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Baier, Georg Martin, 2008, *Dari Agama Politeisme ke Agama Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa. Teologia Sistematika, Agama Hindu Kaharingan: Pembahasan Kemajuan Iman dan Kehidupan Agamawi Agama Hindu Kaharingan. Disusun Berdasarkan Buku Pelajaran Agama Hindu Kaharingan untuk Tingkat SMTP kelas I-III* [From a Polytheistic to a Monotheistic Religion (a religion of the one and only God). Systematic theology, Hindu Kaharingan religion: A study of the faith's progress and the religious life of Hindu Kaharingan, based on the Hindu Kaharingan schoolbook for Junior High School classes I-III], Untuk Kalangan Sendiri, 160 pp, 1 b/w plate; A4; metal spiral binding; price in SE Asia Rp. 65.000; in Europe and USA at least USD \$35.00.

Pour savoir de quoi sont faites ces conceptions que nous n'avons pas faites nous-mêmes, il ne saurait suffire que nous interroguions notre conscience; c'est hors de nous qu'il faut regarder, c'est l'histoire qu'il faut observer [...] (Durkheim, 1912:27-28)

This book is written by a German theologian and anthropologist, Dr. Martin Baier, who has lived in southern Borneo for many years, mainly among the Ngaju people. Here, he spent much of his childhood and, later, many years as a pastor, researcher, and teacher. Today he pays annual visits to Kalimantan where he teaches as a visiting lecturer at STT Petra, Samarinda. Dr. Baier shows his concern for the Dayak people by teaching and writing in Indonesian. His purpose in using the Indonesian language is to make this book accessible to Indonesians, and especially to Dayak scholars. In this way, he allows Dayak readers to share in the knowledge and discussions of their own culture that have been conducted mainly in foreign languages and introduces Dayak readers to the possibility of reflecting on their own traditions through the use of a historical perspective.

The point of departure of this book is the *Buku Pelajaran Agama Hindu Kaharingan tingkat SMTP kelas I-III* (Schoolbook of the Hindu Kaharingan Religion for Junior High School) written by the Majelis Besar Agama Hindu Kaharingan and published by the Ministry of Education in three languages: Indonesian, Ngaju, and Sangiang (sacred language). Dr. Baier's book analyzes its contents chapter-by-chapter using a historical-critical method. His focus, he tells us, is on two concerns: *Sejarah* (history) and *Penyesuaian dengan Ideologi Pancasila* (accommodation with the ideology of Pancasila). In Kaharingan's struggle to survive, accommodation was necessary. With some discreet manipulations (as part of a political strategy), Kaharingan, which was known to most Indonesian people simply as an *aliran kepercayaan* (a body of beliefs) was made into a modern religion. Hindu Kaharingan worship was modernized in two ways: 1) it was transformed into a monotheistic religion, and 2) entirely new regulations were added that are not rooted in Dayak culture (p. 120).

The book includes an extensive survey of historical sources tracing the development of the Kaharingan religion back to the 1840s. In my opinion, this is the most valuable part of the book. The author also criticizes misprints, inappropriate uses of Indonesian terms, and defects in the interpretation and translation of the *sangiang* sacred language into Indonesian.

Due to the fact that the book contains a critical discussion of an Indonesian

religion, i.e., Hindu Kaharingan, no Indonesian publisher dared to publish it. However, one publisher helped Dr. Baier with the layout and editing, so that he was able to make copies of it on his own. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as the book could then be sold at a low price affordable to many scholars. The book is available at Toko Buku GKE Palangka Raya, Jl. Diponegoro No. 3, Komplek Resort GKE, Palangkaraya 73111, Central Kalimantan.

Dari Agama Politeisme ke Agama Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa comprises 160 pages and opens with a foreword (pp. 7-15) written by Prof. Drs. Kumpiady Widen, Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at the University of Palangkaraya. This is followed by a list of abbreviations, a preface, four chapters, a conclusion, a diagram, an index, and a bibliography.

The foreword introduces the reader to the political vicissitudes that the Kaharingan religion has undergone down to the present. During Indonesia's *Orde Baru* (New Order) era (1966-1998), Kaharingan and its believers were seen as obstacles to modernization (p. 9). In addition, laws and policies relating to development were often detrimental to the continued existence of Ngaju customs and culture. Nevertheless, the right of the Ngaju people to practice Kaharingan has been acknowledged and upheld by Indonesian law since 1945 (pp. 11-12).

"Kaharingan" is a relatively recent term. Damang J. Salilah is said to have presented it formally for the first time to a Japanese officer at Banjarmasin in 1945 (Ugang, 1983: 10). "Kaharingan" is the key word in Baier's book. Kaharingan itself is a system of beliefs and the religion of the Ngaju. There are a plethora of names used by the Ngaju to refer to Kaharingan, like *Gama Ono*, *Agama Kuno*, and *Agama Helo*. All have the same meaning: "ancestral religion that has existed since the creation of the world." Many efforts have been made by the *Majelis Besar Agama Hindu Kaharingan* (The Great Council of the Hindu Kaharingan Religion) to maintain the Kaharingan religion. Some of them are remarkable, such as the introduction of the Kaharingan religion into the school curriculum, from elementary school to university level. The Council also founded a *Sekolah Tinggi Agama Hindu Kaharingan* in 1986 (Academy of Hindu Kaharingan religion). In 2001, the academy's name was changed to *Sekolah Tinggi Agama Tampung Penyang Palangkaraya*.

On 28 April 1980, the Kaharingan religion was granted official status as an *agama suku*, an ethnic religion. Known before as merely an *aliran kepercayaan* (system of beliefs), Kaharingan was accepted as an official religion by affiliation with the Hindu Bali religion and officially acquired the "new name" of *Agama Hindu Kaharingan*. Henceforth, the *Majelis Besar Alim Ulama Kaharingan* (The Great Clergy Council of Kaharingan) changed its name by adding two "official" words: *agama* (religion) and *Hindu* and became *Majelis Besar Agama Hindu Kaharingan*.

With the fall of Suharto in 1998 and the beginning of a new "reformation" era, the state granted recognition of *agama suku* (ethnic religion) status to Confucianism as the sixth official religion after Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. In 2003, MBAHK submitted a demand to the government that Kaharingan be separated from the Hindu Bali religion and be accepted officially as the seventh recognized religion. However, this demand has yet to receive a government response.

In the preface, the author discusses problems related to sources of information on Ngaju culture and the fallibility of recent western writers. According to the author, one of the reasons for the superficiality of much recent writing is due to the relative ease of modern travel. Back in the nineteenth century, many westerners (scholars, soldiers, and missionaries) came to inland villages to learn about Dayak culture. Due to difficulties of transportation, many of them stayed for a long time, some even marrying native people. They had time to learn properly and, living among natives, many learned to speak native languages fluently and so had greater opportunity to collect accurate information. By the 1960s, it was much easier to reach Kalimantan and to find native people who could speak a little English. With limited time to explore and complete research, easier access to inland villages and natives who could speak English, many scholars dedicated only a short time to their field research. The disadvantages are potentially biased reporting or, worse, drawing false conclusions. These difficulties are especially acute in dealing with religious myths and correctly interpreting the sacred language.

With this in mind, the author reviews the information contained in Dutch-, German-, and English-language sources over the last 160 years. To avoid bias, he composes the four main chapters of his work in two parts, using smaller fonts for citations taken from the *Buku Pelajaran Agama Hindu Kaharingan tingkat SMTP kelas I-III*, and larger fonts for his own analysis, i.e. comparing these citations to show possible manipulations and misinterpretations.

In the first chapter (*Pendahuluan* or Introduction), Dr. Baier evaluates the Hindu Kaharingan religion schoolbook against the writings of a series of authors who studied, observed and wrote about Ngaju culture. Among these are J.F. Becker, the first observer to write about Ngaju religion in his study, *Het district Poeloepetak: Z. en O. kust van Borneo*. Becker lived for 13 years in Central Kalimantan (1836-1849). Others include Hardeland (who lived for 15 years in the Murong and Kahayan areas), Schwaner, M.T.H. Perealaer, F. Grabowski, Philipp Zimmermann, H.P.H. Tromp, K.Epple, J. Mallinckrodt, H. Witschi, Hans Schärer, Tjilik Riwt (who was an assistant of Schärer), F. Ukur, and A. Schiller (who lived for 10-12 months in the middle and upper Kahayan and in the middle Katingan areas).

The author notes that some changes in the Kaharingan religion were made for political reasons. Beginning in 1848, for example, historical sources indicate that in the Ngaju religion there were two supreme gods, one female and one male. However, during the New Order period, according to the state ideology, Pancasila, the co-existence of two supreme gods violated the principle of *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* (belief in the one and only God). Therefore, the two supreme gods had to be merged to conform to the official religion, with the female supreme god becoming a manifestation of the male supreme God. Other rules and systems also had to be adapted to the political and economic situation. Thus Kaharingan, which was “only” an ethnic religion, became a recognized religion, Hindu Kaharingan, and an *agama helo* (old religion) became a modern religion.

The most challenging part of Baier’s book is chapter three, *Etika* (Ethics). The three subjects dealt with here are the *tiwah*, sacred fornication, and the status of the supreme god, Ranying Hatalla Langit. The author explores the documented history of

tiwah before 1870 and reveals facts which are quite difficult to swallow, especially for Ngaju readers, because of modern antipathy towards certain features of the ceremony. He records, for example, the act of *mangangkuit* (removing the soul from the body) performed on the *kabalik* (offering slave) as a part of the *tiwah* rite, and describes in detail how the *kabalik* was killed (p.98-99). In discussing this topic, which some Ngaju regard as a tabooed subject, it is important to stress the historical existence of these practices as part of an elaborate system of beliefs relating to the Kaharingan religion. That is why the author always introduces himself to a new class (in Kalimantan) as a German person whose nation killed 6 million Jewish people by poison gas. By introducing himself in this way, he tries to make his students understand that history contains many events, some good, but also some bad. Hence, in studying history and anthropology, the unpleasant, painful, or even disgraceful facts should also be acknowledged and taken into account. On the subject of sacred fornication, the author argues that this practice, which was reported to have been done by *balian* (women priestesses) and found in the area of south Paju Sepuluh, south-middle Barito (from Buntok, Kapuas), and in the middle and south Kahayan, was introduced by outsiders who came to Borneo as *ronggeng* (professional dancing or singing girls, sometimes also available for sex). However, *balian* in the Ot Danum, Katingan, and Paju Empat areas were ordinary women who lived as housewives (p. 104).

Finally, the last tough subject that the author discusses is the supremacy of the supreme God, Ranying Hatalla Langit. Eighty years ago, Ranying Hatalla Langit was said to live in the highest level of the sky, or in the seventh sky; therefore he rarely bothered about human beings. Instead, the deities and the *sangiang* (spirits) took on the task of helping humans. The praise, veneration, and hopes of humans were thus aimed less at Ranying Hatalla Langit than at the latter. The MBAHK curriculum, however, states that Ranying Hatalla Langit is the only one exclusively revered by humans, while the deities and *sangiang*, being only the spirits, received less respect (p. 116).

Concerning ethics, the author also writes about the behavior of westerners. Referring to the “famous” story of Wyn Sargent and her tribal (ex) husband (p. 24) and the story of one western female scholar who studied Ngaju culture in the 1980s (p. 24, 34), he stresses the importance of respecting local standards of morality and ethical behavior in Indonesia.

The author concludes his book by stressing that his work is meant to encourage Dayak and Indonesian scholars to reflect critically on Dayak Ngaju culture from what has been recorded over the last 160 years (p. 143). Since ethnic religions contain mysteries, most Indonesian/Dayak scholars tend to regard them as something whose past is hidden. However, history is always there and the author encourages us to emphasize the past and its significance to the present and for the future. It is said that “Criticizing a religion may disturb the religious peace,” especially if the criticism comes from an outsider’s perspective, but in my opinion there is a huge difference between criticizing a religion based upon hatred and criticizing it based upon concern. Indeed, for me as an Indonesian and a Dayak who tries to understand my culture’s roots, the greatest value of this book lies in its historical detail and in its honest discussion of the history of Ngaju culture, free from political bias.

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