PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
THEOLOGY, RELIGION, CULTURE, AND HUMANITIES
Vol. 3, No. 1, June 2026 (305-321)

Being Church without Hegemony: Brazil and Indonesia in Ecclesiological Dialogue between Minority and Minoritization

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.24071/tic.v3i1.937

Abstract

This article proposes an ecclesiological dialogue between the Catholic Church in Brazil and the Catholic Church in Indonesia, reading some institutional documents of their respective episcopal conferences as convergent responses to a shared question: what does it mean to be Church when cultural dominance is no longer available as a foundation for identity? The two Churches arrive at this question from opposite trajectories. The Indonesian Church has always inhabited a minority position, developing an ecclesiology of insertion and dialogue from within a plural, predominantly Muslim society. The Brazilian Church, by contrast, is living through an accelerating process of minoritization, as five centuries of Catholic hegemony give way to religious pluralization and institutional displacement. Drawing on four institutional documents, the KWI's Umat Katolik Indonesia dalam Masyarakat Pancasila (1985) and Final Assembly Statement (2023), and the CNBB's Igreja: Comunhão e Missão (1988) and Diretrizes Gerais 2019–2023, the article argues that these two traditions, elaborated without formal contact, trace the outlines of a common post-hegemonic ecclesiology grounded in encounter, prophetic presence, and relational identity. The asymmetry between them is the source of their theological richness. What the KWI has practiced, the CNBB is somehow learning. What the CNBB has elaborated doctrinally, the KWI is applying pastorally. Together, they outline a form of dialogical ecclesiology appropriate for a world where the Church is no longer at the center.

Keywords

Ecclesiology; minority; minoritization; hegemony; Brazil; Indonesia; CNBB; KWI; post-hegemonic Church; comparative ecclesiology; Global South

INTRODUCTION

Brazil and Indonesia are approximately 17,730 kilometers apart. They are located at opposite ends of the Southern Hemisphere and differ in nearly every aspect of comparison: language, history, legal systems, and religious demographics. And yet, within a remarkably short span of time, they have accumulated an unusual number

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of points of strategic convergence. On January 6, 2025, Brazil, as the rotating BRICS[1] chair, officially announced Indonesia's formal admission into the alliance as a full member, making it the first Southeast Asian state to join.[2]

While this is a theological article, the geopolitical closeness between Brazil and Indonesia is not secondary to its argument. Still, it is, in a sense, part of it. The political and economic alignment of two major nations of the Global South around shared interests in multipolarity and development signals a mutual recognition between two societies that have long occupied peripheral positions in the world order. If such recognition occurs on political and economic grounds, some questions may naturally follow: Does this political closeness have a corresponding theological dimension? When nations draw closer, do their Churches have reason to ask what they might learn from each other?

Beneath this geopolitical configuration, however, lies a constitutional and theological difference that shapes everything that follows. On one hand, Brazil has been a formally secular state since the Republican Constitution of 1891, [3] which abolished the *Padroado* system and established freedom of worship. Indonesia, on the contrary, founded its Republic on the Pancasila, the five principles approved on August 18, 1945, of which the first reads: *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* (Belief in the One and Only God).[4] In Indonesia, religiosity is a constitutive part of national identity, within a framework that is neither fully secular nor theocratic. This difference goes a long way toward explaining why the ecclesiological histories of these two countries

[1] BRICS is an acronym designating an intergovernmental bloc of major emerging economies, originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (hence the acronym). Following a formal expansion process, Indonesia was admitted as a full member on January 6, 2025, under Brazil's rotating presidency of the group.

[2] Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), "Indonesia Joins BRICS," January 2025. Available at https://www.csis.org/blogs/latest-southeast-asia/indonesia-joins-brics.

[3] Brazil's Republican Constitution of 1891, inspired by the positivism of Auguste Comte and Benjamin Constant, was the first Brazilian constitutional text to establish a formally secular state. Decree Number 119-A of January 7, 1890, issued by the Provisional Government, abolished the *Padroado* system and formally separated Church and State.

[4] The Pancasila (Sanskrit: "Five Principles") was formulated by Sukarno on June 1, 1945, and formally incorporated into the Preamble of the Indonesian Constitution on August 18, 1945. The five principles are: (1) Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa (Belief in the One and Only God); (2) Kemanusiaan yang adil dan beradab (Just and Civilized Humanity); (3) Persatuan Indonesia (The Unity of Indonesia); (4) Kerakyatan yang dipimpin oleh hikmat kebijaksanaan dalam permusyawaratan/perwakilan (Democracy guided by deliberation among representatives); (5) Keadilan sosial bagi seluruh rakyat Indonesia (Social Justice for all Indonesians).

have diverged so significantly, and why the convergences that nonetheless exist between their Churches are theologically interesting.

A NOTE ON TERMS

Four concepts in the title of this article require precision before the argument can proceed. They are introduced here not in the order they appear in the title, but in the order the argument requires. The movement is to consider the condition the Church is leaving (hegemony), through the structural positions it navigates (minority in Indonesia and minoritization in Brazil), to the question that orients the whole inquiry (being Church).

The term hegemony is used here in a broadly Gramscian sense, namely "the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'." 5 This term describes the Catholic Church's cultural and institutional dominance and its ability to present its worldview as natural, universal, and legitimate, thereby making coercion unnecessary, as consent is already granted. For example, in Brazil, the Church exercised institutional and cultural hegemony for centuries by occupying a central place in national symbolic life.

The second term is minority. In this article, this term designates a structural position of lesser demographic weight and reduced public influence within a given society. Being a minority, however, does not necessarily imply marginalization. In Indonesia, for example, the Catholic Church, as this article argues, has built a vital and publicly engaged identity from that position.

The third term is minoritization. Drawn from the sociology of religion, it denotes a dynamic historical process rather than a static condition.6 Minoritization here refers to the transition of the Church from cultural hegemony to reduced centrality. It is minoritization not through persecution or legal exclusion, but through the gradual restructuring of the religious field itself.[2] The Brazilian Church has not been suppressed. The number of Catholics has been decreasing quite rapidly over the decades. According to the IBGE national census, the share of Catholics in the Brazilian

[5] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 45.

[6] The term is used here in the sense developed by José Casanova, for whom the transformation of the social place of churches in modernity is an open historical process, not a fixed structural condition. See José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), chap. 1.

population fell from 65.1% in 2010 to 56.7% in 2022, a decline of 8.4 percentage points.7

The fourth concept, being Church, can be seen as the article's inspiring term. It refers to ecclesial existence and ecclesial identity understood as constitutively relational. The Church is what it is always in relation to others, to the poor, to the cultural other, to the other religious. This article argues that both Brazilian and Indonesian Churches have, from different perspectives, found that their sense of ecclesial identity is rooted in this relational constitution, especially in a post-hegemonic world.

A METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The primary sources of this article are the institutional documents from the *Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil* (CNBB) and the *Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia* (KWI). It is a deliberate choice. The subjects of the dialogue proposed here are the national Churches themselves, rather than individual theologians or isolated pastoral initiatives. The documents through which they have spoken in their own institutional voices are those produced by their respective episcopal conferences. However, the analysis proposed here is analytical and historical, not doctrinal. This article examines the identity each Church has established through its official documents and whether any common themes emerge when these texts are read together.

For the Brazilian Church, two CNBB documents are selected as primary texts: *Igreja: Comunhão e Missão* (1988) and the *Diretrizes Gerais da Ação Evangelizadora da Igreja no Brasil 2019–2023*. Together, they offer a sense of the Brazilian Church's negotiation with its shifting cultural position.

For the Indonesian Church, the documents are the *Umat Katolik Indonesia dalam Masyarakat Pancasila* (1985) and the *Final Statement of the KWI Annual Assembly* of 2023. These documents span the full arc of the Indonesian Church's institutional self-articulation in the post-conciliar period.

IN THE SELECTION OF SOURCES AND THE LIMITS OF THE ARGUMENT

The four documents examined in this article do not exhaust the institutional output of either conference. They were selected because, read together, they trace a

[7] IBGE - Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, *Censo Demográfico 2022: Religiões - Resultados preliminares da amostra* (Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2023).

recognizable arc, but the selection is, to a degree, necessarily arbitrary. Other documents could have anchored the same argument: the KWI's joint Christmas messages with the *Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia* (Communion of Churches in Indonesia), the CNBB's documents on ecology or urban pastoral ministry, and the various synodal preparatory texts produced by both conferences in recent years. The two pairs proposed here are not the only possible dialogue, nor the most comprehensive. They are an opening. This article aims not to resolve the question but to show that it exists and deserves further exploration through more extensive documentation and, ideally, discussions with scholars from both ecclesial traditions.

When placed side by side, each pair illuminates the same ecclesiological movement: a community that did not choose its circumstances and had to discover, within them, what it means to be Church. The KWI initially reached a post-hegemonic ecclesiology out of necessity. In contrast, the CNBB is arriving at it through loss. The following discusses what each can contribute to the other precisely because of this difference.

THE INDONESIAN CHURCH: AN ECCLESIOLOGY BORN OF MINORITY

Context: A Church That Has Never Occupied the Center

To understand the ecclesiology of the Indonesian Catholic Church, it helps to begin with geography and numbers. Spread across more than 17,000 islands, the Catholic community counts approximately 8 million faithful, roughly 3% of a population of nearly 280 million, of whom more than 87% are Muslim.[8] These figures describe the permanent structural condition within which the KWI has had to construct, generation after generation, an answer to the question of what it means to be Church in the Indonesian context.

This condition indicates a theology that did not have the luxury of being elaborated within a Church in a position of cultural or institutional hegemony. The Church could not define itself by its institutional weight, because that weight was modest. It could not rely on state support, because the Suharto regime (1967–1998), while not overtly hostile, required all religious organizations to demonstrate loyalty

[8]Indonesian population data: approximately 87% Muslim out of a population of nearly 280 million. Catholic faithful number approximately 8 million, or roughly 3% of the population. Source: BPS Census 2020; Agenzia Fides, Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2022 (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2023).

to the *Pancasila* principles in ways that effectively subordinated confessional identity to civic belonging.[9] The result was an ecclesiology that emerged in a community that learned to inhabit plurality from within rather than from above.

The Pancasila Document (1985): Constraint Received as Vocation

In Law number 8 of 1985, issued by the Suharto government, all social organizations were required to adopt the *Pancasila* as their sole ideological foundation. For the Indonesian Church, this posed a real dilemma: conforming could diminish Catholic identity to a government-approved framework, while resisting could lead to institutional marginalization. The *Umat Katolik Indonesia dalam Masyarakat Pancasila* (1985) was the KWI's response.

The document's move is theologically instructive. Rather than accepting the *Pancasila* as an external political requirement and separating it from the life of faith, the KWI received it as a framework consonant with Catholic values of human dignity, solidarity, and the common good. As Binawan observes, the Church's acceptance of *Pancasila* was formalized in the revised statutes of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference through the insertion of Article 3: "In the light of the Catholic faith, KWI is based on *Pancasila* in its involvement in the social life of the nation."[10] This formulation was not arrived at easily. Yet what began as negotiated compliance was afterward received as theological conviction: the bishops declared that they accepted *Pancasila* not "for tactical reasons but because of their belief in the noble values in *Pancasila*."[11] What an authoritarian regime imposed as an ideological constraint, the KWI appropriated as a theological declaration.

This transformation, from compliance to conviction, is precisely what makes the 1985 document more than a political accommodation. It shows a Church that has learned, through decades of minority existence, to make a home in conditions it did not choose. The *Pancasila* is received as the shared civic horizon within which the Church can be itself without imposing itself. That posture, first negotiated under authoritarian pressure, would prove durable. Nearly four decades later, it remains the grammar of the KWI's public self-understanding.

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[9] Andang L. Binawan, "Indonesian Catholic Bishops' Attitudes toward Three Controverting Issues during Indonesia's New Order (1966–1998)," Religions 14, no. 1 (2023): 94, p.3-4 https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010094, 4.

[10] Andang L. Binawan, "Indonesian Catholic Bishops' Attitude," Religions 14, no. 1 (2023): 94, p. 4.

[11] "Bishops' Conference of Indonesia," *UCA News*, January 14, 1987.

The 2023 Assembly Statement: Minority Ecclesiology in Contemporary Voice

The Final Statement of the KWI Annual Assembly of November 2023, titled "Walking Together Towards a Peaceful Indonesia," [12] is not a departure from the trajectory consolidated in 1985. It is that trajectory speaking in a contemporary voice, and speaking now in the language of the universal Church.

The document is a wide-ranging text. It addresses corruption, social inequality, democratic erosion, the dignity of women and children, ecological concerns, and the role of young people in the Church. All of these topics are framed within the language of synodality and shared mission. But what is theologically significant is less the scope of its concerns than the posture from which they are addressed.

The bishops describe the KWI as committed to building a Church engaged in "a continuous struggle alongside all Christian believers in Indonesia to establish a Synodal Church: a Church that walks alongside all humanity in its mission to revolutionize our shared planet into a sanctuary where every individual may flourish, develop, and mature into a complete human being."[13] It is not the language of an institution that presumes cultural authority. It is the language of a community that defines itself by accompaniment, by movement toward others rather than by occupation of a position.

When read alongside the 1985 Pancasila document, the 2023 statement highlights the continuity of the KWI's ecclesiological development over more than fifty years. From the early days of Vatican II to the present, the Indonesian Church has consistently reaffirmed a fundamental belief: the Church's identity is determined not by its institutional power but by the quality of its presence in the world. What began as a necessary conviction has, over time, progressed into a theological home.

[12] Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia Sikapi Situasi Politik Bangsa" [Indonesian Catholic Bishops' Conference Addresses the Nation's Political Situation], *Kompas*, November 14, 2023, https://www.kompas.id/artikel/en-konferensi-waligereja-indonesia-sikapi-situasi-politik-bangsa.

[13] KWI, Final Statement of the Annual Assembly, "Walking Together Towards a Peaceful Indonesia," November 7–14, 2023, signed by Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunjamin, OSC, and Bishop Paskalis Bruno Syukur, OFM; as reported in Kasmir Nema, "Indonesian Bishops Raise 'Concerns' About Domestic and International Issues," Radio Veritas Asia, November 15, 2023, https://www.rvasia.org/church-asia/indonesian-bishops-raise-concerns-about-domestic-and-international-issues

THE BRAZILIAN CHURCH: AN ECCLESIOLOGY DISCOVERING MINORITY

Context: Five Centuries of Hegemony and the Unraveling

The Brazilian Church enters the twenty-first century from a different starting point than the Indonesian Church. For five hundred years, from the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries in 1500 through to the last decades of the twentieth century, Catholicism occupied the center of Brazilian cultural, institutional, and symbolic life. Traditionally, as Bruneau describes, the Brazilian Church was "closely linked to the Iberian Crowns and then the independent governments, supporting the *status quo* through statements and deeds."[14] The formal separation of Church and State established by the 1891 Constitution removed the juridical link between the two institutions but did not dismantle Catholic cultural hegemony.

More recently, the preferential option for the poor, the Basic Ecclesial Communities, and the prophetic engagement with the military dictatorship were not expressions of a Church learning to survive without privilege. They were expressions of a Church with enough cultural authority to challenge power on its own terms. As Bruneau shows, during the dictatorship, the Church "assumed the role of surrogate in the dictatorial political system,"[15] because it was the only institution with sufficient autonomy to do so. A majority Church can afford prophetic confrontation because it speaks from a position in which power itself must negotiate, a structural advantage the KWI has never possessed.

The authority of the Brazilian Church has been eroding rapidly since the 1990s. The expansion of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements, the growth of religious disaffiliation, especially among younger Brazilians, and the fragmentation of what was once a coherent Catholic cultural world have progressively displaced the Church from its central position.[16] The CNBB has tracked this transformation through its successive quadrennial frameworks, each one absorbing, more explicitly than the last, the reality that the Church can no longer assume the surrounding culture will carry the faith forward on its behalf.

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[14]Thomas C. Bruneau, "Church and Politics in Brazil: The Genesis of Change," Journal of Latin American Studies 17, no. 2 (1985): 271–293, 282.

[15]Bruneau, "Church and Politics in Brazil," 285.

[16]"Catholicism Has Declined in Latin America Over the Past Decade," Pew Research Center, January 21, 2026, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2026/01/21/catholicism-has-declined-in-latin-america-over-the-past-decade/.

Igreja: Comunhão e Missão (1988) — Theology Ahead of Its Moment

The CNBB's *Igreja: Comunhão e Missão* – Church: Communion and Mission (1988) is among the documents in which the Brazilian episcopate clearly articulates that its ecclesial identity no longer depends on institutional privilege. Shaped by the intense internal debate between different currents within the Brazilian Church, the document proposes communion and mission as the twin axes of ecclesial identity, defining the Church by where it stands. The document's core theological move is to insist that the Church's identity is constituted by its orientation toward the other. "The challenge," it states, "consists in forming a missionary community, where the community sustains the mission and the mission permanently animates the community."[17]

More concretely, the document grounds this relational identity in the preferential option for the poor, which it presents not as a pastoral program but as a way of being. "The Latin American Church, without excluding anyone from the invitation to participate in the Kingdom of God, prolongs the Council's concern for the evangelization of the poor and suffering, in whom it recognizes the face of Christ, by assuming a 'clear and prophetic preferential and solidary option for the poor.'"[18] The document adds, significantly, that the Church "always needs to be evangelized."[19]

What makes this theological self-understanding particularly striking is the historical moment in which it was articulated. The CNBB produced this text while still occupying a position of considerable cultural authority, and, remarkably, while registering full awareness of that position's contingency. The document itself notes that during the years of military repression, the Church had come to hold "a prominent position in the social and political landscape of the nation," occupying "de facto near-exclusivity of the liberatory discourse alongside a critical and prophetic stance", a situation the document acknowledges as circumstantial rather than constitutive.[20]

In doing so, the CNBB prepared the theological ground for the moment when that authority would no longer be available. *Igreja: Comunhão e Missão* was produced

[17] CNBB, *Igreja: Comunhão e Missão na Evangelização dos Povos, no Mundo do Trabalho, da Política e da Cultura*, Documentos da CNBB 40 (São Paulo: Paulinas, 1988), §21. All translations from Portuguese are my own.

[18] CNBB, *Igreja: Comunhão e Missão*, §53

[19] CNBB, *Igreja: Comunhão e Missão*, §57.

[20] CNBB, *Igreja: Comunhão e Missão*, §195.

by a Church still capable of choosing. In 1988, the CNBB could opt for a relational, outward-facing ecclesiology from a position of cultural strength, as a theological preference rather than a structural necessity. What the document could not anticipate was how quickly the conditions sustaining that choice would erode. In the three decades that followed, the Brazilian Church would lose the near-monopoly on liberatory discourse it had held under the dictatorship, face the rapid growth of Pentecostal and evangelical communities, and watch the cultural Catholicism that had long guaranteed its social presence quietly dissolve. By the time the CNBB gathered to draft its next set of pastoral directives, the Church was no longer choosing a posture. It was responding to a situation.

Diretrizes Gerais 2019–2023 — A Church Learning to Go Out

The *Diretrizes Gerais da Ação Evangelizadora da Igreja no Brasil 2019–2023* - General Guidelines for the Evangelizing Action of the Church in Brazil - is that response.[21] The document is organized around the image of the Church as a house, as a community that creates belonging, forms identity, and sends its members outward in mission. That image is more theologically loaded than it might initially appear. A house is not a fortress nor a center to which the world comes. It is a place from which one departs and to which one returns, a community of belonging that exists in tension with the world beyond its walls.

The four pillars of the framework - Word, Bread, Charity, Mission - are understood as dimensions of a community that must generate missionaries, because it can no longer rely on a culture that transmits the faith by default. The document is explicit about the theological weight of the image: the Church is the *house* that is "*building of God*" (1 Cor 3:9), a community whose identity is constituted not by its physical structure but by a particular posture, what the bishops' own presentation of the document described as a community "that welcomes, that is a space of tenderness and mercy."[22]

The document's third chapter, titled "The Church in the houses," formalizes this logic: the Church does not wait to be found, but goes out. The Church that does not occupy a center, that inhabits a margin; that does not define itself by what it

[21]CNBB, Diretrizes Gerais da Ação Evangelizadora da Igreja no Brasil 2019–2023, Documentos da CNBB 109 (Brasília: CNBB, 2019).

[22] "Novas diretrizes da Igreja no Brasil 2019–2023 são aprovadas pelo episcopado," CNBB, May 10, 2019, https://www.cnbb.org.br/novas-diretrizes-da-igreja-no-brasil-2019-2023-sao-aprovadas/.

contains but by what it sends.[23] It is the vocabulary of a community learning, under pressure, to inhabit a position it did not choose, a position, in other words, that the Indonesian Church has always inhabited.

The structural parallel with the KWI's 2023 Assembly Statement is striking. Both documents, produced in the same decade, describe their respective Churches in the language of accompaniment, synodality, and outward movement. Both propose a Church defined not by its institutional weight but by the quality of its presence in the world. The difference is one of arrival: the KWI has always spoken this language.

A DIALOGUE ACROSS ASYMMETRY: WHAT EACH CHURCH CAN LEARN

The KWI and the CNBB have not arrived at the question of post-hegemonic ecclesial identity from the same direction or with the same resources. The KWI speaks from decades of lived minority experience, from a tradition of ecumenical solidarity forged under pressure, and from a theology of insertion that was neither chosen nor optional but necessary. The CNBB speaks from a tradition of prophetic engagement born of social centrality, which must now survive the loss of that centrality. Neither tradition has everything the other needs. Each has something the other lacks.

What the CNBB Can Learn from the KWI

An important contribution of the Indonesian experience to the Brazilian Church lies in an understanding of ecclesial identity that does not rest on institutional possession or cultural influence. In the Indonesian Church, this posture is not a strategic pastoral option but a structural condition, the only available form of ecclesial existence. Over time, this condition gave rise to a stable ecclesial *habitus*. The Church learned to inhabit religious plurality without diluting its identity, to engage with other traditions through sustained dialogue, and to exercise a public voice that does not depend on numerical strength. It is not a withdrawal from the world but a different mode of presence within it. It resonates with the broader trajectory of Asian ecclesiology, particularly as articulated by the Federation of Asian Bishops'

[23] "CNBB publica as Diretrizes Gerais da Ação Evangelizadora da Igreja no Brasil 2019–2023," CNBB, June 14, 2019, https://www.cnbb.org.br/cnbb-publica-as-diretrizes-gerais-da-acao-evangelizadora-da-igreja-no-brasil-2019-2023/.

Conferences (FABC), which emphasizes dialogue with religions, cultures, and the poor.[24]

The Brazilian Church has long possessed theological resources that point in this direction. The language of communion and mission, as well as the preferential option for the poor, already implies that ecclesial identity is constituted relationally. Yet these intuitions were developed within a context in which the Church still held cultural authority, meaning that insertion could function as a prophetic stance without ever becoming a structural necessity.

The process of religious pluralization in Brazil alters this situation. As cultural hegemony recedes, what had been a theological orientation must increasingly take the form of institutional life. In this respect, the Indonesian trajectory offers more than an example. It suggests that the transition from centrality to plurality need not result in theological impoverishment. On the contrary, a Church that learns to define itself through dialogue, presence, and witness may discover a form of credibility that does not rely on social dominance.

What the KWI Can Learn from the CNBB

While the Indonesian Church provides a model of sustained insertion, the Brazilian Church contributes a unique and equally vital tradition of prophetic social engagement. Since the late twentieth century, the CNBB has consistently promoted an ecclesiology that sees the Church's identity as inherently linked to its dedication to the poor and its ability to identify systemic injustice. The preferential option for the poor, developed in Latin America, serves not just as a pastoral focus but as a key theological standard of authenticity.[25]

This tradition emerged under conditions very different from those of Indonesia. Because the Brazilian Church occupied a position of cultural influence, it was able to confront political and economic structures with a degree of institutional freedom unavailable to many minority Churches. The result was the development of

[24] The FABC's threefold dialogue (with the religions, cultures, and peoples of Asia, especially the poor) was articulated programmatically in the Final Statement of the First FABC Plenary Assembly (Taipei, 1974) and developed across subsequent plenary documents.

[25] The formulation of the preferential option for the poor as a *theological criterion*, not merely a pastoral priority, is rooted in the Latin American liberation theology tradition. For its integration into a broader theology of mission, see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 432–447.

conceptual and pastoral tools for social analysis, as well as practices of accompaniment that linked ecclesial life to broader struggles for justice.

The KWI's 2023 statement demonstrates that the Indonesian Church has not retreated into a defensive or self-referential posture — its engagement with corruption, democratic erosion, and social inequality is real. What the Brazilian tradition adds is not the concern itself, but the institutional grammar for sustaining it: frameworks for social analysis rooted in theological anthropology, a pedagogy of accompaniment developed through the Basic Ecclesial Communities, and a long practice of speaking prophetically from within civil society rather than above it.

A concrete example can be helpful. The CNBB's *Igreja: Comunhão e Missão* dedicates a significant part to explaining the Church's relation to labor, politics, and culture. It describes a form of public involvement that avoids reducing the Church to political activism while also avoiding a mere focus on self-preservation. The document insists that the Church's prophetic role, its capacity to name injustice and accompany the excluded, is not an optional supplement to its identity but an expression of its constitutive orientation toward the poor. This integration of prophetic witness with communal identity offers the KWI a model for translating its genuine social concern into a more structurally sustained form of ecclesial presence. The KWI's 2023 statement is rich in social awareness. What the Brazilian tradition supplies is the institutional memory of how such awareness becomes embedded in the life of local communities, through Basic Ecclesial Communities, pastoral land commissions, and other forms of organized accompanying presence.[26]

TOWARD A POST-HEGEMONIC ECCLESIOLOGY: CONVERGENCES

Read together for the first time, the documents of the CNBB and the KWI trace a convergent trajectory that neither body has formally named, because neither has had the opportunity to read the other. The convergence is not the result of mutual influence. It is the result of two Churches responding, each in its own idiom, to the same underlying ecclesiological question: what does it mean to be Church when cultural dominance is not available as a foundation for identity?

[26] The three elements named here, interpretive frameworks for social reality, practices of ecclesial presence among the poor, and evangelical credibility as an alternative to numerical strength, each have distinct genealogies within the Latin American tradition.

Both Churches have answered by insisting that ecclesial identity is constituted by relationship rather than by position. The CNBB's theology of communion grounds the Church in what it does with others—the poor, the excluded, the world. The KWI's theology of insertion grounds the Church in where it places itself — within the fabric of a plural society, in genuine dialogue with religious and cultural difference. These are not identical answers, but they are convergent ones.

Both Churches have discovered, in their respective contexts, that the loss of hegemony is not merely a pastoral emergency; it is a theological clarification. The prophetic tradition of the Brazilian Church becomes richer when it is separated from the use of institutional power. The Indonesian Church's dialogical tradition gains new urgency when its interlocutors include not only the religious other but a globalizing world that threatens the very fabric of communal pluralism it has long inhabited. In both cases, the minority or minoritizing condition removes what was contingent in the Church's self-understanding, leaving what is essential: a community of the baptized, sent into the world in witness.

It is the theological substance of the geopolitical proximity with which this article began. When Brazil and Indonesia draw closer in the political order, they create conditions in which their Churches might also draw closer, not diplomatically, but theologically. The CNBB and the KWI have, without knowing it, been working toward a common ecclesiology from opposite ends of the same question. A formal dialogue between them would not need to begin from scratch. It would only need to name what is already there.[27]

CONCLUSION

This article proposes an ecclesiological dialogue between the Catholic Church in Brazil and the Catholic Church in Indonesia, reading their respective episcopal conferences' documents as convergent responses to a shared question: what does it mean to be the Church when cultural dominance is no longer available as a foundation for identity? The dialogue is not symmetrical. One Church arrives at this question from a position of experienced minority. The other, from a position of minoritization. That asymmetry is not an obstacle to the conversation. It is, as this article has argued throughout, the very condition of its theological productivity.

[27]On the concept of a minority or diaspora Church as ecclesiological resource, see Y.T. Mangunwijaya, *Gereja Diaspora* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1999).

The analyzed documents show that both the CNBB and the KWI are independently promoting an ecclesiology based on encounter rather than possession, emphasizing witness over privilege. The KWI arrived at this posture by necessity and, over decades, transformed it into a stable theological conviction. The CNBB articulated it by prophetic choice, in a moment of still-available cultural authority, and is now being called to inhabit it as a structural condition.

This convergence has an ecclesiological significance that goes beyond simple comparison. If two Churches at opposite ends of the Southern Hemisphere, shaped by entirely different histories, legal frameworks, and religious demographics, have arrived at structurally similar answers to the same question, this convergence is no coincidence. It is a sign, in the theological sense of the word, that the question itself is among the defining ecclesiological questions of today. What does it mean to be a minority Church? What resources does that condition make available, and what does it demand? These questions are not unique to Brazil or Indonesia. They are being asked, with varying degrees of urgency, by Catholic communities across the Global South and beyond.

A formal dialogue between the CNBB and the KWI has not yet taken place. This article proposes that such a dialogue take place, not diplomatically, but theologically. The documents are ready. The question is whether those who read them will be.

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