

TPM 27 2020: How would Indonesia sustain its freedom in the midst of political distrust? Stewardship of Christian Freedom (in Christ, to Love, to Worship, and to Serve)

As a democratic society, Indonesia is very much still in the process of understanding and practicing true civic freedom. In September 2019, tens of thousands of people flooded the streets to protest a controversial amendment of Indonesia's Criminal Code (**RKUHP**), which in a nutshell, constrict civil freedom yet increase the power of the government. This happened right before Jokowi's reelection for his second term; which shows "authoritarian" moves that further undermine **government accountability** ^{1,2}. Although Indonesia's economy is growing at a steady level in the last five years³, there are still many reasons to feel uneasy. Both due to distrust of the government and lack of self-fulfillment and sense of freedom in the lives of Indonesians.

Polarization → Radicalism → Unrests → Tighter laws → Totalitarian → ...

In reference to Polybius' cycles of governments, a **polarized society** tends to morph itself into a totalitarian one. When a society is becoming more plural, the polarization of ideas follow, which then breeds **radical** thinkers on the extreme sides, much like what we see in the USA's current political climate. The contention between the two sides causes more unrest. Consequently, the leading authority country would attempt to take control of the situation by tightening laws and heightening the involvement of law enforcement officers. That marks the beginning of a totalitarian government. In Indonesia, today we can see many **evidence of radical religious-fundamentalist** voices gaining traction, which often cause social unrest, therefore the tightening of laws as portrayed by the RKUHP proposal.

Freedom is a very broad topic, so we are focusing the discussion on freedom around these aspects of freedom:

1. Identity/dignity (in the Biblical/spiritual sense, redemption through Jesus Christ)
2. political and religious life (in relation to the government)
3. socio-economic (as marks of the obtained freedom and the ability to fulfill vocation)

1. *Biblical-spiritual freedom*

The Bible, in [Galatians 5](#), speaks about **spiritual** freedom at a large extent so as to teach us to honor the freedom - the justification of our sins which Christ has given to those who have faith in him. The freedom that Christ has brought for the Christian is precious; redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Freedom in Christ enables Christians to have the sight of eternity, thus enabling us to **live sacrificially for our friends**. Awareness of the **importance of individual freedom and dignity** leads to one's care for the society, the urge to enact justice; it gives the conscience in one's heart to practice awful things like corruption that can hurt many people.

As we have discussed in TPM 2019, our **identity of Christ is to be superior to our victim mentality**. Therefore, even when our race, ethnicity, nation are being persecuted, God is calling

us to make peace with our fleshly desires, through Jesus Christ, and acknowledge the depravity of human sin in humility.

2. The advancement of political freedom since the Reformation in the 1500s

Martin Luther, the German reformer, led the movement that called people to their full allegiance to God and the Scripture rather than to the political or religious authority. Over two centuries later, this idea inspired James Madison, the mind behind the **First Amendment to the US Constitution**, as he spoke about the American model of religious liberty: “illustrates the excellence of a system which, by a due distinction, to which the genius and courage of Luther led the way, between **what is due to Caesar and what is due God**, best promotes the discharge of both obligations⁴.” Furthermore, Luther is also credited for the foundation of civil laws. He suggested that the political leader should act like a father caring for the community, while exercising God’s judgment and wrath against human sin and crime. The legal legacy of the Reformation can still be seen in modern laws concerning family, education, social welfare, crime, and church/state relations⁵.

Therefore, the main goal of **political freedom** should be the **protection of civil rights** in relation to their government. Fair political freedom should then allow diversity of culture to coexist and express their opinions and ideas. For example, the First Amendment to the US Constitution summarizes this to five tenets: freedom of **establishment and exercise of religion**, freedom of **speech**, freedom of the **press**, the right of the people peaceably **to assemble and to petition the government** in order to keep the government accountable. Freedom is a **Judeo-Christian** idea-it is against sexism, slavery, caste system, and many other discriminations. To uphold freedom is to **respect the dignity** of each individual, for we all are created and dignified in the **image of God**, and ultimately to honor the creator himself. We can also learn from the missionary and social reformer William Carey; the passion for preaching the gospel led him to advocate for the eradication of the practice of widow-burning, infanticide, and the liberation of the caste system in India in the 1800s⁶.

3. Freedom lived out in society and affecting our day-to-day life

Furthermore, freedom to live and make decisions in our personal lives goes hand in hand with strife for **financial/economic freedom**. There is no doubt that wealth is an important part of each person's lives. People would like to have freedom from economic burden to provide for their family and to be able to help the poor ones in the community. A goal of positive and fair economic development, therefore, is a noble one. Consequently, it is crucial to have a fair and just political economy that enables people to climb up the ladder in their socioeconomic status, through hard work and wise money management; one that honors creativity and perseverance through fair incentive. Interestingly, often it requires one to be more individualistic at first, so that they can focus on helping themselves and their families first, before they can start to share their wealth in the community. This is embodied in the spirit of capitalism which highlights the importance of **savings** of wealth and with minimal consumption/cost, analogously to Adam Smith’s idea of capital accumulation⁷. That is what freedom from economic burden can give: enabling people to uplift their full **potential, autonomy**, and finally, their **dignity**⁷.

TPM 2020: How does freedom in Christ bring about political freedom?

First, a philosophical basis with understanding of freedom can change the way people treat their neighbors. A responsible understanding of freedom is an underpinning of **how to** advance as a society, hence it gives each individual a **purpose** for their life. However, this worldview should cause not only politicians, but also scientists, engineers, farmers, and every member of the society to gain a purpose in their vocation. Ultimately, advancement in their respective vocational/technical areas contributes to freedom (in all three aspects mentioned above) of the people even beyond their family, but also their society.

As we learned in TPM 2019, **education** can open the individual's **awareness of the need for freedom**: to know, think, and understand their social status in their society. Also through education, people understand the life that is possible beyond their own mind once they know about the world beyond their sight. Educating for freedom is a primary way to uplift one's dignity. Thus, it is also important to measure development beyond the numbers of GDP, but also in educational attainment and political participation which apparently correlates to each another⁸.

How could these aspects of freedom therefore be achieved? The answer is through **teaching of the meaning and importance of freedom in schools and churches**. For instance, people need to be educated not only on "**what**" is our country's political system (that is, democracy) but also "**why**" it is important for the flourishing of the society. This is a relevant education for churches and public schools alike. It is undeniable that nations have risen and fallen for struggles of freedom. Therefore Christians/non-Christians alike need to learn about this properly. In TPM 2020 we would like to learn how godly precepts of freedom can be introduced in churches and school systems.

Further understanding of the difference between dignity vs freedom

Dignity is a fundamental attribute that is given from God to humans; every human being is born with dignity and has a right to life and liberty. In contrast, **freedom** needs to be redeemed by and for individuals and communities. Freedom is much more dependent upon the conduciveness of the political environment of a community. Dignity, however, is almost a choice that one has to make for themselves. Freedom, however, needs to be fought for together, especially by Christians to honor the dignity of individuals.

God's grace enables us to fulfill our potential as God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do ([Eph 2:10](#)). As we have seen many times, people abuse the freedom that they have or chain other people from their freedom and oppress their fellow human counterparts. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor who called for resistance against the Nazi Germany, called out Christians who treat their salvation as "cheap grace" - that their state of forgiven sins is lacking **spiritual and moral reformation**. For his activism, Bonhoeffer was ultimately martyred, but his inspiration for the Kingdom lasts. We often abuse

our freedom, both as an individual or institution, when we lose sight of God's deliverance from our sins.

Therefore, through education in schools and churches, we **envision** an ideal society with true freedom is one that is spiritually free from sins through Jesus Christ and free to serve each other, that is politically enable people to express themselves, honor human rights and democracy, and economically free for individuals to build wealth and free themselves from poverty. May these be done with God's favor in Indonesia. We hope that each of use can use our talents to uplift freedom in our own aspects of vocations.

Please join us in praying that God will use us to enable **godly and biblical freedom through education** for our society, especially in Indonesia. We will learn from examples of work that has been done in this area in Indonesia/the US. Finally, we will discuss what it means to be Christians who promote responsible freedom in the midst of political distrust in our society. We look forward to seeing you in **TPM 2020!**

In Christ.

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