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Dialectic between the Law and the Gospel in the Context of Indonesia*

Abstract

In the theological context of Indonesian churches there is an unhealthy polarization between the Gospel and the Law. It arose out of a misunderstanding the Old Testament as Law and the New Testament as Gospel. Here it is attempted to overcome this polarization by utilizing the thinking of Paul and Calvin, where the Law and the Gospel are regarded as having a dialectical relationship.

Keywords: polarization, law, gospel, spiritually, dialectical, relationship.

Introduction

Let me start with a sad story which happened on Wednesday, February 15, 2012, at the island of Halmahera in North Molucca. The Evangelical Church in Halmahera (*Gereja Masehi Injili di Halmahera*, abbr: GMIH) was holding its fifth annual Synod Meeting in East Tobelo. In the fourth day (it is a five day-meeting), at the last session (the fifth) before they adjourned for dinner, the synod was going to hear a lay-person explaining his plan for the transformation of the church, based on his book, which has the title *Transformasi GMIH* (Transformation of GMIH). That lay-person is a retired agricultural expert who was a professor at the state university Pattimura in the capital of the Moluccans, Ambon. Then he became Rector/President of a private Christian University at the capital of Indonesia, Jakarta. After retirement age (65) he devoted his life for the empowerment and well-being of the (Christian) Moluccans,

* This is the English version and further development of my article in Indonesian, "Dialektika antara Taurat dan Injil" [ET: "Dialectic between the Law and the Gospel"] in A.M.L. Batlajery *et al.*, *Setegar Batu Karang Selembut Embun Pagi* [ET: *As hard as a rock and as soft as a morning dew*], in memoriam J.M. Pattiasina (Ambon: UKIM Press, 2010), 160-175, and is presented at IRTI (International Reformed Theological Institute) Conference, 2-7 July 2013, at Sarospatak Reformed Theological Academy, Sarospatak, Hungary.

especially the people of Halmahera. He is a Halmaheran and a member of GMIH. But he is also very open to evangelical and charismatic fellowships. His book is a mixture of socio-economic and theological analysis on the condition of the church, which according to him is at low ebb. One of the main reasons why it is in that condition is caused by reliance on the Law! How he explained it is not clear, but my understanding of his book is that the congregations are so much burdened by the structures of their faith and their customs, that they are now in a situation where they feel they can do nothing to improve their lives. The law that makes them conscious of their sins is being counter-productive, it makes them feel helpless, and that is why what the church need is a big Paulinian NO to the Law! Initially, the fifth session is intended for a book-review, namely the book of the professor. Three theologians from GMIH have written their reviews, and all three reach a negative conclusion about the book: it is not describing the real situation of GMIH, and the negative view of him concerning the Law is wrong. I did not attend the Synod meeting, but according to one of my M.Th. students, who is a GMIH minister and a candidate for the Faculty of the theological faculty of the Christian University at Tobelo, and was present at the occasion, the professor was only able to deliver his speech for five minutes before he was stopped by the moderator and then asked to leave the meeting-room, escorted by the stewards. It seems that the three reviews were read by the leadership of the church, and as the result, they decided to reject his proposals, even before he explained them to the audience.

I regret the way the leadership of the church handled the professor, but my purpose in telling you the story is to show that the issue of relationship between the Gospel (or Grace) and the Law is deeply ingrained in the minds and hearts of the congregations in Indonesia. The character of the relationship is described as an antithesis, which caused polarization: either you are against the law or you are for the law. When the polarization is sharp, then of course it can trigger emotional reactions. Most of the established and traditional Protestant churches in Indonesia belong to the Calvinist tradition which is mixed with Pietist tradition (including GMIH), but the largest denomination is the Batak Protestant Church (*Huria Kristen Batak Protestan*, abbr: HKBP) at North Sumatra with two million members, and they belong to the Lutheran communion. On one hand, of course, officially they refer to the Lutheran *sola fide* and *sola gratia*, but on the other hand they also lean very hard on the Law, not in the form of church law or church polity, but on the customs, the *adat*. The relationship between the Gospel and the Law becomes in reality, the relationship between Gospel and *adat*. In many cases they just follow the traditional Lutheran teaching of two kingdoms: on Sunday you are in the realm of the Gospel, but from Monday to Saturday you are in the realm of the *adat*. In the Javanese Christian Church (*Gereja Kristen Jawa*, abbr: GKJ) the official view is of course, the Gospel above the Law. In their everyday relationship with the Muslims, they regard the Muslims as followers of the Law, while they themselves are recipients of the Gospel, which means Grace. But in their internal affairs the Law is omnipresent:

formerly it is the Ten Commandments (which in older church buildings are written on the wall below the pulpit), but nowadays it is the church order (*pranatan*) and the teachings (*piwulang*).

So what I am going to do is to describe the dialectical relationship between the Old and the New Testament, where there is Grace in the former and there is Law in the latter, and then with my limited knowledge of Calvin, I also try to understand how Calvin interpreted the Law, and after that, in the conclusion, I will return to the context of Indonesia and propose some way out of the problem.

Learning from the Bible about the Law and the Gospel

I think the polarization above arises out of our understanding of the Old Testament and the New Testament. As it is known, what we call 'the Old Testament' is actually the scripture of the Jewish people. Because our forerunners believed that God's plan for salvation does not start with Jesus but has been foretold long before in encounters between God and the people of Israel, in the end the record of that encounters in the Jewish Bible is combined with the post-Jesus writings which have re-interpreted that encounters, using as perspective, the Jesus-event. This re-interpretation is called 'The New Testament', while the Jewish Bible is called 'The Old Testament'. Although they are now combined in one scripture, meaning, they are related, the problem is still how to define that relationship. In the Indonesian context it is common to regard the New Testament (NT) as representing the concept of Grace, while the Old Testament (OT) is representing the concept of Law. Whether the former is higher or better than the latter is not clear.

On one hand, if you look at the number of biblical scholars, there is more OT than NT scholars, and this has been going on for decades, but on the other hand, lay persons and undergraduate theological students are usually more inclined to appreciate NT. Within the Pentecostal-charismatic groups, there is emphasis on NT, but others seem to place emphasis on OT, in particular those who belong to the *Volkskirchen*. There they make a parallel between Israel as the people of God, and their own people or tribe as the continuation of the people of God in OT. Many Batak, Moluccan and Papuan Christians regard themselves as the new Israel which is related to the old Israel (and in their understanding it is the *new state* of Israel! Although Indonesia has no diplomatic relationship with Israel, quite a number of Christians somehow managed to do pilgrimage to the Holy Land and the result is that they become tacitly pro-Israel in the midst of a society which is very much anti-Israel). Let us say that there is no way of defining the relationship between OT and NT, and eventually the relationship becomes an antithetical and polarized relationship. Those who place emphasis on NT usually belong to the Pentecostal-charismatic groups, while those who very much appreciate OT usually belong to the *Volkskirchen*. But within the *Volkskirchen*, those who look at themselves as

the New Israel sometimes ally themselves with Pentecostal-charismatic groups in their pro-Israel stance.

If we look at the Biblical passages themselves, then the dominant view in Indonesia which regards NT as representing Grace and OT as representing Law will not get much support. In OT there is Grace and in NT there is Law. I will take two examples from OT: the first is from Gen. 12:1-3 and the second is from Ex. 20:1-17. In Gen. 12:1-3 we read that Abram (who later on is called Abraham) is called by God to leave his country and his relatives, and God will make him and his descendants a great nation and that through Abram, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (or "all the families of the earth shall bless themselves"). Usually this text is interpreted as the reward of his sacrificial act in leaving his country and his community. But the promised country of destination is not mentioned. Abram journeyed without knowing where to go. Of course in Gen. 12:6-7 we read that Abram reached Canaan and stayed under the sacred oak tree at More¹. But that is disclosed by the narrator *after* the journey. And only after he reached Canaan, God promised him that Canaan shall be given to his descendants. Also the term "bless" in this context does not relate to land or riches, but to descendants, sons! This is made clear in the following episode in Gen. 15:1-6, where Abram hurled his disappointment at the Lord, who seemingly forgot his promises, so that Abram is going to die without having any children (verse 2). The Lord reacted by asking him to count the stars, Abram believes in the Lord and then the narrator give a conclusion in verse 6, which is notoriously ambiguous. In Hebrew the phrase is short: *wayakhshebeh lo zedaqah*, tr: 'and he reckoned it to him as righteousness'.

What does the phrase mean? Here I rely on J. Gerald Janzen in his commentary on Gen. 12-50.² It may be understood in three ways: 1. 'He believed in the Lord, and he (Abram) reckoned it (the promise) to him (the Lord) as righteousness'. Here God is righteous. 2. 'He believed in the Lord, and he (the Lord) reckoned it (the believing) to him (Abram) as righteousness'. Here Abram is righteous, because he believes. One of the Indonesian versions (TB-LAI) follows this understanding ('*maka Tuhan memperhitungkan hal itu kepadanya sebagai kebenaran*'). I think all the other Protestant translations of the Bible also follow this meaning. 3. 'He believed in the Lord, and he (the Lord) meant it (the promise) to him (Abram) as posterity'. Here it is about the future fruitfulness of Abram and his wife Sarai. Janzen does not choose which one of the three is the right interpretation. According to him, it depends on the reader.³ I choose the second possibility. It is very close to the Protestant understanding of faith, but I do not apologize, as that is the result of the reader's response to the text. If we read Gen. 12:1-3 in relation to Gen. 15:1-6, then we can say that there is *sola fide* in the text of OT. Faith is of course related to Grace,

¹ In Gen. 18: 1 it has a different name: Mamre

² J. Gerald Janzen, *Genesis 12-50: Abraham and all the families of the Earth*, ITC (Grand Rapids-Edinburgh: Eerdmans-Hansel Press 1993).

³ See Janzen, *Genesis 12-50*, 37-39.

and the Abram story in the early narratives of Gen. 12-50 is pregnant with Faith and Grace.

The second text is Ex. 20:1-17, the granting of the Ten Commandments to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. As it is known, the form of these commandments is prohibitions, 'do not...' for 10 times. The first half of the prohibitions is concerned with the right relationship between God and human beings, while the second half is about the right relationship between human beings. But what has often been overlooked is the Prologue (Ind: *mukadimmah*; the term is also used in the beginning of the Indonesian Constitution) of the Ten Commandments, in Ex. 20:2, "I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the place of slavery". God saved the people of Israel by delivering them from oppression in Egypt. First there is proclamation on God as the Deliverer or the Liberator, and only after that there is description of commandments that Israel has to keep, in order to preserve her freedom. Perhaps I am influenced by the Prologue of the Indonesian Constitution, which states that colonialism is not according to God's will, and such Indonesia's independence is the will of God. Only after this statement, you will see chapters and paragraphs like in all other constitutions. In the churches the practice is to read the Ten Commandments straight away from the first commandment, and as far as I know, the church people never paid attention to the Prologue.

What is Israel's merit so that they were saved by the Lord? There is none. In Ex. 3:7, 9, God has seen the suffering of His people, and that their cry has reached His presence. The suffering of the people moves God to act and save them. Perhaps the fact that they are God's *people*, that causes them to be saved by God? They belong to Him, so it is normal that He acts to save what belongs to Him. If the Israelites were not His people, then God is not moved to help them. In the narrative of Exodus 3 for the first time we read that Israel is called the people of God. But as Christoph Barth has discerned, the reference to Israel as God's people in the narrative is at the same time a declaration of Israel's *birth* as God's people.⁴ We can say that the suffering of the people is the cause of their salvation, but if it is so then suffering cannot be seen as a merit, unless they are seen as meritorious suffering. However, the context of the setting in the narrative nowhere indicates that Israel has gone to Egypt in order to undergo meritorious suffering.

It is also helpful to see the election of Israel as God's people from the perspective of other texts. According to Marie-Claire Barth, in Hos. 13:4 and Deut. 7:6; 10:15; 14:2, they are God's people since they were in Egypt. In Hos. 13:5, Deut. 32:10-12, Jer. 2:2-3 they are chosen in the

⁴ See Christoph Barth, *Theologia Perjanjian Lama*, jilid 1 [*ET: Theology of the Old Testament, volume 1*], (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2006), 138. Christoph Barth was an OT scholar, one of the sons of Karl Barth. He worked for a long time in Indonesia, and produced his magnum opus in Indonesian, in four volumes. An abridged form in English appeared in 1991 with the title *God with Us – A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*.

wilderness. In Ex. 19:5 they are chosen at Mount Sinai.⁵ From all the examples shown by Mrs. Barth, it is clear from their contexts that the election of Israel is not because of their merit or superiority, but precisely because of their inferior status. But election also means that Israel has to improve their status so that they can live according to the will of God. First comes God's grace and freedom, but later on come the laws and regulations. It can be paralleled with Indonesia's independence. They are free, but precisely because they are free, they have to follow the Constitution. After the totalitarian regime of general Soeharto collapses in 1998, many in Indonesia are caught in a kind of euphoric spirit. They are once again free from the yoke of oppression! But since then the country is plagued by many deviations from the constitution, everyone is wont to go his/her own way and the government practically can do nothing. It is not governing the country. No wonder that now the ghost of Soeharto appears again in the form of his picture in the outer side of the lid at the back of many trucks, with the words in Javanese: "How are you now? It was better during my time, wasn't it?" It is the old tension between freedom and anarchy. Seen from this biblical perspective, the understanding of Israel as "God's people" cannot be separated from Grace. It is because of God's grace that Israel becomes His people, and only because of this Grace the people of Israel can live and follow the Law.

Now I will take an example from NT which rarely becomes a topic in sermon preparations in Indonesia, which is the Sermon on the Mount. Before I explain it, it is good to return to the professor's book above, to see why it is that the Sermon on the Mount is almost never preached. According to the professor, NT starts with the resurrection of Christ. All that comes before that, including the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels (Matthew to John) are still in OT!⁶ It is of course an extreme position to say that the teachings of Jesus belongs to OT rather than NT, but I think it is developed from the habit of many Christians who inherit the teaching of the missionaries, that Christianity is not concerned with the teachings of Jesus but with the teachings *about* Jesus. And of course, most of the teachings about Jesus can be found not in the Gospels but in the Letters and other parts of NT. There in the second part of NT people learn about Grace from the teachings of the apostles Peter and Paul, and from the direct disciples of the apostles, such as Titus and Timothy, but mostly from Paul. For the professor, the teachings of Paul are more important than the teachings of Jesus. According to him, Paul teaches about freedom from sin. Those who really believe in the salvation brought by Jesus Christ are free from condemnations, which comes to the mind because of the Law. So in order to retain our freedom from sin, we ought to get rid from the clutches of the Law. As long as we cling to the Law, we are in sin. We

⁵ See Marie-Claire Barth, *Kitab Yesaya pasal 40-55 [ET: The Book of Isaiah chapters 40-55]*, (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2003), 94, based on the findings of Christoph Barth. Marie-Claire Barth-Frommel is the wife of Christoph Barth, who taught herself the art of biblical exegesis and write commentaries in Indonesian.

⁶ See *Transformasi GMIH [ET: The Transformation of GMIH]* (no information on the publisher, year and place of publication), 51.

are free from sin, in Christ we can sin no more, and because of that we can renew ourselves, our church and our country (that is Halmahera).⁷ It is a kind of perfectionist theology, and later on I will return to this theology.

Although the Sermon on the Mount is rarely preached, in theological schools of course students study the passages in Matthew chapters 5-7 and Luke chapter 6:17-49. In both description of the setting, Jesus is addressing the crowd and the disciples, so it is a general admonition and not a special teaching which is directed to the inner circle only. Of course in the course of studying these passages, students are sometimes reminded by their teachers that in modern history, those who practiced the Sermon on the Mount are precisely non-Christians and non-Protestants such as Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy. And it is also good to hear that Mahatma Gandhi inspired Martin Luther King Jr. to fight for justice and the end of racial discrimination in the U.S. It means that the Sermon on the Mount is universal, and is intended for all, even if people admit that the practice of the Sermon on the Mount is difficult. If I remember lectures on the Sermon on the Mount from my student days, in Matthew it is compared with the granting of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. Jesus is compared with Moses. Of course Jesus is greater than Moses, but the greatness that was Moses is also apparent in Jesus. If the contents of the Sermon are commandment-like, then it is expected that the listeners respond to it with concrete acts.

In Mt. 5:17-48 Jesus explains the relationship between his teachings and the Law. He comes not to destroy the Law or the Prophetic books, but to fulfill them. Not one iota of the Law is expunged, till all has happened (verses 17-18). The word 'fulfill' (Gr: *pleroo*, *pleroosai*) has been interpreted into two directions: the first is a maximalist interpretation, in which the validity of the Law is defended. The other is a minimalist interpretation. Because Jesus has come, he invalidates the Law. As the Matthean community consists of former Jews, the term 'to fulfill' is used as a polite way to say that the old Law is no more valid. The phrase at the end of verse 18 is also a polite way of saying that *now* it is no longer valid. To support this view, not infrequently the letter of Paul to the Galatians is cited, where the contrast between the Gospel and the Law is explicitly given. And yet, looking at the context of chapter 5, it cannot be denied that there is something to be done, not in order to fulfill the Law, but in order to obey and follow Jesus. Mt. 5:20 can be seen as a clue, "If your righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven". Does it mean that the followers of Jesus have to be more zealous than (the already zealous) scribes and Pharisees? There are two observations here: first, Jesus does not attack the religious observance of the Jews. Or in to-day's term, he does not condemn the religiosity of the Jews, whether it is done through ritual and symbolic deeds, or by virtues. What he condemns is not righteousness, but self-righteousness. Second, if we cannot make religiosity as an absolute

⁷ See *Transformasi GMIH*, 59-68.

demand, either in the form of ritual or virtues, it does not mean that there is no religiosity. Again in the context of Indonesia, religiosity is important. The Muslims in Indonesia practices fasting in the month of Ramadan. Many Christians who are converts from Islam, but even those who are not, sometimes express a longing for fasting as a concrete religious act. In fact, some congregations which belong to the Javanese church (GKJ) already introduce voluntary fasting in what people in the West calls 'Lent' (it is not a whole month of fasting, only on Monday and Thursday during Lent, but it is real fasting, they eat nothing from dawn to dusk).

In Mt. 7:12 (par. Lk 6:31), Jesus said: "Everything that you wish others will do to you, do likewise to them; this is the content of the law and the prophets". I translate the Indonesian version of TB-LAI, which is a bit different from NRSV: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets" (NRSV). Here NRSV is faithful to the Greek text. But why then in the Indonesian Bible, they put the meaning of "content"? In Indonesia we are more used to the summary of the Law in Mat. 22:37-40, which ends with, "on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (v. 40). To love God and to love fellow human beings are commandments, law! But what is more important, the emphasis on the two commandments as the *content* of the law and the prophets, or the emphasis on the dependence of the law and the prophets toward the two commandments? The reason is that in Asia, the saying of Jesus in Mat. 7:12 is familiar with the saying of Confucius (or Konghucu, who lived four centuries before Christ), "Everything that you do not wish others do to you, do not do it to others". It is the Golden Rule, and of course it is not originally Confucian, as The Golden Rule is found in almost every culture in Asia, including Indonesia. The Indonesian Bible translator is unconsciously influenced by this Golden Rule. But then, why is Mt. 22:37-40 read in churches every Sunday before or after the confession of sins, and not the Golden Rule?

I think it is again one of the missionary heritages where Christ cannot have any commonality with Asia (in theological debates: the Gospel has no *Anknüpfungspunkt* with the wisdom of the world). If there is similarity with a biblical text, you just ignore it. I remember that in my student days there is awareness of Confucius, but since Confucius formulated his saying in a negative form while Jesus has it in a positive form, then the latter must be more superior. The famous H.H. Rowley, who was a Chinese scholar before he became an OT scholar, contested this false comparison between the negative and positive forms, but in the end he supported the view, that the Golden Rule of Jesus is superior to the Golden Rule of Confucius (and his disciples).⁸ But Rowley's argument is more theological than logical, so I think that in this era where Confucianism is recognized by the Indonesian government as one of the official religions of Indonesia, we should have more sympathy with Confucius and confirm Jesus' commonality with him concerning the

⁸ See H.H. Rowley, "The Chinese Sages and the Golden Rule", in H.H. Rowley, *Submission in Suffering* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1951), 74-107.

Golden Rule. I am not arguing that Mt. 22:37-40 ought to be replaced by Mt. 7:12, but that both should be read in church on Sunday!

The last NT passage is from one of the letters of Paul, 1 Cor. 12:21-26. Paul is of course known as critical of the Law and all what we now termed as works, deed or virtues. But in this passage he is explaining about the gifts of the Spirit, which in the end demands that the members of the church behave in an orderly and just way. The congregation at Corinth consists of people who own different social status. They are the *honestiores*, those of high social status and the *humiliores*, those of low social status.⁹ Those of high social status tend to dominate the congregation, hence the concrete exhortation of Paul, which nowadays could be included within the principle of preferential option for the poor and the weak. "And those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with great respect, *whereas our more respectable members do not need this*. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (1 Cor. 12:23-26, NRSV).

To be just means giving attention to the weak, the strong does not need this attention. It is very hard for Indonesian congregations to accept this breaking of a pyramidal honor system in society. In the Indonesian Bible (TB-LAI), the term for 'honorable' (Gr: *askhemona*) is '*elok*' and for the 'less honorable' is '*tidak elok*'. But the latter has a two nuanced meaning. First, it does not only denote somebody from a lower stratum, but also somebody who is without manners. Second, it is taken literally. Like the ancient Israelites, Indonesians are prone to regard beauty and handsomeness as outward sign of a good inner character. And like all ex-colonized people, criteria for beauty and handsomeness are taken from the colonizers. It goes without saying that the leadership of the congregations almost always come from the high stratum. And they are not inclined to change the system. Preferential option for the poor and the weak is rejected as Marxist thinking. I think the letter to the Romans is more popular than the first letter to the Corinthians. People at the congregations are not aware that Paul could also talk like a Marxist. But to give it a balance, it is also good to take heed on Gerd Theissen's conclusion after he evaluated the more recent study of Paul: "I am convinced that Paul was a rebel and a rebel against the law. In his greatness he never denied the value of law, although he discovers its darker side, which makes him a forerunner of Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud".¹⁰ But I can also

⁹ See Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth, a socio-rhetorical commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids-Carlisle: Eerdmans-Paternoster Press, 1995), 260.

¹⁰ See Gerd Theissen, "The New Perspective on Paul and Its Limits: Some Psychological Considerations", in *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, 2007, 84-85.

add: we should also be aware of the darker side of Grace, that is cheap grace and anarchy.

Learning from John Calvin about the Law and the Gospel

Now I look to Calvin, but I will start with Luther. As it is known, he is much influenced by the teachings of Paul in the letter to the Romans, which emphasizes that human beings are saved by faith, and also by Augustine's interpretation of Paul. Confronted with the religiosity of his context, which has lost its heart and soul while insisting on the outward deeds, works and appearances, Luther demands repentance which means stop relying on works or deeds, and return to faith. *Sola Fide!* Faith is contrasted with Deed or Works. Luther is aware that this formulation is contrary to the teachings of James, especially James 2:17, "so faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (NRSV). But he relies on Paul, not on James whose letter he regards as 'fodder'. But in the age of Calvin there is a different situation. The Reformation started by Luther in 1517 has to go on and there is much need for consolidation and re-consolidation. Western Europe has just been freed from traumatic experiences caused by Anabaptist rebellions, and many Anabaptists at that time are notoriously known as extreme antinomians (and such anti-OT) and exponents of freedom from church and state. Reform then means to re-emphasize regulations and even Law, in order that the situation could become more balanced.

If *Sola Fide* is central to the thinking of Luther, then the application of this principle is *Justificatio*. But according to Alister McGrath, this principle is not central to the thinking of Calvin.¹¹ It does not mean that it is not important, but clearly Calvin is following the line of thought in the letter of James rather than in the letter to the Romans. Faith and Grace are preserved by the Law, which functions as a fence. If so then the application is not *Justificatio* but *Regeneratio*. According to McGrath, Calvin uses this term more often than *Sanctificatio*. I might be wrong, but *Sanctificatio* is often (mis)understood in Indonesia (such as in Nanere's understanding) as a condition where somebody is really free from sin, really holy, and being holy means sharing the divine power of renewal from the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we should use more and more the term *Regeneratio* (Ind: *regenerasi*), which is also frequently used in public discourse. *Regeneratio* then means adjusting one's character with the will of God in terms of individual and sosial moral renewal. It is a continuing process which is evident in religious or public activities, *i.e.* virtues. In the mind of Calvin there is no separation between piety and virtues.

What about the relationship between Law and Gospel in the thinking of Calvin? I think in him the relationship is seen as dialectical. It means both have a different nature, but both are also complementary to each other. We have referred to the Anabaptists who are antinomians and

¹¹ See Alister McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin* (Oxford-Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1995), 165.

anti-OT. For them, NT is fundamentally different from OT. The latter has a transitory character and its character is worldly. It does not point to eternal things, which is the concern of true believers. As a reaction to this view, Calvin emphasizes that although in OT the promises of God are seemingly in the context of worldly well-beings, these promises are not limited to that context. Eventually the promises have a spiritual content because they mirror something which is coming in the future. So there is also a difference between OT and NT. The first difference is that in OT the teachings of the Gospel are given under the cover of worldly well-being, meaning, it is not spiritual (perhaps with the exception of the Book of Psalms). The second difference is that, in the same way NT (especially the Letter to the Hebrews) have used pictures and symbols of OT to portray Jesus Christ and His works, so we can also see the whole of OT as pictures and symbols of Jesus Christ, He that cometh.

Contemporary biblical scholarship of OT and NT has gone beyond this difference between OT as worldly or carnal and NT as spiritual. In both, salvation is described in a *holistic* way, covering both the worldly and the spiritual aspects. Salvation also covers healing and well-being. That is what Jesus has done with His healing miracles and what Paul exhorts in his letters concerning spiritual gifts. In 1 Cor. 12-13 he goes from explication of spiritual gifts or *charismata* to acts of love toward other human beings, and that in the end, the ultimate gift is love. When he emphasizes Faith or Grace, it does not mean he neglects Life and Work. What is the letters of Paul, if not proposals for a better conduct of Christian life in the world? But in the age of Calvin, the context is about an antithesis between the carnal or worldly and the spiritual or the eternal, which is represented by OT and NT respectively.¹² My intention is not to evaluate contemporary biblical scholarship from the standpoint of Calvin or *vice versa*, but to see them from a historical perspective.

According to Calvin, if Jesus is He that cometh, it does not mean that the Law is invalidated or abrogated. So at the end of this review of Calvin, I will look at his meaning of the Law. Calvin has several understanding of the Law. The first is the Law as reference to the whole corpus of the OT religion as given by Moses. The second is the Law as regulations concerning the character of the people of God, especially The Ten Commandments and the summary of the Law in Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18. The third is the rules concerning civilian life, juridical cases and religious rituals (for example the sacrificial rituals and regulations in Leviticus). According to Calvin the first and the third have been abrogated, while the third is still valid as "the laws concerning moral behavior".¹³ In turn these laws consist of three functions. First, it shows the truth of God. The Law is like a mirror, where human beings can be aware of their

¹² See David Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament*, (Louisville: John Knox, 1995), 37-45.

¹³ See Yohanes Calvin, *Institutio: Pengajaran Agama Kristen* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2000), 87. This is the Indonesian translation of Calvin's *Institutio*, which is based on Beveridge.

weakness and their evil inclination, and also the curse or condemnation which arises from these two characteristics. By being aware of their weakness, human beings could become aware of the Grace of God in Jesus Christ, and so they will not submit to their weakness.

As you may have noticed, in my reference to the understanding or interpretation of Calvinism in Indonesia there is a grave (mis)understanding which holds that Calvin's view of human beings is pessimistic. Like Hsun Tzu (China, three centuries before Christ), he thinks that human beings are essentially bad or evil. This is different from Confucius who holds that human beings are both good and evil, or Mencius (Meng'ko, between 372-289 before Christ) who holds that human beings are good in principle. But according to T.F. Torrance, for Calvin, humans are not essentially evil or bad, but humans *without grace*, they are evil or bad.¹⁴ The second function: the Law has such authority, that people are afraid to transgress the Law. Human beings are restrained from realizing their evil inclinations. Calvin regards this phenomenon positively, within the framework of the welfare of the society as a whole. In community life, the Law is enforced, it cannot be otherwise. If people transgress the Law, they have to bear the consequences. To some extent Calvin thinks in the same way as many Muslims in Indonesia, who thinks that within the Constitutional Law of the country, there should be room for the application of the *Syariah* law, or at least the Law of the country should be infused with 'the breath' of the *Syariah* law. Christians in Indonesia are of course aghast with these attempts of theocracy, but many experts of Calvin will agree that in his life-time such theocratic application of the Law had been experimented in the city of Geneva (note: Alister McGrath in his biography on Calvin above, disagrees that there is an idea of theocracy in Calvin's theology).

The third function of the Law is to live it in such a way that it becomes internalized in our inner beings. This according to Calvin is the closest to the purpose of the granting of the Law. What we will is one with what we must do. Calvin pointed to Jer. 31:33 which speaks about inner Law or inner Torah. For those who have done this internalizing process, their life will become life in the freedom of the Spirit. They are free because they are under the power of the Spirit. But different from the Anabaptist teaching where freedom means antinomianism, here those who are under the power of the Spirit will obey the Law. Those who are governed by the Spirit will be more and more aware of their weakness, and because of that, within their inner life, the Law will function "like a whip for a lazy and obdurate donkey".¹⁵

¹⁴ See T.F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 88, 107. Human beings are fallen, they lost their spiritual gifts, and their natural gifts are also perverted, but still, "they remain human, they are not like horses or dogs without intelligence and without discretion" (Torrance quoted Calvin's Sermon on Ephesians 4:17-19).

¹⁵ See Calvin, *Institutio: Pengajaran Agama Kristen*, 89.

Conclusion

After the third function of the Law, where people are governed by the power of the Spirit, it is good to conclude this discourse by returning the problem faced by the professor in the Introduction. We have seen how he explains the nature of a Christian as a believer of Christ as a new person who cannot sin and is not under the Law, a kind of Christian *Uebermensch*. It is of course wrong, but he developed this view by observing the negative effect of the traditional teaching on the awareness of the power of sin in human lives. This awareness, as we learn from Paul, precisely comes from observing the Law. Paul of course does not stop here, but he continues with Grace. But somehow, the traditional teaching received by the congregations in Halmahera discontinued with Grace. They feel comfortable under the Law. But there is no sign of the workings of a Calvinist work ethos. It concurs with the observation of Eka Darmaputera, an Indonesian theologian at Jakarta, who states long ago that in Indonesia, the doctrines of Calvinism are accepted, but the work ethos is rejected. The professor reacted against this discontinuation. He relies on Paul's rejection of the Law. But he went to the extreme, and threw out the baby together with the water. What is the cause of this extreme theologizing by a lay-person? I think it is the professor's openness to the Pentecostal-charismatic groups.

One of the attractions of these groups is their insistence on the empowerment of human beings by the power of the Spirit. It is also common observation now to say that Pentecostal-charismatic people are usually very motivated, and when they go into business, they often succeed and become rich. Many traditional Christians, such as members of the established Protestant churches are attracted by the teaching of human beings as "children of the King". Although they remain in their churches, they develop a kind of perfectionist theology to replace the traditional theology of human total deprivation derived from Calvinism. In his book the professor does not seem to be aware of the Calvinist work ethos. That is why he embraces perfectionist theology (popularly known as "success theology"). The polarized situation of the Gospel and the Law in Indonesia very often take the form of success theology against deprivation theology! I think this polarization is unhealthy for the theological life of the Indonesian churches. We have to overcome this polarization by looking at the relationship between Gospel and Law as a dialectical relationship. Can we endeavor to construct a contextual theology based on the dialectic between Gospel and Law, which will enable us to make a balance between awareness of sin and awareness of the fullness of life, for the betterment of the life of human beings in community?

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