CHAPTER 2

The Internal Affairs of the Catholic Community

While preparing this chapter there was some doubt how to start: with the top or bottom? With the smallest group of the faithful, with the basic communities under supervision of a catechist, or just stimulated by a simple lay man or woman, still one degree in organisational level under the parish, lead by a priest? Finally we decided to start with the top, the papal Nuncio, the Bishops and the national organisation, simply because Indonesian culture and also the Catholic Church is quite hierarchical in all its aspects.

1947 A Papal Delegate and (Inter-)Nuncio in Jakarta

The Roman Catholic Church retained from its history as a middle-sized Italian state a system of diplomatic prelates, commonly called Vatican Nuncio. In the European tradition of the modern time the Vatican Nuncio was automatically also dean of the diplomatic corps in many countries. For the Southeast Asian region the Vatican Nuncio resided until 1947 in Sydney. This was not a great problem for the Dutch East Indies in the pre-independence period because minor or local affairs were handled by the Vicar Apostolic of Batavia who administered most contacts with the Vatican as well with the central Government of the East Indies. Some other matters between the Vatican and the Dutch Government were discussed in The Hague. From the pre-independence period only one case of intervention at the Apostolic Delegate of Sydney is known in the affair of Bishop De Backere of Surabaya who in 1933 wanted to issue the ban of excommunication on all Catholics who were members of political parties outside the one recognised Catholic Party.  

Already in late 1946 the Vatican planned to nominate a nuncio or at least a special representative in Jakarta. Bishop Visser of Purwokerto who was in the Netherlands in early 1947, supported the idea, because he was convinced that the international status of the Vatican would strengthen the Catholic influence in the debates about new constitutions, in the Republican but also in other regions of Indonesia. He did not, however, share the idea of a non-Dutch envoy to Jakarta. On 13 January 1947 Visser had a meeting with the Dutch Prime Minister, the Catholic Louis Beel, who shared his opinion. Beel was afraid that

1 For this affair see Steenbrink 2007:56–9, 501–505.
this appointment would be seen as Vatican support for an independent Indonesia.\(^2\) Visser defended his position during a visit to Rome, early March 1947, but could not push his preference for a Dutch envoy.

On 6 July 1947 the Vatican nominated the Belgian priest Georges-Marie-Joseph-Hubert-Ghislain de Jonghe d’Ardoye (1887–1961), long time missionary in China and former Apostolic Delegate in Iraq, to the new position of Apostolic Delegate in Jakarta. De Jonghe was officially not a diplomat. But for this new position at the top of the Catholic community a Dutch government permit was necessary, and easily given on 25 June 1947. His formal task was not truly that of a diplomat to the Dutch and Republican Indonesian government, but a surveillance of the internal affairs of the Catholic community. He nevertheless immediately started consultations with both fighting parties (Dutch and Republican) about the position of religion in the coming constitutions. In order to prove his neutrality in this period of fighting, De Jonghe sent his first ‘greetings and blessings’ to Vicar Apostolic Soegijapranata and the Catholics of the Republic by way of the International Red Cross in August 1947.\(^3\)

The Apostolic Delegate had to find a position for himself and he was not a timid or modest figure. He bluntly stated (mostly in Latin or in French, since he probably had only a poor command of Dutch or rejected the use of that language) that he was put in charge of all affaires générales for the Catholics in Indonesia. In October 1947 he claimed the direct authority of the Centraal Missie Bureau (CMB) that was erected in the early 1930s for the national contacts of with the colonial administration. The personnel of CMB, however, were unwilling to follow his directives and took their own plan. When Capuchin Friar and CMB Director Ludovicus Boddeke visited him in March 1948 to discuss confidential information from B. van Eijk in Makassar about the draft of the constitution of the State of East Indonesia he behaved quite impulsively, in an authoritarian manner and without any respect for the confidentiality of the information. To the Jesuit A. Ingen-Housz who had joined him on the visit, Boddeke confessed that he doubted that the affairs of his church were safe with De Jonghe.\(^4\) An open clash became public in November 1948 when in one

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\(^2\) Visser to Vatican nuncio in Sydney, 4 February 1947: ‘Nomination of non-Dutch will be accepted as a hostile action’. Visser wrote on this matter again to the Vatican Nuncio in Sydney on 17 March 1947. This English letter included an attachment in French about his visit to the Dutch Prime minister: ‘Parmi les indigènes il y a encore assez de non-coopérateurs qui dans la nomination d’un non-hollandais trouveront un prétexte quoiqu’injuste, à proclamer hautement que même le Saint-Siège ne reconnaît plus les néerlandais.’ Sint Agatha, msc inv. 175.

\(^3\) Bank 1983:252.

\(^4\) Report by Boddeke of this visit in AJAK E 3–4.