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**“EVERYONE IS A POTENTIAL LEADER”  
– ATTRACTIVENESS OF A CHARISMATIC CHURCH  
IN SOLO, JAVA (INDONESIA)**

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**Summary:** The evangelical-charismatic Family of God Church (GBI-KA: *Gereja Bethel Indonesia – Keluarga Allah*) was founded in the Javanese town of Solo and is currently booming, especially in predominantly Muslim surroundings. The reason why so many Christians prefer specifically this church over several other churches in town is still unknown. After doing ethnographic field research in 2011, I suggest that the reasons for its boom are not so much the economy or successful business relations, as was perhaps the case up to five years ago. To prove my findings, I will take a closer look at the Family of God Church’s economic and social system as well as its internal structure. It is quite obvious that this church, like many other churches, fills a gap in Indonesian social politics. But what is different about the Family of God Church is its inner cell-structure, which sees everyone as a potential leader. This structure picks up the idea of the International Charismatic Mission Church (ICMC) of 12 cell churches. The idea is to build an endlessly growing organism of cells and then add a spiritual component by organising these cells in groups of twelve to evoke the idea of Jesus and his twelve apostles. Next to the attractive spiritual component, this organisational structure stands out in contrast to the Javanese traditional social system as it offers individuals the chance to move up the hierarchical ladder. Furthermore, the masses of the fast growing population are broken down into small groups who share the same aim, i.e. to experience Jesus or to be “born again” (*melahirkan kembali*), as they call it.

**Keywords:** Indonesia, church, religion.

## **1. Introduction**

The Indonesian island of Java is inhabited mainly by Muslims. Christians form the biggest religious minority of about 10%. They have been divided into Catholics and Protestants since colonial times and, from the 1980s onwards, evangelical-charismatic churches have added to this diversity. Over the last ten years or so their numbers have been growing rapidly. This is especially true for the central-Javanese towns of Semarang and Solo (= Surakarta), where according to the governmental

census in 2010, about 20% of the inhabitants are Christians.<sup>1</sup> A different situation in Solo goes back to 1965–66, when members and supporters of the Indonesian communist party (PKI) were killed in large numbers. Many of them were *abangan*, who were united in a Javanese spirituality (*kejawen*), which followed Muslim rituals only during some parts of the life cycle.<sup>2</sup> Being *abangan* was not accepted as a religion by the government or by Muslim *santri* (educated in Muslim boarding schools: *pesantren*). In Solo, a large number of *abangan* were killed. As the killings by the military received support by *santri*, many *abangan* did not regard Islam as an option, and therefore many chose to save their lives by converting to Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it is unclear why, in 2011, there is one specific church in Solo which has experienced such significant growth. Twenty years after its establishment, it has more than 30,000 members in nine branches in Javanese towns.

To find an explanation for this extraordinary growth I took a closer look at this church, “the Bethel Church Indonesia – Family of God” (*Gereja Bethel Indonesia – Keluarga Allah: GBI-KA*) during two months of ethnographic field-research in Solo in 2011.<sup>4</sup> The choice of Solo as a research area was further connected to the town’s special mixture of local tradition, Islam and Christianity. Solo is one of the few court towns of Java with a long tradition of mystic Islam. During colonial times, Christian missionaries came to Solo not to proselytise, but to live and translate the Bible into Javanese.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Solo is the town where in recent years Indonesian terrorists came to live for some time.<sup>6</sup> It was also there that riots started in the

<sup>1</sup> The numbers are published by Badan Pusat Statistik, *Sensus Penduduk 2010*, population census 2010, <http://sp2010.bps.go.id/index.php/site/index> (accessed: 15.04.2012). Obviously there has been no big change as Bambang Budijanto referred to the same numbers in 2009 (p. 167). At this point in the research, I have not yet taken a closer look at the situation in Semarang.

<sup>2</sup> Geertz elaborates on the difference between *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi* (C. Geertz, *The religion of Java*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1965, pp. 127–128). Also R.W. Hefner, Of faith and commitment: Christian conversion in Muslim Java, [in:] R.W. Hefner (Ed.), *Conversion to Christianity. Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1993, pp. 115–118.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Feillard, R. Madinier, *The End of Innocence? Indonesian Islam and the Temptations of Radicalism*, KITLV Press, Leiden 2011, pp. 70–71; B. Budijanto, Evangelicals and politic in Indonesia. The Case of Surakarta, [in:] D.H. Lumsdaine (Ed.), *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Asia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York 2009, pp. 162, 167; R.W. Hefner, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> The research was part of an ongoing German-French project on “LOTWOR - Local Traditions and World Religions: The Appropriation of ‘Religion’ in Southeast Asia and beyond”. The German portion is generously funded by the DFG (German Research Foundation). My part of the project is on “Christians in a minority position in central Java”, located at the Institute of Ethnology, Heidelberg University (Germany), and headed by Prof. Dr. Annette Hornbacher. I would like to thank her for accepting me as member of the project. Furthermore, I would like to thank the many people in Solo who accompanied my research, for the immense confidence they placed in me, and for accepting my presence and my questions at any time.

<sup>5</sup> B. Budijanto, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>6</sup> The International Crisis Group (ICG) states in its Asia Briefing 20 (8 August 2002) on “Al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia: The case of the ‘Ngruki Network’ in Indonesia” (corrected on 10 January 2003)

aftermath of President Suharto's withdrawal when many shops in Indonesian towns were destroyed. During that time, no churches were destroyed,<sup>7</sup> but Europeans did experience considerable harassment. How has it come about that this is the town where the *Keluarga Allah* church was founded, where it has been booming since the beginning of Indonesian "reformation" (*reformasi*) in 1998, and is now expanding to other Javanese towns, where it is usually extremely difficult to build a new church? Where do all the members come from? What is so special about this church which other churches, other religions and the government do not offer?

Juliette Koning and Heidi Dahles recognised that evangelical-charismatic churches on Java are especially attractive for ethnic Chinese business people.<sup>8</sup> This was the case in 2004, when they did research, but it is definitely not true for the *Keluarga Allah* church in 2011. Here ethnic Chinese, as well as ethnic Javanese meet, regardless of their economic background. *Keluarga Allah*'s success seems to lie not in its inner economic or social security system, but in its subdivision of members into cells of some twelve people. This structure guarantees that no one gets lost in the huge institution and, what might be even more important, that every cell member after a period of time founds a cell and becomes a religious leader for his or her own cell, while nevertheless always remaining a member of his or her initial cell. Additionally, this system also includes a spiritual component, as every cell should have twelve members, thus becoming comparable to Jesus with his twelve apostles.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Muslim–Christian Confrontation

In the aftermath of the Asian economic crisis, the long-term presidency of Suharto came to an end in 1998. This brought about significant socio-political and religious

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that "One network of militant Muslims [the Ngruki network] has produced all the Indonesian nationals so far suspected of links to al-Qaeda". Farish Noor shows that in this and similar reports not everything is real, many things are imagined (See F. Noor, *Ngruki Revisited: Modernity and Its Discontents at the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin of Ngruki, Surakarta*, 2007, p. 7, <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/WorkingPapers/WP139.pdf> (accessed: 18.04.2012)). But nevertheless, the awareness exists that this *pesantren* has a very bad record outside the Muslim community.

<sup>7</sup> Budijanto, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>8</sup> J. Koning, H. Dahles, Spiritual power: Ethnic Chinese managers and the rise of charismatic christianity in Southeast Asia, *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 2009, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 5–37.

<sup>9</sup> B.C. Trümper, *G12 International Charismatic Mission: G12*, Metropol: Christus Centrum Limburg, 2006, [http://www.center-of-christ-ghana.org/pdf/g12-the\\_vision.pdf](http://www.center-of-christ-ghana.org/pdf/g12-the_vision.pdf) (accessed: 17.04.2012); J. Comiskey, *The Family of God Church (GBI) Known for Seeing Everyone as a Potential Leader*, 2006a, <http://www.joelcomiskeygroup.com/articles/Newsletters-CCS/June2006LargeChurches.htm> (accessed: 21.04.2012); J. Comiskey, *Myths & Truths of the Cell Church. Key Principles that Make or Break Cell Ministry*, 2006b, <http://www.joelcomiskeygroup.com/mythsTruths.html> (accessed: 21.04.2012).

changes. The number of Indonesian nationals grew from 200 million in 1997 to 240 million in 2012. During this time, the number of religious groups also increased radically, be they Muslim or Christian, but the percentage of followers of the respective religions has remained mostly unchanged. Nevertheless, with regard to Christians, what is noteworthy, is both in an increase in the number of evangelical-charismatic churches and church buildings as well as an increasing number of violent attacks on these buildings.<sup>10</sup> There might be a connection between these two facts as a number of Muslims still fear that the archipelago will be “Christianised”. This fear became especially strong after 1965, when quite a number of *abangan* preferred to choose Christianity, thus demonstratively turning away from Islam. This fear has not subsided, not even in the Islam-friendly atmosphere of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono even asked the Indonesian Ulama Council (*MUI: Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) during his opening speech to the MUI congress in 2005 to not only to emphasise Muslim matters but also to push the government to accept all those matters as being handled by the MUI and not by the government.<sup>11</sup> In the public sphere, Islamic norms are slowly becoming the measure of all things.<sup>12</sup> All this seems to support the fact that radical Muslims react violently whenever they think they see incidences of blasphemy or proselytisation. A prominent case happened in Temanggung in 2010, when a Christian man circulated books and flyers in a predominantly Muslim area declaring Islam a violent religion. Moreover, he compared holy places in Mecca to male and female genitals.<sup>13</sup> The reaction of some fanatics was further fuelled when in 2011 the court’s judgment ordered five years in jail instead of the death penalty, as the fanatics had demanded. They destroyed everything in the proximity of the court that in any way looked

<sup>10</sup> See a documentation of attacks until the end of 2010 (Th. Bela, *Muslim Attacks on Indonesian Christian Churches in 2010*, Friends of Indonesia: Baltimore, Maryland 2011, <http://friendsofindonesia.org/2011/01/muslim-attacks-on-indonesian-christian-churches-in-2010/> (accessed: 18.04.2012)).

<sup>11</sup> Here A. Feillard, R. Madinier, *op. cit.*, p. 257 refer to ICG – International Crisis Group (2008): *Indonesia – Implications of the Ahmadiyah Decree. Update Briefing*, Jakarta/Brussels (Asia Briefing 78), p. 3, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/b78\\_indonesia\\_implications\\_of\\_the\\_ahmadiyah\\_decree.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/b78_indonesia_implications_of_the_ahmadiyah_decree.pdf) (accessed: 15.04.2012).

<sup>12</sup> Melissa Crouch stresses that “the overwhelming majority of religious regulations [on Java] are couched in specifically Islamic terms and justified on Islamic grounds” (M. Crouch, Religious regulations in Indonesia: Failing vulnerable groups, *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 2009, Vol. 43, No. 2, p. 8). For the history which led to these regulations see M. Crouch, Regulating places of worship in Indonesia: Upholding freedom of religion for religious minorities?, *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies* 2007, pp. 96–116.

<sup>13</sup> Protesters riot in central Java town, *Herald Sun*, 8 February 2011, <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/breaking-news/protesters-riot-in-central-java-town/story-e6frf7jx-1226002354962> (accessed: 04.04.2012). This kind of comparison is a popularised version of a long-running academic discourse on the religious reinterpretation of pre-Islamic symbols (K.-H. Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge: Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Objekte*. [English: “Power of Things: History and Theory on Sacred Objects”], C.H. Beck, Munich 2003, p 158. It is common practice in all religions and it is also quite common that orthodox members of these religions feel insulted when confronted with their historic past.

Christian. This was an extreme case of *sweeping* (“intimidating”), which many Christians and Muslims are afraid of as almost every area is in danger of becoming a target of Muslim fanatics violently trying to maintain law and order whenever they believe there is prostitution, drinking alcohol or gambling. The term *sweeping* is used to designate the swarming out of large groups of motorcyclists yelling “Allahu Akbar” and destroying everything in their reach.<sup>14</sup>

When looking at just Solo the situation is in many ways comparable to all of Java but, at the same time somewhat unique. The town is governed by a rather popular Muslim mayor while his deputy is Catholic, which is a very rare combination on Java. Next to Solo in the village of Ngruki, which in fact is part of the town, is the *pondok pesantren* (Muslim boarding school) al-Mukmin.<sup>15</sup> It is often mentioned as the school where Indonesian terrorists had lived for some time, at least. Its existence and history most likely adds to the feeling that by sticking to religious rules one can avoid punishment by *sweeping*. In January 2012, there was another *sweeping*-attack, this time at the construction site of a residential house belonging to a Protestant pastor. It was interpreted as an attack because of misinformation. Obviously, the fanatics ignored a sign that stated “working to build a residential house” and thought that it is in fact a church which is constructed without permission, which they determined must be prevented.<sup>16</sup> This explanation sounds strange at least for Solo where, unlike in other Javanese towns, it is not too difficult to obtain governmental permission to build a church. In Solo during the last 10 years, the number of church buildings increased from about 50 to 138 in 2010.<sup>17</sup> This church-friendly atmosphere in Solo is a big advantage for Christians.

### 3. “Bethel Church Indonesia – Family of God”

Nevertheless, this atmosphere in Solo does not explain why the *GBI Keluarga Allah* (“Bethel Church Indonesia – Family of God”) is the biggest and the fastest growing church in town. According to their webpage in December 2011, their goal was to have 30,000 members. In April 2012, the webpage was updated and now shows a new target of 1 million.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> With their shouting they might follow the terrorist Mohamed Atta, who flew one of the planes into the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001. In his baggage there was a written document that reads like a to-do list for terrorists. It includes the advice to shout “Allahu Akbar, because this strikes fear in the hearts of the non-believers” (*The Guardian* 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Noor, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Cecep, *Gerombolan Bercadar Rusak Rumah Pendeta* [English: “Veiled gang destroys a pastor’s house”], 2012, <http://mediakeberagaman.com/gerombolan-bercadar-rusak-rumah-pendeta.php> (accessed: 21.04.2012).

<sup>17</sup> Daftar Gereja-Gereja Anggota Badan Antar Kristen Surakarta tahun 2010 [List of all Churches which are members in the Organisation of all Protestant Christian Churches in Surakarta in the year 2010].

<sup>18</sup> [www.gbika.org](http://www.gbika.org).

*GBI Keluarga Allah* is the name of the church, and *El-Shaddai* (usually translated as “God the Almighty”) is the term used for the church’s radio station and its high school, as well as for some institutions and offices run privately by church members elsewhere in town. *Keluarga Allah* separated from *GBI* in 1989 with Pastor Obaja Tanto Setiawan. *GBI* is the Indonesian branch of the American Bethel-Pentecostal Church which originated in Seattle, Washington, and opened its first *Gereja Pantekosta Indonesia* (“Indonesian Pentecostal Church”) in 1932 in Surabaya. Because of a schism in 1952, a group of pastors separated from this church and founded the *Gereja Bethel Injil Sepenuh* (*GBIS*: Bethel Full Gospel Church). This church divided again in 1972 to open *Gereja Bethel Indonesia* (*GBI: Bethel Church of Indonesia*).<sup>19</sup> In 1989 Pastor Obaja Tanto Setiawan opened a further branch in Solo, but added the name *Keluarga Allah* (“Family of God”) to create a new one without leaving the original synod. By 2012, it had two branches in Solo and seven more in other Javanese towns.<sup>20</sup> It is possible, though, that some of its 30,000 baptised members are not part of the church. I met former *Keluarga Allah* members who now show their sympathy for the Russian Orthodox Church in Solo. The Orthodox priest, himself born into a Javanese Buddhist family and first baptised by *Keluarga Allah*, has a wife who converted to the Orthodox Church from Islam. He sees no problem in baptising people from other Christian denominations. He interprets their first baptism as nothing more than normal washing (*mandi*). Nevertheless, even if it is quite possible that many former members of *Keluarga Allah* have moved on in their search for a suitable church or religion, the church’s community is big. This becomes obvious during the five services on Sundays, when in the former showroom of a cinema almost all 3,000 seats fill up for each service. The former showroom is now called *Pondok Daud* (“House of David”). It can be used not only for Sunday services, but also for prayer at other times either by individuals or by groups. The adjacent buildings house administrative offices, meeting rooms for cell groups, school and high school classrooms, a library, a place to host the baptismal pool, a polyclinic, shops for Christian paraphernalia, a café, children’s playground and a parking lot for motorcycles.

All church members usually meet twice a week: once for service on Sunday when they listen to the sermon of the church founder Obaja Tanto Setiawan. The second time they meet in their cell group. The sermon can be bought on CD or downloaded as a live recording from the church’s website and is distributed to the church’s branches in the other towns in this form. But what is even more important are the two A4 pages distributed on Sundays with fixed guidelines for *sharing* during next week’s cell meetings. These guidelines follow mainly the sermon, completed

<sup>19</sup> Nelson R., *Sejarah singkat Gereja Bethel Indonesia – Lahirnya GPdI* [English: “Short History of the Bethel Church of Indonesia, which Gave Birth to GPdI – Gereja Pantekosta di Indonesia, the Pentecostal Church of Indonesia”], 2009 <http://www.sinodegbi.org/Sejarah-GBI/sejarah-gbi/Lahirnya-GPdI.html> (accessed: 21.04.2012).

<sup>20</sup> With branches in Jakarta, Jogjakarta, Semarang, Madiun, Ngawi, Magelang and Wonogiri.

by those texts from the Bible which Pastor Obaja had presented during service and which have to be reviewed in all cell groups. At present, according to the webpage, there are 1,500 cell groups. The *sharing* unites the huge community, makes everyone an active part of it, but keeps up the sense of being in a small group of close friends who really care about each other. The cell groups of twelve people are run by laymen. Every church member is encouraged to join a cell to meet once a week near his or her home or in an air-conditioned meeting room at the church. The leader of the cell has to pass on the list of participants to the church administration every week. Every Sunday, the results are then made public to all churchgoers. One rule for the *sharing* is to have an open discussion on personal experiences. This discussion is started differently every week. It is connected either with a keyword in the shared Bible text or with a straightforward question asked on the *sharing*-paper. Questions run along the lines of: “What have you done to become accepted by God?” or “Did you pass the test before God or Jesus already?” If necessary the cell members will help struggling members to find an answer. They also “helped” me by interpreting my travel to Indonesia as a good sign. According to them, it would have never happened without Jesus’ support.

Most members of the church *Keluarga Allah* were not “born in” the church but joined it as adults by personal choice. Even if one takes into consideration that the published number of members on the church’s webpage does not represent the real number, the true number is still much higher than that of any other church in the town of Solo.<sup>21</sup> The established churches, like the *Gereja Kristen Indonesia* (GKI), have experienced a significant loss of members to *Keluarga Allah*, even if it is impossible to prove this shift. No one will report it to the church where one was baptised but of course one would know in a town with only 500,000 inhabitants.

It is remarkable that the decision to join the evangelical-charismatic church is made individually. This stands in contrast to conversion during colonial times in other areas of Indonesia when an entire village or area followed the conversion of their leader. The governmental rule *istri ikut suami*, “the bride has to follow the groom”, can still be seen in this tradition. The one with lower status follows his or her patron in all relevant points. This of course includes religion. Nowadays, in times of industrialisation and urbanisation, families are torn apart and individualisation takes place, often because of migration for work or education. The increasing individualism of urban life aligns with the evangelical churches’ rule to baptise adults only. Adult individuals have to decide on their own, even concerning their religious peculiarities. Therefore, it is still rare but not uncommon for husband and wife to be members of different churches or even religions, most often Christians and Muslims.

The *Keluarga Allah* church uses the widespread trend of searching for a church or religion which fits the individual to enhance their missionary work. Entering the

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<sup>21</sup> For comparison: *Keluarga Allah* counts 30,000 members in all branches, but *Gereja Kristen Indonesia* (GKI) counts about 4,000 members in Solo. The statistic of *Keluarga Allah* does not show details according membership in its branches.

main entrance of the church building one reads the church's motto: "Save the lost at any cost", written in English in the otherwise all-Indonesian – not Javanese – context. The same words are written at the pulpit. "The lost" are those who "have no religion", words which always have a bitter taste in a country where only 50 years ago anyone who did not follow one of the officially accepted world religions was in danger of being accused a communist and killed.<sup>22</sup> For many of the new converts, their interest in religion ended once the religious affiliation was recorded on their identity card. Most of them were not educated in religious doctrine, but continued with their traditional Javanese beliefs. They, as well as anyone who did not experience religion for whatever reason, are targets for proselytisation. In this matter, Muslims and Christians compete. Therefore, orthodox Muslims become very angry when they see people born as Muslims convert to Christianity. They try to prove that conversion took place because of forced proselytisation, which is forbidden by law in Indonesia. This was not a great problem as long as Christianity was mainly a religion of Europeans, ethnic Chinese, or European-Javanese who have at least one parent of European origin. But now most churches have as many ethnic Javanese members as non-Javanese. Therefore, as *Keluarga Allah* members are encouraged to open cell groups with their relatives, friends, neighbors and colleagues, more and more ethnic Javanese<sup>23</sup> are at first only so-called *simpatisan*, who visit the church and the cells and after some time want to get baptised. This means of proselytisation leads to all social strata being represented in the composition of church members. The church is no longer an exclusively middle-class institution. The churches are open to all social strata. There are also the very poor, even beggars and waste collectors, joining and bringing along their friends.<sup>24</sup> In Javanese society, it is very uncommon to give special attention to the poor. Until now, they have been regarded as "the quiet masses". No one cared for them except when organisers of political or religious demonstrations, or even of riots, needed actors for realising a certain task. They would get a lunch box and a new t-shirt for their efforts. Now, the *Keluarga Allah* church is bringing change to these people. The church policy is that everyone is a potential leader regardless of his or her social and financial background.

The core of this strategy<sup>25</sup> is to build cells where everyone can become a leader of a cell but still stay a member of the cell where he or she started their "spiritual

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<sup>22</sup> R.W. Hefner, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>23</sup> Their Muslim background can be very different. Some grew up in families where traditional Javanese Islam was practiced, others in families where the father or the parents or grandparents went to Mecca.

<sup>24</sup> When I joined a church service in November 2011, shortly before the sermon, a film was shown on a waste collector finding the Church *Keluarga Allah* and starting to climb up the social ladder, from being a parking attendant to now driving a motorcycle himself and telling his friends in the street of his unexpected career in the church.

<sup>25</sup> "In 1999 Obaja traveled to Bogota, Colombia to learn about the G12 strategy at the International Charismatic Mission". J. Comiskey, *The Family of God Church (GBI) Known for Seeing Ev-*

journey”. This cell idea is expanding around the world, as demonstrated on German pastor Bernd C. Trümper’s web-page: “Pastor César Castellanos developed the G12 strategy in his church in Bogota, Colombia – the International Charismatic Mission”. G12 means “group of twelve” and follows the spiritualised idea of Jesus and his twelve apostles. “The G12 structure, with its four-step Ladder of Success: win, consolidate, disciple, send – ensures that the cell stays true to its purpose. The cell is the primary place for winning new believers, disciplining, training and releasing them to become disciple-makers of others”.<sup>26</sup> When talking to church members, no one speaks of the special opportunity to become a leader. The contrary is the case. During cell meetings, those who have been members of a cell for a longer time will bring up their concerns, be this regarding issues pertaining to the opening of their own cell or to problems inside their recently founded own cell.

Except for this cell and group of twelve structure, everything in this church seems to be almost identical to other evangelical-charismatic churches. During the two hours of the church service, for one hour loud pop music is played, people sing along, some start to cry – even members of the worship team at the altar. The huge TV cameras focus directly on these people, showing their images on the big screen behind the altar. Obviously no one feels shame when giving vent to emotions. This has been especially uncommon on Java so far, where children are educated to feel *malu* (or in Javanese *isin*: “ashamed”) whenever they show their emotions aloud in front of adults.<sup>27</sup> The “polite” (*sopan*) Javanese version to handle emotions includes laughing with suppressed sound with the hand in front of the mouth. And if one feels sad, it is the rule to go next door to cry silently. No one should see a person’s weakness. The churches seem to go against these rules.

When I talked to Christians about why they join these evangelical-charismatic churches, they mentioned the music, the friendship, the emotional help they receive and that the topics discussed during the sermon are right out of everyday life and without philosophic or academic talk. But first and foremost, only here they feel Jesus, feel that they are not alone, that there is someone always accompanying and often even protecting them. A Muslim friend of mine who is doing sociological research on evangelical churches on Java was astonished when he recognised the faces of the people leaving the church: “They all look so happy and content”. He had never seen something similar in his Muslim communities. What he saw the churchgoers explain as being the result of their spiritual experience.

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*eryone as a Potential Leader*, 2006a, <http://www.joelcomiskeygroup.com/articles/Newsletters-CCS/June2006LargeChurches.htm> (accessed: 21.04.2012); J. Comiskey, *Myths & Truths of the Cell Church. Key Principles that Make or Break Cell Ministry*, 2006b, <http://www.joelcomiskeygroup.com/myths-Truths.html> (accessed: 21.04.2012).

<sup>26</sup> B.C. Trümper, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–5.

<sup>27</sup> F. Magnis-Suseno, *Javanische Weisheit und Ethik: Studien zu einer östlichen Moral*. [English: “Javanese Ethics and Wisdom: Morality in an Eastern Society”], Oldenbourg, München 1981, p. 57.

Nevertheless, keeping in mind the G12 cell structure of *Keluarga Allah*, I would like to delve a little deeper into the church's internal organisation in order to find further reasons for its exponential growth compared to other, slower growing evangelical-charismatic churches. With my concern I am following Eileen Barker's (1989) suggestion that any New Religious Movement can only succeed when it fills a gap in society. The question is: What gap is filled by this church?

#### 4. Economic situation and social services

In order to exclude other possible reasons for the great popularity of this particular church, I will briefly describe the features that this church shares with others. While they do certainly contribute to its popularity, the fact that other, less popular churches share these features shows that they can hardly be the reason for the overwhelming success of this church.

The *Keluarga Allah* church is known all over Solo as the richest one. It always publishes the biggest advertisements, and its services are held in a former cinema with about 3,000 seats. This air-conditioned room is equipped with a huge screen in the back of the altar. During service the audience can watch small film-clips, pictures of nice landscapes and of poor people from all over the world, of famous religious films and also of live recordings made by several TV cameras of the audience sitting in the church. The church even has an escalator and an elevator to bring visitors of the service comfortably into the room. In another part of the church building there is a business centre with about 40 employees. They have their desks in one big room, as is common in Java. Only some of them have a computer. All the paperwork is done in this office, which includes the change of registration for all newly baptised members, paperwork for the yearly pilgrimage to Egypt and Israel, and for organising all special public events, like a flea market, a Christmas program in a shopping mall or the distribution of rice to the poor in town. Thus, the church is an important employer for its own members.

It also invented a discount card, which gives the owner a 20% discount in shops run by church members. Of course, this card helps strengthen the feeling of being part of the "in-group". It is like a passport that is shown in public as a commitment to Christianity in general, and to the *Keluarga Allah* church in particular. As the card brings financial advantages to its owner, it psychologically excludes all people in these shops who do not have this card. It becomes visible that they are excluded. At best, shopping with a member-card opens conversations with other members, like the shop-owner and other clients. At worst, those who do not hold the card might avoid this shop in the future, as they do not want to feel insulted again. But the situation at the counter also has the advantage that the card-holder recognises those who might become members of a new cell and, thus in the long-run, a member of the church.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> I was never present during such a situation. Only a friend who is married to the pastor of another church told me that she feels offended when people take out their *Keluarga Allah*-card in public in order to receive their discount.

The church regards it as quite important to be publicly visible. That is why they organise events in public, usually in malls. Furthermore, they run their own radio-station. The radio online stream as well as special TV broadcast helps to reach not only existing members but also newcomers. Without leaving home everyone in Solo can hear and see what happens inside this church. This is also an advantage to help newcomers take the first step into the church, as was the case with a young lady in a wheel-chair whom I got to know.

As soon as someone enters the church-building or even gets to know someone from the church, he or she is offered different kinds of social services for free. Some of the services provided are already obvious when entering the church: polyclinic, kindergarten, school, advertisements for charity projects, and the pilgrimage to Egypt and Jerusalem led by the pastor Obaja Tanto Setiawan. Furthermore, there is an employment service at least once a year, where supply and demand are brought together. The church even offers job-training, if needed. Again, in this list there is not much that is different from services offered in other Christian churches. Therefore, I suggest that while the economic and social structure of the church is important, it is not what makes the church stand out against all the other churches in the area. It might be a factor that initially attracts people. But it does not explain why people stay. In this regard it seems that the church's unique cell-structure is crucial.

## 5. Summing-up: The Family of God as a successful model

The inner institutional social security system most likely helps to strengthen the church's wide acceptance, particularly by poor, old and handicapped people. Nevertheless, the church needs wealthy members as well if it is to be able to afford all this inner-institutional social and educational work. It is most likely the existence of the cells that also keeps the rich in the church. They are leaders of their own peer-groups and therefore seldom have to be in direct contact with people who have a different social and financial background. At the same time, in the congregation as a whole, which assembles each Sunday for services, everyone is equal in front of the pastor. For two hours a week, during religious service, social differences become totally unimportant; only emotions and spiritual experiences matter. The available social security system also helps to solve individual problems which the government so far has been unable to solve.<sup>29</sup> Instead, the church takes up the Javanese *gotong royong* principle of "mutual assistance", which, according to Franz Magnis-Suseno, has two aspects: to help each other and to work together in order to help the community as a whole.<sup>30</sup> By looking again into research on New Religious Movements done in America and Europe, it is very obvious that the Family of God

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<sup>29</sup> *Ropewalking and Safety Nets. Local Ways of Managing Insecurities in Indonesia*, J. Koning, F. Hüsken (Eds.), Brill, Leiden 2006, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> F. Magnis-Suseno, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

Church in Solo can be added to these movements insofar as it is able to fill social gaps in society. This guarantees the church's success, for the present moment, at least. It is not inconceivable that conversion to evangelical-charismatic churches is a momentary phenomenon that may subside when the political situation changes.

Nevertheless, the cell-group structure seems to be the difference in relation to other churches and probably also to other religions. Also at the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, "home-cells" are the core of a very successful organisation. "Most of the praying and converting is done at home, in small groups. The idea is that these cells, like their biological equivalents, will multiply".<sup>31</sup> This system is spreading all over the world. It most likely found its way to the *Keluarga Allah* church through the International Charismatic Mission led by Pastor César Castellanos in Bogota, Colombia. According to Joel Comiskey's webpage, the founder of *Keluarga Allah* Church in Solo went to Colombia in 1999, where he learned about the cell-group structure of 12 multiplying the group like the cells of an organism by delegating the task of evangelisation to laypeople.

The idea that every church member is a potential leader is quite new to Java. So far, Javanese society has been based on the idea that everyone has to find his or her proper place and stick to it in order not to bring turmoil to society.<sup>32</sup> To change this social ideal by giving every member the opportunity to become a leader can in fact bring serious changes to Javanese society. It gives *wong cilik*, the so-called "small people", the chance to mix with middle class people, who so far have been the main members of Christian churches. It offers everyone a chance to be individually responsible for the project inside this church, i.e. to bring Christianity to all Indonesian people. On the other hand, every member is recognised as an individual and protected in a group that has a manageable size. Thus, an essential requirement for survival in the fast-growing towns of Java is presented here. More research is required concerning the reasons why Javanese people of other congregations convert to Christianity. Furthermore, it has to be researched what kind of changes their conversion brings to their families and to their neighborhood. It has also not yet been researched what kind of changes the increasing number of Javanese church members brings to the churches.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> O come all ye faithful. God is definitely not dead, but He now comes in many more varieties, *The Economist*, 2007, p. 3, [http://www.economist.com/node/10015239?story\\_id=10015239&CFID=25385374](http://www.economist.com/node/10015239?story_id=10015239&CFID=25385374) (accessed: 20.04.2012).

<sup>32</sup> F. Magnis-Suseno, *op. cit.*, pp 80–81.

<sup>33</sup> I plan to do further research on these topics during my next stay in Solo.

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## **„KAŻDY JEST POTENCJALNYM LIDEREM” – ATRAKCYJNOŚĆ CHARYZMATYCZNEGO KOŚCIOŁA W SOLO, JAWA (INDONEZJA)**

**Streszczenie:** Ewangelicko-charyzmatyczny Kościół Rodziny Bożej (GBI-KA: *Gereja Bethel Indonesia – Keluarga Allah*) został założony w mieście Solo na Jawie i obecnie przeżywa okres gwałtownej ekspansji, zwłaszcza w swoim przeważnie muzułmańskim otoczeniu. Wciąż jednak nie jest znany powód, dla którego tak wielu chrześcijan woli ten Kościół od innych kilku także obecnych w mieście. Po przeprowadzeniu etnograficznych badań terenowych, wydaje się, że najważniejsze przyczyny tej ekspansji leżą poza zależnościami ekonomicznymi czy biznesowymi. Aby dowieść swoich wniosków, autorka zagłębia się w system ekonomiczno-społeczny Kościoła Rodziny Bożej, a także w jego wewnętrzną strukturę. Jest jasne, że Kościół ten, podobnie jak wiele innych, wypełnia lukę w polityce społecznej Indonezji. Jednak podstawowa różnica polega na jego wewnętrznej strukturze, która traktuje każdego jako potencjalnego lidera.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Indonezja, kościoły, religia.