

# Globethics Repository

The logo for Globethics, featuring the word "Globethics" in white, sans-serif font centered within a solid blue rectangular background.

## A History of the Pentecostal Movement in Indonesia

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see <https://www.globethics.net>. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see <https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy>.

Item Type	Article
Authors	Seleky, Trinidad E.
Publisher	Asia Pacific Theological Seminary
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-04-19 16:49:40
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/237035">http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/237035</a>

## A HISTORY OF THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT IN INDONESIA<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

By way of introduction, I would like to explain the choice of this topic. One feels a need to justify over thirty hours of research, interviews and writing, especially when very little data is available. The scarcity of written material on the history of the Pentecostals in Indonesia is one of my motivations for undertaking such a project, albeit somewhat limited in its scope. I am particularly interested in the first thirty years of the Pentecostal movement in Indonesia (1921-1951), although there will be references to more recent events. As the reader will note in the bibliography, my resources are limited, especially in English.

A second aspect of the significance of this topic is the size of the Pentecostal denominations in Indonesia. From its humble beginnings in 1921, the Pentecostal movement has grown to become a dominant force in Christianity here. Accurate data on the actual size of the Pentecostal denominations is difficult to obtain.<sup>2</sup> David Barrett reported a list of Pentecostal denominations comprising a membership of 1,959,000 members in 1980.<sup>3</sup> From my observation, these statistics are very conservative. Even if the totals were accurate, there were at least ten Pentecostal denominations that were not listed. Also significant is the

---

<sup>1</sup> At the time of publication, the author of this article has not been identified. A hard copy was sent to the editors by an Indonesian church leader as a "floating document." Numerous attempts have proven to be futile. Once the author is identified, however, the journal will make it known. For this, the editors ask the readers' assistance.

<sup>2</sup> Most churches in Indonesia are reluctant to publicize accurate data on their growth for fear of reprisals from the dominant religion or reaction from the government.

<sup>3</sup> David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 386-87.

continued growth of the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches over the last decade. The church that I work closely with, the Gereja Sidang-Sidang Jemaat Allah (The Assemblies of God), has more than doubled in the last ten years. A new church that grew out of the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship, Gereja Betani (Bethany Church) that was not mentioned by Barrett, now has congregations of over 10,000 in several cities on Java alone! From my observation the Pentecostal denominations are by and large the fastest growing churches in Indonesia.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, I am personally interested in this subject due to the fact that I see myself as part of the Pentecostal movement in Indonesia. I help train pastors and often minister in these churches. I am often convicted by their intense zeal for the Kingdom. Additionally, I am fascinated at the way God has blessed them and multiplied their numbers despite a lack of formal theological or missiological training. Finally, I am also interested in this history because of my awareness of the rich spiritual heritage I personally enjoy as a result of the labors of the early Pentecostal pioneers in this country.

## 2. A Brief Overview of the History of Christianity in Indonesia

Pentecostals were rather late arrivals in Indonesia. The first known missionaries associated with the Pentecostal movement arrived in Indonesia in 1921, four hundred years after Portuguese sailors brought the message of Christianity to the Spice Islands, at that time known as the Moluccas. (There is speculation that Nestorian merchants brought Christianity to the island of Sumatra as early as the eighth century, but very little evidence remains to suggest that there was a community of believers that continued into the following centuries.)

Th. van den End divides the history of Christianity in Indonesia into three main periods.<sup>5</sup> The first period was 1522-1800. During this time, two colonial governments, first the Portuguese, then the Dutch played a major role in both the propagation of Christianity as well as

<sup>4</sup> This would make a fascinating church growth study. My guess is that over 50% of the adherents to Evangelical Christianity in Indonesia are of a Pentecostal/Charismatic persuasion.

<sup>5</sup> Th. van den End, *Ragi Carita: Sejarah Gereja Di Indonesia Vol. I: 1500-1860* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1987), pp. 11-12.

church government. Though the Portuguese priests and Dutch chaplains represented radically different streams of Christianity, there are interesting similarities in their approach to propagating Christianity among "the natives." Both saw their main task as the spiritual care of the European colonialist. The Christianization of the "natives" was merely an afterthought for most of these early missionaries (with some notable exceptions such as Francis Xavier). Not surprising is the fact that the church that took root in this period was heavily dominated by European culture. What is astonishing is that Christianity became a dominant force in the Molucca Islands and was introduced throughout the coastal areas at the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago.

The church in Indonesia entered a new era around the year 1800. Several political and religious changes had great impact on Christianity. There was a transfer of power within the Dutch colonial government with the dissolution of the VOC<sup>6</sup> (The United East India Company) in 1799. The king of Holland (and then the parliament in 1964) began to exercise direct rule over the colonies. Hence, the political current in Europe had a direct effect on Indonesia. Most significant for the church was the effect of the Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> The government began to take a neutral stance toward religion resulting in a decline of its support of religious workers. In many religions, pastoral care diminished as Dutch missionaries returned to the Netherlands. Simultaneously, developing mission structures emerging in Europe as a result of the Pietistic revival resulted in the sending of new missionaries to Indonesia.<sup>8</sup> There began to be new structures, new methods of evangelism, and new life in the church with the coming of the new breed of missionaries fresh in their experiences in the "fire" of the revival in Europe.<sup>9</sup> Christianity made new inroads among the animistic people groups of north Sumatra, Borneo (Kalimantan), north Celebes (Sulawesi), and islands of eastern Indonesia.

Ironically, while Christianity was flourishing, Islam also gained new strength and dominance in the nineteenth century. Opposition to

<sup>6</sup> Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie.

<sup>7</sup> Van den End, *Ragi Carita*, p. 145.

<sup>8</sup> One of the most influential of the new missionary societies was the Nederlandsch Zendinggenootschap (or NZG). They sent over 95 workers to Indonesia between 1813 and 1894.

<sup>9</sup> Van den End, *Ragi Carita*, p. 142.

Dutch rule spread. Islam became the rallying point for those opposed to foreign dominance. Increased resistance to Christianity occurred in the areas that were predominantly Islamic. In order to insure peace and productivity, the Dutch colonial government prevented missionary activity among adherents to Islam. This tragic policy resulted in the majority of the populations of Sumatra, Java, Madura, Lombok, and southern Celebes becoming virtually "off-limits" to evangelism until the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup>

Th. van den End sees the third main period of Indonesian church history beginning in the 1930s. This new chapter is marked by significant changes in the leadership structure of the church. The older Protestant churches became self-governing. The centralized hierarchy was exchanged for a Presbyterian system. More importantly, Christianity began to break out of traditional geographic boundaries. Churches sprang up, even in the predominantly Islamic regions. This resulted in Christianity becoming one of five nationally recognized religions of Indonesia.<sup>11</sup>

The 1930s also mark a new trend in the sending of missionary personnel to Indonesia. European sending agencies begin to decline while North American based mission societies intensified their efforts to place workers in Indonesia. American Evangelicalism began to be a dominant outside force changing the personality of Christianity in Indonesia. The majority of the rapidly increasing number of church denominations and organizations during this period trace their roots back to North American missions and church agencies. In general, the growth rate of these evangelical churches has surged since the 1930s while the more traditional Protestant denominations dating back to the nineteenth century have grown at a more moderate rate.

### 3. Early Pentecostal Missions

For at least fourteen years prior to the arrival of the first Pentecostals in Indonesia, those impacted by the Pentecostal message in North America began to propagate their teaching in other countries. According to Gary McGee, over 185 Pentecostal missionaries from

<sup>10</sup> This policy also applied to the Hindus of Bali with the same result.

<sup>11</sup> Van den End, *Ragi Carita*, pp. 11-12.

North America alone had traveled overseas by 1910.<sup>12</sup> Most of them were in some way linked to the revival at the Azusa Street mission in Los Angeles that occurred from 1906 to 1908. A deep burden for the lost and a powerful sense of urgency characterizes the testimonies of thousands who were influenced by this early Pentecostal movement. Pentecostal historian L. Grant McClung, Jr. states, "Motivation for lost souls and the preaching of the gospel to all the world flowed from a life in the Spirit and the literal instruction and modeling of Scripture, particularly the book of Acts."<sup>13</sup> From its inception, the Pentecostal movement was a missionary movement.

McGee sees several distinct groups emerge among these early Pentecostal missionaries. Some were veterans formerly serving with other mission agencies. Others were graduates of the Bible institutes associated with the Pentecostal movement throughout the United States. It is probable that the majority of the early Pentecostal missionaries ventured abroad with limited financial resources, little preparation and almost no knowledge of the national languages and cultures of the people they were attempting to evangelize.<sup>14</sup> Most missionaries testified to a supernatural vision or revelation for their call and place of service. Many believed that God would supernaturally give them fluency in the language of their hearers (the technical term for this is "xenolalia"). Their zeal was astounding, however their success ratio was rather low, especially before 1920.<sup>15</sup>

### 4. The Beginning of the Pentecostal Movement in Indonesia

In March of 1921, two missionary families arrived in Jakarta on the ship *Suwa Maxu*. They were Marie and Cornelis Groesbeek and Stien and Dirkrichard Van Klaveren. Details about them are rather sketchy, but we do know that they were in their early to mid-forties when they

<sup>12</sup> Gary B. McGee, "Missions, Overseas (North America)," in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 610-25 (612).

<sup>13</sup> L. Grant McClung Jr. (ed.), *Azusa Street and Beyond* (South Plainfield, Bridge Publishing, 1986), p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> McGee, "Missions, Overseas (North America)," p. 613.

<sup>15</sup> McGee, "Missions, Overseas (North America)," p. 613.

arrived in Indonesia. They were born in Holland, but before arriving had apparently lived for some time in the Seattle area of the United States. As officers in the Salvation Army, they were exposed to the Pentecostal message at a tent revival meeting in 1919 near Seattle. A year later God spoke to them in a vision and said they were to go to Java where they would pioneer a work that would become the center for a great harvest of souls.<sup>16</sup> It is probable that they had some prior contact with Indonesia because Indonesia was still under Dutch rule. There were thousands of Dutch families residing there.

A Seattle church, Bethel Temple, participated in sending out the Groesbeeks and the Van Klaverens. This church was a thriving independent Pentecostal church pastored by an Englishman named W. H. Offiler. When Pastor Offiler heard about the calling of these Dutch families, who had served as Salvation Army officers, he committed to help sponsor them.

There is an interesting testimony as to how God provided part of these families funding. After months of intense prayer and preparation for departure to the field they were still short \$500.00 of the needed \$2,200.00. At that time a member of Bethany Temple, came to Pastor Offiler in need of prayer. A young woman had been suffering from a large tumor on her side. The doctor had scheduled surgery to remove the cancerous tumor. "They prayed for healing with no immediate results, yet the woman seemed to believe she had experienced a divine touch of healing. She returned home and was walking through her kitchen when the tumor fell off onto the kitchen floor. Upon being examined again by her physician, he confirmed that she was totally healed. She promptly gave the \$500.00 she had planned to spend on the surgery to Pastor Offiler as an offering for the missionaries bound for Indonesia.<sup>17</sup> Pastor Offiler and Bethel Temple and their pastor played a significant role in Pentecostal Missions in Indonesia, as they eventually sent at least six other missionaries to Indonesia.

Upon arriving in Jakarta, the Groesbeeks and Van Klaverens immediately booked passage to Bali. In Denpasar, Bali they rented a dilapidated building that had been used as a copra warehouse. This served as both housing for the two families as well as a meeting hall for

<sup>16</sup> Nicky J. Sumual, "Pentekosta Indonesia; Satu Sejarah" (an unpublished paper on the history of the Pentecostals in Indonesia, 1980), p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> Sumual, "Pentekosta Indonesia," p. 45.

their evangelistic efforts. The facilities were rather simple with plywood walls installed as a partition for bedrooms and a small kitchen. The roof leaked and the only way to reach the building was by walking a muddy path through rice fields.

The missionaries employed a Dutch speaking, Balinese man who helped them translate the Gospel of Luke into Balinese. He also served as an interpreter for the evangelistic services they promptly began to hold in the copra warehouse.

From the outset, the emphasis in their preaching was Jesus as the healer. Apparently, the Balinese were interested in this strange new teaching, because they began to attend the evangelistic meetings.<sup>18</sup> Many sick were brought to the services and prayed for by the evangelists. On one occasion, a leper was brought to the meetings and, to the horror of the Balinese, the missionaries began washing his wounds. (They did not seem to know it was actually leprosy.) After he was anointed with oil and prayed for, he was completely healed.

Opposition began to surface toward these strange foreigners from the Balinese neighbors near their copra warehouse. One night a group of ruffians planned to attack the missionaries. As they were sneaking up to the warehouse, they were startled by a group of large "men" standing in the yard. Their clothing glimmered and they were armed with large swords. They promptly changed their plans and made their way home as fast as they could. News spread throughout the neighborhood of these "divine guards," and there were no more attempts to outwardly oppose the missionaries.<sup>19</sup>

On another occasion, Groesbeek was invited to the palace of a Balinese prince to pray for his daughter who was suffering from a severe pain in her head. The prince had a dream in which a white foreigner was sent to heal his daughter. When Groesbeek prayed for the girl, she was immediately healed.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> We do not have exact figures as to how many actually attended, but the fact that they had any response at all is amazing since traditionally the Balinese have been very resistant to the gospel. The history of missionary efforts in Bali is a fascinating study in itself. For example, the first Dutch missionary to Bali had only one convert after seventeen years of ministry. Then in 1881 the single convert murdered the missionary.

<sup>19</sup> The ruffian's testimony of this event was related to the missionaries' language helper who in turn told the missionaries.

<sup>20</sup> Sumual, "Pentekosta Indonesia," p. 50.

There is no evidence that the efforts of these early Pentecostal missionaries resulted in a congregation of believers. Had they been permitted to stay in Bali, they undoubtedly could have started a church. However, in January of 1922, just ten months after their arrival the Groesbeeks and Van Klaverens were ordered by the Dutch government to leave Bali.<sup>21</sup> They relocated in the large city of Surabaya located on the northeast coast of Java. This became their next target of ministry.

Upon arriving in Surabaya, the Pentecostal missionaries began to fellowship with some of the Dutch Evangelical Christians who were associated with an organization called Bond Van Evangelisasi. They were well received by this group and were even asked to preach. After several months in Surabaya the two families separated. The Van Klaverens moved to the town of Lawang in the mountains south of Surabaya. Meanwhile, the Lord opened a door for the Groesbeeks to start a church in the town of Cepu located about 200 kilometers east of Surabaya. Once again, a miraculous healing was the impetus for an open door of ministry.

One day, while Groesbeek was taking a walk in Surabaya, Cornelis was in earnest prayer concerning the direction of their ministry in Indonesia, the Lord prompted him to go to a large house. There he met a Dutch woman seated on the veranda. He struck up a conversation with the woman and discovered that she was ill. "Would you like the Lord to heal you?" he asked. She nodded her head. He then encouraged her to invite some of her friends together that night and he would explain how faith in Jesus could bring healing. That evening, several of the woman's friends gathered together. Mr. and Mrs. Groesbeek led them in a time of singing and prayer. They sensed the presence of the Lord and proceeded to explain the promises of Scripture concerning healing and then anointed the woman with oil (James 5:14-15) and prayed the prayer of faith. She was instantly healed.

Several days later the woman approached the Groesbeeks and requested them to accompany her to Cepu to meet her son, George Van Gessel who was employed by large, Dutch oil company. Through this encounter and developing relationship, the Groesbeeks were invited to lead a weekly meeting in the home of the Van Gessels in Cepu. The nucleus of a church was formed starting with about ten people, growing to around forty by the end of the year. The majority of those attending

<sup>21</sup> It is doubtful they ever had official permission to serve in Bali since the Dutch East Indies government forbade all Christian evangelistic activity on Bali.

were Dutch, while some members were Indo (a mixture of Dutch and Indonesian). Apparently, the meetings held in the Van Gessel home impacted several Dutch speaking Indonesians.

Many attendees experienced encounters with the power of the Holy Spirit, which resulted in glossolalia. Manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit were common in the meetings and there were several miraculous healings. Probably the most significant result at this time in the Groesbeek's Cepu ministry was the impartation of his vision to those who accepted his Pentecostal doctrine. At least ten people who had been involved in the Cepu meetings eventually became active in some type of ministry.<sup>22</sup>

In March of 1923 Groesbeek led thirteen people from his new congregation into water baptism by immersion. Most had been sprinkled as infants in the Dutch Reformed church, but Groesbeek insisted that the believer's baptism by immersion is the only valid Biblical pattern. The baptismal formula was also important to Groesbeek. They were baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that is the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>23</sup>

Toward the end of 1923, Groesbeek returned to Surabaya. The pastoral leadership of the Cepu congregation was turned over to Van Gessel. Groesbeek then concentrated his evangelistic ministry in a storefront building in an area called Tunjungan in Surabaya. The Van Klaverens also returned to Surabaya and began holding services in the Sindunegara area. They continued to witness miracles especially in healing the sick.

On one occasion, the police were sent to investigate this "new religion." A policeman arrived at the service with pen and notebook in hand. His heart began to be stirred by the enthusiastic singing, and the

<sup>22</sup> Among those who were influenced by Groesbeeks ministry in Cepu were the Van Gassels, the Van Loons, the Lumoindongs, the Hornungs, and A. E. Siwi. They were all instrumental in carrying the Pentecostal message to different parts of Indonesia.

<sup>23</sup> This emphasis on baptizing in the name of Jesus reflects a point of variance in Pastor Offiler's teaching at Bethel Temple with the more Trinitarian Pentecostals like the Assemblies of God. A type of "Pentecostal unitarianism" that became popular around 1915 influenced Offiler. At it is worst, it led to a virtual denial of the Trinity. This insistence on using the name of Jesus in the baptismal formula eventually led to a parting of the ways of the newly formed Pentecostal groups.

vibrant testimonies. At the end of the sermon he repented of his sins and trusted Christ as Savior. When he returned to the police station he turned in this succinct report on the Pentecostal church service, "Alles is goed."<sup>24</sup>

Between 1924 and 1926 a number of Indonesian young people came to Christ through the evangelistic efforts of the Pentecostal missionaries. Young men by the names of Runkat, Lesnusa, Rantung, Jokom, and Mamahit experienced powerful conversions during this period. These and many others who were impacted by the Pentecostal message during this time. They eventually became the backbone of the Pentecostal movement's church leadership, especially when the missionaries were imprisoned during the Japanese occupation.

### 5. The Spread of Pentecostalism

Within a decade of the establishing of the small predominantly Dutch congregation in the small town of Cepu, the Pentecostal message was disseminated throughout areas of Indonesia that had previously been influenced by Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Through the network of the Dutch who attended the Cepu meetings and then through the Indonesians who came to Christ in Surabaya, Pentecostal congregations sprang up throughout the archipelago.

Wenink Van Loon began propagating divine healing in Bandung, West Java in 1926. A congregation was then established with Van Loon as the pastor.

The Hortsmans, an elderly couple who lived in Temanggung, Central Java, opened their home to Groesbeek. When he preached there, many received the "baptism of the Holy Spirit."<sup>26</sup> Among them was M.

<sup>24</sup> Or "All is good" in English. Sumual, "Pentekosta Indonesia," p. 64.

<sup>25</sup> One of the common criticisms lodged against Pentecostals is that they targeted "Christians" rather than the lost. The reader must keep in mind that most of the early adherents to Pentecostalism were from traditionally "Christian" people groups (i.e., Dutch, Minahasan, Ambonese, Batak, etc.). Naturally initial lines of communication would be with those in the same cultural group. Secondly, many of these traditional Christians were nominal in their faith and frictionally non-Christian.

<sup>26</sup> The term used by Pentecostals for a second work of grace in which the believer is filled with the Holy Spirit and speaks in other tongues.

A. Alt, a single female missionary serving in the nearby area of Gambangwalu. The Hortsmans' son Han, at that time a university student, became ignited with a passion to preach the gospel. He then became the pastor of the Temanggung congregation and eventually moved to Malang where he pastored one of the larger Pentecostal churches.

Indonesian young people consumed with an evangelistic zeal were sent out to northern Sumatra, northern Sulawesi, Ambon, and Timor. Pentecostal churches were planted in all four areas by 1930. Even in cities like Bukittinggi, and Palembang (central and west Sumatra) where the Christian presence was small, they experienced great responsiveness to their gospel message accompanied by "sign and wonders."

In the late 1920s the Chinese began to receive the Pentecostal message. Ong Ngo Tjwan was converted in Surabaya. After his training and discipleship at a Bible study lead by Van Gessel,<sup>27</sup> he began holding evangelistic crusades in Surabaya that were attended by thousands (mostly Chinese). The Lord used him powerfully in miracles of healing. There were reported cases of blind people receiving their sight, the deaf hearing, and lame people walking. There was reconciliation in broken homes and many were baptized into the faith.<sup>28</sup>

Even more influential than Ong Ngo Tjwan in reaching large numbers of Chinese was a young evangelist from China by the name of John Sung. By invitation of the Pentecostals in Surabaya, he came to Indonesia in 1939. He held large crusades in the major cities throughout Java as well as Unjung Pandang (Sulawesi) and Ambon. Thousands came to hear him preach. He preached with great fervor. He prayed for the sick. But he was most noted for his "alter calls." He would quote specific sins that he felt the listeners had committed.<sup>29</sup> Great conviction would fall on the hearers and many would repent. He was in Indonesia only three months, but his impact was significant. Perhaps his greatest legacy was the number of young Indonesian evangelists that he inspired to reap the harvest through mass evangelism.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Van Gessel had moved from Cepu to Surabaya in 1926 where he was instrumental in establishing a follow-up/teaching ministry.

<sup>28</sup> Sumual, "Pentekosta Indonesia," p. 65.

<sup>29</sup> Probably using the spiritual gift commonly called "a word of knowledge."

<sup>30</sup> F. D. Willem, *John Sung, Riwat Hidup Singkat Tokoh-Tokoh Dalam Sejarah Gereja* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1987).

Extensive receptivity to Pentecostalism among the Javanese during this early period is not recorded. We can assume that some Javanese attended the evangelistic meetings in Surabaya. We know for certain that Alt pastored several large Javanese congregations in the Gombangwalu area of Central Java. Her Pentecostal experience at the Hortsmans' home was undoubtedly communicated to the believers under her care.<sup>31</sup>

#### 6. Pentecostal Training Institutions

The early Pentecostals were quick to realize the need for some method to disciple new converts and train workers for the harvest. Van Gessel turned over his congregation in Cepu to Lumoindong in 1926 and moved to Surabaya where he started a Bible training program for the young people coming to Christ in that city. Many of the young evangelists that carried the Pentecostal message to the outer islands in the early 1930s spent time in these training sessions with Van Gessel.

In 1932, W. W. Patterson arrived from Bethel Temple in Banjarmasin, Kalimantan. After studying Bahasa Indonesia, he moved to Surabaya to open the first Pentecostal Bible school. From its inception, the emphasis of the school was a basic understanding of doctrine and a practical application of Biblical truth. The program lasted less than a year and then graduates were quickly thrust into full-time ministry. This school eventually moved to Lawang and then to Beji (near the city of Batu) where they continue to emphasize a practical, short-term approach to ministerial training. Every year they graduate about 600 students who then either immediately plant a church or go through further training under the tutelage of a local pastor. As of 1980, this school and ten other Gereja Pentekosta Di Indonesia training institutions throughout Indonesia have graduated over 7,500 workers.

<sup>31</sup> I have had the privilege of preaching in several of the congregations that Alt established. They are definitely as Pentecostal today as they have been known for in the past.

#### 7. Organization and Proliferation of Pentecostal Groups

In 1924 the Pentecostals were officially registered with the Dutch East Indies government under the name "De Pinkster Gemeente in Nederlandsch Indie." In 1942, the name was Indonesianized to become "Gereja Pentekosta Di Indonesia" (or GPDI). The chairman of the new organization was Weenink Van Loon.<sup>32</sup> They were given status as a church body with the right to receive members, to ordain clergy, etc.

In 1925, Alt was made secretary of the church, but tensions arose concerning two issues. First, was the doctrine of the Trinity. Under Pastor Offiler's influence, there was a tendency to emphasize the oneness of God at the expense of the Trinity in church teaching. Missionaries from Offiler's Seattle congregation perpetuated this doctrine. The baptismal formula that concluded with the phrase "...that is the Lord Jesus Christ," reflected a Unitarian tendency.

The second issue concerned the role of women in ministry. Influential leaders like Van Gessel were uncomfortable with women as pastors. As a female minister, Pastor Alt felt restricted in her pulpit ministry in this new Pentecostal denomination. In 1931, she resigned De Pinkster Gemeente In Nederlandsch Indie and started a new organization called "De Pinkster Zending" (The Pentecostal Mission). This became the first of many splits from the original Pentecostal denomination.<sup>33</sup>

One year later (1932) Thiesen resigned from the original organization to form "De Pinkster Beweging" which later became the "Gereja Gerakan Pentekosta." Thiesen, like Pastor Alt, felt the original organization's doctrine of the Trinity was less than biblically sound.

In 1941, one of the early Batak leaders, D. Sinaga, pulled out of the GPDI and formed "Gereja Pentekosta Sumatra Utara" (The Pentecostal church of North Sumatra). On this occasion, the conflict was a cultural

<sup>32</sup> One can only speculate as to why one of the founders, Groesbeek or Van Klaveren was not chosen as chairman. It is possible that the fact that they were no longer Dutch citizens excluded them from holding official positions in the organization. Or, perhaps Van Loop, relatively new to the movement, had "connections" with the government thus insuring his recognition of official status.

<sup>33</sup> There are now over forty Pentecostal denominations in Indonesia. The Gereja Pentekosta di Indonesia (GPDI) continues to be the largest of all the Pentecostal churches with approximately one million members.

issue. Batak culture involves ritual meals in which blood is eaten. The GPDI forbade Christians to eat blood based on a literal application of the decision reached at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). This prohibition created tension for Bataks who wanted to become Pentecostals. Since other Christian Batak churches do not apply this prohibition literally, Sinaga's group decided to do the same. They decided not to make an issue of Christians who eat blood.<sup>34</sup>

During the ensuing years, other schisms occurred, not because of doctrinal differences, but because of personality clashes among those in leadership. Strong charismatic national leaders began to emerge especially when the Japanese occupation (1942-1945) required Indonesians to take over the leadership positions formerly held by westerners.<sup>35</sup> The leadership, structure of the local church contributed to this institution's schismatic tendency. In the GPDI the pastor is "Raja" (king). He is the "Bapak" (father) who, in most cases, not only rules the church but he owns it, too! The church properties are in his name or under an independent board of which he is the chairman.

New denominations were formed out of the GPDI with reasons like, "We were not given freedom to work in an organized manner." This was the reason given by Tan Hok Tjwan when he formed the Gereja Isa Almasih in 1946. Another reason was, "We wanted to stand on our own." This was the explanation given by Van Gessel when he resigned from the GPDI and "Gereja Bethel Injil Sepenuh" (The Bethel Full Gospel Church) 1952.<sup>36</sup> (This church in turn has divided into six different denominations since 1952). In 1959, Pastor Ishak Law pulled out of the GPDI because of a dispute over Bible school properties in Surabaya. His church, which is called the Gereja Pantekosta Pusat Surabaya (The Pentecostal Church Headquarters Surabaya), now has several hundred congregations scattered throughout Indonesia.

This tragic tale of schism pervades the brief history of the Pentecostal movement in Indonesia. While we must denounce as sin the motivation behind many of these divisions in the body of Christ, most of

<sup>34</sup> In 1948, Renatus Siburian left the GPDI over the same issue and started yet another Pentecostal church in north Sumatra.

<sup>35</sup> Westerners, including missionaries, fled Indonesia or were interned during WW II. Many like Van Klaveren died while in internment.

<sup>36</sup> Nicky Sumual feels the real reason Van Gessel resigned was because he was not re-elected as superintendent.

these forty old denominations have continued to grow at a phenomenal rate.

## 8. Gereja Sidang-Sidang Jemaat Allah

During the 1920's, not all the Pentecostal churches in Indonesia have a direct link to the ministry of Groesbeek and Van Klaveren. An English translation of the Gereja Sidang-Sidang Jemaat Allah (Literally, The Assemblies of the Congregation of God Church") reflects its historical ties with the Assemblies of God in America.

In 1936, an American Pentecostal missionary of the family name, Devin arrived in Indonesia under the auspices of Bethel Temple in Seattle.<sup>37</sup> Ralph Devin owned a large office supply company in the Seattle area when he felt the call to serve in Indonesia. He approached the Christian and Missionary Alliance about the possibility of serving with their mission, but was told that, "they were too old, had too many children (five), and that they would never be able to learn the language."<sup>38</sup> He was determined to fulfill his call so he sold his company and briefly associated himself with Bethel Temple having learned of their ties with a mission in the Dutch East Indies. They sailed to the island of Ambon in the Maluccus.

The following year Raymond Busby and his wife sailed from Seattle to Medan, North Sumatra in order to join the labors of the Pentecostal missionaries sent out from Bethel Temple. Both the Busbys and Devins who had a rather loose tie with Bethel Temple decided to form a new mission.<sup>39</sup> In 1940, the Bethel Indies Mission received official government recognition from Dutch East Indies government. The following year both families had to escape Indonesia and returned the United States when the Japanese invaded Southeast Asia.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Several other missionaries from Bethel Temple had already joined the Groesbeeks and Van Klaverens before 1938. Among them were the W. W. Patterson family and the Ray Jackson family.

<sup>38</sup> Wayne Warner, "The Evangel Crosses the Pacific," *Assemblies of God Heritage* 9:3 (Fall 1989), p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> They actually never received support from Bethel Temple.

<sup>40</sup> The Devins escaped Ambon just four days before the Japanese landed.

During the war years the Devins and Busbys joined the Assemblies of God and were received into the Northwest District Council. Following the war the Devins returned to Ambon and the Busbys located in Jakarta where they opened a Bible school to train national pastors. The Busbys also maintained ties with a group of Pentecostal believers in Medan where they eventually opened another Bible school. Meanwhile the Devins started a Bible school in Ambon that produced workers who began to plant churches throughout the Maluccus. These churches, along with those started in Medan and Jakarta, identified themselves with the Assemblies of God of Indonesia.<sup>41</sup>

Other Assemblies of God missionaries soon joined the Devins and the Busbys. The Tinsmans, Carlblooms, Skoogs, the Lamphears and Margret Brown all began serving in Indonesia before 1950.<sup>42</sup> The work expanded to Northern Sulawesi, to Kalimantan, and to other parts of Java. In 1951, the national pastors and missionaries gathered in Jakarta for the first General Council of the Assemblies of God of Indonesia. There were ten ordained national pastors present.

In 1952, the name of the church was changed to Gereja Sidang-Sidang Jemaat Allah. At that time, six churches that had been affiliated with the Gereja Utusan Pentekosta (formerly the Pinkster Zending) that had been started by Alt in 1931 joined the GSSJA.<sup>43</sup> The leader of that church, Sumardi Stefanus, also joined and later (1959) became the first general superintendent of the GSSJA.<sup>44</sup>

Currently the GSSJA has a membership of 70,000 with about 700 congregations throughout almost every province of Indonesia. There are nine Bible schools and the denomination boasts of one of the best Christian publishing houses in Indonesia.

<sup>41</sup> Most of the above information about the early history of the Assemblies of God in Indonesia was obtained through personal interviews with the son of R. M. Devin, Morris, who with his wife Joyce, have served in Indonesia since 1952.

<sup>42</sup> More than sixty Assemblies of God missionary families from the U.S., Australia, and Holland have served in Indonesia.

<sup>43</sup> Alt encouraged this affiliation. About ten of her churches, however, remained in the parent organization.

<sup>44</sup> R. M. Devin, "Information on the Assemblies of God Work in Indonesia" (an unpublished paper, January 29, 1991).

## 9. The Unique Contribution of Pentecostals

During the seventy years since the Pentecostal movement first entered Indonesia, it has influenced the nature and character of the church in Indonesia. Presented as follows, is the writer's summary of the positive effects of the Pentecostal movement in Indonesia.

### 9.1 A Gospel of Signs and Wonders

Since Groesbeeks and Van Klaveren's evangelistic meetings in Bali in 1921, prayer for the sick has been common to Pentecostals in Indonesia. Culturally, Indonesians can relate to a supernatural worldview in which spirits exercise influence over humans causing illness, misfortune, and even demonic bondage. Pentecostal theology addresses the dimension of the supernatural. This power encounter approach in evangelism has created an openness and responsiveness to the gospel, even among resistant peoples. A majority of testimonies in Indonesia, where there was a converted to Christianity from a Muslim background, involve some kind of miracle (i.e., healing, deliverance, dream, etc.). This emphasis on "power evangelism" is certainly not unique to Pentecostals, but the author contends that the Pentecostal movement provided this type of evangelism long before its' current emphasis on the theology of the kingdom.

### 9.2 Mass Evangelism

While evangelistic crusades are not unique to Pentecostals, they have been an incredibly effective means of reaching the lost in Indonesia. Since John Sung's crusade in 1939, large crowds have gathered in soccer stadiums, theaters, and public halls to hear Pentecostal evangelists. Western Pentecostal evangelists like Oral Roberts, T. L. Osborn, Morris Curillo, and more recently, Rienhard Bonke have drawn the large crowds.<sup>45</sup> The anticipation of witnessing a miracle draws many to attend, creating what we would call a "circus atmosphere." Yet, many Indonesians seek repentance and are grafted into local churches.

<sup>45</sup> Rienhard Bonke's crusade in Jakarta in May 1991 had over 100,000 people a night in attendance.

### 9.3 Vibrant Worship

Just as in many western countries, Pentecostals (and Charismatics) in Indonesia have introduced a style of worship that has been incorporated, to some degree, in most Evangelical churches. Hand clapping, lively music, and simple worship choruses have brought new life into many staid congregations.

### 9.4 Practical Theological Education

Pentecostal Bible schools have produced few theologians, yet they have proven effective in turning out church planters and pastors. As someone once stated, "They don't squelch the zeal in their workers through a four year academically-oriented program." Similar to the West, Indonesia's trend is toward higher theological degrees for ministerial candidates. However, most of the Pentecostal Bible schools continue to place an emphasis on practical ministry in their curriculum.

### 9.5 Aggressive Church Planting

There is a common joke among Evangelical missionaries in Indonesia. It stands as: One can hike into a mountain village where there is no electricity, no post office, no bank, nor even a school, but in many cases, there will already be a Pentecostal church. Both in rural and urban areas Pentecostals have disregarded the traditional boundaries of comity long established by other churches or missions agencies.<sup>46</sup> Even if there are other Protestant churches present Pentecostals have not been reluctant to start a home fellowship, or rent a hall and begin holding evangelistic meetings with the goal of starting a new church. It is no wonder that, from its humble beginnings in 1921 until today, the Pentecostal movement has participated in the conversions of a multitude of believers and has established thousands of churches throughout Indonesia.

---

<sup>46</sup> Th. van den End (1989), p. 257.