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Pentecostal ecclesiology in the new adaptation era: The case of the Bethel Church of Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The Synod of the Gereja Bethel Indonesia/GBI (Bethel Church of Indonesia) is Indonesia's largest Protestant and Pentecostal denomination, with over 7,000 local churches and nearly three million church members. It is, therefore, significant to discuss this church. Over the past three years, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced churches worldwide to adjust to the off-site system of worship and ministry. The pandemic also led to the speedy acceleration of digital technology. Consequently, it called for redefining and repositioning our ecclesiology and praxis. This article presents the theological position of GBI in a new era of adaptation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This article uses a systematic approach, by briefly introducing the concepts of ecclesiology and fellowship, then developing these concepts further with concrete and relevant examples in the context of the GBI church.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions worldwide and has forced all domains to make new adaptations. The world of business and the economy had to find new ways to avoid bankruptcy. The world of education had to prepare online lectures or at least a hybrid system, in order to maintain high standards of education. These adaptations also extended to other fields. Currently, the world abounds with

network, reflexivity, and entrepreneurship. First, the growth of networks has resulted in the transfer of a multitude of information, promoting the formation of other networks. Secondly, the rise in reflexivity has accelerated entrepreneurial thinking. The essence of entrepreneurship is to question both the external setting and the individual's response to that context. Thirdly, the expansion of entrepreneurship promotes the spread of reflexivity. More entrepreneurship means more role models for people to look up to. The fourth invention, of course, produces more innovation (Moynagh 2017). The most recent development of the internet has led many academic disciplines and the business world to pursue digital research competencies. Social scientists have begun to research the relationship between digital media, religion, and culture. The church, however,

has been slow to engage with digitally mediated expressions of Pentacostalism via the internet or what might be designated [as] 'digital Pentacostalism'. Therefore, it is timely to begin to address this field of study (Cartledge 2022).

One cannot imagine, in history, that, when the church struggled to consolidate, due to the ban on crowds, church services and pastoral ministry could not be halted. People talked about working remotely, studying remotely, and worshipping online. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the use and invention of technology. The integration of digital technology into church life has become increasingly essential, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that urged churches to adapt to a digital-first approach (Bani *et al.* 2023). This transformation is not only a trend, but also a necessary evolution that many religious institutions cannot resist. A digital technology revolution led to a metaverse society and the use of artificial intelligence, which the church cannot resist. Research indicates that congregations that engage actively with their communities by using technology during the pandemic – whether through service projects or online support groups – reported higher levels of member satisfaction and retention (Bani *et al.* 2023).

What kind of consolidation will the church consider, in order to survive and be more productive for the kingdom of God? The COVID-19 pandemic and the acceleration of digital technology are blessings in disguise, as they are essential *kairos* for spiritual progress; on the other hand, they can exacerbate the situation. Many businesses have gone bankrupt, due to their inability to consolidate. Likewise, the church needs new adaptations, as it can no longer be maintained in the present and the future. Of course, all church denominations worldwide have taken the best consolidation steps for their future ministries. Yet a church generally has several common concerns.

In this article, I endeavour to share the experience of the Indonesian Bethel Church (GBI) in consolidating both the concept of ecclesiology as a theological basis and at the level of its church practice during the past pandemic and an insistence that we inevitably have to embrace advances in digital technology. The ecclesiology discussed in this instance is not a discovery but an attempt to highlight innovation and to find a theological justification for the consolidations being carried out in both the present and the future. Even though this is a GBI case, it is relevant to the context of other Pentecostal denominations worldwide, particularly in Asia.

2. METHOD

The research uses a qualitative method and approach (Creswell 2021). Primary and secondary data were obtained from literature studies, including books, journal articles, magazines, and scientific reports. This article uses a systematic approach, by briefly introducing the concepts of ecclesiology and fellowship, and then developing these concepts further with concrete and relevant examples in the context of the GBI church. It focuses on the ecclesiology of GBI as a Pentecostal-Charismatic church, with an emphasis on pneumatic-encounter ecclesiology, in which the Holy Spirit plays an important role, enabling encounters with God anywhere and anytime (Wibowo *et al.* 2022)

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI): A brief history and current state

This section briefly describes the GBI church, and gives an idea of the GBI Synod's existence. The GBI Synod is now the second largest of all church denominations in Indonesia, second to the Batak Lutheran Church (the HKBP church), and the largest of all Pentecostal-Charismatic (P-C) denominations (74 denominations). The GBI Synod has over 7,000 local churches across Indonesia and in over 20 countries (Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Vietnam, China, South Korea, United States of America, Belgium, Germany, Canada, Australia, The Netherlands, Timor Leste, Cambodia, Taiwan, Brunei, Philippines, Japan, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, and so forth), with an estimated total of three million congregants. GBI is a P-C church founded on 6 October 1970 in Sukabumi, West Java, by 129 pastors who were ordained pastors of the Full Gospel Bethel Church (Gereja Bethel Injil Sepenuh/GBIS), led by two leaders, Rev. H.L. Senduk and Rev. Timotius Jonathan. An internal conflict relating to the amalgamation agreement with the Church of God

(COG), Cleveland, TN, USA, resulted in some pastors suspecting financial assistance from COG. After three years of conflict, Rev. H.L. Senduk and the pastors finally left the GBIS Synod and founded the GBI Synod. The Ministry of Religion Affairs of the government of the Republic of Indonesia granted this new synod full support and official recognition, in order to end the conflict during the pandemic.

Since 1970, GBI, under the leadership of Rev. H.L. Senduk, who became the first General Overseer, and the next successor, launched a vision called the “Church Planting Movement” to plant 10,000 new churches. The movement has already planted over 7,000 churches. GBI currently has over 25,000 ministers (exhorters, associate ministers, and ordained reverends).¹ GBI is an active member of ecumenical bodies such as Communion Churches in Indonesia (CCI/PGI), the Indonesian Evangelical Fellowship of Churches and Para-Churches (IEFC/PGLII), and the Indonesian Pentecostal Fellowship of Churches (PGPI). In addition, GBI has 23 Bible/Theological Schools, hundreds of private schools (from pre-school to high school), two GBI-affiliated universities and academies, several hospitals and clinics, agro-businesses, retreat centres, cemetery sites, micro-credit banks, legal aid, social and relief organisations, as well as international standards of the convention center (*Sentul International Convention Center*). The vast majority of mega-churches in Indonesia are GBI; some are among the largest churches in Asia/Southeast Asia. Although GBI had an amalgamation agreement with COG Cleveland over 40 years ago, both synods became independent, meaning that GBI is no longer under COG. While COG is a centralised synod, GBI has an autonomous system of church government with few exceptions.² For example, COG recognises three sacraments (baptism, Holy Communion, and feet-washing), while GBI has only two (Baptism and Holy Communion).

The Synod of GBI (*Gerakan Baptis Indonesia*) encompasses a vast network of over 7,000 local churches across Indonesia, each exhibiting unique practices influenced by geographical and ethnic diversity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these differences became particularly pronounced, as congregations adapted their worship styles and community engagement strategies to meet local needs and comply with health guidelines. The pandemic prompted some ethnic churches to develop tailored outreach programmes to address specific community needs such as food distribution or mental health support.

1 In the GBI Synod, the rank of ministers resorts under three categories: Exhorter (Pendeta Pratama/Pdp), Ordained Associate Minister (Pendeta Madya/Pdm), and Ordained Pastor (Pendeta/Pdt).

2 Key arrangements such as basic doctrines, bylaws, ordination for clergy, and social and government-related issues.

The voices and views articulated by the GBI leadership do not necessarily represent all local churches uniformly. While they aim to provide guidance and support, local churches often interpret and implement these directives based on their contextual realities. Some congregants report feeling disconnected from the broader synodal discussions, emphasising the importance of grassroots feedback in shaping church policies.

The theological framework within GBI emphasises community and relationality, which was crucial during the pandemic. This perspective aligns with findings from the Synthesis Report of the Synodal Assembly, which highlights the less bureaucratic and more relational need for a church, with the focus on the lived experiences of its members. The emphasis on synodality within GBI encourages participation from all members, fostering a sense of belonging and shared mission that resonates with theological teachings of the body of Christ.

3.2 A balance between Aggiornamento and Ressourcement

Asia Pentecostal Society (APS) held the Inaugural Online Conference in June 2023, with the theme “Pentecostal ecclesiology for the future”. The question is: How do we envision that theme? What will P-C ecclesiology be in the Asian context in the future? To answer this, I ask: What is the different context of challenges between non-P-C Western churches and P-C non-Western churches? Some decades ago, the context of churches in the West (mainly non-P-C) has declined, due to the Christendom mentality, especially in Europe and North America.³ Lessie Newbigin (1995) and Darrel L. Guder (1998)

3 It seems that Christianity in the West has declined, with the exception of the US as Rev. Keller (2022) argues: “one of the reasons much of the evangelical church in the United States has not experienced the same precipitous decline as the Protestant churches of Europe and Canada is because in the United States there is still a heartland with remnants of the old Christendom society. There the informal public culture, though not the formal public institutions, still stigmatizes non-Christian beliefs and behavior. There is a fundamental schism in American cultural, political, and economic life. There’s the quicker-growing, economically vibrant ... morally relativist, urban-oriented, culturally adventuresome, sexually polymorphous, and ethnically diverse nation ... And there’s the small-town, nuclear-family, religiously oriented, white-centric other America, [with] ... its diminishing cultural and economic force. ... [T]wo countries.” In conservative regions, people still profess faith and the church grows without becoming missional. Most of the traditional evangelical churches can win, to Christ, only people who are temperamentally traditional and conservative. Wolff notes, however, that this is a shrinking market, and eventually evangelical churches ensconced in the declining, remaining enclaves of Christendom will have to learn how to become missional. If they do not, they will decline or die. We do not simply need evangelistic churches; rather, we need missional churches. (See Keller 2022.)

argue that Christianity in the West denied its identity as God's missionary people. Consequently, the concept of a missional church has become a new jargon to awaken the dying state of the church. When we talk about the future of ecclesiology for the Western churches, it is about the urgent call to redefine "the why" of its existence in this world. This is an ontological ecclesiological question. Therefore, it is not surprising to note that the themes relating to ecclesiology and mission in the West are dominated mainly by phrases such as "Post-Secular Mission"; "Evangelism in a post-Christian West"; "Church after Christendom", "Post-church Church", "Missional Ecclesiology in a Secular Society", and the like.⁴ In short, it is obvious from those discourses that Western churches are reconsolidating the calling and the nature of being a church for a post, post-post society. The reason for this is that Christianity has lost its influence in society, and is even being marginalised. It may be said that the challenge of the digital technology revolution features in second place in ecclesiology discourses in Western churches.

In the Asian context, however, church has nothing to do with the issues of Christendom. The Philippines and East Timor (Timor-Leste) are two prominent countries in Asia with significant Catholic populations, each reflecting unique historical and cultural contexts. The significant growth of Christianity, especially due to the P-C movement, in non-Western countries has been continually discussed in mission references and how it causes the shift of Christian gravity to the Global South. The religious landscape is shifting to non-Western countries, bringing about the discussion of future ecclesiology that relates to the themes of contextualisation, multi-culturalism, and decolonisation. While the churches in the West and non-West have different contexts, they have some issues in common, namely the current world trends after the COVID-19 pandemic. The post-pandemic era marks an accelerated use of digital technology, posing a challenge to the global Christian church to elaborate on the future of ecclesiology. This is a classic issue and should come as no surprise since there is no doubt that the ongoing crises of our times pose new challenges to Christian churches that call again and again on the Christian contextual approach to those challenges. Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989) argue that the contextualisation of the Bible and the ministry of the church must always respond first to the crisis of faith that is endemic; to issues of social justice and human development; to the dialectic between local cultural situations and religion, as well as to a universal technological

4 See the works on ecclesiology by scholars such as Guder, Paas, Lachart, Jenkins, Gaillardetz, and so on.

civilisation. Technological advances urge the church to redefine its mission and reconceptualise its contextual task. Moynagh (2017: 121) contends that

[n]ew ecclesial communities owe their lives to far more than emergent dynamics within the church. They are a response to developments in the world outside.

Chan (2011) argues that the contemporary church has two main concerns: the challenges of postmodern culture and the digital age. Postmodernism and digital technology have created an unstable and fluid environment. As a result, traditional communities began to disintegrate. To maintain its essential identity as the church of Jesus Christ, the church must be a robust and stable community. The second point of contention is excessive individualism. This issue is not new, as Pentecostals acquired it from late 19th-century evangelicals. Many Pentecostals and Evangelicals recognise the need to solve this issue through solid ecclesiology. As mentioned earlier, to respond to an unstable and fluid world, the Pentecostal church must be maintained as a church rooted in tradition,⁵ while simultaneously maintaining its vibrant and fluid nature. Chan (2014) calls this “*Aggiornamento*” (God always makes new things) and “*Ressourcement*” (a call always to be rooted in tradition),⁶ which should be balanced.

Church leaders and observers have realised the need to refresh our memories of what a church is and what church life is about nowadays. During the pandemic, the following phrases were often heard: “worship from home”, “the church is not the building but the people”, “online worship”, “communion from home”, among others. As a people called out of darkness into his miraculous light (1 Peter 2:9), the church is a community with a unique identity, namely “my precious treasure” (*se’gullah*), to declare praises to him (worship and mission). This speaks of identities with privileges and responsibilities attached to them. In the dynamics of this world (social, political, economic, cultural, and epidemics), the church must not forget this identity as well as a *kairos* (concept of time) to proclaim the love of Christ to the world (Andrian *et al.* 2021).

5 The tradition that Chan meant, as he quoted Walter Hollwegger: first, the 5 to 10 years at early Pentecostal inception, and secondly, the tradition is referred to in dialogue with other Christian traditions such as Eastern Orthodox and Catholic.

6 According to Kelly (2022:3), “I have chosen to use the term *ressourcement* to my mind better reflects the retrieval of biblical, patristic, liturgical and medieval texts which form the sources of Christian theology in order to ‘refresh’ theology.”

Therefore, it is crucial to prepare the GBI church to newly adapt, and this starts by laying the foundation for ecclesiology as a theological response of GBI. From this ecclesiological basis, the carrying out of the duties and vocations of the church in the areas of *marturia*, *diakonia*, *koinonia*, and *didaskalia* have its theological rationale.

The following description of the church is not exhaustive. This is not a comprehensive and extensive writing on ecclesiology. It only addresses issues related to the interests of new adjustments to the church at GBI, especially in matters of *koinonia* (corporate worship and fellowship), of pastoral ministry, including relating to sacraments (baptism and Holy Communion). This highlights the characteristics of Pentecostal ecclesiology that support churching in this new period of adaptation.

3.3 A prospective Pentecostal Ecclesia: A GBI case

This section discusses issues related to the model of the church that are relevant in the present and the future with rapid social change, due to advances in digital technology and the possibilities of the next global pandemic. This inevitably forces the church to reconsider its calling and to redefine its mission in this world, by sharing a GBI case. The following characteristics of GBI's ecclesiology are relevant to respond to the "face" of the church during the new era of adaptation.

3.3.1 GBI ecclesiology is an encounter-pneumatic way of churching

The ecclesiology of Pentecostals (including GBI) can be described as pneumatic ecclesiology, in which the Spirit's place is central and omnipresent. This omnipresent Spirit spreads to all corners of space and time. The encounter can be viewed with familiar words (in both personal devotions and corporate worship) such as "anointing", "travel", and "his presence" that can be experienced anywhere and anytime. This pneumatic *koinonia* makes it easy for theological pronouncements of worship from anywhere. This unlimited Spirit can be experienced in everyday life and informal worship services. Yong (2005) calls this pneumatological ecclesiology, where the church is an organic, dynamic, and eschatological people of God called after the name of Jesus and constituted in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

In situations where it is not possible to gather directly (on-site) or even if some have been able to hold services and sacrament services on-site (with the hassles of health protocols), at least until a vaccine for the COVID-19 virus was found, the images (metaphors) of the church reappear "on the surface", *i.e.* as the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23; 4:12); The Temple of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:21; 1 Cor. 3:16-17); the Family of God (Eph. 2:19), and so forth. Why

are these church metaphors essential for us to remember? By recalling this, it is hoped that GBI congregants who hold services online or in homes, will have theological certainty of their validity and value equal to on-site services. Besides, the anointing of the Spirit in the service, meant by the meeting earlier, will happen anywhere. However, the records of these pneumatic encounters are not interpreted as wild ones. Chan (2011) emphasises the importance of Pentecostals having what is called “pneumatic ecclesiology” as a correction. The expression of the claims of encounter with the Spirit must be subject to the leadership and structure of the church as a community that has collective wisdom and discernment. This also confirms that services held in homes are still within the structure and leadership of the local church. Therefore, the conditions required must still pay attention to that context. Meanwhile, the GBI local churches follow the directions and decisions of the GBI Head Office.

3.3.2 GBI ecclesiology is *ad hoc* ecclesiology

One of the ecclesiastical experts, Pete Ward, initiated the idea of liquid ecclesiology, which he interprets as

a way of seeing existing Church life as a fluid form, and it suggests a way of place divine action in the wider society ... from ‘Solid Church’ to fluidity and ‘Liquid Church’ (Ward 2017: 9).

Pentecostal churches, including GBI, were born from a movement. Because it previously had the face of a movement, it needed to be more interested in forming a model of its government, organisational system, liturgy, and other things as established. This is also indicated by the historical fact that the Pentecostal churches do not pay attention to theology and creed. They are better known as “doers” rather than “thinkers” (Karkkainen 2002). Over the past few decades, Pentecostal churches, including GBI, have slowly consolidated their organisation, due to the demands of the times and the changing social context. However, they are still reluctant not to be directed towards a stable organisational system. In fact, until the present, GBI has maintained its decentralised or autonomous nature.

Lee (1994: 3) rightly mentions that,

if Pentecostalism is a movement, is it useful or valid to talk about ecclesiology at all? What does ecclesiology mean to a Pentecostal? At first, Pentecostals were so busy spreading the ‘good news’ of the fresh outpouring of the Spirit ‘in the last days’ that they became unconcerned about forming a denomination. The premillennial urgency of the imminent Kingdom made Pentecostals focus on their readiness, through personal conversion and regeneration, thereby rendering any ecclesiological deliberation rather irrelevant or at least secondary.

From the above description, it can be admitted that GBI is still characterised by *ad hoc* ecclesiology (borrowing the term from Kärkkäinen [2002]); at least ecclesiological considerations are provisional or liquid. Why is it important to mention this? First, during this new era of adaptation, this autonomous *ad hoc* face of ecclesiology is very relevant in giving space to dismantle the tendency of standard church rules, which in many denominations are no longer a tool, but an end. GBI must, therefore, maintain this *ad hoc* nature but still requires some organisational adjustments through decisions of the General Overseer and Executive Leaders at the Head Office after hearing input from the Advisory Council (MP) and the GBI Forum of Theologians. Secondly, *ad hoc* ecclesiology makes GBI an open church for future possibilities and developments, between the two extremes of charismatic and hierarchical systems. This position will continue to benefit GBI missionally. This *ad hoc* ecclesiology will always provide plenty of room for improvisation amidst the challenges of virtual and digital forms of worship. According to Warrington (2008: 131), “[w]hile they have not provided a systematized ecclesiology, they have left valuable room for improvisation, adaptation, and pragmatism”.

In its efforts to find spiritual characteristics, GBI will continue to show creative-restorative church motives amid demands to provide liturgy and worship in digital-artificial forms. Apostolic ministry can be preserved, by imparting power and restorative-missional spiritual signs in the sacraments and online worship. When people were forced to cope with the physical distancing policy during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, satellite waves were adequate intermediaries. At least, the meaning of the slogans, “the church is not the building” and “the congregation belongs to God, not the shepherd”, which the church echoed the most prior to the pandemic, became increasingly radical-ontologically evident in worship in homes.

This ecclesiology also targets the issue of church congregation membership which used to be rigidly tied to long files in the church membership cabinet/shelf. Nowadays, it has to shift from the centrality of the cathedral to the number of followers and viewers of digital media, which are highly liquid-interdenominational. This fact forces the church to make peace based on congregational membership, not on bureaucratic matters but to release it in the people’s spiritual encounter with God. Simply put, the church must be willing that the congregation worships not because of being “reluctant” to the pastor and for fear of losing the church government’s bureaucratic benefits, but to what extent the community experiences a spiritual encounter with their God. This is difficult to achieve in churches with a high view of the church.

3.3.3 GBI ecclesiology is a fellowship in nature

One of the toughest challenges during a pandemic is related to the church's *koinonia*. The progress of the digital technology era, which was used to overcome the inability to attend worship service, fellowship, and receive sacraments on-site, due to COVID-19, has resulted in severe issues regarding how this *koinonia* was carried out and to what extent it has a theological basis for its justification? Will it display a spirituality of what Moynagh (2017:134-136) calls "self-managed spirituality"? A shift from organised to self-organised spirituality, a turn away from life in terms of external or "objective" roles, duties, and obligations, and a turn towards a life lived by reference to one's subjective experiences. They become more reflexive to spirituality.

The presence of God is, therefore, a continual revivifying, as the church is being made alive and formed into the temple of God. It is this life energy that makes the Church a fluid community. The Church is Liquid because created by the work of the Holy Spirit: living water wells up in believers and overflows as the crazy love of God (Ward 2017:47).

In line with the face of ecclesiology, GBI is a church characterised by fellowship, a liquid fellowship. For Pentecostal people, including GBI, the church is a charismatic community (in the sense of charism), a community of persons, the Body of Christ. Although the issue of the church is fellowship, it is not only the case among the Pentecostals. The Eastern Orthodox Churches, for example, are also known for the term "communion", where the act of the sacrament is participation in communion with the Trinity, which is interpreted as having a mystical power to Christoforation in the partakers of Holy Communion as an individual or as a corporate. As a church with a high view of the church, the Orthodox church found it difficult, during the pandemic, to consolidate clerically centred corporate worship (priests).

However, the meaning of fellowship in the context of GBI churches differs from that of the Eastern Orthodox Church. For the GBI churches, fellowship is interpreted as another form of worship or encounter with God in not too many contexts. No mystical belief is centred on the sacrament of Holy Communion and the conscious act of worship as a demonstration of communion with individuals within the Trinitarian formula. Although this way of fellowship has its weaknesses, it needs to understand that the corporate actions of the fellowship must be based on full awareness of the meaning of being together with brothers and sisters in the fellowship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Pentecostals, including GBI, understand the church as a community that focuses on the personal aspects of *koinonia* rather than on the structural, sacramental, or ecumenical aspects. Therefore, Pentecostals, including GBI, need to be reminded of the fact that *koinonia* must be lived for the mutual enrichment of all members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:26). The gifts that

are bestowed on all believers are for the edification (building) of the body of Christ. Fellowship is not always called good, only in the church building. The smallest nuclear or extended family unit can enjoy fellowship through worship in their homes. This is the true meaning of the church as a community of the Spirit.

3.3.4 GBI is a pioneer in releasing and ordaining lay people for ministry

GBI is a Pentecostal church whose founder, Rev. Dr H.L. Senduk, allowed laity and ordained professionals to hold ecclesiastical offices and credentials. In the classic Pentecostal era, to become a pastor, a person had to trust that God calls that person into a full-time ministry, characterised by a dramatic spiritual experience and discernment. That person then joins a Bible school, and after graduating from the Bible school, that person was sent into the mission field primarily to plant and pastor a church. This model is still found at GBI. Most of the others, however, come from among the lay professionals who still hold their respective position outside the church but are ordained to serve in the church leadership, such as a local church pastor, a teacher, an evangelist, and a minister. Later, they joined the evening class or any executive mode of study for theological training.

During the pandemic and the new period of adaptation, both the ordained reverend (Pendeta/Pdt) and the ordained lay ministers (exhorter, licensed minister/Pdp and Pdm) were authorised to serve the people. When on-site church services were not held, due to the COVID pandemic, Pdp and Pdm could serve congregants from house to house. They were eligible to administer the sacraments. The question arises whether GBI allows a family head or a senior member of the family to administer the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion. GBI bylaws do not allow this. Only ordained ministers (Pdp, Pdm, and Pdt) have the authority to administer it. Since people's mobility was restricted, the pastoral visitation of congregants did not occur regularly. The GBI Synod made an exception so that an unordained head of the family was allowed to administer the sacraments (baptism and Holy Communion). This practice was common during great persecutions, as in China, for example. The GBI Synod then had to guide the family on leading the sacrament with a practical protocol. The basis is similar to the role of the family head in spiritual education among the Israelites (Deut. 6).

In the context of corporate services, which were allowed to be held on-site with the provisions of specific health protocols, the specificity of GBI in the context of services by ordained lay people is no different from that before the pandemic. They are an essential, authoritative group in ministry leadership in the local church.

3.3.5 GBI practise the church as *oikos* (house)

Many GBI churches have grown from small groups (cell groups). Although, during the pandemic, the church could adjust the situation to maintain fellowship, care, and discipleship, GBI reactivated the household or the cell group ministry. This is in line with the call to refrain from carrying out large gatherings of people. The theological basis is that Christ instituted the church to facilitate authentic connection. Being connected only happens in the context of small groups. Everyone needs an *oikos*. What is *oikos*? In Greek, it is translated as a house, sometimes a family. Everyone we care for is translated as *oikos* (this is a small circle) (Stokes 2016).

Cell group, first, negates the myth of saints and sanctuaries. The centralisation of serving authority is only considered in the clergy and must be in the church building because it is viewed as holy, is not entirely true. As explained earlier, cell groups can draw authority and decentralise places in the context of families or small groups. Secondly, cell groups in homes are places where opportunities to serve are open to anyone, not only the head of the household, but also the children can lead worship. Thirdly, during the pandemic, the cell group further emphasised the importance of paying attention to, and encouraging each other. When there was an appeal not to carry out activities that involved many people, the cell group gained momentum to function as a place where believers could have closer fellowship. Where there was

advice, there was a consolation of love, there was a fellowship of the Spirit, there was affection and compassion, one heart, one mind, in one love, one soul, one goal (Phil. 2:1-3),

as well as close fellowship and sharing (Acts 2:42-47).

3.3.6 GBI practises the ministry of healing

The healing ministry was one of the crucial and critical issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. GBI believes in and practises a divine healing ministry as a P-C denomination. At a time when millions of people were infected with the COVID-19 virus, many people – mostly non-P-C – questioned and criticised GBI for its revival ministry that was often conducted prior to the pandemic. They challenged P-C churches to prove their braveness to do a healing revival in the public space. For some P-C believers, this weakened their theological conviction in spiritual healing ministry. The problem was partly because the government authority did not allow any activity that attracted a crowd and restricted visits to COVID-19-affected patients.

Consequently, many healing evangelists could not make a healing crusade or prayer meeting to pray for sickness, particularly for those affected

by COVID. One reason for the growth of P-C churches, including the GBI churches, is the supernatural healing services. As a life-giving community, the church is also understood in a broader context and the practice of God's mercy towards the sick. Thus the belief in divine healing miracles is a distinctive part of Pentecostal theology, "Jesus as the Healer" in the five-fold gospels (Jesus as the Saviour; Jesus as the Baptist; Jesus as the Healer; Jesus as the Sanctifier, and Jesus as the coming King).

GBI believes that Christ's work on the cross provides not only forgiveness of sins but also healing power through the blood of Jesus, as stated in the GBI's statement of faith. This belief is based on Jesus' healing ministry and the healing gifts intended to reach souls (see the stories of Jesus' ministry mainly in Luke and John) and for the welfare of believers (Jas. 5:13-18). Of course, healing covers not only the body, but also the soul, emotion, mind, and primarily, the spiritual state. This healing ministry is the biblical practice in historical Christianity:

The early church took Jesus' healing ministry seriously, and Christianity presented itself to the Mediterranean societies of the time as a healing community. The final chapter of Mark's gospel, which was probably added in the second century CE, reflects this. Many writings of the early church fathers also affirm the centrality of the church as a healing community and proclaim Christ as the world's healer (Onyinah 2010: 219).

P-C people, including GBI, view the sending of Jesus to the disciples to be involved in the healing ministry in the context of preaching the Kingdom of God (Matt. 10:6-7; Mark 6:12; Luke 9:2). This also applies to Christ's disciples nowadays. Although the issue of death, due to illness or severe illness, never heals, P-C people do not contradict God's sovereignty and human will. This healing miracle is not contrary to God's works through the medical process.

During COVID-19, the GBI churches still conducted the healing ministry through online prayer meetings. When the Bible describes God as a protector, a rock, a fortress, a healer, a shield, a shepherd, a hiding place, and so on, these descriptions do not function under normal circumstances but only in times of disasters, anxiety, worry, and sickness.

3.3.7 GBI unlocks the development of digital technology culture

The digital world, or the newest term to describe the present is "World 5.0". This term refers to a new era in human history resulting from rapid technological advances and digitalisation. In the digital World 5.0, it is hoped that technology and human beings can reach harmony, in order to achieve more crucial

common goals such as human welfare, a sustainable environment, and world peace.

In the context of the digital World 5.0, the church or religion, in general, will experience significant dynamic changes. On the one hand, technology will provide new opportunities to expand the reach of churches and create new spaces for horizontal-vertical encounters, for example, by using social media and online applications as new terminals for congregations and church ministries. In addition, technology can also enrich creative experiences in worship and spiritual life, by using digital musical instruments, LEDs, touchscreens, and attractive visual applications. On the other hand, technology and digitisation can also be a challenge for the church. There is a risk that the digital presence cannot replace the need for people to gather and worship physically. Moreover, digital encounters are more challenging than they appear to rapidly heal the more significant issue between individualism and alienation. In this instance, churches are forced to consider methods to remain relevant and attractive to their congregations, without compromising the values and basic principles of their religiosity.

Christians can hardly be immune to these developments. When entrepreneurship is in the air, it is little wonder that believers are becoming entrepreneurial concerning the church. New ecclesial communities express a more emergent and reflexive society and a more entrepreneurial one (Moynagh 2017: 115).

With all this advancement, we may echo Hess' (2005) statement in our church ministry: How do we understand our God? Are we sufficiently filled with faith to imagine how God could reveal Godself amid our search to integrate digital technologies into our ministry?

At present, Haptik technology (Hess 2005) is believed to overcome the physical meeting in the wireless digital worlds through electromagnetics in the human or animal body. However, Haptic technology presents several philosophical challenges (post-humanism)⁷ and ethics.⁸ In addition, Haptic technology is still in the development and research stage. More research needs to be done to ensure the safety, privacy issues, and reliability of this

7 In the discussion of philosophy, it may be questioned whether, by using this haptic technology, human beings can fulfil their definition of being "pure" human beings or have human beings changed "to become another human being" or post-human.

8 In terms of ethics, the use of Haptic technology will support the development of sexual crimes in the metaverse world. One can imagine that, if the church embraces this technology in its metaverse worship, it must consider the possibility of overcoming sexual crimes in metaverse worship.

technology. Of course, not to mention its high cost. The church should discern all those issues.

The church is indeed seeking a stable position in the tension between the physical and digital worlds to play a role in human life. However, I opine that the church can no longer reject Haraway's theoretical constructs of human identity. Although he discusses "A cyborg manifesto" (1985) in the feminist language, Haraway's idea about the future relationship between human beings and machines is a theory that the church should consider. Haraway's thinking is mainly based on the concept of post-humanism, in which he criticises the binary aspects of human beings and nature, feminine and masculine, as well as human beings and machines. He proposes that human identity is the product of many factors, including interactions with technology and the environment. According to him, technology helps expand the human body's capabilities and enables human beings to become more robust and fluid in their relationships with the environment and the world. Haraway rejects the separation between human beings and nature as a mistake in Western thought. Instead, he stresses the importance of both paying attention to ecology and human relations with nature and maintaining the sustainability of the environment and our planet.

In developing post-modern transgression culture, GBI is a pioneer in converting this vibrating organic and artificial world. For example, on 6 March 2022, GBI NDC (Nafiri Discipleship Center) held its first service in the metaverse.⁹ It is believed that using the metaverse can enrich the spiritual experience differently from traditional religious activities. Congregations can participate in virtual services, attend sermons, and pray together in the metaverse. Several local GBIs have even created virtual church buildings that congregants and users can visit within the metaverse. GBI is a pioneer in dismantling the binary between the concept of spirituality, which is categorised as a person's relational dynamics with God, and belief in religious doctrines and practices exclusively, into a contour of spirituality as well as the humanity that focuses more on developing virtual meditation that is calibrated with human vertical-horizontal life.

In this discussion, GBI and the church face fundamental challenges in maintaining an identity as an extension of the Kingdom of God. The church must struggle with its attitude towards social, ecological, gender, and political issues. GBI must mix its liquidity in this 5.0 era stream to keep making its original contribution to the topics mentioned earlier.

9 AltSpaceVR.NDC Metaverse.

4. CONCLUSION

The above descriptions are only relevant parts of the current pandemic situation (at least for Indonesia and several other countries that have gone through pandemics), where we are entering a period of new adaptation, including in church life. Thus, the ecclesiological basis suffices, noting the addition of the theology of the sacraments and the liturgy.

The pandemic reinforces our question: “Who is the Temple?”, not “Where is the Temple?”. Let us not be forced to carry out the duties and calling of the church, but the church must adapt to the current situation. As part of the P-C family, GBI has a contextual, dynamic, empowering, and existential understanding and practice of the church. Nevertheless, the GBI Synod continues to emphasise the importance of expecting the service/worship to start onsite (in church buildings), as it was before the pandemic, while still paying attention to health protocols and additional directives from the GBI Board of Executives, which are intended in the context of a particular period. In the post-pandemic period, GBI has adjusted government guidelines regarding the dynamics of the cultural order of society, which has been open to physical meetings, but it has simultaneously left digital culture applied for efficiency purposes. Thus the question: “Where is the Sanctuary” is not ruled out. During the pandemic, GBI remained committed to emphasising the importance of being embedded in a local church, both leaders and congregations, to ensure the availability of all services and discipleship. Nowadays, it provides a hybrid culture between on-site and online meetings and worship.

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