

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH
ACCORDING TO CALVIN AND ITS MEANING
TO THE CHURCHES IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH ACCORDING TO CALVIN AND ITS MEANING TO THE CHURCH IN INDONESIA

This dissertation is trying to express the ecclesiological and theological thoughts of Calvin on the unity of the church and seeking its meaning to the church in Indonesia. What it means by the church in Indonesia here are particularly the churches united in the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (CGI) in which the calvinistic church are considered to be big churches.

Therefore, two things have to be scrutinized, they are, on the one hand the depth of Calvin's thought on church unity, on the other hand how far church unity have been worked out and achieved by the churches in Indonesia. Also, in order to bring the unity into reality, can the Indonesia churches learn something from Calvin?

The main question here is what Calvin's concept on the unity of the church is and whether his view is meaning full to the Indonesian churches in achieving their unity. What contribution the Indonesia churches with the Calvinistic

background can make to the ecumenical life of the churches in Indonesia?

Assumptions underlying this study are:

1. Surprisingly, primary accent of Calvin's ecclesiology falls on unity. Whenever he talked about the church he would at the same time talked about the unity of the church prominently. He even put over his concepts not only theoretically but also practically in the Reformed churches in his time. When the church was threatened to be falling apart because of he different views and church practices, he strove to overcome it.
2. The Indonesian churches, especially the churches united in CGI, are striving to achieve the goal of bringing the unity of Indonesian churches into reality. Two things, then, are prominent here, they are: a) The unity in a form of organization, which is called a structural unity, and b) The unity in a form of witnessing and doing ministries together. It can be said that the struggle between these two views has not finished yet. In this context, probably, the Indonesian churches, especially "the calvinistic churches" might learn something from Calvin's ecumenical concept and practice, even though his context are different from the context of the churches today.

To gain Calvin's concept on the church unity clearly, a study has to be done by using his own writings. It is impossible to study, for example, the Institutes alone, because it will not be enough. Therefore, besides Institutes, studying his commentaries, letters, tracts and treatises, catechism, and sermons has to be done. In order to prove that he put his ideas into practice we need to observe his ecumenical activities in several ecumenical meetings to overcome conflicts and different points of view at that. It is the core of this dissertation presented on chapter II and III.

Base on this study, it is found out that the core of Calvin's concept on the unity of the church is the unity based on Christian faith and creed. In other words, it is the unity in the creed and faith. The basis of Christian faith and creed, according to Calvin, is that God is One, Christ is God and the Son of God, and that the salvation of man depends entirely on God's mercy - in other words, the unity in one faith in Christ. Since they are mentioned in the Word as truth, therefore for Calvin the Word or truth become the base of the church unity. Therefore, there are fundamental doctrines of Christian faith, which should allow no differences and there are unessential doctrines which allow differences. For him, unity does not mean over all similarity. Perhaps the phrase "Unity, does not mean union" is the precise words to illustrate it.

Furthermore, because of "notae ecclesiae" which characterize the church, the church unity also lies on its mutual recognition and acceptance as church, which administers the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments. The unity of the church does not lie on organization unity.

The basic idea was realized in the ecumenical activities of his time. If the Word of truth states that Christ is one and undivided, and therefore the Church is also one referred to by the catholic and universal concept, then brokenness of the Church should not be allowed to happen. For him, "the biggest crime is the fact that the bride of Christ i.e. the Church, has been torn apart" and that "separatism is the work of Satan". As a result, Calvin was involved and gave his support in the meetings of Hagenau, Worms and Regensburg, the meeting plan in Lamberth Palace, the conflicts on the holy Communion producing the Tigurinus consensus, and the conflicts in Neuchatel and Frankfurt. He was also tolerant to the difference in non-fundamental church in Poland to resemble that in Rome (see chapter III).

Calvin's ecclesiological view as stated above is influenced by the context at the time. The Roman Catholic Church and the Anabaptist Radicals were becoming two groups as targets of his criticism, even though he still accepted them in several issues. The development of Christian humanism and eagerness to study the classical writings of the Church Fathers is the fact that cannot be ignored by Calvin.

Therefore, the influence of humanism and theology of the Church Fathers is very strong in formulating his doctrines about the Church and Unity of the Church (see Chapter I).

This study is being implemented to the church in Indonesia who are striving for unity in which the Calvinistic churches are considered to be big churches. It cannot be avoided that Calvinistic traditional heritage, especially, Dutch Calvinism, is still kept within the churches in Indonesia, even though it is not in a genuine form any more, either in doctrines, theology or in church life practices. These Calvinistic churches have initiated in Indonesia (DGI) in 1950 until it has been changed into the Communion of Churches, from different denominational background, such as Methodist, Pentecostal, Mennonites and even Evangelicals united in the CCCI, they have been striving for creating the One Christian Churches in Indonesia (GKYE).

The Result that has been achieved is Five Documents on Church Unity or LDKG which was adopted in 1984, and which was revised on the General Assembly XI in Surabaya in 1989 and on the General Assembly XII in Jayapura 1994. The LDKG was finally reformulated again as The Documents of Church Unity (DKG) on the General Assembly XIII in 2000 in Palangkaraya (see Chapter IV point 2).

After observing all the long way to unity of the churches in Indonesia and studying Calvin's ecumenical views and practices, the writer draws some conclusion (see Chapter V):

1. Even though it has different context, Calvin's concept is still relevant to the churches in Indonesia, because he talks about the unity with the basic perspective of Christian faith in accordance with the biblical witness. The principles of ... are valid continuously for ages long. The tense between prioritizing to the spiritual unity and structural-organization unity, then, can be overcome.
2. The path to the unity of the churches in Indonesia is not to deviate from Calvin's concept, because in the LDKG it can be found two important documents, they are, The Common Understanding of the Christian Faith (or PBIK) and the Charter of Mutual Recognition and Acceptance (or PSMSM). In the DKG the order of its documents has been change that PBIK has been place on the first place. It is in accordance with Calvin's concept more fully. Its deviation is only that the goal of the unity is doing to be directed to the structural-organization unity.
3. Based on the historical experiences, the directed structural unity will not make any meaningful but possibly it might bring disadvantages. Therefore having an inspiration from Calvin, the churches in Indonesia ought to be wise to their own history. The kind of unity as expressed in the LDKG is enough, isn't it?
4. The churches rooted in Calvinism should play a "pro-active role" in every effort and struggle for maintaining the Unity of Christian Churches in Indonesia. They are the ones

who should show their "obedience" in realizing the ecumenical agreements made in accordance with the LDKG, and in certain sense, DKG. They should take part actively in the program of socializing the document to the member churches as structure and congregation. In the history of the international ecumenical movements the contribution of Calvinistic Churches has been admitted, hasn't it?