

INDONESIA

An Overview and Its Challenge for Mission

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The name Indonesia derives from the Latin *Indus*, meaning “India”, and the Greek *nesos*, meaning ‘island.’ The name dates to the 18th century, far predating the formation of independent Indonesia. In 1850, George Earl, an English ethnologist, proposed the terms *Indunesians* for the inhabitants of the “Indian Archipelago or Malayan Archipelago.” In the same publication, a student of Earl, James Richardson Logan, used Indonesia as a synonym for Indian Archipelago. However, Dutch academics writings in *East Indies* publications were reluctant to use Indonesia. Instead, they used the terms *Malay Archipelago*; the *Netherlands East Indies* (*Nederlandsch Oost Indies*), popularly *Indie*; *the East*; and even *Insulinde*. From 1900, the name Indonesia became more common in academic circles outside the Netherlands, and Indonesian nationalist groups adopted it for political expression.

Overview

Sophisticated kingdoms existed before the arrival of the Dutch, who consolidated their hold over two centuries, eventually uniting the archipelago in around 1900.

After Japan's wartime occupation ended, independence was proclaimed in 1945 by Sukarno, the independence movement's leader. The Dutch transferred sovereignty in 1949 after an armed struggle.

Long-term leader General Suharto came to power in the wake of an abortive coup in 1965. He imposed authoritarian rule while allowing technocrats to run the economy with considerable success.

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But his policy of allowing army involvement in all levels of government, down to village level, fostered corruption. His "transmigration" programmes - which moved large numbers of landless farmers from Java to other parts of the country - fanned ethnic conflict.

Suharto fell from power after riots in 1998 and escaped efforts to bring him to justice for decades of dictatorship.

Post-Suharto Indonesia has made the transition to democracy. Power has been devolved away from the central government and the first direct presidential elections were held in 2004.

But the country faces demands for independence in several provinces, where secessionists have been encouraged by East Timor's 1999 success in breaking away after a traumatic 25 years of occupation.

Militant Islamic groups have flexed their muscles over the past few years. Some have been accused of having links with al-Qaeda organization, including the group blamed for the 2002 Bali bombings which killed 202 people.

Lying near the intersection of shifting tectonic plates, Indonesia is prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. A powerful undersea quake in late 2004 sent massive waves crashing into coastal areas of Sumatra, and into coastal communities across south and east Asia. The disaster left more than 220,000 Indonesians dead or missing.

Geography



Map of Indonesia

Indonesia consists of 17,508 islands, about 6,000 of which are inhabited. These are scattered over both sides of the equator. The five largest islands are Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan (the Indonesian part of Borneo), New Guinea or Irian Jaya which is now called Papua (shared with Papua New Guinea), and Sulawesi. Indonesia shares land borders with Malaysia on the Islands of Borneo and Sebatik, Papua New Guinea on the Island of New Guinea, and East Timor on the Island of Timor. Indonesia also shares borders with Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines to the north and Australia to the south across narrow straits of water. The capital, Jakarta, is on Java and is the nation's largest city, followed by Surabaya, Bandung, Medan, and Semarang. At 1,919,440 square kilometers, Indonesia is the world's 16th largest country in terms of land area.

Indonesia's location on the edges of the Pacific, Eurasian, and Australian tectonic plates makes it the site of numerous volcanoes and frequent earthquakes. Indonesia has at least 150 active volcanoes, including Krakatoa, which is famous for its devastating eruptions in the 19th century. Recent disasters due to seismic activity include the 2004 tsunami that killed an estimated 167,736 people in northern Sumatra, and the Yogyakarta earthquake in 2006. However, volcanic ash is a major contributor to the high agricultural fertility that has historically sustained the high population densities of Java and Bali.

Lying along the equator, Indonesia has a tropical climate, with two distinct monsoonal wet and dry seasons. Average annual rainfall in the lowlands varies from 1,780–3,175 millimeters (70–125 in), and up to 6,100 millimeters (240 in) in mountainous regions. Mountainous areas—particularly in the west coast of Sumatra, West Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua—receive the highest rainfall. Humidity is generally high, averaging about 80%. Temperatures vary little throughout the year; the average daily temperature range of Jakarta is 26–30 °C (79–86 °F).

Demographic

The national population from the 2000 national census is 206 million, and the Indonesian Central Statistic Bureau and Statistics Indonesia estimate a population of 222 million for 2006. 130 million people live on the island of Java, the world's most populous island. The latest data (2009) stated that the national population is 240,271,522 with 1.1% growth rate. Despite a fairly effective family planning program that has been in place since 1960s, the population is expected to grow around 315 million by 2035.

Most Indonesians are descendant from Austronesians-speaking peoples who originated from Taiwan. The other major grouping are Melanesians, who inhabit eastern Indonesia. There are around 300 distinct native ethnicities in Indonesia and 742 different languages and dialects. The largest is the Javanese, who comprise 42% of the population, and are politically and culturally dominant. The Sundanese, ethnic Malays, and Madurese are the largest non-Javanese groups. A sense of Indonesian nationhood exists alongside strongly maintained regional identities. The slogan that Indonesians is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). Society is largely harmonious, although social, religious and ethnic tensions have triggered dreadful violence lately. Chinese Indonesians are an influential ethnic minority comprising less than 1% of the population. Much of the country's privately owned commerce and wealth is Chinese-controlled which has contributed to considerable resentment, and even anti-Chinese violence.

The official national language, Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia), is universally taught in schools, and is spoken nearly everywhere Indonesian. It is the language of business, politics, national media, education, and academia. It was originally a *lingua franca* for most of the region, including present-day Malaysia, and is thus closely related to Malay. *Bahasa Indonesia* was first promoted by nationalists in the 1920s, and declared the official language on independence in 1945. Most Indonesians speak at least one of the several hundred local languages (*bahasa daerah*), often as their first language. Of these, Javanese is the most widely spoken as the language of the largest ethnic group. On the other hand, Papua has 500 or more indigenous Papuan and Austronesian languages, in a region of just 2.7 million people. Much of the older population can still speak a level of Dutch.

Society and Culture

Indonesia has around 300 ethnic groups. Indonesian culture has been shaped by long interaction between original indigenous customs and multiple foreign influences. Indonesia is central along ancient trading routes between the Far East and the Middle East, resulting in many cultural practices being strongly influenced by a multitude of religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Islam, all strong in the major trading cities. The result is a complex cultural mixture very different from the original indigenous cultures. This great diversity has needed a great deal of attention from the government to maintain cohesion. As a result the national motto is "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" that is translated into "Unity in Diversity." The language has been standardized and a national philosophy has been devised known as "Pancasila" (Five Principles) which stresses universal justice for all Indonesians.

Due to the diverse nature of Indonesian society there exists a strong pull towards the group, whether family, village or island. People will define themselves according to their ethnic group, family and place of birth. The family is still very traditional in structure. Family members have clearly defined roles and a great sense of interdependence.

As with most group orientated cultures hierarchy plays a great role in Indonesian culture. Hierarchical relationships are respected, emphasized and maintained. Respect is usually shown to those with status, power, position, and age. This can be seen in both the village and the office where the most senior is expected to make group decisions. Superiors are often called "*bapak*" or "*ibu*", which means the equivalent of father or mother, sir or madam. Although those higher up the hierarchy make decisions Indonesians are advocates of group discussion and consensus (*musyawarah dan mufakat*). These ties back to the idea of maintaining strong group cohesiveness and harmonious relationships.

Despite the influences of foreign culture, some remote Indonesian regions still preserve uniquely indigenous culture. Indigenous ethnic groups such as Mentawai, Asmat, Dani, Dayak, Toraja and many others are still practicing their ethnic rituals, customs and wearing traditional clothes.

Religions in Indonesia

The state recognizes 6 religions: Islam, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucianism. The Indonesian Central Statistic Bureau (BPS) conducts a census every 10 years.

The latest data available, from 2000, drew on 201,241,999 survey responses. The BPS report indicated that 88.22 percent (210 million in 2004) of the population label themselves Muslim, 5.87 percent Protestant, 3.05 percent Catholic, 1.81 percent Hindu, 0.84 percent Buddhist, and 0.2 percent "other," including traditional indigenous religions, other Christian groups, and Judaism.

Historically, immigration has been a major contributor to the diversity of religion and culture within the country with immigration from India, China, Portugal, Arabian, and Netherlands. However, these aspects have changed since some modifications have been made to suit the Indonesian culture.

Before the arrival of the Abrahamaic faiths of Christianity and Islam, the popular systems in the region were thoroughly influenced by Dharmic religious philosophy through Hinduism and Buddhism. These religions were brought to Indonesia around the second and fourth centuries, respectively, when Indian traders arrived on the islands of Sumatra, Java and Sulawesi, bringing their religion. Hinduism started to develop in Java in the fifth century AD with Brahmanist cults worshipping Siva. The traders also established Buddhism in Indonesia which developed further in the following century and a number of Hindu and Buddhist influenced kingdoms were established, such as Kutai, Srivijaya, Majapahit, and Syailendra. The world's largest Buddhist monument (temple), Borobudur, was built by the kingdom of Syailendra and around the same time, the Hindu monument Prambanan was also built. The peak of Hindu-Javanese civilization was the Majapahit Empire in the 14th century, described as a golden age in Indonesian history.



Borobudur, a Buddhist Temple



Prambanan, a Hindu Temple

Islam was introduced to Indonesia in the 14th century. Coming from Gujarat, India, Islam spread through the west coast of Sumatra and then developed to the east in Java. This period also saw kingdoms established but this time with Muslim influence, namely Demak, Pajang, Mataram, and Banten. By the end of 15th century, 20 Islam-based kingdoms had been established, reflecting the domination of Islam in Indonesia.

The Portuguese introduced Catholicism to Indonesia, notably to the island of Flores and to what was to become East Timor. Protestantism was first introduced by the Dutch in the 16th century with Calvinist and Lutheran influences. Animist areas in eastern Indonesia, on the other hand, were the main focus Dutch conversion efforts, including Maluku, North Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, Papua, and Kalimantan. This explains the fact that the majority Christians (Protestants and Catholics) live mostly in the eastern parts of Indonesia. Later, Christianity spread from the coastal ports of Borneo and missionaries arrived among the Torajans on Sulawesi. Parts of Sumatra were also targeted, most notably the Batak people, who are predominantly Protestant today.

Catholic Church in Indonesia

Catholicism came to Indonesia together with the arrival of the colonialism. Historically the development of the Catholicism in Indonesia can be divided as follows:

Portuguese era - Portuguese explorers arrived in the Maluku Islands in 1534, with the goals of converting the natives to Roman Catholicism and to obtain valuable spices endemic to the region. The Spaniard Francis Xavier, a co-founder of the Jesuit Order, worked in the islands from 1546 to 1547, and baptised several thousand locals of the islands of Ambon, Ternate and Morotai (or Moro), laying the foundations for a permanent mission there. Following his departure from Maluku, others carried on his work and by the 1560s there were 10,000 Catholics in the area, mostly on Ambon, and by the 1590s there were 50,000 to 60,000. Portuguese Dominican

priests also had some success in missionary activities on Solor where by the 1590s the Portuguese and local Catholic population is thought to have numbered 25,000.

The VOC era - Cornelis de Houtman was the first Dutchman who sailed east to modern day Indonesia in 1595. Although his expedition could be considered a commercial failure, it showed the Dutch they were able to sail east in search for the spices. In 1602 the VOC or the Dutch East India Company was created. Subsequently Ambon was conquered and occupied by the VOC in 1605. As a result, the Catholics were forced to convert to Protestantism. The same happened in Manado and the islands of Sangihe-Talaud. In 1613 Solor also fell to the Dutch, and Catholic mission activity was reduced in Flores and Timor, which were still under Portuguese administration.

The Catholic priests were replaced with Protestant pastors from The Netherlands. Many Christians at the time converted to Protestantism. For some time, Catholic priests were threatened with capital punishment if found to be residing in VOC territory.

At the end of the 18th century Western Europe saw intense warfare between France and Great Britain and their respective allies. The sympathies of the people of the Netherlands were divided, and the Netherlands lost its independence. In 1806 Louis Bonaparte assigned his brother Louis Napoleon, a Catholic, to the throne of the Netherlands. In 1799 the VOC went bankrupt and was dissolved.

The East Indies era - The change of politic in The Netherlands, mainly because of the accession of Louis Bonaparte, a fervent Catholic, brought a positive effect. Religious freedom was recognized by the government. On May 8, 1807, the leader of Catholic Church in Rome was given permission from King Louis to establish an Apostolic Prefecture of East Indies in Batavia.

On April 4, 1808, two Dutch priests arrived in Batavia. They were Fr. Jacobus Nelissen and Fr. Lambertus Prinsen. Nelissen became the first Apostolic Prefect, when the Apostolic Prefecture of Batavia was created in 1826.

Governor General Daendels (1808-1811), replaced VOC with the government of Dutch East Indies. Religious freedom was then practiced, although Catholicism was still difficult.

The Van Lith era - Catholicism in this area began when Frans van Lith, a priest from The Netherlands came to Muntilan, Central Java in 1896. Initially, his effort does not produce a satisfying result, but in 1904, suddenly four chiefs (the head of the town) from local region came to his house and demanded him to give them education in the religion, until on 15 December 1904, a group of 178 Javanese were baptized.

Van Lith also established a school for teachers in Muntilan called "*Normaalschool*" in 1900 and "*Kweekschool* (also for teachers)" in 1904. In 1918, all Roman Catholic schools were put under an institute, called "Yayasan Kanisius", which produces the first priests and bishops of Indonesia. In 20th Century, the Roman Catholic Church grew fast.

In 1911, Van Lith established "*Seminari Menengah*" (Minor Seminary). Three out of six candidates that were in the school during 1911-1914 were received into priesthood in 1926-1928. Those priests were FX Satiman SJ, A. Djajasepoetra SJ, and Albertus Soegijapranata SJ.

The independence war era - Albertus Soegijapranata became the first Indonesian bishop on 1940.

On 20 December 1948, Father Sandjaja and Frater Hermanus Bouwens SJ were killed in a village called Kembaran, near Muntilan, when Dutch soldiers attacked Semarang which continued to Yogyakarta. Father Sandjaja is recognised as Indonesian martyr in the history of Roman Catholic Church in Indonesia.

Mgr. Soegijapranata with Bishop Willekens SJ faced the Japanese colonial rule, and they managed to keep some Catholic institutions to operate normally.

The post-independence era - The first Indonesian bishop to be made the first Indonesian cardinal was Justinus Kardinal Darmojuwono on 29 June 1967. The current cardinal is Julius Riyadi Cardinal Darmaatmadja SJ, the archbishop of Diocese of Jakarta.

The post coup d'état era - In 1965 there after the so-called abortive coup attempt by the Indonesian Communist Party, a purge was carried out amongst Indonesian communists and alleged communists, especially in Java and Bali. Hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions civilians were killed in the ensuing turmoil by the army and vigilantes. Communism was associated with atheism and since then every Indonesian citizen was expected to adopt one of the five official religion endorsed by the state.

Roman Catholicism, as well as other religions, experienced an enormous growth especially in areas inhabited by large numbers of Chinese Indonesians and ethnic Javanese. For example in 2000 in Jakarta alone, there were 301,084 Catholics while in 1960, there were just 26,955, while the whole population almost tripled from 2,800,000 to 8,347,000.

The dramatic increase of the number of Catholics in particular and Christians in general has led to enmity and allegations of 'Christianization'.

The second half of 1990's and begin 2000's were also marked by violence against Catholics in particular and Christian in general. However former president Abdurrahman Wahid, himself a leader of Nahdatul Ulama, one of the biggest Muslim organization in Indonesia, has made several contributions in bringing together the different parts of the population.

Current Issues: Inter-religious relations and the rise of fundamentalist Islam

Although the Indonesian government recognizes a number of different religions, inter-religious conflicts have occurred. In the New Order era, former president Suharto proposed the Anti-Chinese law which prohibits anything related to Chinese culture, including names and religions. Nevertheless, positive forms of relations have also appeared in the society, such as the effort from six different religious organizations to help the 2004 tsunami victims.

Between 1966 and 1998, Suharto made an effort to "de-Islamicise" the government, by maintaining a large proportion of Christians in his cabinet. However, in the early 1990s, the issue of Islamization appeared, and the military split into two groups, the Nationalist and Islamic camps.

During the Suharto era, the Indonesian transmigration program continued, after it was initiated by the Dutch East Indies government in the early nineteenth century. The intention of the program was to move millions of Indonesians from over-crowded populated Java, Bali and Madura to other less populated regions, such as Ambon, Lesser Sunda Islands and Papua. It has received much criticism, being described as a type of colonization by the Javanese and

Madurese, who also brought Islam to non-Muslim areas. Citizens in western Indonesia are mostly Muslims with Christians a small minority, while in eastern regions the Christian populations are similar in size or larger than Muslim populations. This more even population distribution has led to more religious conflicts in the eastern regions, including Poso and Maluku communal violence since the resignation of President Suharto.

Recently, Indonesian Islamic activists have received considerable attention from development organizations for encouraging participation in public policymaking, promoting government accountability, and otherwise contributing to democratic reform. At the same time, however, the country's transition to democracy has been marked by the emergence of powerful Islamic interest groups aiming to dominate the legislative process, exert strict control over Muslims' private lives, and diminish the rights of minorities. As the government has been inconsistent in upholding constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, it remains unclear whether Indonesia's democratization process will continue to lead toward greater liberty for its citizens, or whether it will encourage forms of Islamic integralism that reject pluralism and ultimately deny individual rights.

Within Islamic circles, two overlapping social movements have vied ardently for dominance since the reform period began. The first of these movements has called for the establishment of a pluralistic democracy based on tolerance, social justice, and a strong civil society. These movements are associated with two leading Islamic group in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. The other movement has promoted Islam as a political ideology aiming for sectarian control of the state--a phenomenon referred to as Islamism. The later is associated with some group such as Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Social) which makes movements politically and Hizbut Tahrir, Laskar Jihad, Negara Islam Indonesia (Islamic State of Indonesia), Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defender Front), Jemaah Islamiah, and some other groups.

A research conducted by LibForAll Foundation, an organization dedicated to promoting the culture of liberty and tolerance worldwide and supported by moderate Muslim groups in Indonesia, noted two main causes of the latest rise of radical conservative Islam in Indonesia. These are structural crisis and cultural crisis. These two causes are interrelated. Structurally, Indonesia has experienced a weak state post Soeharto era, lack of law enforcement, economic turbulence, and hatred toward the United States and western policies among some Islamic groups. Culturally, some Muslim misread the globalization and modernization, experience an identity crisis, and believe in conspiracy theory suppressing the Muslim. These two causes lead to an ideologization that triggers these groups to perform radical actions. It appears in two form of movements: (1) emphasizing moral reform, advocate the complete Islamization of Indonesian society through the imposition of Islamic law (*sharia*) on the nation's immense Muslim population as well as the establishment of Saudi-style social norms for the rest of the country; (2) through act of "terrorism."

Although the largest Muslim community is well known as moderate Muslim that are more tolerant to other religions, the Christianity in Indonesia has been regarded as something alien brought by the colonials. The rise of Islam Fundamentalist groups, conflict between Christian and Muslims, violence such as closures of churches, religious violence and intimidations, urges an effort to find a new way of living as Christians.

Endnotes: Challenge for Mission

In Indonesia Christians live as small, vibrant, minority communities within a complex of Islamic, Hindu-Dharma and indigenous cultures. Since May 1998 Indonesia has been undergoing a great upheaval as the nation is trying to stumble from a brutal military regime (1966-98) and move towards a more civil and democratic society. The outcome of this messy and dangerous transition to some form of democracy is uncertain. Complicating matters, this transition is being attempted at a time when Indonesia is being buffeted by globalised trade and communications, with all the myriad social, cultural and ethical consequences that a globalised society entails. In this transitory and volatile situation, it has become crucial for Christians to seek out the authentic face and figure of Jesus the Nazarene, God's Word-made flesh, the One to whom we witness in the values we live, the words we utter, the rites we celebrate and the Ecclesial body which proclaims our faith identity.

The Indonesian churches, are being challenged to re-incarnate themselves as authentic communities of faith that reveal the truth of the person and message of Jesus Christ from within a complex inter-religious and inter-cultural context. Prerequisites for creating a new Indonesian Christian culture are twofold.

1. *Healing Historical Memories.* The churches need to heal historical memories in the spirit of the Jubilee and only then go on to seek out and encounter the Nazarene amidst the inter-ethnic and inter-religious strife triggered by the political elite. The majority Muslim community associates the churches with the political colonialism and economic imperialism of Catholic Portugal and the Protestant Netherlands. Today we are associated with the amoral commercialism of neo-liberal globalization (of the "Protestant" USA and "Catholic" EU) which is destroying the religious values and humanist roots of Asian cultures. Christians are perceived as a vanguard for a capitalist globalization that is expelling God from public life. In Indonesia, and more generally in Asia, minority Western churches – often oases of wealth within deserts of poverty – are seen as the harbingers of the very capitalistic culture that has been censured in Roman Catholic social teaching since Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903). For the Muslim majority this image of the church delineates the face of Jesus. In Indonesia the Christian community needs to read mission history anew from ecumenical and inter-faith perspectives in order to embark upon a feasible future. Rediscovering the Nazarene – born on Asian soil – necessitates de-coupling our historical memory from colonial piracy. Witnessing to the Asian Christ also presupposes releasing our contemporary identity, both social and ecclesial – from any likeness to "the predatory outsider"

2. *Finding a language inspiring faith.* Christian language is not understood by, and is anyway not acceptable to, the Muslim majority. That is why key values in the life and witness of Jesus the Nazarene such as sacrificial love, living for others, God's preference for the oppressed, men and women as images of a God of compassion, are being voiced in a language collected from Indonesian life and culture. I should emphasize that this "faith-centered humanism" or "inter-faith humanism" is not a lowest common denominator, nor a bland, inoffensive compromise. Experience shows that when the Jesus of the Gospels and the very best of Christian

tradition is expressed in the language of Indonesian contemporary life, it is openly welcomed. Christians are being challenged to generate such a faith-centered and life-enhancing humanism, and so play a part as a dynamic minority in grassroots struggle, while openly acknowledging to ourselves and to others, the source of our humanism in the life and witness of the Nazarene. Leaving aside explicit Christian language does not mean compromising faith in Jesus the Christ: we are simply avoiding unnecessary inter-communal strife at a time of great national uncertainty and increasing confusion. At the same time we are patiently building up understanding and awareness, firmly rooted in the heart of the Christian message, namely the sacrificial love and Easter peace of the compassionate Word of God.

The Indonesian churches are at a crossroads. We are now undergoing a turbulent transition from a military dictatorship that co-opted Christians into its scheme of things, to a more democratic society where each of the myriad elements of this heterogeneous archipelago is seeking out an appropriate space. The choice facing minority Christian churches is to retreat into a ghetto or become a dynamic, prophetic Diaspora, joining hands with the Muslim majority in rebuilding a culture of faith in a compassionate God who respects the dignity of all.

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