CHAPTER FIVE

THE ARRIVAL OF PROTESTANTISM AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE MOLUCCAS 1605–1800

Around 1600 the period of the vibrant spread of Islam and Christianity came almost to an end. In western Indonesia Gayoland, in inland Aceh, accepted Islam about 1700. The southern Batakland became Muslim in the aftermath of the Padri-movement (1803–1838). These were two inland developments, but in the coastal regions of Sumatra the decisive movements towards Islamisation had been completed about 1600. The same can be said of the central islands of Kalimantan (Dutch Borneo) and Java. It was only in East Indonesia that Islam still made some progress in the seventeenth century: Makassar and the south of Sulawesi accepted Islam in the first decade of the seventeenth century, Bima (in the island of Sumbawa) not much later. That was the end of nearly two centuries of successful Islamisation of many regions of Indonesia. We may ascribe this break to the influence of the VOC that carried out a quite effective policy of containment of Muslim rulers. The VOC also stopped the traffic between West Sumatra or Malaysia and Eastern Indonesia. Even for the people who went on the pilgrimage to Mecca conditions for travelling became more difficult.

All these elements contributed to a slowing down of the expansion of Islam, but this was not balanced by an increase in the growth of Christianity. In fact the spread of Christianity also was slow and uncertain during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was mostly due to the special character of the VOC as a trading company.

The VOC as an outspoken Christian ruler: its pastoral obligations

In the first contract of the VOC no article on religion was included. In 1623, at the renewal of this *octrooi*, formulated by the highest authority in the Netherlands the *Staten-Generaal*, the religious duties of the VOC were formulated for the first time. Some argue that religion was simply forgotten in 1602,¹ others stress the changing conditions in the 1620s. The VOC had started as a trading company, but in its first two decades it developed into a colonising institution as well. The first contract was based on a short stay

¹ Van Boetzelaaer 1947:4, “dit moet een onwillekeurig verzuim zijn geweest.”

overseas, just sufficient to buy enough commodities. Between 1605 and 1619 the fortification in Ambon was its main settlement. But the VOC established its headquarters in Batavia in 1619 and settled firmly in factories in Bantam, Banda, Ternate, Ambon and other places. Besides, the victory of the orthodox wing of the Reformed Church during the Dordrecht Synod (1618–1619) also had strengthened the duty of the state “to maintain the sacred service of the church, to prevent and eliminate every form of idolatry and false religion.” This religious conscience, besides the new emphasis on permanent centres in the world of Asia, may have led to the insertion of the religious duty in the preamble of the VOC charter of 1623. It has to be stressed, however, that the VOC in its personnel never was restricted to Reformed people. Not only among the common soldiers and marine personnel, but even among governors general some Lutherans and Catholics were found besides a smaller number of Armenians and Mennonites as traders. The VOC could not really behave as a strict Reformed body. Different from the articles of the charter for the West Indies Company (WIC), where the company was given the task of proclaiming the knowledge of God to the inhabitants of Brazil, the VOC was given in the preamble only the general obligation to “maintain the public faith.”²

The pastoral and missionary duty of taking care of proper religious duties was already formulated in private instructions to the first two Governors General, Pieter Both (1609) and Gerard Reynst (1613). They had to “promote the eastern trade in service of the propagation of the name of Christ, the blessing of the non-Christians.” They “must nominate for their places without delay the ministers and teachers who join the fleet in order to stay in the Indies. You have to look after them, so that they will perform their duty the best they can.”³

In some districts of its vast territory, the VOC indeed supported quite outspoken missionary activities, but in most of its regions it restricted itself to pastoral care for Christian communities, mostly European, but also some Asian. The most spectacular, although in time quite restricted, missionary activities were in Taiwan. Between 1627 and 1662 a considerable number of people were baptised. Not less than thirty ministers served this mission, until this experiment was terminated by the invasion of a warlord from mainland China, Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga).⁴ There was also a quite impressive missionary endeavour in Ceylon, where the Dutch tried to transform the converts

² Koolen 1993:24.

³ Articles 10 and 13 of the instruction to Pieter Both, after Koolen 1993:25. Also in Enklaar 1947:35.

⁴ Kuepers 1978.

of the preceding Catholic mission into faithful Reformed Protestants.⁵ In the major area of their activities, the Indies, there was much less overt religious activity. Here the VOC was only willing to provide pastoral service to those who were already Christian, and to contain the further expansion of Islam. This may have had practical as well as religious reasons. As to the practical reasons, the expansion of VOC influence in Taiwan and Ceylon was strengthened by the loyalty of the new Reformed citizens in territory that was directly ruled by the VOC. In the Indies this directly ruled territory was restricted to the southern region of the small islands of Ambon and Lease, while on the tiny island of Banda the whole territory was under VOC control. For the rest, the territories where in 1600 most spices were grown were under Muslim rule. Gradually, during the first half of the seventeenth century, the growth of spices, especially cloves, in Halmahera and other territories under the influence of the sultanates of Ternate and Tidore, was destroyed and transplanted to the 'Christian' regions of Ambon and neighbouring Lease islands. But this was done gradually and no efforts were undertaken to evangelise the Muslims of this region. As we will see below, there were even various agreements with Muslim rulers in this region that the religious boundaries between Christians and Muslims would be respected and that people who tried to convert from Christianity to Islam or *vice-versa* would be denied admission by the respective communities.

There was, however, besides the more practical reasons, also a more fundamental hesitation amongst VOC leaders to propagate Reformed Christianity. First, the Dutch *Heeren XVII* or the seventeen commissaries of the VOC were mostly broad minded aristocrats rather than orthodox Reformed leaders. Second, the Reformed tradition from the time of John Calvin did not really stimulate foreign missions. For Calvin himself the 'apostolate' was restricted to the times of the apostles and this missionary duty was not extended to the following generations. But there were other voices. In the Netherlands there were some theologians who voiced their conviction that it was a Christian duty to preach the gospel. One of them was Justus Heurnius, born in 1587, who had finished his medical study in 1611 at Leiden university. In 1615 he had begun his study of theology in Groningen, the Netherlands, and published in 1618 a 300 page treatise on the "Necessity to Preach the Gospel in the Indies." For Heurnius the Catholic mission had failed and therefore God had now given the Protestants the opportunity to spread the true message of Christian doctrine. Heurnius arrived in Batavia in 1624 and worked in the Indies until 1639.⁶

⁵ Van Goor 1978.

⁶ Koolen 1993:51–52.

The strongest restrictions against a dynamic missionary spirit came from the strict theologians at the national Synod of Dordrecht (1618–1619) where the liberal followers of Arminius were declared heretical because they did not acknowledge God's eternal and absolute decrees of predestination. In this synod also a question was discussed, sent by the Batavia minister A. Hulsebos, whether children born from parents who were not Christian could be baptised? In fact the question was about children of VOC personnel who had a 'housekeeper', either a non-Christian free woman or a slave, with whom they had children. Could a child born from this relationship be baptised? The Dordrecht Synod gave as its answer that such children could not be baptised at a young age. Only as adults and after sufficient education and at their own request could baptism be administered to them. In the motivation for this denial that was repeated again and again during the two VOC centuries, two elements were mixed. On the one side there was the irregular relation that led to children who were born outside legal marriage. Therefore the moral argument was given against people who had no proper marriage bond but nevertheless had a sexual relationship. The other reason was a theology of baptism that considered the sacrament as a confirmation of membership of the covenant between God and His chosen people. In most ways this membership was acquired through descent from a Christian couple.

Only in the period 1620–1630 was there some support in the Netherlands for the ideas of the major architect of Dutch colonialism in the seventeenth century, Jan Pieterszoon Coen (born 1586), founder of the major Dutch settlement Batavia in 1619, and from 1618 until his death in 1629 governor general of the VOC in the East Indies. Coen propagated the idea to send also Dutch women to the Indies. However, after 1630 very few Dutch women came to the colony and it therefore quickly developed as an endeavour led by mostly Eurasian people of mixed origin.

When Coen died in 1629 the capital Batavia was under siege of Mataram troops. Although they could not occupy the town, all surrounding lands were still under Mataram rule. Quite a few soldiers and tradesmen were taken captive. Between 1648 and 1654 embassies were sent to Mataram to regulate relations. Rijkloff van Goens, the chief ambassador, was permitted to take home some prisoners and also their children, whom Javanese women had borne them during their imprisonment. In 1651 Van Goens returned from a journey to Mataram and brought along a boy who had been born from such a relationship, between a Javanese woman and a Dutchman. This Dutchman had been imprisoned and was said "to have been circumcised by the Javanese and to have renounced Christ." After Van Goens promised that he would give the boy a proper education, the child was allowed to be baptised "not primarily on account of the child's father, who was supposed to have renounced his faith, but on account of his believing forefathers, in whom also this boy is

sanctified and accepted.”⁷ Christian faith was an immediate relationship to a covenant between God and an elected people, the Dutch Protestant community. In the coming pages we will see some aspects of the theocratic character of the Dutch colonial empire. There was no outspoken *apartheid* involved in the restriction put on the missionary character of Dutch Protestantism (as was the case in twentieth century South African Protestant politics, resulting also from the same blend of Dutch Reformed Protestantism), but there was a clear connection between ethnicity and religion and this was in practice an important restraint for the missionary activities of Reformed Christians in this period. As was indicated in the foundational charter of 1623, the VOC saw as its duty “the conservation of the public faith,”⁸ no less and no more: Reformed Christianity was the leading religion in all settlements where VOC personnel would have the ultimate authority.

For the implementation of its pastoral duties, the VOC was a well-organised, cognisant and generous employer. During these two centuries not less than 900 ordained ministers were sent to its territory and many more lower ranking religious officials, such as the *krankbezoekers* or *ziekentroosters* (respectively visitors or comforters of the sick). These latter, however, were most active on the ships, where most of the sick and dead were to be found. Even more important was the nomination of native teachers, sacristans and guardians of churches, who kept Christianity alive in the East Indonesian territories where the VOC inherited large numbers of Christians from the Jesuit and Dominican missions undertaken by the former Portuguese authority. In fact the number of academically trained and ordained expatriate (Dutch or German) ministers never was very large. But it was stable and supported by the solid administration of the VOC. The ordained ministers who were assigned to permanent posts were for the various years as follows:⁹

Ordained ministers	1625	1650	1675	1700	1725	1750	1775
Batavia	2	3	7	8	10	12	9
Moluccas (i.e. Ambon, Lease and Ternate)	3	4	6	5	9	2	2
Banda	2	2	2	2	1	1	–
Other places of the East Indies (Timor, later also Semarang)	–	2	5	3	3	5	4
Total	7	11	20	18	23	20	15

⁷ Mooij 1927–1931–II:203.

⁸ “Conservatie van het publieke geloof,” after Koolen 1993:23–24.

⁹ Adapted from the statistics of F.A.van Lieburg in: Schutte 2002:87.

From these statistics it is clear that the largest number went to the colonial head-quarters in the mixed European/Eurasian town of Batavia. A relatively large number went to the small Eurasian community of nutmeg-growers on the Banda islands. The largest native Christian community of Ambon got a fair allocation, but in fact much less than the mixed Eurasian community of Batavia.

Ambon and Lease

For the small but already stable pockets of Christians in East Indonesia the arrival of the Dutch trading company was the end of Catholic growth. When the first Dutch fleet arrived in Ambon, in February 1605, Admiral Steven van der Haghen, promised free exercise of religion to the Portuguese priests and their flock, but Frederik de Houtman, the first governor of Ambon (1605–1611), deemed it necessary to expel all Portuguese, including the clergy, a few months later, in May 1605. The Ambonese understood that the Dutch had a different religion from that of the Portuguese. Had they not thrown down the holy images and removed the crosses?¹⁰

From 1605 on the VOC sent sick-comforters and ordained ministers to Ambon. The first was Johan Stollenbecker who served as a minister between 1605 and 1609. Johannes Wogma, was nominated as a first teacher to start a Dutch-language school. The choice of this language was dictated by the wish of Cornelis Matelieff to reduce the influence of Portuguese, still the language of communication between the local population and the Dutch. Most of Wogma's pupils probably came from mixed Portuguese-Ambonese offspring, living close to the castle. At the instigation of Frederik de Houtman who had already translated a short catechism and some basic prayers into Malay, this school used in part also Malay. After Wogma's death the school was led by another Dutchman, Hendrik Tack. Gillis Hendriks was the last teacher. When he died in 1616 the school, already ailing, was closed and the experiment of a Dutch-language training within the compound of the Ambon castle had proved not to be really successful.¹¹ In this period the Muslims of northern Ambon, Hitu, were very active. In 1616 the majority of the village Nussanive next to the castle Victoria crossed over the bay to the north, to live there as Muslims.¹²

Like with the Portuguese, also Dutch personnel often served for a short period. Caspar Wiltens (born 1584 in Antwerp) was already the third or

¹⁰ Van Boetzelaer 1947:13; Keuning 1982:372–375.

¹¹ For this school, Koolen 1993:154–156.

¹² Keuning 1982:375.

fourth ordained minister to work in Ambon. He arrived in East India probably in late 1611 and worked first in Bacan and Banda before he was nominated for Ambon in 1614. He continued the efforts to develop the Dutch-language school in Ambon, and also worked on a Dutch-Malay dictionary. When he died in Ambon on 8 January 1619, he had already a gifted colleague, Sebastiaen Danckaerts, who had arrived in Banten in late 1616. After one year of training in Malay, he arrived in Ambon 2nd January 1618. Although he only worked in Ambon until 1622, he was the first to really concentrate on the native Ambonese Christians. He translated his sermons into Malay with the help of an Ambonese teacher.

Danckaerts initially hoped to establish a Dutch-language school in Ambon and even received some twenty Dutch-speaking pupils from Batavia toward this goal. But soon it became clear to him that the future for Ambonese Protestant Christianity was in the further education of the local leaders, commonly called *mèster* after the Dutch *meester* for a teacher. It is not known how the situation was in the villages outside the town of Ambon in the period 1605–1620. Were there still native teachers, continuing some education and prayer services? Besides the formal but not so effective Dutch-language school in the castle, Danckaerts was giving private education to several local native teachers until 1622. After him Justus Heurnius (working between 1624 and 1632 in Batavia and after that year until 1638 in the Ambon region) was known for his dedication to the further education of native schoolteachers. Compared to the very small number of ordained ministers, the numbers of teachers grew quickly: from 32 schools with 1,200 pupils in 1633 to 46 schools and 3,600 pupils in 1680 and finally 54 schools with 5,190 pupils in 1700. The schoolteacher became the backbone of Ambonese Christianity.¹³

Ambonese Christianity was based on a local school, where the teacher was also the leader of the Sunday morning service. The *mèster* read a Malay sermon and officiated as leader of prayers and singing. Three times a week, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday, the teacher also officiated at evening prayers. Ideally a school was visited several times a year by the ordained minister. In the seventeenth century Ambonese Christianity developed a special ceremony for such a visit which lasted one or two days. At the beach or boundary of the village the minister and his following were welcomed by the community and in procession people went to the church for the first prayers and a first sermon. The school was visited, children and their teachers examined, baptism and marriages were administered and especially those people who were on the list

¹³ Knaap 1987:85; Niemeijer 2002:129–130; Koolen 1993:157–160. On Heurnius also Niemeijer 1999.

to be admitted to Holy Communion were scrutinised.¹⁴ Contact between the centre and the periphery not only took place during the pastoral visits of the ministers to the outer villages. According to the constitution of the church of Ambon of 1673 the teachers were ordered to come to the central town every two weeks or at least every month for consultation, classes and examination.¹⁵ These visits took place during the regular market-day. The *mèster* had to pay a fine of one *rijksdaalder* if he did not come without good reason. However, it may be supposed that many teachers liked to come to Ambon on the market day also to sell some of their produce and to buy other things.¹⁶

In the places where an ordained minister was stationed (a few places in Ambon and also for some time in Saparua), it was quite common that there was a public order to attend church services. Danckaerts noted around 1620 that, “these people here call themselves Christians, but still seek secretly the devil, while they think that they affirm their confession by eating pork. Many of them indeed come to church on Sunday, but this is more a matter of compulsion than of conviction because they will be fined a quarter of a *real* if they do not come.”¹⁷ Even where there was only a *mèster* to officiate at church service such fines could be imposed, as was also the practice in Muslim villages. The money was for the village chief and the sexton. This, of course, could also lead to abuse and therefore it was abolished in 1689 by Governor De Haas.¹⁸ In 1692 minister Van der Vorm complained that only the school children and the village chief and his wife attended Sunday service.¹⁹

Like the Portuguese, the Dutch had come to the Moluccas for the spices. Ternate was until the 1560s not only the major market for cloves, it was also an important farmland for this precious product. After the clash between the Portuguese and the people of Ternate in the early 1570s, Ambon was founded as a Christian town. After Dutch rule became more and more stable in the seventeenth century, they concentrated the production of cloves in the Christian territories of the southern districts of Ambon and the Lease islands. The VOC not only tried to obtain the monopoly of trade, but also of the production of cloves. In 1623 the last British citizens in Ambon were accused of treason and executed. From 1625 on there were yearly conflicts with the Muslims of South Seram and North Ambon (Hitu). This resulted in the violent suppression of Hitu (1642–1646) and the nearly total depopulation of South Seram (Hoamoal) between 1651 and 1656. The direct rule of the

¹⁴ For a description of such pastoral travelling and the problems involved see Niemeijer 2002a:132–142.

¹⁵ Knaap 1987:91.

¹⁶ Niemeijer 2002a:136.

¹⁷ Quoted after Niemeijer 2002a:129.

¹⁸ Knaap 1987:88.

¹⁹ Niemeijer 2002a:142.

VOC, that was initially restricted to the town of Ambon and soon thereafter to the Christian villages on the islands of Ambon and Lease, was extended more and more to the coastal regions of the Northern Moluccas, including Seram and Buru. But the VOC had to deal more directly with the Christian population than with the Muslim territories.

The boundaries between Christian and Muslim territories were already fixed in Ambon and the Lease islands about 1650 and few conversions took place after that time. But in Seram, Buru and other islands, there was still territory to occupy for the two major religions. In the 1640s G. Demmer (1642–1647) and A. de Vlaming (1647–1650) were the governors. Demmer wrote proudly in 1647 that during the five years of his rule more than a thousand couples were formally married and more than 4,500 children baptised. His successor, De Vlaming also stimulated church marriage: for sexual relations before marriage a fine of three years prison and 200 *rijksdaalders* was set.²⁰

Also for the conversion to Christianity by people of traditional religion, the VOC government had its strategy. After the submission of Hoamoal, the Ternatean stronghold on South Seram in 1656, various efforts were made for the spread of Christianity. Governor Hurdt took a special initiative in 1674, immediately after a big earthquake accompanied by a serious flood. People from Kaibobo, living in Haruku after an earthquake, were allowed to return to South Seram after they had accepted Christianity. In 1675 a campaign began on the southern coast of Seram in the village of Kamarian with the destruction of the 'devil's altars' and the invitation to the population to embrace Christianity. A *mèster* was sent to the village and some people who opposed his proposals were deported to Victoria Castle in Ambon, where they 'truly converted.' In 1677 there was a collective baptism of the population of Kamarian, where governor Hurdt himself was present. The VOC had sent two cows and 4,500 kilos of rice for the festive meal after the baptisms, where also pagans and Muslims joined the celebration. The governor on that occasion also gave cloths to the new Christians "in order to arouse honest jealousy among the pagans living in the region."²¹

The conversion of Kamarian was no exception, especially not during the last decades of the seventeenth century, a period during which the Dutch rule was extended more and more, after the Spanish had left their last strongholds in Ternate in 1663, and a revolt against the Dutch had failed in 1679 and ended in the temporary exile of Sultan Sibori (1681–1683). After these events the power of Ternate was broken and the Dutch could continue the double policy of containment of Islam and further spread of Christianity in pagan villages.

²⁰ Niemeijer 2002a:134–135.

²¹ Knaap 1987:90–91.

During the last decades of the seventeenth century the villages of Seruawan, Hatusua, Rumakay and Tihulale in South Seram accepted Christianity. The southern coast of Seram as far as it belonged under the Residency of Haruku, was still totally pagan in 1670, but twenty years later more than 70% were Christian. Also Piru and Lakamay, coastal villages in the northeast of the bay opposite Hoamoal, converted to Christianity. But shortly after their conversion, the new church and school were destroyed and the most prominent Christian of Piru, Abraham Kéan, was murdered. This action was again followed by a military expedition from Victoria Castle in Ambon. About 1690 it was estimated that about 15% of the population of South Seram had pledged to follow Christianity.²²

There was no action to attract Muslims as a group to Christianity. The VOC only took the position that those who were not yet Muslim, should be discouraged from embracing this religion. In the Ambonese village of Waai, where by about 1620 half of the Christian population had embraced Islam, the Dutch took firm action. The mosque was burnt down and the renegades were summoned to return to their former Christian faith.²³ Part of this containment policy was the removal of the growth of spices, especially cloves, to the 'Christian territories' of Ambon and Lease. This made the contact of the VOC with the Muslim regions of quite a different nature from their contact with the Ambonese. We should, however, not exaggerate the influence of VOC trade on Ambonese society. Clove production provided the major cash income, but was not the major livelihood for Ambonese or Moluccans in general. In fact cloves were produced to buy some extra, luxury goods. The basic economy was still a subsistence one with some rice, but mostly palm-trees, sago-trees, hunting and fishing as its basis.²⁴

The formal conversion to Christianity did not mean a total change in the life and rituals of the new Christians. The *mèster* became the centre of the Christian community, with church and school, Sunday services and some prayer meetings in evenings during the week. There were baptisms, the celebration of marriages and of Holy Communion on the occasion of the visit of the ordained minister from Ambon. The *mèster*, however, was most often not a native of the village he served: he was educated in the central town of Ambon and in a foreign language, Malay, and was nominated and paid by the central government. For many situations in daily life, on the occasion of birth, marriage, burials, harvest, earthquakes or other natural disasters, it was still the traditional religion that often was resorted to. As in so many places in the world, we can notice two religious systems in Ambon, quite separated, living

²² Knaap 1987:91.

²³ Knaap 1987:78.

²⁴ Knaap 1987:172–189.

side by side. This is often labelled the *agama Ambon*, Ambonese religion, a mixture of Christianity or Islam and traditional religion.

Reports from the seventeenth century show a continuing struggle of ministers and *mèster* against what they considered to be superstition or remnants of paganism. One of the first native Ambonese teachers, Thomas Rodrigos, announced in 1641 to the government in Ambon that in his village, Ema on East Leitimor, a statue of a pig was venerated. The statue was destroyed, but life became too difficult for Rodrigos and he had to be moved to another place. Most houses had a sacred space, where food was offered to the ancestors in a small chapel (*duyvelshuisje*, ‘abode of the devil’). Thousands must have been destroyed in these centuries, but also many rebuilt, close to the houses or deeper in the forest in inaccessible places. In 1657 a decree of the governor of Ambon imposed the death penalty for the veneration of any statue of an idol in a house, in its garden or on one’s land. But a visitation of the school and church of Kamarian relates that “in a forest, about one hour walking from the village, some *duyvelshuisjes* were found together with the statue of a dragon of 16 yards length covered with a sea-bird and with a human skull in its mouth. Minister De Leeuw chopped the head off the dragon.”²⁵

The political but also religious centre of villages was the *baileu*. It was the place where the skulls were hung in the earlier times of headhunting. The sacred possessions of the ancestors were kept here, the *mamakur*, very rare glass bracelets, also old Chinese pottery, used for offerings, as well as cloths and utensils that were used by the ancestors who had founded the village. Outside the *baileu*, giant stones were placed, *batu pemali*, also a sign of the continuing presence of the ancestors. The church and the school were built after Christianisation, but they did not replace the *baileu* in all its functions. Even in the 20th century it was still said that the church is the most important building of a village, second comes the *baileu*, because “God has priority, then the ancestor”.²⁶ The *baileu* remained the base for the village chief, although in time it lost much of its religious function. Still, we can consider the co-existence of church and *baileu* as the physical representation of the double religious loyalty of the Moluccans.

We use here the word double loyalty rather than “remnants of paganism” or even modern sociological terms like the great versus the little tradition (Robert Redfield) or the official versus the folk religion. The latter distinction, however, makes some sense: it was not only used by the political and religious authority of the VOC state, it also explains why there was no double loyalty between Islam and Christianity, but rather between the unequal (and

²⁵ Knaap 1987:86.

²⁶ J. Lusikooy unpublished thesis of 1957 *Sisa-sisa animisme di Maluku Tengah* (Remnants of Animism in the Central Moluccas), quoted in Cooley 1987:114–115.

therefore in practice often not competing) traditional religious system with the new world religions. A much later observer, Frank Cooley, who did his field research in the 1960s, noted about this double religious loyalty that it could be compared to the word of Jesus in Mark 12:17, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."²⁷ We may question what is here meant by Caesar and what by God? Cooley identifies Caesar with the commands and institutions of the ancestors and 'God' with the gospel that was brought by Christianity. We may also take the other conclusion, that the real religious tradition still was the living custom, represented by the village chief, the *raja* as a direct offspring of the ancestors, while the ruling supra-local government had introduced Christianity. In other places therefore, Christianity was also called *agama Kumpeni*, the religious ruling of the Dutch East India Company.²⁸

In 1684 a mixed commission of VOC officials and chiefs of (mostly Christian) Leitimor, was sent to a region of South Seram (Seram Haruku) to investigate the traditional religion, also called Alifuru religion after the word used for all people of East Indonesia who were not Muslim or Christian. They found such strong local variations that they refused to give an overall description of 'Alifuru' religion. They found belief in many super-human beings, sometimes with one of them given superiority so as to be considered a Supreme Being. In Central Seram and Buru this divine being was called Alahatala, certainly after an Arabic name for the One and Highest God: *Allah ta'āla*. In addition there was a whole range of non-divine beings, related to ancestors or animals (totem): the *nitu*. Evil spirits were called *suangi*, a name also used for people possessed by evil spirit or witches. In Seram, the major initiation ritual was the loin-cloth, *cidako*, given to boys at the age of ten and to girls at the age of twelve. Some of the most obvious 'remnants' of traditional religions were the circumcision of boys and the *cemar kain* for girls. The latter was the ritual cleansing of the girls' *cidako* after their first menstruation. Belief in the spirits and rituals of initiation were for a long time continued also after Christianity was accepted as the formal religion.²⁹

The Banda Islands

The ten small islands of the Banda archipelago (together just 55 sq. km.) were the only places known where nutmeg and its side-product mace were grown, the 'fragrant gold'. Banda was also a centre in the vaster trading network of East Indonesia. A round-trip from Malacca to Banda could be completed in

²⁷ Cooley 1973:133–134; see also Knaap 1987:89.

²⁸ For Ternate see Niemeijer 2002b:147–175.

²⁹ Knaap 1987:72–74.

six months, while the voyage to North Maluku would take another half year.³⁰ In 1523, the Portuguese had set up a factory on the island of Neira where the small town of Bandaneira is located, the main settlement of the small archipelago. Nothing is known about possible conversions made by the Portuguese from their fortification in Neira. The British had founded their settlement in 1601 on Run (also Rhun). In 1599 the Dutch had arrived for the first time, but only to buy spices. In 1602 Wolfert Hermanszoon concluded a treaty with some chiefs of Banda with a very tolerant religious paragraph, “that everybody should honour their God according to the belief given to him or her by God, without hatred of the other or causing trouble and the rest will be entrusted to God who is the judge over all belief and all souls.”³¹ This was still the time of the first and peaceful encounters. Soon the Dutch would try to impose a monopoly on the spice trade. In 1609 they conquered the remnants of the Portuguese factory and renamed it Nassau Castle. Besides this place another fortification was built in 1611, now named *Benteng Belgica*.

The Dutch attack in 1609 only occurred after negotiations with the proud and independent Bandanese had failed and the Dutch admiral Pieter Verhoeven and 46 of his soldiers had been killed. This was the beginning of one of the bloodiest episodes in the history of the VOC. After some small expeditions had failed to subdue the islands a great attack was planned in 1614. It was the first of several attacks. In 1616 commander Jacob 't Lam conquered the island of Ay with the help of 800 European soldiers and 23 Japanese mercenaries. Scores of people were killed and some 400 drowned when they fled from the island and tried to reach nearby Run. The final attack was in 1621 led by Governor General Jan Pieterszoon Coen in person. With 19 ships and an army of 1,655 European and 286 Asian soldiers he attacked Banda. The final battle was on the largest island of Lonthoir (also called Great Banda). During new peace talks all the chiefs were imprisoned and 46 were put to death by a Japanese executioner, 789 members of their families were sent in exile to Batavia. During the voyage 176 of them died. The rest of the people of Lonthoir fled into the mountains and continued fighting for several months until they had to give up. At that time the last independent Bandanese who had fled to the island of Run in order to seek protection from the British, also accepted Dutch rule.³² It is estimated that, from the original population of some 15,000, only 1,500 were left after the bloody period 1609–1621. This episode is still debated but many have blamed Coen for its cruelty.

³⁰ Niemeijer 2001:251–282, esp. 256.

³¹ Quoted in Van Boetzelaeler 1947:14.

³² The British only formally gave up the island of Run at negotiations in 1667 when this island and Dutch Guyana (now Surinam) was given to the Dutch in exchange for New Amsterdam (now New York), Niemeijer 1994:5.

Because of the almost total depopulation of the islands Coen proposed a resettlement with many European elements. This had already begun after the conquest of Ay in 1616, with the import of slaves from Siau. In 1621 all plots that were suited for spice-cultivation were divided into estates (*perken*) and given to Dutch settlers, that is to say, Dutch men who had married local women.³³ More and more people (many of them slaves) arrived from Gujarat, Southwest India (Malabar), Malaysia, Buton, Java and there were even Chinese. Together with the remaining Bandanese they worked in the plantations. The owners of the plantations sold their harvest against fixed prices to the VOC, which held the monopoly of the trade in spices. In fact, after 1621, a new Bandanese society had been started, a 'unique colony of exploitation,' concentrated on the cultivation of nutmeg and mace. They amounted to some 4,000 people in the 1630s.³⁴

Shortly after the conquest of Ay, minister Casper Wiltens had been transferred from Ambon to Banda. He had to make good Protestants of the slaves who were imported from Siau, conquered in 1614 by the VOC. As we saw above, there was a good number of Catholic Christians among them. Wiltens who did not have a high opinion of the Catholic mission and their converts, noted that, "This nominal Christianity gives the East India Company at least the profit that it wins some subjects for us."³⁵

When Coen conquered the major Banda islands in his bloody action, Wiltens had already left the region. He was succeeded in March 1622 by one of the most praised Dutch ministers of the seventeenth century, Rev. Adriaan Hulsebos.³⁶ He instituted the first church council and ordained Wouter Melchiorisz Vitriarius to the ministry.³⁷ The first church council met in Nassau Castle, 15–17 March 1622. The church, which had close ties to the military and administrative sections of the VOC, was in fact subject to the VOC rulers. As in other places there were services in both Dutch and Malay. The Dutch-language services were also explicitly held in order "to make the coloured people, who are married to the Dutch, acquainted and familiar with

³³ A map of the major division of Great Banda in Cribb 2000:106.

³⁴ Niemeijer 1994:6.

³⁵ "Dit voordeel heeft onse Oost Indische Compagnie van dit naem-christendom datser ondersaeten mede can winnen", quoted in Niemeijer 1994:7.

³⁶ Van Boetelaer 1947:23–28. After his first visitation to Banda Hulsebos sailed to Ambon but his ship capsized in the bay of Ambon and Hulsebos drowned in May 1622.

³⁷ Vitriarius was earlier convicted of Arminian heresy by the church council of Amsterdam. Because of the small number of people who were willing to go to the colony we meet quite a few people among church officials, who would never have obtained such a position in the homeland. Niemeijer 1994:7.

the lofty sacrament, so that they may remember it or at least know it.”³⁸ In the new mixed society of Banda, it proved impossible to make the Dutch language the commonly used one. Most services and also school education used Malay more often than Dutch. In contrast to the strict ruling on infant baptism, as issued by the Dordrecht Synod of 1619, the ministers were quite liberal in the administration of the sacrament. In the period 1623–1634 eight children and four adults were baptised on Rosengain (now *Pulau Hatta*). Among these were a slave named Maria, a Rodriques, born from “Moorish parents,” a boy Abel “not knowing from what parents he is born.” Also the baby of Jan Bouillion van Middelburg and Maria of Siau (not yet baptised), was baptised. For adult slaves the minimal requirement for baptism was that they should be able to say the Our Father. This proves that notwithstanding strict rules, and criticism of easy baptism by the Catholics, the Dutch Protestant ministers in this extremely mixed society had to accommodate their practice to the local conditions.³⁹

In the administration of marriage we can see the same pastoral attitude. Banda Governor Sonck had in 1622 forbidden men to live in concubinage. But the cases that are illustrated in the archives of the church council show that such a floating and mixed society had its own rules. In this unruly period many people were separated from their partners and did not know where they were, or whether they still lived or had died in the terrible disaster of the Dutch conquest and its aftermath. VOC seamen, who already had a wife in their homeland, settled in Banda and married a new wife there, concealing their first marriage. To give just one case: one Isabella Bentsana of Siau had arrived in Banda with her husband, Philippus, son of one of the Christian chiefs of Siau. But this Philippus had left her for a Muslim wife and now lived in a Muslim village in Seram. Could this Isabella legally marry a Dutch newcomer, Willem Jansz from Den Briel? The church council admitted this marriage “in order to prevent worse things.” Between 1616 and 1625 there were 196 marriages registered by the Protestant church of Banda. With the exception of two, in all cases it was Asian women, while only 80 men were of Asian descent.⁴⁰

Besides the church services and the administration of baptism and marriage the school was also, in Banda, one of the major tasks of the Protestant church. In the 1620s it was estimated that two thirds of the children were from parents

³⁸ “dat de inwoonders, also swarten met duytschen ghetrouwt ende andere, het hoogweerdich Sacrament mede in gedachtenisse moghen houden oft ten minste haer bekent ghemaect worden,” Niemeijer 1994:9.

³⁹ Niemeijer 1994:13.

⁴⁰ Niemeijer 1994:17–18. There are many more examples that show the quick mixing up of the new Banda society in the 1620s.

who had died or had fled the islands during the fighting of the last decade. In 1624 there were already three schools: one in Ay (100 *costkinderen*, or orphans who lived at the cost of the VOC, and 40 *buitenkinderen*, children of free citizens), one in Great Banda (100 pupils) and a third in Run (45 children). Only the school in Run still continued the ideal of a Dutch language education. Later schools were also erected in Selamon (in Great Banda) and Rozengain. Initially there were Dutch school teachers, but after a decade several schools were taken over by Bandanese who were trained in a school where not much more was taught than elementary reading and writing, some mathematics and most of all the basic Christian teachings and prayers. Also Muslim children were obliged to enrol in the schools, they even received twenty pounds of rice per child per month. But the hope “that by these means the Muslim religion would disappear from the island” soon turned into pessimism.⁴¹ The parents of these children were stubborn (*opstinateelyck inde Machumetische leere*).

In 1625 the church council asked the governor to ban all public Muslim rituals such as marriage, circumcision and common prayers. Sunday as a day of rest should be officially announced. The governor accepted the proposal and the *marinyo*, the assistant to the sexton, had to administer it. But, as was the case with this kind of decree in Batavia, they were soon afterwards forgotten. In 1625 two lay members of the church council, elders, went on a mission to the ‘Moorish Street’ of Run, but people rejected their offer to become Christian and said that they “had done enough by sending their children to the school in Ay.”⁴²

In the history of Protestantism under VOC rule, it was the church council of Banda that tried as long as possible to preserve its independence over against the local government. In line with the ruling of the Dordrecht Synod, the local administration wished to send representatives to the meetings of the church council. Succeeding ministers in Banda continued opposition to this presence. Therefore during several years no formal meeting of the church council was held. Only after the death of one of the major opponents, Rev. Michael Clarenbeek, and the departure of a second minister, Wilhelm Holthenius, in 1634, could the representative of the governor take his seat in the meetings of the church council of Banda.⁴³

As we have seen above, Banda remained a regular post for ministers. With the lack of ministers in the colony it was certainly not always easy to find suitable people who were willing to take this position. Sometimes the preparation was done in a very short time. One Jan de Graaf passed his first examination

⁴¹ Niemeijer 1994:21: “dat metter tijt door sulcke middelen de moorsche religie wel t’ eenemaal mocht comen te vervallen.”

⁴² Niemeijer 1994:22.

⁴³ Van Boetzelaer 1947:55.

on 12 January 1691, signed the confessions on 18 January, passed his final examination on 1 February, and was one day later nominated to become minister in Banda. Van Boetzelaer had the impression that the examination was not given the necessary weight.⁴⁴ A sad example of ‘tropical madness’ or a broken career is Abraham Mensing, who left for the Indies in 1733 with wife and children and worked in Banda between 1734–1736. He was totally unfit for the place and after some time in Ceylon he was placed in the poor house of Batavia, because he could not manage his own life.⁴⁵ In 1764, 140 members of the congregation of Rev. Verbeet signed a request for a higher salary for their minister, because living in Banda was too expensive and Verbeet wanted to leave his position.⁴⁶

Banda was the base for travel to Tanimbar, Kai and other islands in the southern region of the Moluccas. These were journeys of inspection, often together with other officials of the VOC administration. There was no missionary planning for these remote areas. In some islands these visits were even considered a disaster rather than a welcome call, because of the cattle that had to be slaughtered on such an occasion.⁴⁷ These travels were exceptional. Occasionally action was taken to spread Christianity. In 1669 the chief of the island of Ujir, close to Aru and in the same archipelago, requested Muslim preachers. Thereupon the governor of Banda sent immediately a Protestant missionary to nearby Wokam to contain any further spread of Islam. But such action was quite unusual.⁴⁸ Banda remained for the most part a quite exceptional, small collection of plantations, ruled by rich owners, run by many slaves and other workers, originating from many other places. It was a dominating Christian place set amidst pagans and Muslims.

Ternate and Tidore

State formation in the Moluccas had remained far behind that in the coastal regions of Western Indonesia, as we have seen in the first chapter. Ternate and Tidore were under way to become a larger political unit around 1500. Both were Muslim, Tidore much more strict than Ternate, but both had spread Islam among their subsidiaries. When Banda became a Christian society, Ternate had remained the centre of an Islamic state and culture. In the foregoing chapter it has been discussed how the Portuguese found a shelter on the small island of Ternate until the rupture of 1570, when they turned to its

⁴⁴ Van Boetzelaer 1947:111.

⁴⁵ Van Boetzelaer 1994:229–30.

⁴⁶ Van Boetzelaer 1947:194–195.

⁴⁷ Summary of a visit in 1645 in Van Boetzelaer 1947:129, 131, 209.

⁴⁸ Niemeijer 2001:259.

rival and neighbour Tidore. After the union between Portugal and Spain, the latter had joined them on Tidore. In 1606, however, the Spanish returned to Ternate where they could rebuild a fortification on the old site of Gamalama. As the result of a treaty with the Ternatean rulers, the Dutch could also build a fortification in Ternate. It was one of the many treaties between the VOC and Ternate. They had often a religious paragraph, stressing two elements: firstly that both parties would respect each other as free and independent in their beliefs; secondly that conversions of Christians and Muslims to either faith would not be permitted and runaways or people trying to convert would be sent back. There were sometimes quite liberal formulations. In 1657 the VOC even promised to the people of Tidore “not to disturb them in their religion or faith, not to defy them, not to force them to accept the Christian religion, but to leave them as they think is necessary for their own salvation.”⁴⁹ The 1669 treaty with the ruler of Sumbawa formulated this even more strongly,

Christians who enter the service of the above-mentioned kings and show themselves favourably disposed to embrace the Mohammedan faith will not by any means be accepted... nor shall the Company draw any of the king's subjects to the Christian faith against the explicit will of Their Highnesses.⁵⁰

Niemeijer supposes that this tolerant formulation should be explained from the Dutch Protestant “abhorrence of forced conversions to Catholicism,” in combination with the “religiously-inspired war of independence from Catholic Spain.”⁵¹ But we may also look to local conditions. In the Indies the diplomatic side apparently was more dominant. It was therefore a matter of good and wise diplomacy to respect those Muslim rulers who were too strong to be beaten or economically not really interesting, as was the case with Ternate and so many others. These treaties also were often ceremonially signed with an ‘inter-religious ritual’: there was not only the oath on the Bible, but also on the Qur’an and as well it happened that “parties by way of further confirmation drank water that had been poured over *kris* (daggers) which from ancient times until now signifies a pact of the highest order.”⁵²

In the rivalry with the Spaniards in Ternate, the VOC did not experience many problems. The Spanish had more problems in the Philippines and became gradually weaker. In 1617 they could still start a mission in the Minahasa, and to Siau and Sangihe, but that was the last expansion. In 1662 the Dutch order came that the Spanish should leave Ternate and Tidore. By that time the VOC had long since consolidated its monopoly on spices: already in 1607 there was

⁴⁹ For various examples concerning Ternate see Niemeijer 2001:278–279; also Steenbrink 1993:66–69.

⁵⁰ Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum* 1907–1955-II:423; also quoted in Steenbrink 1993:68.

⁵¹ Niemeijer 2001:259.

⁵² Examples among others in Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum* 1907–1955-II:11, 426, 453.

a promise of sole trade with the Dutch. While production of spices moved more and more to the 'Christian territories' of Ambon, Saparua and Banda, this process was strengthened in the 1652 treaty with Ternate in which the Sultan agreed to the systematic eradication of the spice trees, in compensation for an annual payment of 14,000 *rijksdaalder*. In 1657 a similar treaty was concluded with Tidore.⁵³ In 1667 Muslim Makassar was brought fully under VOC control with the Treaty of Bungaya.

In regard to religion, the first effect of this political development was the containment of the spread of Islam. But it was not really the beginning of a new spread of Christianity. In fact about 1660 the period of expansion for both religions ended and a period of stabilisation or even stagnation had begun. The VOC ministers took over the remaining Catholics who had converted under Portuguese and Spanish rule. In the North Moluccas these were only small pockets. Ternate itself had had around 1608 a small Christian community, consisting of a mixed group of Portuguese and Asian offspring, free citizens, often emancipated slaves (*mardijkers*). Among them were also a few native Tenatans, some of them members of the highest elite of the realm, as well as some converts from Moro, Bacan, Manado and Siau. When the Spanish left for Manila in 1663 some 200 *mardijker* joined them. The remaining Christians probably were quite few. The 1841 census mentions only 181 Christians for Ternate.⁵⁴ One or two Protestant ministers served the congregation that was formally founded in 1626, with the constitution of a church council and the arrival of a first minister in 1628. In the beginning it was only VOC personnel who joined the services in the Dutch Castle *Oranje*. Some decades later, after the Spaniards had left, they served all Christians, but their flock remained small. The same can be said of the small number of Christians that remained on Bacan and Makian.

Sangir-Talaud and Minahasa after 1662

It was more in North Sulawesi and the northern islands that Protestant missionaries could continue the work of their Catholic colleagues. In this region, with no larger states, much depended on the personal choice of a religion by the local petty rulers. Statistics for 1696 mention a population of 13,100 for the whole region of North Sulawesi, with some 8,000 in Sangir, more than 1,000 in Siau, and 1,107 in the tiny island of Tagulandang (also written as Tahulandang), while not many more than 1,000 were found in Manado and

⁵³ Niemeijer 2001:262.

⁵⁴ Van Fraassen 1987:69–72.

other places on the north coast of the Minahasa.⁵⁵ The case of Tagulandang is quite interesting. In the early 1670s its ruler was glad that the Makassarese were defeated by the Dutch and he showed his loyalty to the most powerful ruler of the region by rejecting Islam and transforming the local mosque into a Christian prayer house and school. We may perhaps also accept for Siau, Sangir and Talaud such anti Makassar feelings as explaining why they were willing to support the Protestants in the early 1670s. After the defeat of Makassar and the departure of the Spanish the Dutch had remained the only supra-local power. For the petty rulers of the coastal areas of North Sulawesi and, even more, the chain of islands northwest like Tagulandang, Sangihe and Siau, it was profitable to accept the Dutch as their formal allies or overlords, to insure themselves from attacks by neighbouring islands or by Tidore which occasionally still tried to expand its realm.⁵⁶

Needless to say, the depth of conversion was in many cases not really profound. It was quite confusing that in Sangihe, after the Catholic beginnings of the 1650s, Rev. Zacharias Kaheing (also written as Caheins) introduced in his period of work, 1677–1680, Malay prayers, while his successor, Cornelius de Leeuw (1680–1688) urged the schoolmasters to translate the common formulas into Sangirese.⁵⁷ In the last decades there were regular visitations (that took some four months) and a large network of schools was established. It was considered as a major duty of loyalty to the Dutch administration that the school should be maintained. It was mentioned sometimes as a kind of *corvée* labour, to be organized by the village chief and his council. In his 1690–1691 visitation Rev. Gellius Cammiga found a place where only 20 out of 200 children were in the school. He noticed, “they only send the children of slaves to the school and keep their own children at home.”⁵⁸ In various ways Christianity entered the social system in an irregular way. The *mèster* was paid by the VOC office in Manado not in cash but in South Indian textiles. They had to pay part of it to their local chiefs. These local rulers also profited from the *denda*, the fines that could be asked from people who did not properly attend church services. The reports of the visitations repeatedly mention stories of chiefs who had more than one wife, of nightly dancing for invoking spirits for various purposes, and in general of broad ignorance of the basic doctrines of Christianity. There were some exceptions, especially in places where Ambonese *mèster* were nominated who taught not only the few

⁵⁵ Niemeijer 2001:266; see also Niemeijer 2002b:147–175, esp. 162 where statistics of 1691 are given, that are much higher, totalling 19,223. Their division is more or less similar to the numbers of 1696.

⁵⁶ Niemeijer 2002b:164; Niemeijer 2001:264.

⁵⁷ Niemeijer 2002b:166.

⁵⁸ Niemeijer 2002b:168.

Malay prayers but also recited daily parts of the catechism. In the period of decline of the VOC church personnel also had to be reduced. For this region the religious officials were, in 1763, brought back from 68 to 41: 33 *mèster* and 8 *marinyo* or sextons. After the British took over the administration of Manado in 1797 the 28 *mèster* and 7 *marinyo* were paid from their account.⁵⁹

Notwithstanding the little impact of Christianity in daily life and the obvious continuation of traditional religion, the formal membership of a world religion brought enough profit for both parties, the local elite and the VOC administration, to be continued and developed at considerable expense. It created a long lasting tradition of exclusive loyalty to Christianity, especially in the northern islands. In the Minahasa proper, there was only a very small Christian community. In the collective memory of this region, together with parts of Batak land the only more or less homogeneous Protestant territory of modern Indonesia, the conversion did not start in the 1670s, but in the 1830s with the arrival of missionaries Riedel and Schwarz.

Timor

Portuguese rule could maintain itself longest in Timor. In the previous chapter we have seen that the Catholic priests for some time even organized military defence and public administration in some territories. In the 1640s this was done by Father Antonio de San Jacinto, head of the mission in Larantuka.

The Dutch conquered the Portuguese fortification of Solor in 1613 and immediately sent two Protestant ministers “to make Solor a second Ambon.”⁶⁰ But the Dominican friars, who were permitted to continue their work from Larantuka, fostered an anti-Dutch and anti-Protestant feeling among their flock. The first Protestant ministers of Solor also entered negotiations with the raja of Kupang, who was negotiating with the Portuguese about a possible conversion to Catholicism. In fact this native ruler did not opt for any of the possibilities Christianity offered. Because the southern islands were not so important for the Dutch they did not continue their efforts to introduce Protestantism from Solor. Only in 1670 was a Protestant minister sent to Kupang, but he died soon afterwards. The same fate was experienced by his successor who arrived only in 1687. In 1674 a raja of Timor arrived in Batavia with a large company, expressing his wish to embrace Christianity. Later it was found out that this chief had been expelled by his people and hoped for Dutch

⁵⁹ Niemeijer 2002b:173.

⁶⁰ Van den End 1989-I:91.

support in order to be installed again in his previous power. Nevertheless, he returned to Kupang with a native teacher.⁶¹

In 1688, the comforter of the sick of the Dutch fortification of Kupang, ran away to the Portuguese, and thereupon in his place a native teacher, Paulus Kupang was accepted as leader of the small Protestant congregation. He performed his duty so well, that he was formally nominated as 'comforter of the sick,' a position that was still below that of a real Protestant minister, but usually only open for Dutch people. After he died in 1716, his position was taken over by an Ambonese teacher, Amos Thenu. The statistics of that time mention 84 baptised (in 1719), growing to 460 in 1729 and even 1,300 in 1753. During the 1740s there was also a strong movement towards Christianity, directed by one of the local chiefs of the island of Rote, west of Timor. Several thousands were baptised and Rote became one of the centres of Christianity (and of schooling) in the region, followed a few decades later by the small island of Sawu.

The Mixed Population of Batavia

The first permanent settlement of the VOC was in Ambon, in 1605. A first factory was built in 1609 on the north coast of West Java, at the mouth of the river Ciliwung, where in 1619 the town of Jayakarta had been conquered by the new colonial power. This town was renamed Batavia and became the international centre of the VOC. Like the town of Ambon and the society in Banda, Batavia also was a colonial creation with a very mixed population. On 3 January 1621 Rev. Adriaan Hulsebos administered Holy Communion according to the Reformed tradition for the first time. He was also the initiator of the church council that gathered for the first time on 21 January 1621. On 26 December of that year the first Malay service was held in Batavia.⁶² Quite soon it became evident that it was important to hold Portuguese services, initially in the Malay church, while later two special Portuguese church buildings were used. All the Reformed faithful of Batavia were ruled by one church council. This council had to admit a representative of the VOC directors in its meetings, as already mentioned above. Besides, all correspondence with the church in the Netherlands had to be shown to this representative. Like all aspects of life, religious matters were under strict control of the VOC administration.⁶³ The elders and deacons were lay members of the church council. For the period 1621–1723 a long list of 422 elders and 475 deacons

⁶¹ Van Boetzelaer 1947:129–130.

⁶² Van Boetzelaer 1947:23–27.

⁶³ Niemeijer 1996:92–93.

has been published in the major work about the period by Rev. François Valentijn, his *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*. This demonstrates the participation of the lay population in church affairs. Only Europeans could be elected for a post on the church council.

The first session of the church council admitted to baptism an illegitimate son of one Gerrit Claesz van Amsterdam, born out of his slave, Sembidji of Bali, “because the baby belongs to the inheritors of the covenant from the side of the father.” This was done notwithstanding the fact that Sembidji was not a Christian.⁶⁴ This was no exception but rather the common practice, although it was against the rulings of the church in the Netherlands: Batavia was a very mixed society, with a European, Asian and Eurasian population that was not only segmented but also hierarchically structured. Rough statistics for 1679 show the following composition:

Dutch	2,227	6.9
Eurasians (<i>mestiezen</i>)	760	2.3
Chinese	3,220	10.0
Free Citizens (<i>mardijkers</i>)	5,348	16.7
Javanese	1,391	4.3
Malay	1,049	3.3
Balinese	1,364	4.2
Slaves	16,695	52.0
Total	32,124	100

Mestiezen is a common word for people of mixed European and Asian descent. It may have been that the Asian component was from one of the Indonesian islands, but it may also have been the descendents of European and Indian (most often Malabar or Bengali) parents. *Mardijkers* were freed slaves, all of them also Asian. It is debated how great the percentage of Protestant Christians was among the population. The Jesuit priest Manuel Soares visited Catholics in Batavia in 1661. He was welcomed by Governor General Maetsuycker (1653–1678), who provided him with lodgings and two guards. Soares guessed that out of the European and Indian Christians one third was Reformed and two thirds Catholic.⁶⁵ His numbers may be biased. Some people said that Maetsuycker was hiding his Catholic background, while he openly denied this. But he never joined the celebration of the Lord’s Supper to refute the gossip. Soares could walk in his black cassock with rosary in Batavia, accept invitations

⁶⁴ “Also tzelve kindeken tregt des verbonds vande zyde des vader toebehoordende.” Schutte 2002:112.

⁶⁵ Jacobs 1989:279–314; Niemeijer 1996:130 and 2005:246–248.

to celebrate the Eucharist and administer baptism in private houses.⁶⁶ Between 1622 and 1783 not less than 190 Catholic priests visited the town of Batavia. Only a few were as welcome and free as Soares. Several were put in prison or sent home immediately, because the formal rule was that they were not allowed to enter VOC territory, let alone to work as a priest there.

Many slaves and also *Mardijkers* originated from the Malabar coast. They were *parruas*, who spoke Portuguese and were very loyal to the Portuguese priests and Catholic practices. In general, most Asian Christians in Batavia originated from places where the Portuguese had spread their faith: Bengal, Ceylon and the southern Indian coastal regions.⁶⁷ Schutte and Niemeijer guess that there was never a Christian majority in the town of Batavia. Besides, quite a few of them were Catholic or Lutheran. In 1768 the population of the town was estimated as 20,000 in the walled centre and 60,000 in the suburbs. If we accept a division of Christians similar to the case of Semarang at that period (see below), then this would give the number of 20,000 Reformed, 10,000 Catholics and 10,000 Lutherans. But these are just global numbers, uncertain and only about external qualifications: something more has to be said about variation in the quality of Christianity. The Reformed Church had a quite strict distinction between members who were baptised and full members who also were entitled to receive Holy Communion. Around 1700 there were about 5,000 full members. This number probably grew but never reached more than 10,000.⁶⁸

The most prominent outward manifestation of Christianity was the building of churches. Here, the Christian character of the VOC capital appeared somewhat late. In line with the building of the Jewish Kings, David and Solomon, in the 'Indian Zion' the VOC officials gave first attention to the city walls, the fortification, the administrative buildings and their own houses. In 1625 a still rather poor provisional church building was erected. In 1632 the foundation for a proper church was laid. This was followed by the first stone to be laid in 1640 and this building was finished in 1643. In 1644 Governor General Antonio van Diemen (1636–1645) built a chapel in the Castle, at his own expense. Already in 1633 a simple wooden church with *atap* or straw roof had been built for services in Malay. The so-called *Portugese Binnenkerk* (Portuguese Church inside the city walls) was built between 1669 and 1672. This fine building was initially meant for Malay services, but was also to meet the needs of the Portuguese-speaking Christians. Another Portuguese-language church was built outside the city walls in 1695, the *Portugese Buitenkerk*, now the Gereja Sion. In addition, in several quarters there were prayer halls. In

⁶⁶ De Graaf 1938:12.

⁶⁷ Niemeijer 1996:128.

⁶⁸ Schutte 2002:115.

1743 the Lutheran Baron Gustaaf van Imhoff was nominated Governor General (1743–1750). He stimulated the building of a Lutheran Church which, in spite of the protests of some Dutch Protestants, was inaugurated on 28 September 1749.⁶⁹

The ministers of Batavia were all Dutch. The only exception was Cornelis Senen (ca. 1600–1661), a native of Banda who was in 1621 taken to Batavia and worked as a teacher in the settlement of the Bandanese there. Later he was entrusted to lead services for the Malay and Portuguese-speaking congregations. He was, however, never a full minister, but only a probationer, a *proponent*.⁷⁰ In 1650 the number of ministers was already eight, after 1685 this was eleven. Besides the ministers, there were also comforters of the sick and teachers in the service of the Batavia church. Among these teachers there were evangelists (*catechiseermeester*) who had to teach adults who were preparing for baptism. If they went to the houses of the candidates they were also called *mèster keliling*. In 1706 there were 34 evangelists who gave religious instruction to 4,873 slaves and free people. The majority of them used Portuguese (4,440 or 91%), while 323 were instructed in Malay and 110 in Dutch.⁷¹

A major task of the VOC church was the care for the poor, entrusted to the deacons as members of the church council. Finances for this activity came mostly from gifts, collected during church service, and from bequests. There was a poor house, an orphanage and distribution of a monthly allowance in cash, for about 750–1500 poor people during the later 17th and the 18th century. Only members of the Dutch Reformed Church were entitled to receive this service.⁷²

Education was not a principal task of the church. Schools were directly supervised and subsidised by the colonial government. However, there were a number of religious aspects in all schools: besides reading, writing and basic arithmetic the singing of Psalms was one of the features of the primary school. School teachers had to agree with the Heidelberg Catechism and the Confession of Faith of the Dutch Reformed Churches. All school days should begin with the common prayers and all schoolbooks should be approved by the church council.⁷³

Because of the shortage of ministers in Batavia, efforts were made there to begin a proper education for church ministers. In 1642 a Latin School was founded, as preparation for academic education in Europe. The pupils all came from the local orphanage. Because of a lack of teachers the school closed in

⁶⁹ Heuken 2003; Van Boetzelaer 1947:183–184.

⁷⁰ Van Troostenburg de Bruyn 1893:392; Van den End 1989:392.

⁷¹ Niemeijer 1996:187.

⁷² Details in Niemeijer 1996:275–356 and 2005:330–342.

⁷³ Van Boetzelaer 1947:113–116, for the school rules of 1684.

1656 after some difficult years, when seldom a teacher worked more than one year in the school. The school produced three students for the Netherlands, two of whom returned to the Indies as ordained ministers. Several of its graduates later worked as schoolmasters. Between 1666 and 1670 a Latin School was opened again, with 24 pupils, this time no longer as an initiative of the church council. This school had to close in 1670, because with only two pupils Governor General Maetsuycker considered it too expensive.⁷⁴

Because of the status of the Dutch Reformed Church as the 'public religion' all other denominations and religions were formally banned. This was in fact more so in theory than in practice. Time and again the Batavia church council turned its attention to the Chinese temples and Islamic places of worship in the city.⁷⁵ The effect was quite often that on paper a ban of these places was repeated, but no firm measures were taken to stop non-Christian acts of worship. In 1651 the Batavia government, at the request of the church council, banned "any public or secret meetings for practising their evil and Mahometan religion." These were considered as "an act which should not be tolerated by a praiseworthy government where the pure and unadulterated teaching of the only true Saviour Jesus Christ was taught and served." An important consideration was also that many native Christians "had only recently emerged from the Moorish religion" and were still weak in the new faith.⁷⁶ Similar requests and bans were produced in 1654, 1662 and 1674, but without much result. As an answer to the same complaint of 1686, when the church council reported that recently new mosques and Chinese temples had been built, Governor General Camphuys (1684–1691) gave the mild but ironic advice, "To practice such amiable initiatives for the persuasion and conversion of the hearts of Moors and pagans, that further growth of these temples will diminish automatically and in these dangerous times no violence will be needed."⁷⁷

In 1635 the municipal authorities stipulated that every newly baptised person would receive two *rijksdaalders* in order "to stimulate others to adopt the Reformed faith as well, and to show how we appreciate that our pagan and Moorish community attempt to seek their salvation through the only Saviour, the Lord Christ."⁷⁸ One quite striking example of a conversion is the case of a pagan, certainly not baptised, slave, Anthoni of Bengal, who accompanied his master to the church (probably carrying his umbrella) and shared in the Lord's Supper "out of ignorance, because he saw other slaves of the Noble Company stepping forward." When the council examined Anthoni, he said that

⁷⁴ Koolen 1993:177–189.

⁷⁵ Steenbrink 1993:70 for twenty requests of the Church council.

⁷⁶ Van der Chijs 1885-II:169.

⁷⁷ De Haan 1910–1912-IV:432–433.

⁷⁸ Van der Chijs 1885-I:371.

he wished to be taught the Christian faith and they warned him “to refrain from such disorderly behaviour from that time on.”⁷⁹

It was not only profitable to convert to Christianity. The Chinese of Batavia had to pay higher taxes than native Indonesians, like Javanese and Malays. When Chinese converted to Islam, as they seemed to do much more often than converting to Christianity, they were for taxation purposes considered to be natives of the Indies. In Banten it was ruled that only the children of Chinese converts would be legally treated as natives, while the converts themselves were still under the direct authority of the Company and therefore subject to higher taxes.⁸⁰ Also in Batavia regulations were regularly issued to prevent the Chinese from becoming Muslim. In 1755 the Company specified that Chinese Muslims would be required to continue paying the poll-tax and that they would not be given permission to travel outside the town freely.⁸¹

The VOC administration was in many ways forced to recognize the presence not only of other Christian denominations, but also of other religions. In 1681 provisions were made for a salary to be paid to the “Mahomedan priest who had to administer the oath to Mahomedan witnesses on behalf of the college of church elders,”⁸² and a Muslim ‘priest’ was appointed as “principal supervisor of the mosque of the Coromandel Moors outside the Utrecht gate at Batavia” in 1748.⁸³ In 1754 a *Compendium of the Most Important Mahomedan Laws and Customs Concerning Inheritance, Marriage and Divorce* was compiled by the VOC administration after consultations between the Delegate for Native Affairs, and some “Machomethan priests and Kampong officers.” The preamble of this document stated that Islamic law was to be applied to Muslims in cases where civil law would apply for Europeans.⁸⁴ These regulations did not imply that Europeans were beginning to accept Muslims as such in the town. There remained a double standard. The *New Statutes of Batavia* of 1776 again formally stated that non-Christian places of worship continued to be banned.⁸⁵ Batavia was not only ethnically a very mixed town, but there remained a number of conflicting measures in its official laws and in the directives given by officials. It was not only an ‘Indian Zion’ but at the same time a free place where people of many convictions could worship.

⁷⁹ Mooij 1927–1931-III:74.

⁸⁰ Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum* 1907–1955-VI:13 and 415.

⁸¹ Van der Chijs 1885-VII:153.

⁸² Van der Chijs 1885-III:68.

⁸³ Van der Chijs 1885-V:548.

⁸⁴ Van der Chijs 1885-VIII:392–407.

⁸⁵ Van der Chijs 1885-IX:29–30.

*VOC settlements on the north coast of Java and other cities
of the archipelago*

In all major settlements (fortifications or factories) of the VOC some kind of religious personnel were available. In 1700 out of 18,117 personnel of the VOC, 95 or about 0.5% were serving religious needs. For later years this was even somewhat higher: in 1780 it was 0.8%.⁸⁶ This was only the European personnel: the native teachers, evangelisers/evangelists and sacristans in East Indonesia (Ambon, Ternate, Kupang) are not included in this number. Places like Makassar had for some time also resident ministers. Between 1719 and 1722 the gifted linguist Georg Henric Werndly, born in Switzerland, was minister in Makassar. He translated the Heidelberg Catechism, composed a rhymed Malay version of Psalms and made contributions to the correction of the Leijdecker Malay translation of the whole Bible.⁸⁷

After the troubles in Central Java, that started with the murder of some 10,000 Chinese of Batavia, and the flight of the remaining 25,000 to Central Java in 1740, direct rule of the VOC on the northern coast of Java was established. In 1753 Rev. J.W. Swemmelaar was nominated minister in Semarang, where he served a congregation of 1,767 Christians. According to his statistics out of this number 454 were Lutherans and 392 Catholics, covering the region from Pekalongan to Madura and Yogyakarta. Because of the large number (nearly half of the total) of non-Reformed Christians he took as his strategy “not to irritate them and not delivering sermons that would chase them out of the church and not mentioning the specific differences by name.”⁸⁸ Swemmelaar even admitted Lutherans to Holy Communion.

The translation of tracts, prayers, hymns and bible

Besides local languages, during the VOC period three major languages were used: Dutch, Portuguese and Malay. Notwithstanding the defeat of the Portuguese and Spaniards in the first decades of the seventeenth century, the Portuguese language had for a longer time a continuing impact on VOC society. In broad circles, especially among people of mixed Eurasian decent, Portuguese remained in use until the end of the eighteenth century as the common language of many slaves and also of free citizens of mixed descent. Only by 1800 had Malay became the most important language in Batavia. There was

⁸⁶ After Gaastra 2002:87.

⁸⁷ Van Boetzelae 1947:250.

⁸⁸ “Niet te ergeren, en uit de kerk te prediken, hare namen in stuk van verschilpunten niet noemen”, Niemeijer 1998:53–73, here p. 67.

not only a Portuguese-language Protestant church in Batavia, there was also a translation of the New Testament, made by João Ferreira d'Almeida, born in 1628 as a Catholic but converted to Reformed Protestantism as a teenager. He was in 1645 in Malacca as a comforter of the sick when he made this translation from a Spanish text. In 1651–1652 this translation was revised. Ferreira d'Almeida used European Portuguese that was quite different from the *lingua franca* that was used in the Asian regions. After working for some time in Ceylon and South India he was from 1663 until 1689 minister for the Portuguese church of Batavia.

The first Malay translation of the Gospel of John was made by a senior VOC official, *Koopman* Albert Cornelisz Ruil, who went to the Indies for the first time in 1600. This translation was printed in the Netherlands in 1629. It was sometimes criticised because of its use of the elegant but complicated language of the Malay court writings rather than the common Malay that was used as *lingua franca* in VOC territory.

A full translation of the New Testament by Rev. Daniël Brouwerius was published in 1668. Several complaints were made against this minister because of his quite severe preaching. A Muslim from Makassar who was sentenced to death had to listen to his admonition to convert to Christianity and was even flogged in support of the predication. His superiors considered this “a very unusual and unsuitable method to convert pagans.” Because of this, initially the printing of his translation was not permitted by the VOC administration, but later they gave in. His translation was close to the daily language used by common people in Batavia and therefore mixed with Portuguese. Swellengrebel, a gifted linguist and experienced bible translator, commented upon his translation as follows, “This Malay has been written from hearing only. The translator apparently never saw a correctly spelled Malay text.... Malay readers or hearers who were not yet familiar with the Bible, must have met so many odd and strange expressions that they could not understand it at all.”⁸⁹

The ‘Leijdecker’ is the Malay equivalent of the ‘King James’ version. It is the translation by Dr. Melchior Leijdecker, born in 1645 in Amsterdam and a full graduate (with the title of doctor) in both theology and medicine, combining the same sciences as Justus Heurnius. He made a career as minister of Batavia from 1675 until his death in 1701. He was married to Antonia van Riebeeck, a daughter of the founder of Cape Town, Jan van Riebeeck and sister of Abraham van Riebeeck, the Governor General of the Indies (1709–1713). Leijdecker studied the Malay language of the Muslim courts and the Islamic schools of the archipelago and composed firstly a dictionary of classical Malay. In 1691 he was charged with the translation of the whole Bible. He had

⁸⁹ Swellengrebel 1974–1978-I:12–13.

finished this work, up to Ephesians 6, when he died in 1701. The Rev. Petrus van der Vorm, known for his knowledge of Hebrew and eastern languages, finished the work in that same year. The work remained locked in the room of the church council of Batavia after its completion because of another debate about the style of translation. Rev. François Valentijn (1666–1727) who was a minister in Ambon between 1685–1695 before returning to Europe, but active again in the Indies between 1705–1713, had started a polemic on the style of translation, pleading for the common Malay or the *lingua franca* as used in Ambon. Valentijn produced a translation of his own that was never printed and is now lost. Leijdecker's work was printed in Amsterdam, 1731–1733, in Latin script. In 1758 an edition in the Arabic script more commonly used for Malay texts was printed.⁹⁰

“Your honour employs men and not angels here...”

In 1614 Jan Pieterszoon Coen, founder of Batavia and of the VOC empire, wrote two extensive memoranda to his Dutch employers, dealing with his plan to colonise the East Indies with many European people. For Coen, religious differences provided the most important reason for colonization:

The Moors abhor us and therefore the Ternatans and Bandanese do not permit anyone from their families to marry any of us for any reason whatsoever. If sexual intercourse occurs, they terminate the pregnancy (they say) and untimely destroy the fruit and its creature that is born so that the mother will not produce pagan offspring. Your Honour employs men, and not angels here.⁹¹

In our context this remark is not only related to the male VOC personnel who were in need of European women, but it may also be extended to the evaluation of the VOC period as a whole. Baron Carel van Boetzelaer van Asperen en Dubbeldam was, between 1906 and 1919, the first *zendingsconsul*, or counsellor for the missions in the Dutch East Indies. It was his duty to negotiate in the name of all Protestant missionary societies with the colonial government. He received the name *baron subsidie*, because of his main job: to receive government support for mission schools, hospitals, and more general ‘civilisation work.’ After retirement Van Boetzelaer wrote a book on the history of the Protestant Church in the Dutch East Indies. This book, published in 1947, is from the beginning one concentrated and intense complaint about the close connection between the church, the VOC and later the Dutch colonial administration, and it celebrates the separation between the various

⁹⁰ Swellengrebel 1974–1978-I:13–20.

⁹¹ Colenbrander 1919–1953-VI:470; see also Steenbrink 1993:61.

regional churches and the colonial administration as executed since 1935. Van Boetzelaer praised the generosity of the VOC, “Very seldom has this company denied for reasons of economy something that was asked for the benefit of the church, especially in its glorious period. It has sent some 900 ministers to the Indies entirely at its own expense and besides several thousand comforters of the sick and teachers. It has spent millions for the spiritual welfare of its personnel and the population.”⁹² But this positive judgment is followed by a whole range of comments on “Conflicts and Problems: the Total Submission of the Church of the Indies to the Government.”⁹³ This total submission was considered the original sin of the Reformed Church in the colony. It was continued during the nineteenth century and only repaired in 1935.

G. Schutte has in several publications severely criticised this negative opinion of VOC policy. We should not judge the reality of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the ideals of the missionary spirit of the period 1850–1950. We should also not apply the liberal nineteenth century separation of state and church to the previous centuries. The core concept should be the *publieke kerk*, the public church, “protected and paid for by the government, the keeper of the public ethics and morality.”⁹⁴ In this vision it was the duty of the church as part of this public system to preach Reformed doctrine and to celebrate public liturgy. It has to be recognised that company officials, from the highest rank to the lowest, often did not organise their private life according to this public religion. It was the duty of the VOC and its church to preach to the sinners, and sometimes also to punish those who committed public offences. Schutte therefore has a quite positive opinion about the VOC, “The Company acted as a good Calvinist father of its personnel and governor for its citizens. It stimulated and favoured Christianity in many ways, directly and indirectly. In line with the spirit of that time, it considered religion as the foundation of morality and the kernel of society.”⁹⁵ Schutte relates the evaluation of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands to that of the VOC church. In the Netherlands there was “a national but at the same a confessional church, a New Testament Zion amidst a wicked and in many aspects depraved generation, and from the beginning of the seventeenth century also among the East India Moors and Pagans.”⁹⁶

In this chapter we found that mixed societies such as those into which VOC personnel entered, often developed double religious loyalties. Even if local people formally accepted Christianity, the orthodox Reformed blend of that

⁹² Van Boetzelaer 1947:5.

⁹³ Van Boetzelaer, title for chapter three, 50–78.

⁹⁴ Schutte 2002:239; Schutte in: Leonard Blussé & Ilonka Ooms 2002:87–99.

⁹⁵ Schutte 2002:98.

⁹⁶ Schutte 2002:23. See also the title of Schutte 2002, *Het Indisch Sion*.

religion was seldom the only religious guideline or inspiration. We have also seen that formal adherence to one religious denomination not only was promoted by religious leaders, afraid of syncretism and praising the superiority of their faith, but also by the Portuguese, Spanish, VOC and Muslim established governments who needed this single and exclusive loyalty for political reasons.⁹⁷

If we look at the historical context of VOC Christianity, we should note some other considerations as well. Dutch colonialism had a great impact on the economy of the whole archipelago. It reorganised and dominated trade and contacts between the islands. It brought Sumatran gold to India in exchange for textiles produced there. This economic impact has been tremendous. But what may be said about the cultural and more specifically religious impact of the VOC? The short Portuguese period has been more influential on the language and the music of the Indonesian archipelago than the longer period of the VOC. Kroncong music is Portuguese and at the same time it is seen as authentically Indonesian. Many more Portuguese than Dutch words have found their way into standard classical Malay. It is the same as with the Chinese who for many centuries had intensive trade relations with Indonesia. But at first it was Indian religion that was taken for rituals and literature and after the fourteenth century more and more Islamic influence in culture and religion was accepted. There never were as many Arabs in the archipelago as Chinese, perhaps not even a tenth of their number, but the Chinese have never had the cultural and certainly not the religious influence of Arab and Indian Muslims. Was it the same case with the VOC Dutch who dominated the international economy of the archipelago but did not extend this domination to the religious sphere, except in some areas of East Indonesia like Ambon-Lease, Sangir-Talaud and Rote-Kupang?

In the classical Malay and Javanese literature up to the 1850s the Dutch are virtually absent. They are there of course as 'infidels' in the Malay poem on the war on Makassar of the 1660s when the Dutch together with the Muslim Buginese fought against the Muslim Makassarese. But in the great encyclopaedic collection of Javanese poetry, the *Serat Centhini* (composed between 1650 until the last version of 1823), there are no Dutch on Java. Although the structure of the some 3,000 pages of this epic poem is about travel to most regions of Java, east and west, north and south, the marginal position of the Dutch in Batavia and some other coastal towns is absolutely neglected in the *Serat Centhini*.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Steenbrink 2003:446–466.

⁹⁸ See Van der Linden 1937; for this and the following also Steenbrink 1990:141–167.

One of the very few references to Dutch religion in the Javanese literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is in the *Babad Suropati*, the story of Suropati, probably a runaway Balinese slave of Batavia turned Muslim, who as an adventurer collected his own army (or should we use the modern term *militia*, a band of independent soldiers). He revolted against the Sultan of Banten in the 1670s and then fought and plundered in Central Java until he founded a realm of his own in East Java, Blambangan, where he became a respected ruler. In one of the episodes of the romantic story of this man, he falls in love with the daughter of the Dutch Governor General. The relationship is, of course, forbidden according to local customs anywhere in Indonesia and also according to Muslim law, as in this story Suropati and the daughter of the high Dutch official were nourished by the same mother. But then the girl says, “According to Dutch religion, as long as we are of the same mind, it can be sanctified by religion, even though you are my adoptive brother. Let us go into this beautiful sleeping-chamber and enjoy the pleasure of love on the bed.”⁹⁹ This is what many Indonesians of that period saw and experienced of VOC Christianity. Religious identity was not the first and most important thing for the Dutch. They respected other religions, were hesitant to begin religious debates, even forbade them to their officials, and were confirming religious boundaries. In private life, the most obvious thing was that the men took women from all regions and all religions without many problems. Jan Pieterszoon Coen repeatedly complained that “we Christians set less value on the honour of our wives than the Turks, Moors and pagans.”¹⁰⁰ Finally he stated that:

One should also be aware that these southern people are much more devout in their religion than our northern people are in theirs. Therefore both Christians and Mahometans should leave things as they are for the time being. But the people who are sent here ought to be peaceful and experienced rather than coarse, uncircumcised idiots. This is mostly the case with ministers, as a result of which their name has fallen into contempt and has almost become an object of ridicule. It is a pity that only such people as one sees here are called to the office of minister or deacon. It is almost as if we ourselves never speak of religion.¹⁰¹

This is the spicy language of Coen. In his style he explains why the expansion of Christianity was halted in the seventeenth century, except in a few regions. He also explains that religion was a marginal affair in the VOC's business, while in respect of culture and religion as a whole the VOC period was just a marginal affair in Indonesian society as a whole. This chapter has been mostly

⁹⁹ Ann Kumar 1976:300.

¹⁰⁰ Colenbrander 1919–1952-III: 886 (from 1622).

¹⁰¹ Colenbrander 1919–1952-VI:474.

devoted to describing this process as well as discussing the few regions where VOC Christianity had some impact.

Karel Steenbrink

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