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Wédha Utama: A Framework for Formulating Principal Teachings of the GKJ in the Javanese Context, PhD thesis, Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit 2015.

On 2 September 2015 the Javanese theologian Raden Bima Adi defended the PhD thesis he had written under the supervision of Professor Martien Brinkman and Dr. Alle G. Hoekema. This thesis is an interesting book for everyone interested in the development of autochthonous Javanese Christian theology.

Wédha Utama consists of five chapters each discussing a separate theme within the field of Javanese culture and Javanese Christianity. It deals, however, merely with the development of Protestant Christianity in Java. Therefore the focus is on Protestantism, although Adi's information and comments are also of importance for Roman Catholic theology. Java has some important Catholic theologians also developing Javanese Christian theology, not the least of them being J.B. Banawiratma.

Wédha Utama means paramount teaching, although others prefer to translate these words with highest wisdom. This expression is derived from the title of the *Serat Wedhatama*, a Javanese booklet authored by Prince Mangkunegara IV of Surakarta in the late 1870s.¹ However, before we go into detail, it is important to point out that Adi wrote his dissertation because of his anger about the inadequate formulation of its principal teachings by the Gereja Kristen Jateng (GKJ — Christian Church of Central Java). In the Indonesian context *Kristen* means almost always Protestant. The book is an attempt to correct this and to come with a new framework for an adequate Javanese rewording of the Christian faith in harmony with its Javanese context.

For this reason Adi starts with a translation and elaborate discussion of the most important parts of the *Serat Wedhatama*, which he in the conclusion of the first chapter circumscribes as 'a letter or a book containing a lofty teaching or supreme knowledge' providing 'guidance for attaining a noble heart as well as loving and doing what is right' (p. 45). In this book one finds 'knowledge of the origin and objective of all that has been created' and 'can be understood by means of human experience 'united' with the highest reality of *kasunyatan*, i.e. the Lord'.

According to Adi these views form the background of the theology of the Javanese *guru* Kiai Sadrach Surapranata (1835-1924), briefly Sadrach. He was born near the town of Demak. For a long time he sought for *ngèlmu sejati*, the original knowledge as formulated above in the representation of the views of Prince Mangkunegara IV. On his quest for this wisdom he travelled all over Java, from Jombang in East-Java to Batavia (Jakarta) in West-Java visiting

1 Stuart Robson, *The Wédhatama: An English Translation*, Leiden: KITLV Press 1990, 4.

both Islamic and Christian teachers to find this *ngèlmu* ultimately in the teachings of Christianity. After his baptism on 6 February 1871 in Purworejo in Central Java he joined a group established by a Dutch woman, Mrs. Stevens-Philips. After her death in 1876 he adopted full leadership of this community, which already consisted of various small congregations in the surroundings of Purworejo. The congregation of Karangjasa gradually became the centre of the community. I do not wish to go into detail about the developments taking place in later times. Unfortunately the Dutch missionaries were unable to see the authenticity of Sadrach's Christian faith boxed as they were as children of their time in a strict form of Reformed orthodoxy and a white colonial superiority complex. When he died Sadrach had founded a *Golongané Wong Kristen kang Mardika* (Community of Free Christians) which counted some hundreds of followers related to the Apostolic Church, since this church was willing to accept Sadrach as an independent leader who was permitted to perform the sacraments.

In the formulation of his faith and theology Sadrach followed the framework of the Javanese *ngèlmu sejati*. His faith was based on his personal encounter with the gospel. He recognised Jesus as his *guru, panuntun* (example) and *ratu adil* (Just King), three terms also common within Javanese thinking. It was clear that the message of Jesus united him with the Lord and offered him guidance for leading a noble life.

The next chapter is devoted to the theology of Harun Hadiwijono (1915-1985), who was one of the leading Javanese systematic theologians at the theological education institute in Yogyakarta, which today is called the 'Christian Duta Wacana University'. One of his main publications is *Iman Kristen* (Christian Faith). Adi is disappointed about this book. Hadiwijono was known to be a great expert in Javanese mysticism and philosophy and he claims that he will take the ideas of this mystic-philosophical current into account in developing his thoughts. But according to Adi he does not so. Hadiwijono's theology is a Calvinist theology scarcely paying attention to the Javanese context. Moreover it emphasises the differences between Christian faith and other religious faiths lacking a proper balance between self-appreciation and self-criticism.

Subsequently Adi pays attention to a document entitled *Pokok-pokok Ajaran GKJ* (PPAG — Main Teachings of the Christian Church of Central Java) accepted by the synod of this church in 1996. Again Adi is disappointed, since this document is likewise stamped by Calvinist thinking, although Adi shows that it also has some Arminian traits at a certain point.

Finally Adi comes with a framework for writing a new PPAG, but now in a narrative style and in harmony with the Javanese custom to speak about a *ngèlmu sejati*, a high knowledge in which human experience finds unity with the Lord, with the absolute God.

Adi's dissertation is a very interesting book. It shows the struggle of the Javanese with the new message coming from the West. It gives frequently sharp analyses of various developments within this struggle. And I am also persuaded that it can help Javanese Christians to learn to experience their faith in a more genuine Javanese way. Yet, I am also disappointed. At the moment that the readership would have expected a serious attempt to conceive a Javanese contextual theology, it only receives a framework. So, I hope that Adi will not be afraid to not only articulating how one has to develop Javanese theology but also to do it himself. Hopefully, he is doing so already through Javanese pulpits and in his theological teaching.

There is, however, another question. This question refers to the context of the Christian Church of Central Java. In his thesis Adi gave an elaborate delineation of the context of the Javanese church of the first decades of the 20th century. This context was very different from its present context. For in the first decades of the previous century this church was situated in a very poor environment in a Dutch colony. The Dutch ruled and exploited the country. Its cultural setting was determined by traditional Javanese culture in which the courts of Surakarta and Yogyakarta played a prominent role. Today the situation is completely different. The Dutch are defeated and had to leave the country. A democratically elected government rules the country nowadays. Java is increasingly stamped by a more Arabic form of Islam. New developments in the medical world confront the Indonesians with new moral and ethical issues. Although the big Javanese Sawokembar church in Yogyakarta has traditional Javanese gamelan music instruments today, which were not there in 1970s, the young people sitting in this church sing and listen to pop songs and are continuously typing on their smartphones. Therefore I wonder what these youngsters would prefer, the slow though magnificently sounding music of the gamelan-instruments or the quick rhythms of the often English pop songs they listen to. I am afraid that they prefer the second.

For this reason I ask myself whether it perhaps may be better to look at the democratic, increasingly Islamic and popular music culture, if we develop contextual theology for the Javanese Christian church of today than returning to the colonial context dominated by the Dutch and by the traditional Javanese culture of the first decades of the previous century.

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