IN THE INDONESIAN CONTEXT TODAY

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Abstract: This article deals with the contemporary task of Christian public theology in constructing a contextual model that is able to maintain the dialectic of commonality and particularity. Such a model must pay attention to the search for common ground among many cultural-religious identities, while at the same time it must respect those identities in their own paticularities. The sensitivity to and solidarity with the victims of the New Order's' regime must also be fundamental elements of such a model. To do so, this article discusses two competing theories in social philosophy (liberalism and communitarianism), and their parallel theories in theology (revisionism and post-liberalism). The necessity to construct a more balanced third way between those theories is needed, if Indonesian Christians want to be open to their social and political call and faithful to their Christian distinctiveness.

Keywords: Public theology, liberalism, communitarianism, revisionism, post-liberalism, commonality, particularity.

Abstrak: Artikel ini membahas tugas kontemporer teologi publik Kristen dalam mengkonstruksi sebuah model kontekstual yang mampu memper-tahankan dialektika kesamaan dan kekhususan. Model semacam ini haruslah memperhatikan usaha menemukan dasar bersama di antara banyak identitas kultural-religius, sekaligus pada saat bersamaan meng-hargai identitas-identitas tersebut di dalam keunikan mereka masing-masing. Kepekaan dan solidaritas pada para korban di bawah rejim Order Baru di masa silam harus menjadi unsur-unsur mendasar bagi model semacam itu. Artikel ini mendiskusikan dua teori yang saling bersaing di dalam filsafat sosial (liberalisme dan komunitarianisme), dan teori-teori sejajar di dalam teologi (revisionisme dan pascaliberalisme). Tuntutan untuk mengkonstruksi sebuah jalan ketiga yang lebih seimbang antara

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teori-teori tersebut sungguh dibutuhkan, jika orang-orang Kristen Indonesia ingin berbuka pada panggilan sosial dan politis mereka sembari tetap setia pada keunikan Kristiani mereka.

Kata-kata Kunci: Teologi publik, liberalisme, komunitarianisme, revisionisme, pascaliberalisme, komunalitas, partikularitas.

INTRODUCTION

As one of the most complicated countries in the world, Clifford Geertz states, Indonesia is "the product of an incredible stream of warring mind-sets."[1] He continues by saying that the task of articulating the spiritual anatomy and unifying identity of this country is, although impossible, "one that anybody who has seriously to do with the place, either from within or without, is inevitably constrained somehow to attempt."[2] Geertz himself has dedicated his scholarly expertise to this task. His interest in Indonesian studies, particularly his research on the Javanese culture, has resulted in voluminous works. The purpose of this article is to do the task Geertz has already given, from my perspective as an Indonesian Christian who has been struggling with the socio-political reality of my society.

Geertz is right in saying that in the Indonesian case the heart of the matter is "the way in which, and the degree to which, the contrasting aspects of the overall conglomerate are to be represented in the formulation of Indonesian identity."[3] In other words, the task of defining the common identity should be focused on the dialectic between recognizing particular identities of its members and finding commonalities among diverse communities. Overlooking one aspect of the twofold task could make the discovery of the common identity implausible.

Geertz wrote the article in 1995, three years before the collapse of Suharto's regime. The era after Suharto has been parodoxical; it has been colored not only by a fresh hope for an authentic democracy, but also by

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1 Clifford Geertz, *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 253.

2 Clifford Geertz, *Available Light*, p. 253.

3 Clifford Geertz, *Available Light*, p. 255.

massive ethno-religious violence. It has been clearly demonstrated that, while in Suharto's rule the cultural and religious particularities had been abandoned for more than three decades, the aftermath of his downfall showed a rejection of any "canopied pluralism," to borrow Robert Hefner's words.[4] Hefner's "canopied pluralism" should be understood in the perspective of his fundamental thesis: The Western world did not pioneer cultural pluralism, nor was such pluralism an invention of the modern Indonesia.

Rather, Indonesia and other countries in Southeast Asia "have their own rich histories of diversity and participation."[5] Hefner uses the term "canopied pluralism" to describe the fact that the cultural diversity during the pre-modern era had been canopied by a trans-ethnic Malay-Indonesian civilization.

In Suharto's modern era, however, it is the strange mixture of Javanese cultural hegemony and economic developmentalism that canopied Indonesian ethno-religious diversity. Both cultural and economic dominations were closely intertwined, guarding the political power that Suharto had held for thirty-two years. The cultural hegemony was obvious in the way the New Order government employed the Javanese culture as the underlying grammar for articulating political discourse. The result was easily predictable, that is, the fears of "Javanisation," so to speak, have stoked ethnic conflicts. Yet, through military power he was able to control ethnic *ressentiment*. In the last years of his regime, Suharto made an "Islamic turn" as he sought a new legitimacy by approaching Muslim communities—unfortunately, the conservative ones—which had been depoliticized before. This move was certainly a fatal failure. Not only was his regime unable to sustain power, but this move also made the cultural and political problems worse. Indonesia after Suharto had to experience a vast amount of bloody ethno-religious violence. The emergence of religious

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4   Robert W. Hefner, "Introduction: Multiculturalism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia," in *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), p. 12.

5   Robert W. Hefner, "Introduction," p. 42.

violence was indicated by the escalation of the burning or destruction of church buildings, religious war in Ambon involving Christians and Muslims, and the bombing of public facilities by Muslim fundamentalists.[6]

Besides cultural and religious tensions, the Indonesian people had also experienced economic repression under Suharto's developmentalist strategy, which had caused massive economic disparity and injustice. The corruption in Suharto's New Order was so systemic, institutionalized, and culturalized that in the years after the downfall of the regime (1999-2004), Indonesia has never reached any significant improvement. The violation of economic rights was not the worst violation commited by the regime. That violation was closely related to other human rights violations. This tells us clearly that the problem of injustice truly needs to be addressed if we want to rediscover the Indonesian identity.

I have described very briefly the reality in which the majority of Indonesian people were marginalized in almost every aspect of their social life (culturally, economically, and politically) during Suharto's regime. The attempt to find a new Indonesian identity ever since the collapse of the New Order has not shown any significant results. The situation became even worse more than a decade after Suharto's collapse, proving that the damage has been so institutionalized that no substantial change could take place immediately.

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6   The figure below demonstrates the number of the destroyed Christian church buildings throughout Indonesia, which are always preceded or followed by terrorism against the Christians, especially during their religious activities. See Eka Darmaputera, "Pancasila Sebagai Satu-Satunya Asas Dalam Kehidupan Bermasyarakat, Berbangsa Dan Bernegara: Sebuah Evaluasi Ulang," in *Agama-Agama Memasuki Milenium Ketiga*, ed. Martin L. Sinaga (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2000), p. 148.

Period	N	%	Average/year
1945 - 1954	0	0	0
1955 - 1964	2	0	0.2
1965 - 1974	46	13	4.2
1975 - 1984	89	24	8.9
1985 - 1994	132	35	13.2
1996 - 1997	105	28	52.5

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

However severe is the situation that Indonesian people are facing, I believe that the remedy should be found by initially redefining the Indonesian identity and by helping those who have been victimied in the past to recover. To do this, I focus my article on the issue of recognition of the particular identities of every ethno-cultural group vis-à-vis the discovery of commonalities among diverse groups. The result of the rediscovery should also be sensitivity to the victims of injustice and human rights violations. Thus, the notion of self is necessarily important in the task.

I limit myself, however, to approaching the issue from the Christian theological perspective. The specific issue that I have described above is also predominant within theological discourse, especially one between two competing streams in the Christian theology: the post-liberals and the revisionists. As competing models, both theologies offer very different ways of approaching the relationship between Christianity and the surrounding culture or the social world. Of course, the debate has been long prevalent in the theological discipline, but the relevance is still obvious. The two figures who will be discussed are David Tracy (a revisionist) and Stanley Hauerwas (a post-liberal). It will be more helpful, however, not to concentrate on the debate itself, but on the discovery of a middle point between both opposing theories. To do so, I would examine the proposal that Jeffery Stout makes in bridging liberalism and communitarianism, especially from his conversation with Stanley Hauerwas.

It is important, firstly, to understand the philosophical background of the issue. What we have is the dialectic between commonality versus particularity, involving two competing groups, namely, liberalism and communitarianism. It is almost impossible to bring forward a generalized picture of what these theories are, since the variants within each theory are so broad and complex and there have also been several proposals attempting to combine or transcend both theories. Yet, the distinction that Rainer Forst describes is useful to justify the use of the labels. He suggests

that liberalism tends to be "context-forgetful," whereas communitarianism tends to be "context-obsessed."[7]

The liberals recognize the necessity of certain primary values transcending particular contexts. In so doing, they make a claim to universal validity that becomes one of their core principles. The values are to be valid for all and must be justified reasonably and publicly. Consequently, any private belief such as religious belief, John Rawls argues, should not be brought into the public sphere. Jeffrey Stout summarizes Rawls' argument succinctly,

> Religious premises cannot be part of the basis on which citizens can reason in common, because not all citizens share the same religious commitments, and nobody knows how to bring about agreement on such matters by rational means. Religion is a topic on which citizens are epistemologically (as well as morally and legally) entitled to disagree.[8]

The context-forgetfulness of liberalism is also unavoidable when the proponents of this position apply their principles to the notion of self. For them, there should be a common nature of the self independent of any context. This is to say that the image of the human being in this theory is so atomistic and abstracted from any particular context that one could find oneself together with others behind a "veil of ignorance," through which they would not know their particular identity such as race, gender, religion, etc. Their communitarian interlocutors call such a self "unencumbered" (Sandel), "ghostly" (MacIntyre), or "neutral" (Taylor).

On the contrary, communitarianism's context-obsessedness appears in the way this theory overemphasizes the importance of community as the authentic locus of values. Those values become the "normative horizons"[9] that constitute the identity of its members. Thus, in this theory we find a strong notion of self dependent on and situated in a particular

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7   Rainer Forst, *Contexts of Justice: Political Philosophy Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 5.

8   Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 68.

9   Rainer Forst, *Contexts of Justice*, p. 2.

context. Apart from community the self cannot find its identity and the meaning of life.

These two major theories have dominated the contemporary political and philosophical conversation, especially in the West. Nevertheless, it is also true that the fundamental problem that they deal with is significantly present in the theological polemic between the revisionists and the postliberals, to which we now move.

THEOLOGY BETWEEN PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY

The revisionist theology of David Tracy agrees in general with the standpoint taken by philosophical liberalism that there should be certain universal values transcending particular contexts. Yet, to some extent he is also critical of modern liberal theology, whose basic faith is the same faith shared by its secular contemporaries. The revisionist theology, on the contrary, emphasizes its twofold commitment that critically challenges both the self-understanding of secularity and the self-understanding of Christianity. By being faithful to this commitment, revisionist theology can perform its task as "philosophical reflection upon the meanings present in common human experience and the meanings present in the Christian tradition."[10] These two dimensions characterize Tracy's correlation method that maintains both Christian tradition and common human experience as sources for theology, investigated through a hermeneutic process. Although in the majority of cases such a process yields similarities-in-differences or analogies, sometimes it can also result in either identical or conflicting visions of religion and the wider public. All of these possibilities could happen insofar as we endeavor to discover "mutually critical" correlation. Thus, this particular method of interpretation enables us to come to certain commonalities among different traditions—or, more precisely, between Christian tradition and wider publics—without either denying the otherness of others or abandoning our own integrity.

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10 David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order, the New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 34.

Furthermore, Tracy argues that Christian theology should always be public discourse, which addresses all people by using a commonly acceptable criterion, i.e., "common human experience." However, any public theology also becomes a philosophical reflection on the very center of Christian tradition, which is God. He forcefully argues that if theologians, "are not involved, at least implicitly, in speech about God, then they are not involved in public theological discourse."[11] In other words, the public character of theology comes from its radically theocentric nature.

The distinction of the three types of public in Tracy's theology — church, society, and academy — could also be relevant for our discussion. A public theologian should not be an individual external to these public environments, since the theologian, "like any other human being, has been socialized into a particular society and a particular academic tradition and has been enculturated into one particular culture."[12]

The strength of Tracy's revisionist model lies precisely in its ability to deal with the pluralist reality. The model enables theologians to put the Christian tradition into a conversation with modernity as well as with other religious traditions. But he also suggests that our engagement with the pluralist reality is supported by our own tradition that is focused on the notion of "classic." For Tracy, a classic is a person, text, symbol, or event, which embodies and discloses truth. It is Jesus Christ that is the paradigmatic classic in the Christian tradition and also the central piece of Tracy's proposal for a public systematic theology.

Moreover, the notion of classic becomes the key to understanding Christian "publicness" in the pluralist culture, because every classic necessitates a pluralism of readings and interpretations. In dealing with the necessity of a pluralist of the classics and their interpretations, Tracy comes closer to the Habermasian notion of consensus. He is optimistic about public discourse, where people can engage with the task of inter-

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11 David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 52.

12 David Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, p. 25.

preting the classics and defending their arguments, in order to reach consensus. In this sense, consensus is "not a failing but the hope of the public realm."[13]

We may conclude that Tracy's revisionist model seems to be suitable in both the *modern* and *postmodern* realms. On the one hand, he commits to the notion of universal experience and the apologetic task of theology. On the other hand, he is interested in the postmodern struggle with the issues of difference and otherness. However, post-liberals such as George Lindbeck, accuse Tracy of being a modern rather than postmodern theologian. In Lindbeck's terms, Tracy is an experiential-expressivist who bases his theology on the modern core experience and therefore fails in defending the uniqueness of Christian tradition.

Stanley Hauerwas, one of the post-liberals, would come to the same critique as that of Lindbeck.[14] The theologian's task, he argues, is not to construct a new theology compatible with the contemporary philosophical basis on which Christians and non-Christians can stand. Rather, the Christian task is to be faithful to the tradition that they serve by living and preaching the Gospel preserved in the tradition. It gives Hauerwas a basis for his harsh criticism of modernity, liberalism, and modern theologies, which, in his opinion, strive for universally acceptable principles. He tells us that we now live in a fragmented world that makes us fragmented persons. Hauerwas argues that any attempt to heal this fragmentary world by reformulating a universal morality would be a failure, because what Christians truly need is "to take seriously their particularistic convictions."[15]

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13 David Tracy, "Afterword: Theology, Public Discourse, and the American Tradition," in *Religion and Twentieth-Century American Intellectual Life*, ed. Michael J. Lacey (Washington, D.C., Cambridge, England & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 202. For Tracy's deeper engagement with Habermas, see David Tracy, "Theology, Critical Social Theory, and the Public Realm," in *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, eds. Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

14 Hauerwas' dominant interlocutor is the revisionist ethicist James Gustafson, not David Tracy. See Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). esp. chapter 2. However, Tracy himself has discussed with Hauerwas several times.

15 Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 6.

In spite of their differences, both Tracy and Hauerwas show a great respect for the nation of Christian tradition or the classic. Yet, while Tracy emphasizes the plurality of classics and their multiple interpretations, Hauerwas defends the distinctiveness of Christian tradition in contrast to non-Christian and modern cultures.

On the one hand, Hauerwas says that in this "fragmented" world, although Christians can be members of many communities, the community to which they should give priority in their commitment is certainly the church. His negative attitude toward modernity, which he borrows from Alasdair MacIntyre and John H. Yoder, leads him to the retrieval of the pre-modern virtues. On the other hand, Tracy argues that what Hauerwas has done is to recover the church as a single fragment. In so doing, the church as a fragment cannot provide a solution for the fragmented world. In contrast to Hauerwas' proposal, Tracy tries to gather as many fragments as possible from other cultures and traditions. In this sense, the Christian classic becomes one among many other fragments actively participating in the finding of a fresh way of recovering the fragmented world. In his interview with Scott Holland, Tracy compares himself to Hauerwas,

> Hauerwas challenges the triumphalist totality system of Christendom and calls for the recovery of more authentic Christian communities. I am sympathetic with this. Yet I would see this move as yet another recovery, a positive and important recovery, of the "fragment." This is where he and I would likely differ in emphasis, for I also remain interested in the fragments from the secular world, I'm interested in gathering fragments from post-modernity, from Derrida's criticism of a nostalgia for a lost totality. I am also very interested in Buddhism and its emphasis on letting-go, on non-attachment or the "not clinging" aspect of faith.[16]

Tracy's criticism of Hauerwas above is much softer that what he says in *On Naming the Present* (1994). He argues in this book that the neoconservative theologies of of retrieval, which Hauerwas and other post-

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16 Scott Holland, "This Side of God: A Conversation with David Tracy," http://www.crosscurrents.org/Tracyspring2002.htm. Accessed on February 2, 2011.

liberals demonstrate, through which the Christian tradition, memory and narrative are overemphasized, are not only ignorant of the memory of the suffering of the oppressed, but also "they are "remembering only a form of Christianity dangerously close to historical Christendom."[17]

DEMOCRACY AND TRADITION

It is not easy to make a choice between the revisionist and postliberal positions, just as between liberalism and communitarianism. Nevertheless, I do not believe that we should choose either one of these two options. Rather, what I am suggesting is to open the possibility for an inter-movement engagement that can gain strengths and insights from each of these movements. What is most important for Indonesian Christians today is how to construct a contextual model that learns from the insights and strengths that those movements provide. This attempt can also be enriched if we learn from thinkers who propose a sort of middle point between these opposing pairs. Someone like Jeffery Stout certainly has something to teach us with his pragmatic proposal.

In his recent work, *Democracy and Tradition* (2004), Stout locates himself at a midpoint between liberalism and communitarianism. The title of this book informs us of the position that he holds, as he says,

> Democracy is a culture, a tradition, in its own right. It has an ethical life of its own, which philosophers would do well to articulate. Pragmatism is best viewed as an attempt to bring the notions of democratic deliberation and tradition together in a single philosophical vision. To put the point aphoristically and paradoxically, *pragmatism is democratic traditionalism*. Less paradoxically, one could say that pragmatism is the philosophical space in which democratic rebellion against hierarchy combines with traditionalist love of virtue to form a new intellectual tradition that is indebted to both.[18]

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17 David Tracy, *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (Maryknoll, NY & London, England: Orbis Books & SCM Press, 1994), pp. 14-15.

18 Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, p. 13.

Thus, by reconciling democracy and tradition Stout argues against both liberalism and new traditionalism. He accuses both Rawls' contractarian model and Rorty's pragmatic liberalism of having purged religious tradition from political democratic discourse. He also criticizes the new traditionalists—Milbank, MacIntyre, and Hauerwas—who have rejected the democratic system in favor of distinctive religious and virtuous traditions. His pragmatic standpoint gives him a reason not to understand democracy in opposition to tradition. Stout does not need to be a liberal contractarian in order to support democracy in the fragmented world; neither does he need to be a traditionalist in order to defend the importance of a particular tradition.

It seems clear that Stout has made Hauerwas the most important interlocutor in his book, because Stout still has a hope that Hauerwas would agree with him in thinking that the preservation of (Christian) tradition does not necessarily mean the abandonment of the importance of justice and the importance of justice and democracy. His criticisms toward MacIntyre and Milbank appear only as the introduction to his longer discussion of Hauerwas' new traditionalism. Stout suspects that Hauerwas' negative attitude toward democracy and liberalism comes from his attraction to MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, joined with with Yoder's dualism. Nonetheless, in his "Postscript" of his most recent book, *Performing the Faith* (2004), Hauerwas rejects Stout's analysis. He tells us that his worries about liberalism began long before MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, especially after he learned from Aristotle and Wittgenstein.[19]

The center of their conversation, I think, is on the issue of democracy vis-à-vis Christian identity. Stout suggests that Hauerwas has dropped entirely the language of justice due to his "rigid and static line between Christian virtue and liberal vice."[20] Stout also tries to show Hauerwas's rejection of "the surrounding political culture in increasingly strident

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19 Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), p. 19.

20 Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, pp. 149-54.

terms."[21] I think Stout does an injustice to Hauerwas here since he disregards the fact that for Hauerwas the boundary between the church and the world is not as impermeable as Stout thought. Also, Stout's accusation can give the impression that Hauerwas is unwilling to be involved with the public sphere, which is, in fact, not the case. In *A Better Hope*, Hauerwas clarifies his position by saying, "I have never sought to justify Christian withdrawal from social and political involvement; I have just wanted us to be involved as Christians."[22] Also, in another place he maintains,

> [N]either Yoder nor I have assumed the boundary between church and world is impermeable. Not only is it permeable, but something has gone wrong when the church is not learning from the world how to live faithfully to God … Indeed I think liberals are doing about the best they can with what they have. My ire is not against liberalism, but against Christians who have confused Christianity with liberalism. As a result Christians have little to offer to a world dying for examples.[23]

In short, far from being a sectarian who wants to secure Christian community from any contact with the world, Hauerwas tells his readers to start from a clear understanding of the identity of Christian tradition before entering a conversation with other traditions (including the democratic tradition).

However, Stout's worry is reasonable when he argues that Hauerwas has dropped the language of justice, and this has isolated him from the real issues of the fragmented world. Hauerwas seems to be so busy with maintaining Christian identity and its "traditional tasks" that conversation with others in order to construct a better public life becomes much less important. In an interview with Dan Rhoades, Hauerwas shows his understanding of Christian tasks:

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21 Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, p. 147.

22 Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2000), p. 24.

23 Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, pp. 231-32.

> I always think that the way you start being the witness in the world at [*sic!*] which you find yourself is the Church asked to care for the poor, to care for the widow, to care for the orphan … and we do that, we need to do that. Unfortunately, I think that many liberal Christians today think that the way you do that is, [if] we are on the liberal democratic side, to ask the State to do that, so we don't need to do that. So I would like to think that the wider public, if we did it well, in caring for our poor that we find among us, would then say "that's pretty good; we need to copy that."[24]

Thus, what matters for Hauerwas is that Christians can practice their faith and become virtuous examples for the wider public. In so doing, we would not confuse Christian faith with the secular tradition of democracy.

On the contrary, Stout's proposal tries to maintain the equilibrium of Christian tasks, that is, to engage with the public sphere (*democracy*) and preserve the identity of their community (*tradition*). These tasks should not be done sequentially, but simultaneously. Stout's model of democracy holds that "people who differ on such matters can still exchange reasons with one another intelligibly, cooperate in crafting political arrangements that promote justice and decency in their relations with one another, and do both of these things without compromising their integrity."[25] Stout's democratic model, therefore, is focused on the reason-exchanging process between people from different backgrounds and traditions. Using Seyla Benhabib's dual-track approach, the official and unofficial public spheres,[26] Stout's democracy opts for the primacy of the unofficial over the official public sphere. What is important for him is not nation-state but "nation" that is understood as "people."[27] In such a "community of reason-giving," democracy is understood as "a sort of practice, one that involves and inculcates virtues, including justice, and that becomes a tradition, like any

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24 Dan Rhoades, "An Interview with Stanley Hauerwas," October 10, 2004, http://www.theotherjournal.net/article.php?id=25. Accessed on February 12, 2011.

25 Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, p. 298.

26 Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 21, 106.

27 Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, pp. 293, 97.

social practice, when it manages to sustain itself across generations."[28] Thus, while Hauerwas envisions the church as the *locus* of virtuous practice, Stout has the public and pluralistic community in his mind where virtues are practiced together.

THE REDISCOVERY OF INDONESIAN IDENTITY

This article begins with a brief description of the complex problems that Indonesian people have been facing during and after Suharto's era. I have argued that the issue of recognition and commonality is most central. Also, the rediscovery of Indonesian identity that pays attention to the dialectic between recognition and commonality should also be sensitive to the suffering-self, the victims of injustice and human rights violations.

Nevertheless, I limit myself to the possibility of public theology informed by the philosophical debate between liberalism and communitarianism. My primary thesis is that the debates between revisionists and post-liberals, as well as between liberals and communitarians, should not push us to a certain point where we have to make an either/or choice. The particular-universal and the self-social pairs of issues are simultaneously present as parts of our identity. Of course, to some extent, we have to begin somewhere and we cannot merely adopt the detailed explanations provided by each group. In this article, I want to focus on two specific themes.

SELF AND OTHER, PARTICULAR AND UNIVERSAL

The communitarian notion of self that is situated within a specific context is more convincing for me than that of the liberal unencumbered-self. It enables us to understand the importance of the particularity of self-identity within community as the point of departure for theology. Hauerwas has applied this notion to the Christian community, combining it with the idea of virtuous-self. The strength of his theology is that it provides the answer to the basic needs of human beings: community and

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28 Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, p. 152.

tradition. Being conditioned by a tradition is plainly a part of human life. But there are two things that should be considered here. First, a community with a tradition of virtues could demonstrate its collective uniqueness in relation to other communities or traditions. But, any linguistic system such as the postliberal (intra-)textualism requires its members to perform some values under certain standards. Thus, if virtues and characteristics belong to the linguistic rule of a given community, through which selves try to fit themselves to the desired virtues, then the danger of sameness and homogeneity is obvious. In Joerg Rieger's words,

> The discourse of the tradition helps us to resist the powers of exclusion insofar as it creates room for alternative traditions. But even the good intentions of the tradition can be misused for other purposes, serving other gods and masters without even being aware of it.[29]

Second, in an extremely complex society such as Indonesia, turning-to-tradition is not enough. Unless the Christian community becomes an open community, permeable to other communities, the danger of sectarianism and fideism is obvious. Hauerwas is certainly right in pointing this out. But, he has given less attention to the excluded and oppressed others, outside the Christian community. What is important for him is "caring for our poor that we find among us," with the result that such virtuous acts function as examples for others. In a complex society, being exemplary is not enough since the interaction between communities and traditions is inevitable. One could be a member of several communities at the same time. The complex society does not only consist of multiple communities, but also creates unique persons —"concrete others," in Benhabib's words. This necessitates a real encounter with the concrete others in the public space, recognizing their uniqueness and celebrating the differences. In this sense, Tracy's public theology is ultimately important.

In *On Naming the Present*, Tracy tells about the importance of approaching "the other as other" or "concrete other."[30] This emphasis on

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29 Joerg Rieger, *God and the Excluded: Visions and Blind Spots in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 151.

30 David Tracy, *Naming the Present*, pp. 21-22.

the concreteness of others is important in making his public theology relevant to the context of oppression and the postmodern era. Along with his previous notion of "common universal experience," the idea of "concrete others" makes Tracy closer to Benhabib's distinction between the generalized other and the concrete other.[31] In the Indonesian context, this distinction points accurately to two different experiences; first, the experience of injustice that became the common experience for all Indonesian people during Suharto's era. Second, the cultural exclusions experienced by those from non-Javanese cultures have clearly shown that their concrete otherness has been abandoned and generalized in accord with Javanese culture. Public theology in the contemporary Indonesian context, therefore, must consider these two facts in its agenda.

DEMOCRACY, LOCAL PUBLICNESS, AND LOCAL CLASSICS

I have shown how postliberal and revisionist theologies can be reconciled by balancing the recognition of the particular and maintaining the commonalities. However, given the complexity and plurality of Indonesian society, another characteristic of such a mixed theological position should be considered. Public theology in a pluralist context such as is found in Indonesia cannot offer a single grand master plan of theological publicness. Each situation needs its own local publicness of theology.[32] This also accords well with William Werpehowski's claim that theological apologetics must proceed "from particular and perhaps partial areas of convergence toward justification."[33]

However, in each locality, our endeavor to construct a contextual public theology should always be guided by four focal values; three of them have been discussed briefly: *recognition of the particular*, *preservation of commonality*, and *sensitivity to the oppressed others*.[34] A fourth focal value

31 Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 158-170.

32 Cf. Terrence W. Tilley, "Incommensurability, Intratextuality, and Fideism," *Modern Theology* 52 (1989): 105.

33 William Werpehowski, "Ad Hoc Apologetics," *Journal of Religion* 66 3 (July) (1986): 287.

34 Here, I am inspired by David G. Kamitsuka, who tries to bring liberation, post-liberal,

is *the necessity of discourse*. In this context, Stout's proposal of democratic tradition is of importance. His understanding of democracy as occurring within a community of reason-exchanging presumes that the particularity of the community members is recognized, the commonality for all is desired and the primacy of justice is emphasized. Stout's proposal is also convincing for me, partly because it takes place primarily on the unofficial track, or the track of civil society. I do not have enough optimism that radical change can happen on the official and legal levels, which have been so systematically corrupted. The change would be from the bottom upward, starting from many local public locations.

If Hauerwas considers the church to be the exemplary community, it is in local public sphere that I believe the exemplary community can be found. Each individual or each smaller community can share within the local public community their virtuous character. In the end, the community itself can grow to be an exemplary community for other local public communities. Among many virtues, however, I find two civic virtues that are extremely useful in the democratic process: tolerance and solidarity.[35] Without solidarity, the virtue of tolerance could be vicious by perpetuating oppressive structures. On the contrary, without tolerance, solidarity could also be vicious by strengthening a sectarian mentality and disunity.

Tracy's public theology emphasizes the importance of diverse classics in the way they assist a theologian to gather as many fragments as possible and to construct a new human community. Consequently, a public theology for multicultural and multi-religious societies such as Indonesia should also show a great respect for other classics from different ethno-religious groups. I believe that the contextualization of public theology in the Indonesian context inevitably needs to hear other classics, narratives and stories.

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and revisionist theologies into conversation; see David G. Kamitsuka, *Theology and Contemporary Culture: Liberation, Postliberal, and Revisionary Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

35 Garrett Fitzgerald provides a good article on these two virtues. See Garrett Fitzgerald, "Toleration or Solidarity?" in *The Politics of Toleration in Modern Life*, ed. Susan Mendus (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

An excellent example of the importance of retrieving local classics is given in Dieter Bartel's article, *Your God is No Longer Mine* (2001), telling about the Nunusaku religion in the Ambonese belief, long before the bloody war between Muslims and Christians in this area. Bartel shows how the purification in each religion destroyed the unitive power of the local classic and played a part in the ethno-religious conflict in Ambon today. Bartel's article is worth quoting at length.

> The Ambonese believe that they all originated from a sacred mountain on the island of Seram, called Nunusaku. A big fight occurred and the original inhabitants split up and populated the Central Moluccas. After the arrival of the two world religions, the paradise of Moslems and Christians was relocated at Mt. Nunusaku, making it the point of origin for all peoples. Upu Lanite, the traditional creator god, was eventually equated with Allah, the name used by both groups for the God of the Koran and the God of the Bible. Thus, there was only one God and Islam and Christianity were seen as two alternate but equally valid paths to salvation. As time passed, the Ambonese came to view Islam and Christianity as basically being only variations of the same faith. This belief is expressed in the popular *pantun* (quatrain):
>
> *Slam dan Serani Pegang tangan-tangan ramai-ramai.*
> It translates roughly as "Moslems and Christians, hand-in-hand, have great fun," or more freely, "As long as Moslems and Christians stick together, life will be most enjoyable."
>
> These beliefs eventually became the basis of Ambonese Moslem-Christian unity and common identity, developing into a kind of invisible ethnic religion that celebrated the uniqueness of Ambonese society, while at the same time allowing both groups to be devout Moslems or Christians. The core of this Ambonese religion, which I called elsewhere Agama Nunusaku or Nunusaku religion … was the pre-Moslem and pre-Christian traditional belief system based on ancestor veneration. After conversion to Islam or Christianity, both halves of society continued largely a way of life following the laws and customs (*adat*) that were laid down in the mystical past by their common ancestors.[36]

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36 Dieter Bartel, "Your God Is No Longer Mine: Moslem-Christian Fratricide in the Central

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have demonstrated the possibility of constructing a Christian public theology that maintains the dialectic of commonality and particularity. Two competing theories in the field of philosophy, liberalism and communitarianism, have been discussed, especially in such a way that their coversation is mirrored in theological discourse through revisionism and post-liberalism. Although both pairs of theories are imported from the West, their basic insights are of relevance to our attempt to construct a more contextual Indonesian public theology. By discussing two focal themes—self and other *and* democracy and locality— I believe that Indonesian Christians are enabled to construct more contextual third ways and, in so doing, we could participate in global discourse by sharing our contextual perspective.

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