



URL : <http://jurnal.sttsati.ac.id>

e-ISSN : 2599-3100

Edition : Volume 8, Nomor 2, Juli 2025 (*Special Issue*)

Page : 152 - 177

Indonesian Women's Struggle for Equality in Church and Society

Julia Theis

ABSTRACT

According to ancestral custom, the position of Indonesian women is equal to the men. Indonesian women have marriage's right equal to men. The influence of Islam, among other things, caused the position of Indonesian women to be inferior to the men. Indonesian women were struggling for equality in the society. Although, women have a special position in the church because of their roles in the early history of Christianity, women have to struggle for equality leadership roles in church. It was caused by the fallen human nature and the wrong interpretation of the Bible. The purpose of this paper is to describe the struggle of Indonesian women for equality in church and society, and to find Pentecostal theology solutions which can help them in their struggle for equality. In order to accomplish this purpose, I will discuss the cultural, economic and political perspective on Indonesian women. I also will discuss position of women in Indonesian church concerning their roles in the church.

ABSTRAK

Menurut adat istiadat leluhur, kedudukan perempuan Indonesia setara dengan laki-laki. Perempuan Indonesia memiliki hak menikah yang sama dengan laki-laki. Pengaruh Islam, di antara faktor-faktor lainnya, menyebabkan kedudukan perempuan Indonesia menjadi lebih rendah daripada laki-laki. Perempuan Indonesia berjuang untuk kesetaraan dalam masyarakat. Meskipun perempuan memiliki kedudukan khusus di gereja karena peran mereka dalam sejarah awal Kekristenan, perempuan harus berjuang untuk peran kepemimpinan yang setara di gereja. Hal ini disebabkan oleh sifat manusia yang jatuh dan penafsiran Alkitab yang salah. Tujuan dari makalah ini adalah untuk menggambarkan perjuangan perempuan Indonesia untuk kesetaraan di gereja dan masyarakat, dan untuk menemukan solusi teologi Pantekosta yang dapat membantu mereka dalam perjuangan mereka untuk kesetaraan. Untuk mencapai tujuan ini, penulis akan membahas perspektif budaya, ekonomi dan politik tentang perempuan Indonesia. Penulis juga akan membahas posisi perempuan di gereja Indonesia terkait dengan peran mereka di gereja.

Keywords:

Indonesian women, equality, women roles, church ministry, society, feminist movement, women's position, Pentecostal theology.

Kata Kunci:

Perempuan Indonesia, kesetaraan, peran perempuan, pelayanan gereja, masyarakat, gerakan feminis, posisi perempuan, teologi Pantekosta

1. Introduction

The position of women has a certain connection to the various roles that they perform in the church and society. Women have a special position in society because of their roles concerning the continuity of the family and society. It is the women who gives birth to children and educates them. In addition, it is the women who does the routine everyday chores about the house.¹

Women have also a special position in the church because of their roles in the early history of Christianity. God chose Mary to give birth to the Savior. He chose Mary Magdalene to be the first apostle to proclaim the Good News of His resurrection. And He chose women in the early church to pastor, teach, and proclaim the Gospel.²

The fact above proves that in general, women have a good position in church and society. Women are not created to be inferior to men. They have important roles in church and society as well as men. On the other hand, women have to struggle for equality in church and society because of fallen human nature and the wrong interpretation of the Bible.

¹ S. Takdir Alisjahbana, *Indonesia: Social and Cultural Revolution* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), 105.

² Susan C. Hyatt, "Spirit-Filled Women" in *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Vinson Synan (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2001), 262.

2. Cultural Perspective on Indonesian Women

2.1. Women's Position According to Ancestral Custom (*adat*)

The position of Indonesian women according to ancestral custom (*adat*) can be described through the three principal family system of *adat* in use in Indonesia. Those are matrilineal system, patrilineal system, and bilineal system. According to the matrilineal system, the continuation of the family is assured by the women. The children do not belong to the father's family but to the *suku*, the family of the mother. The decision making for the future of the children is through the family discussion (*rapat*). In this family discussion, the advice of the wife is accepted. Moreover, husband and wife may through joint effort acquire goods, which are called *harta suarang*.³

Under the patrilineal system, the wife generally follows the husband into his family. The children become members of the father's family. In this system, the wife may manage her own property, and she has the right to ask for divorce. In the case of the death of the husband, the wife can become the wife of his younger brother. However, the widow's opinion is always asked, and it is for her to decide whether she will marry the younger brother, remain a widow, or marry another man. Under the bilineal system, the children belong to both families, to the husband's as well as to the wife's. Sons and daughters inherit the family possessions and the

³ Cora Vreede-De Stuers, *The Indonesian Women: Struggles and Achievements* (Netherlands: Mouton & Co., 1960), 24.

household goods. The husband and wife decide together what use will be made of their property (*mupakat*).⁴

Indonesian history of pre-colonial and colonial times records women held some positions of authority. For instance,

In pre-colonial times, Javanese women were royal leaders of powerful Queendoms. The Hindu state of Majapahit (on Java) in the 13th century dominated most of Malayan peninsula for two hundred years and Moslem traders propagated Islam in 14th century. As early as the 17th century, women have led armies in Aceh. So when the Dutch arrived they had an encounter with Cut Nyak Dien, a woman who ruled Aceh for fifty years. Women have also ruled and were chiefs in the Buginese parts of South Sulawesi and in Kalimantan and were royal leaders of the Balinese... These women have manifested great strength and endurance in battles they fought and in hunting.⁵

From the discussion of the three principal family systems of *adat* in use in Indonesia, I can say that the position of Indonesian women according to ancestral custom is equal to the men.

2.2. The Influence of Islam on Women's Position

There are five religions that are practiced in Indonesia. Those are Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Islam is the dominant religion by far in Indonesia. According to the data statistics of 2024, the population of Indonesia is about 289 million people. The number of Muslims is estimated about 253 million of the population.⁶

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Lily Quintos, "Women and Culture: Women's Struggle for Equality in Church and Society," in *Doing Theology with Asian resources: Theology and Cultures*, vol. 2 (Singapore: ATESEA, 1995), 69.

⁶ Country Meters, "Indonesia Population," accessed March 28, 2025; available from <https://countrymeters.info/en/Indonesia>, internet.

Islam was brought by Arab trades to Indonesia between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. It was quickly accepted and swept more or less peacefully through the islands, first along the trade routes and later inland. There were likely two reasons why Islam was quickly accepted by Indonesians. Firstly, Islam preached the equality and brotherhood of man, an idea which appealed to the common people who were tired of being at the bottom of the rigid, hierarchical Hindu caste system.⁷ Secondly, Islam probably came to Indonesia in the form of mystical Sufi tradition. Sufism easily gained local acceptance and became synthesized with local customs.⁸

The influence of Islam especially on the position of Indonesian women is, it made Indonesian women to be inferior to the men. In the Islamic marriage, the husband is bound to support his wife and children (*nafaka*).⁹ It caused women heavily dependent on men, because they did not take part in providing material for the family. According to ancestral custom (*adat*), women were allowed to take part in providing material for the family. They were independent economically.

Another influence of Islam that made Indonesian women's position to be inferior to the men is in the Islamic marriage, the husband is not bound to be faithful to his wife. Islamic law allowed the practice of polygamy. Qur'anic verse 4:3 states that a Muslim can marry four wives, and he must treat them equally.

⁷ Gouri Mirpuri, *Cultures of the World: Indonesia* (Singapore: Kim Hup Lee Printing Co., 1990), 67.

⁸ Joel C. Kuipers, "Religion and Worldview" in *Indonesia: a Country Study*, ed. William H. Frederick and Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1993), 89.

⁹ Cora Vreede-De Stuers, 32.

Abdur Rahman I. Doi gives two reasons on why Islam allowed the practice of polygamy. First, polygamy is allowed in Islam to meet the needs of women for protection and care. Though the numbers of women are more than men in the world, Islam allowed men to marry more than one wife to protect and care for them.¹⁰ Second, polygamy is allowed in Islam to safeguard society against promiscuity.¹¹

Actually, Indonesian ancestral custom (*adat*) allowed the practice of polygamy. According to *adat*, the husband has to inform his first wife and ask her permission before he takes a second wife.¹² The rules are very strict, so the husband does not easily take a second wife.

Finally, the other influence of Islam that made women's position to be inferior to the men is the right of divorce (*talak*) is in the hands of the husband alone. Cases of abuse of the *talak* without valid reasons are extremely frequent. Abdur Rahman I. Doi explained the reason on why the right of divorce is to the husband, but not to the wife, as follows:

As to the question of the right of unilateral divorce granted to the husband in Islam, the following points are worth taking into consideration. A woman's psychological and physiological makeup is such that every month for a period of five to seven days she is in a state of pathological change...Also during this period when a woman is exceptionally sensitive and irritable...If women were given the power of unilateral divorce, it is probable that millions of them would divorce their husbands and it is probable that millions of divorces would have ensued and there would be chaos in society.¹³

¹⁰ Abdur Rahman I. Doi, *Women in Shari'ah (Islamic Law)* (Malaysia: A.S. Noordeen, 1990), 50.

¹¹ Ibid, 63.

¹² Cora Vreede-De Stuers, 39.

¹³ Abdur Rahman I. Doi, 94-5.

The woman's opinion is not heard by the man in Islam. She is viewed as an emotional person, so her opinion is not objective. In contrast, the woman's opinion is heard by the man in the family discussion according to *adat*. She also has the right to ask for divorce.

The facts above prove that the influence of Islam caused the position of Indonesian women to be inferior to the men. It caused Indonesian women to struggle for emancipation.

2.3. The Indonesian Feminist Movement

The foremost precursor of the feminist movement in Indonesia is Kartini. She is a daughter of a senior Javanese official. She was born on April 21, 1879. She voiced the right for girls to be educated, and her antipathy to the practice of polygamy. She wrote a series of personal letters to several Dutch women and men. She wrote about the indignities of colonialism, education for the Javanese, the emancipation of women, and about her own cultural identity. The publication of her letters, after her death, gave rise to waves of enthusiasm among the young men and women and aroused sympathy for the feminist cause in Indonesia.¹⁴

Kartini encouraged the Dutch, the colonial in Indonesia at that time, to take up the issue of women's education seriously. The basic thinking of Kartini was simply a passion to give women a greater chance to study and work for themselves

¹⁴ *Encyclopedia of Asian History*, vol. 2, s.v. "Kartini," by James R. Rush; Cora Vreede-De Stuers, 50.

and for society, to live their own lives and to develop themselves in every possible way.¹⁵ Kartini started a modest vocational school for girls before she died in delivery of her child in 1904.

The effort of Kartini was continued by other women who were involved in the feminist organizations. The purposes of the feminist organizations were to point out the need for improving the education of Indonesian women, fight against polygamy, and voice the right for women to refuse and or ask for divorce.

The efforts of Kartini and feminist movement improved the position of Indonesian women fruitfully. S. Takdir Alisjahbana describes fruits of the effort of Kartini and feminist movement concerning women's education as follows: "All the various types of education are as fully open to women as they are to men. As a result, all official posts and appointments, up to and including membership of Parliament, ministerial positions, ambassadorships, and so on, have now been held by women".¹⁶

Furthermore, he explains that polygamy is still allowed in Indonesia, but the rules of polygamy became very strict. For example, before taking a second wife he must gain the permission of the first wife. About the problem of divorce, he says that courts of conciliation have been set up, which try to advise and conciliate husbands and wives seeking divorce, before the decree itself is affected.¹⁷

¹⁵ S. Takdir Alisjahbana, 107.

¹⁶ S. Takdir Alisjahbana, 107.

¹⁷ Ibid, 114-5.

Even though Islam is still the religion of the majority in Indonesia the position of Indonesian women is not determined by Islamic law. Concerning the position of Indonesian women, K.P. London says that:

In general, the position of Indonesian women is not Moslem in character. Official Islam has regarded women as socially inferior to men. But in Indonesia, even in the Moslem sphere of family law, the women retain a position of privilege far above that of women in other Moslem lands.¹⁸

Therefore, the position of Indonesian women today concerning cultural perspective is equal to the men.

3. Economic Perspective on Indonesian Women

3.1. An Expanding Role of Women in the Economy

Indonesia is an agricultural country, because more than 60 percent of the population works on the land.¹⁹ In this agricultural society, women play an active role as the peasant. Women are allowed to take the same responsibility as the men in the economy. Though the most population of Indonesia is Muslim, however, that is *adat* (ancestral custom) which determine the role of Indonesian women in the economy.²⁰

¹⁸ K.P. Landon, *Southeast Asia: Crossroads of Religions* (n.p., 1949), 154 quoted by Cora vreeede-de Stuers, 46.

¹⁹ Gouri Mirpuri, 39.

²⁰ S. Dissarajana, "The Household Context and Women's Labor Force Participation in Indonesia," (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1982) quoted in *Continuity, Change and Aspirations: Social and Cultural life in Minahasa, Indonesia*, ed. Helmut Buchholt and Ulrich Mai (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1994), 123.

Before 1966, the Indonesian economy had virtually no industry and little more total production per capita. But, under the new order of President Suharto (the second president), Indonesia began to industrialize. As a result, by the mid-1980s, the production of steel, aluminum, and cement was far more valuable than the produce of many thousands of hectares of plantations.²¹ The growth of industries has brought an expanding role of women in the economy. In general, many young women leave traditional agricultural employment and enter industrial employment.²²

The opportunity for women to be educated is also affecting an expanding role of women in the economy. Through education, women have access to all professions equal to men. Women can play roles as teachers, doctors, lawyers, bankers, governors, and so on. On the other hand, women still have less access to education than do men.

Since 1950, Indonesian government persuaded to provide every Indonesian with at least six years of primary schooling. This goal had not been reached by the late 1980s, particularly among females.²³ The reasons are most of Indonesian life in poverty, and the socio-economic environment which favors sons. In fact, when the household finances are in crisis, sons are given priority in education. This fact is proved by Robert S. Gelbard. He says, "...the economic downturn has forced

²¹ Kathryn G. Marshall, "The Economy," in *Indonesia: A Country Study*, 139.

²² Yulfita Raharjo, "Women's Role in Demographic Transition and Human Resource Development" in *Indonesia Assessment: Population and Human Resources*, ed. Gavin W. Jones and Terence H. Hull (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997), 179.

²³ Joel C. Kuipers, "The Society and Its Environment," in *Indonesia: a Country Study*, 123.

hundreds of thousands of girls to leave school and join the informal economy to help support their families.”²⁴

Even though women still have less access to education than do men, women become the backbone of Indonesia’s economy. According to the 1990 population census, female labor force participation was 37 percent. In addition, labor force participation rates of Indonesian women have increased substantially. In 21st century, the labor force participation of Indonesian women is expected to reach 50 percent.²⁵ In short there will be more and more female workers in the market.

3.2. Economic Challenges for women

Gender discrimination in terms of wages is one of economic challenge that Indonesian women have to face in the labor market. Average wages for women workers are lower than male workers. More women than men are employed on a contractual basis. They may be paid on a daily basis without any social security.²⁶

When the economic crisis was happening in 1998, there has been a flow of labor from Indonesia to other countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and also the Middle East. The number of women who work outside Indonesia is more than doubled that of men. Despite success stories, it is also creating many

²⁴ Indonesian Women Workers, *replay: Indonesian Working Women*, accessed March 22, 2003; available from www.usembassyjakarta.org/workingwomen.html; internet.

²⁵ Yulfita Raharjo, 176-9.

²⁶ Ibid, 176.

problems in the foreign countries and at home, for instance: sexual abuse, violence, imprisonment, spouse remarriage, and neglected children.

Another economic challenge that Indonesian women have to face is prostitution. Not all women have an opportunity to be educated well. Women, who have a low level of education, have a harder time finding a good job with higher income. As a result, prostitution becomes a temptation to those who want to have higher income with low levels of education. Prostitution becomes a big problem in Indonesian society. *ILO News Geneva* reports that there were between 140,000 to 230,000 prostitutes in Indonesia in 1993/4.²⁷

In spite of higher income, prostitution has a high risk of sexually transmitted diseases. One of the sexually transmitted diseases that often caused by prostitution is AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). The Ministry of Health reports that between 1987 and 30 June 1996, there were 407 cases of HIV/AIDS in Indonesia. Of these, 303 were HIV positive and 104 were AIDS cases. By 1996, 63 AIDS deaths were reported.²⁸

Concerning those economic challenges that Indonesian women faced, the United States government is working with Indonesian government and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) to eliminate the scourge of trafficking in women and

²⁷ ILO Focus-Summer/Fall 1998, *replay: Prostitution in Indonesia*, accessed March 22, 2003; available from www.us.ilo.org/news/focus/982/art12.html; internet.

²⁸ Meiwita B. Iskandar, "Health and Mortality," in *Indonesia Assessment: Population and Human Resources*, 225.

children for forced labor, prostitution, and other exploitation.²⁹ United States has influenced Indonesia's economy. The worth of products Indonesia that exported to US each year is about US\$600 million. In June 1993, the US Trade Representative (USTR) warned Indonesian government to improve its worker rights for its trading benefits with the US. As a result, Indonesian government was making efforts to rise the minimum wage and to give freedom of association to Indonesian workers.³⁰ This result affected the right of Indonesian women worker as well as men.

From the discussion above, we can see that Indonesian women have to struggle with gender discrimination in the labor market. Finally, they find their right. Today, Indonesian women have right to all professions in the economy, and equal treatment as well as men.

4. Political Perspective on Indonesian Women

4.1. Pancasila: The State Ideology

We need to understand Pancasila as the state ideology of Indonesia in order to understand the position of Indonesian women in politics. Pancasila contains five principles of the official political philosophy of Indonesia. It is the basis of Indonesian law and government. These principles, declared by President Soekarno in 1945, are a combination of ideas with focus on traditional village customs.³¹

²⁹ Indonesian Women Worker Conference, internet.

³⁰ Adam Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia in the 1990s* (Australia: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd., 1994), 258-61.

³¹ Gouri Mirpuri, 34.

The first of Pancasila principles is belief in one supreme God. Even though the majority of Indonesians are Muslims, Pancasila allows for freedom of worship for all faith based on belief in one God. In fact, there are six world religions in Indonesia recognized by the state, namely Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity (Protestant and Catholic), and Confucianism.³²

The second of Pancasila principles is just and civilized humanity. Pancasila does not allow oppression of any human beings by any others, whether by other Indonesians or foreign nations. So that, men and women, as human beings, must be treated equally. The third of Pancasila principles is the unity of Indonesia. This principle states that no group of any tribe or skin color is superior to any other. Loyalty to the nation and all of its people is essential. All Indonesians, men and women, are equal.

The fourth of Pancasila principles is representative democracy. This principle manages how political decisions are made. That is through *musyawarah* (consultation and discussion) until *mufakat* (consensus) is reached. In the democracy system, everyone's views are heard and considered and taken into account towards developing a consensus solution acceptable to all. According to the democracy system, men and women's opinions are heard by Indonesian government. The fifth of Pancasila principles is social justice for all the people of

³² "Mengenal 6 Agama di Indonesia, Kitab Suci, hingga Hari Besarnya," *CNN Indonesia*, 5 June 2023, accessed 28 March 2025; available from <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/edukasi/20230531163253-569-956372/mengenal-6-agama-di-indonesia-kitab-suci-hingga-hari-besarnya>, internet.

Indonesia. This principle states that all natural resources of the country should be used to further the greatest possible good and happiness of all the people. In other words, it states that all Indonesians, men and women, have right in social and economic justice.

From the five principles of Pancasila, we can see that Pancasila, as the state ideology of Indonesia, views women are equal to the men in social, economics, and politics, and not inferior to the men as several local cultures and religions' view. Indonesian women have right to participate in politics.

4.2. Women's Participation in Politics

Participation of Indonesian women in politics started in the Dutch colonial period (1815-1941). The harsh period of Dutch domination was to bring a greater desire for independence than had ever existed before. In the early years of the twentieth century several Indonesian nationalist movements started.³³

The first Indonesian women organization was *Putri Mardika* association (The Independent Women). The aims of *Putri Mardika* were to grant financial help to intelligent girls; to advise and give information to girls; and to render the women less timid and to give them the chance to join in public life.³⁴ Another Indonesian women organization was *Sarekat Perempuan Islam Indonesia* (Federation of Muslim

³³ Sylvia McNair, *Enchantment of the World: Indonesia* (Chicago: Children Press, 1993), 52.

³⁴ Cora Vreede-De Stuers, 61-2.

Women of Indonesia). This organization purposed to increase the religious knowledge of the Muslim women.³⁵

Participation of Indonesian women in politics was continued in the era of new independent state of Indonesia. The independence of Indonesia was declared by Soekarno and Hatta on 17 August 1945, in Jakarta, and the Republic of Indonesia was born. At the time, women were active in the building up and strengthening of the new independent state. The best-known women's organization of this period was *Persatuan Wanita Negara Indonesia (Perwani*, The Union of Indonesian Women). Its purpose was to form the rear-guard in defense of the country's liberty. The women were active in preparing food for the guerrilla fighters, operating mobile clinics, and doing courier work.³⁶

Women participation in politics was established by the Indonesian Republic in Act No. 7, 1953. This act claims the right of women to vote and to be elected.³⁷ In fact, all Indonesians, who are seventeen years old, can be involved in the election every five years. Women can be elected as the members of the DPR (House of Representatives) and the MPR (the People's Consultative Congress). DPR and MPR are political institutions in Indonesia. Even, the women can be elected as the president of Indonesia.

³⁵ Ibid, 66; Sylvia McNair, 53.

³⁶ Cora Vreede-De Stuers, 114.

³⁷ Ibid, 118.

Megawati Sukarnoputri is the first woman president of Indonesia. She was elected by MPR as the fifth president on 23 July 2001. In 1999, Indonesia's presidentship was snatched away from her by Islamic parties. The reasons of the Islamic parties to reject her were her moderate views and her gender. According to the Islamic law, woman is inferior to the man. A woman cannot rule over the man. A woman is restricted from a leadership role. But ironically, now, Islamic parties have supported Megawati's installation as the president of Indonesia, because of the troubled nation's presidentship.³⁸

Even though there are some Indonesians who have restricted women from leadership role in politics, the Indonesian law that based is on *Pancasila*, allowed women to have a leadership role in politics. Indonesian women were active in politics before the Independence of Indonesia until the Independence of Indonesia. Women have the right to vote and to be elected as well as men.

5. Indonesian Women in the Church

Christianity was introduced to Indonesians in the sixteenth century by Portuguese and Spanish traders who converted a few of the people of Maluku to the Roman Catholic faith. Later the Dutch colonists, most of whom were Protestants, built churches that some of the Indonesians joined.³⁹ Pentecostals were

³⁸ The Hindu Group of Publications, *Replay: President Megawati*, accessed 12 June, 2002; available from www.hindustantimes.com/nonfram/230701/dtl; internet.

³⁹ Sylvia McNair, 29-30.

rather late arrivers in Indonesia. The first known missionaries associated with the Pentecostal movement arrived in Indonesia in 1921.⁴⁰ In 2024, the number of Christians in Indonesia is about 9,9 percent of the population [289 million] or 28 million people.⁴¹

5.1. The Role of Indonesian Women in the Church

According to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, the role is "a character or part played by a performer."⁴² So that, the role of Indonesian women in the church means a part played by Indonesian women in the church. I will describe the role of Indonesian women in the church based on examples of the role of women in the early church.

Indonesian Christian women play the role as helpers to the poor. In the book of the history of Indonesian Bethel Church recorded Mrs. F.A. Remst as the coordinator of the orphanage "Deborah." This orphanage takes care of more than 300 orphans.⁴³

Moreover, the Assemblies of God (AG) Indonesia have a women's fellowship, called "Wanita Terpuji." The main purpose of this fellowship is to minister to women to know Jesus and to improve their Christian lives. Motto of Wanita Terpuji is

⁴⁰ *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, s.v. "Indonesia," by P. Lewis.

⁴¹ Country Meters, "Indonesia Population."

⁴² *The American Heritage Dictionary*, s.v. "Role."

⁴³ H.L. Senduk, *Sejarah GBI: Suatu Gereja Nasional Yang Termuda* (Jakarta: Yayasan Bethel, n.d.), 164.

serving God, family, and others.⁴⁴ Women can involve in all kind of ministries in the church. In fact, Ronny Rebekah Inkiriwang, AG National chair of Women fellowship, says that, Christian AG women have revealed their hidden strengths and talents that have an impact on church growth in Indonesia.⁴⁵

Indonesian churches allow women to pray. Women can pray during the worship service, for sick people, or in the prayer meeting. In fact, numbers of women are usually more than men in the prayer meetings. In Indonesian churches, there are also some women who work in the church as pastor's coworkers or assistant pastors. They help the senior pastor to minister in women fellowship, children and youth ministries, and evangelization. They work together with the senior pastor to build the congregation and to spread the gospel.

Indonesian women can perform the role as pastors in the church. I know some female pastors, who are pastoring Assemblies of God churches in Indonesia. All of them are ordained ministers. Women are allowed to pastor a church through the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal churches in Indonesia.

In the Indonesian church and society, women are involved in teaching. Women, who are educated people, do not only teach women and children, but also men. In the church, women ministers can teach in Bible study classes and Sunday

⁴⁴ Agus Sugiarta, "GSJA Indonesia Jemaat Eben Haezer Gelar HARNAS Kaum Wanita," *Kompasiana*, 29 September 2024, 1.

⁴⁵ Ronny Rebekah Inkiriwang, "Sambutan Ketua DKWD," *Konferensi Wanita Terpuji 2023*, 31 Januari 2023, 4.

school. They can teach also the congregation through their preaching in Sunday service. Indonesian women ministers have the right to teach and preach.

Some of Indonesian women are prophesying in the church especially in the Pentecostal churches. Pentecostal churches believe that the work of the Holy Spirit, that includes the gift of prophecy, is continuing today. Women have the right to prophesy as well as men.

5.2. Issue of Woman's Leadership in the Assemblies of God in Indonesia

According to the roles of Indonesian women in the church, that I have discussed, Indonesian women are welcome in the ministry field. They have the right to help the poor, pray, minister, evangelize, pastor, teach, and prophesy. On the other hand, Indonesian women are still struggling with those who restrict women from leadership roles. In this case, I want to talk about the issue of women's leadership in the Assemblies of God (AG) in Indonesia.

The AG in Indonesia was founded by two American missionaries: Ralpli Devin and Raymond Busby. Devin's family arrived in Indonesia in 1936. The following year, Busby's family arrived in Indonesia. They are Pentecostal missionaries that were sent out from Bethel Temple in Seattle. The Devins and Busbys had rather loose ties with Bethel Temple, because they had never received support from Bethel Temple. In 1940, they joined the AG in the Northwest District Council, USA. Later, other AG missionaries joined the Devins and the Busbys. The Tinsmans, Carlblooms,

Skoogs, Lamphears, and Margaret Brown all began serving in Indonesia before 1950.⁴⁶

From the history of the beginning of the AG in Indonesia, we can see that there is connection between the AG in USA and the AG in Indonesia. This connection had affected views of women's leadership of the AG in Indonesia are similar with the AG in USA. *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* describes the AG in USA views of women's leadership as follows,

The first general council limited voting to males. It noted that women were to be subject to male leaders but acknowledged their right to be evangelists and missionaries. The key issue was authority: males refused to admit women to positions that granted them authority over men...Full ordination of women by the AG was not granted until 1935.⁴⁷

Even though women are allowed to be ordained ministers, women never achieved national office. The AG agreed with Ernest S. Williams who says that God had "*placed headship*" in the males.⁴⁸

In Indonesia, the AG also allowed women to be ordained ministers, but women are not allowed to have leadership roles. Indonesian women never had positions in general council and general district. They are taught to submit to male authority according to 1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34; and 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

In 1999, the issue of women's leadership was discussed by the AG congress in Batu-Jawa Timur. The AG ministers asked the general council about the truth of

⁴⁶ *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, s.v. "Indonesia," by P. Lewis.

⁴⁷ Ibid, s.v. "Assemblies of God," by R.M. Griffith and D. Roebuck.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

reasons behind the restriction of women's leadership. Through hermeneutic principles, they found that 1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34; and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 did not restrict women from leadership roles.

According to 1 Corinthians 11:3, the position of men and women in Corinth were equal. They prayed and prophesied. But they must be sensitive with their culture in exercising their gifts. According to their culture, a woman must cover her hair in public to honor her husband. In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Paul was not quieting all Corinthian women from the church's ministries. He was quieting the individuals who were speaking during the worship service. In 1 Timothy 2:9-15, St. Paul did not restrict women from teaching or leading. According to cultural-historical background of Ephesus, St. Paul thought that Ephesian women were not yet ready to teach or lead, but they were ready to learn.⁴⁹ These passages must be interpreted by their context. Finally, the general council decided to welcome women's leadership in the AG.⁵⁰

6. Conclusion, Lessons, and Challenge

6.1. Conclusion

According to ancestral custom, the position of Indonesian women is equal to the men. The influence of Islam, among other things, caused the position of

⁴⁹ Judy L. Brown, *Women Ministers According to Scripture* (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 1996), 249, 271, 288.

⁵⁰ Oldie Brijan F.T., interview by author, Baguio-Philippines, 19 June 2002.

Indonesian women to be inferior to the men. Indonesian women were struggling for equality in the society. Finally, they are successful in their emancipation. In fact, Indonesian women have marriage's right equal to men. They have the right to all professions and economic justice equal to men. They have the right to participate in politics equal to men.

Indonesian women also were struggling for equality in the church. In Indonesian Assemblies of God (AG) churches, woman ministers are allowed to be ordained, but they are not allowed to have leadership roles. They are taught to submit to male authority according to 1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34; and 1 Timothy 2:11-12. The misinterpretation of these passages caused Indonesian woman ministers to struggle for equality in the church. In 1999, the AG general council decided that women may have leadership roles as general council and general district.

6.2. Lessons

There are two lessons that I found from this paper. The first lesson is from the cultural perspective on Indonesia women, I learned that Indonesian ancestral custom viewed women as equal as men. I found some Indonesian customs and stories told that Indonesian women could performs all roles as well as men. These customs and stories have the same message with biblical perspective on women.

Man and woman were made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). They *shared equally in the dignity of being made in God's image*; consequently, they

shared equally in exercising leadership over God's handiwork (Genesis 1:28-30). That is God's original plan for men and women to live in equality. On the other hand, the fall of humankind into sin affected male dominance (Genesis 3:16). It caused women have to struggle for equality in church and society.

The second lesson is Indonesian churches must evaluate their theology on women based on a text in its context. They do not only accept the western theology on women, but also articulate the biblical text on women in their context. The text must be interpreted in its context. Then, this interpretation needs to be contextualized in our context in order to find the meaning of biblical text in our situation.

6.3. Challenge

I would like to challenge Pentecostal theologians to help Christian women find their identity. For long time, Indonesian churches viewed women that they were inferior to the men. The mind of Indonesian Christian women has been formed by this view. Indonesian Christian women should realize that God has created them as equal as men. They are created in the image of God. They are good in the eyes of God (Gen. 1:31). God has given them gifts that include the gift of leadership (Rom. 12:6-8). They can perform different kinds of roles that God trusts them to play in church and society. They should use their full potential for the betterment of their church and society.

References

- Alisjahbana, S. Takdir. *Indonesia: Social and Cultural Revolution*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Brijan, Oldie F.T. Interview by author. Baguio-Philippines, 19 June 2002.
- Buchholt, Helmut and Ulrich Mai. *Continuity, Change and Aspirations: Social and Cultural life in Minahasa, Indonesia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1994.
- Burgess, Stanley M. and Eduard M. van der Maas, ed. S.v. "Indonesia, Assemblies of God," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Revised and Expanded Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.
- Country Meters. "Indonesia Population." Accessed March 28, 2025. Available from <https://countrymeters.info/en/Indonesia>. Internet.
- De Stuers, Cora Vreede. *The Indonesian Women: Struggles and Achievements* Netherlands: Mouton & Co., 1960.
- Doi, Abdur Rahman I. *Women in Shari'ah (Islamic Law)*. Malaysia: A.S. Noordeen, 1990.
- Frederick, William H. and Robert L. Worden, ed. *Indonesia: a Country Study*, Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1993.
- ILO Focus-Summer/Fall 1998. *Replay: Prostitution in Indonesia*. Accessed March 22, 2003. Available from www.us.ilo.org/news/focus/982/art12.html; Internet.
- Indonesian Women Workers. *Replay: Indonesian Working Women*. Accessed March 22, 2003. Available from www.usembassyjakarta.org/workingwomen.html; Internet.
- Inkiriwang, Ronny Rebekah. "Sambutan Ketua DKWD." *Konferensi Wanita Terpuji 2023*, 31 Januari 2023, 4.
- Jones, Gavin W. and Terence H. Hull, eds. *Indonesia Assessment: Population and Human Resources*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997.
- Lin, Chia Nyoke. "Women in Ministry in Malaysia." In *ATESEA Occasional Papers no. 5, Women Participation and Contributions in Asian Churches*, ed. Yeow Choo Lak. Singapore: ATESEA, 1988.
- Quintos, Lily. "Women and Culture: Women's Struggle for Equality in Church and Society." In *Doing Theology with Asian resources: Theology and Cultures*. vol. 2. Singapore: ATESEA, 1995.
- "Mengenai 6 Agama di Indonesia, Kitab Suci, hingga Hari Besarnya." *CNN Indonesia*, 5 June 2023. Accessed 28 March 2025. Available from <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/edukasi/20230531163253-569-956372/mengenai-6-agama-di-indonesia-kitab-suci-hingga-hari-besarnya>. Internet.
- McNair, Sylvia. *Enchantment of the World: Indonesia*. Chicago: Children Press, 1993.
- Mirpuri, Gouri. *Cultures of the World: Indonesia*. Singapore: Kim Hup Lee Printing Co., 1990.
- Morris, William, ed. S.v. "Role" in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing, 1976.

Schwarz, Adam. *A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia in the 1990s*. Australia: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd., 1994.

Senduk, H.L. *Sejarah GBI: Suatu Gereja Nasional yang Termuda*. Jakarta: Yayasan Bethel, n.d.

Sugiarta, Agus. “GSJA Indonesia Jemaat Eben Haezer Gelar HARNAS Kaum Wanita,” *Kompasiana*, 29 September 2024, 1.

Synan, Vinson, *ed. The Century of the Holy Spirit*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2001.

Short biography of author:

Julia Theis finished her master’s degree from Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Philippines, and Satyabhakti Advanced School of Theology, Malang-Indonesia (SATI). Presently serves as a lecturer of SATI and an associate pastor of SIF Surabaya. Email: julia.theis@sttsati.ac.id