

Polemic On Church Construction in Jakarta

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Embracing religion and performing worship in accordance with one's own preference is the right of each citizen, and is guaranteed by law. However, the ugly truth is that the Indonesian society's tolerance is relatively low, especially in addressing the beliefs or religious differences that become an issue in the fulfillment of those rights. As a result, religious reasons often become the cause of conflicts at the grassroots level. For example, in the construction of churches, as described in the book entitled *Kontroversi Gereja di Jakarta* (Church Controversy in Jakarta), which was written by the research team of Paramadina Foundation, Master's program of Peace and Conflict Resolution of Gadjah Mada University (MPRK UGM) and the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP), where in the case of Jakarta, the construction of churches also often causes polemic.

This book presented some data of destruction of churches obtained by the team of writers. In 2008 there were 15 cases of violation of church construction while in 2009, there were 12 cases. These violation ranged from acts of extortion, intimidation, to acts of vandalism. In addition, there were also government official dysfunctions characterized by the cancellation of permits, mainly due to the pressure from the community. Similar cases deteriorated in 2005 in which the number of cases reached 50 cases, and more than 1,000 cases between mid 1969-2006 (pp. 21-22). However, these data are no more than the figures that show that there have been violations, especially regarding the destruction of houses of worship. These data need to be presented, especially in describing the polemic on the house of worship. In fact there are often reports that only presented the destruction, while the cause was not fully revealed. Furthermore, the focus of these data was only about matters of church destruction, as if denying that there were many churches established without issues (p. 22).

Undeniably, the construction of the church was often accompanied with social issues around it. So, it is necessary to discuss the roles of the government and

community elements regarding the issues of church construction, such as the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) which occupies the position of mediating between the government, the community and the church. FKUB's presence is very important especially related to the awareness of religious tolerance in society. Also discussed in this book is the dynamics of the church in the midst of the economic and social conditions surrounding the community, including the negative initiation and the dialog on conflict solution on church construction. In addition, the "uninvited guests" (read: provocateurs) who often turn the flames of conflict to take advantage of the post-conflict situation were also among the subject of discussion. These provocateurs usually have ideological or practical goals to achieve.

There are four types of cases of polemic presented in this book including the cases of church construction that did not encounter significant obstacles, the cases of church construction that had problem but now is not problematic or deliberately disputed by certain elements anymore, the cases of churches that previously had no problem in the construction but are now facing problems and the cases of churches that had problems from beginning of the construction until now. Those mentioned cases specifically happened in Jakarta including the Catholic church (KWI) and the Christian church of PGI members. From my point of view, this is one of the weaknesses of this book because major cases involving churches outside of the PGI or KWI were not touched.

There are several conditions of church that became the object of study in this book including the churches that had no problems, i.e. St. Aloysius Church and St. Valentino Chapel (pp. 42-45). The churches whose problems were resolved include St. Michael Catholic Church (pp. 46-53); Pasundan Seroja Church (pp. 53-57); Indonesian Christian Church of *Terang Hidup* (pp. 57-62); Cathedral Church (pp. 62-68); St. Albert Catholic Church (pp. 68-73), and Nehemiah Javanese Christian Church (hlm.73-79). The churches that previously had problem but are now problematic includes St. Bernadet Catholic Church (pp. 79-84), Yasmin Indonesian Christian Church (pp.84-91), and HKBP Pangkalan Jati (pp. 91-97). The last is the churches with unresolved problems such as HKBP Filadelfia (pp. 97-103), St. John the Baptist Catholic Church (pp. 103-111), and the Church of Mary Vianney (111-123).

There are several recommendations to overcome the polemic on church construction presented in this book. First, to the state, as described in this book, the police should be able to act decisively in the face of groups that initiate provocation or vandalism. Base on the results of the author's research, these groups are afraid of the law enforcement officers. Local governments should better understand the entire chapter in the PBM 9 and 8 of 2006. The case in

Jakarta, for example, the local government - until this study was completed - used the Governor Decree No 137/2002. While we understand, the law is no longer valid. In addition, it is also important for the central government to create effective mechanisms to minimize the possibility of conflicts regarding construction of churches or other houses of worship. The Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) should help mediate before and during the polemics and conflicts. (pp. 137-138). Second, to religious figures and organizations such as NU, Muhammadiyah and MUI, they should be able to mediate the conflict. The NU, Muhammadiyah and MUI should do more, especially with regard to the right to religious freedom. These organizations should continue to support the government to take legal action against anarchist groups that act in the name of religion. Christian religious organizations such as the PGI and KWI should always seek interfaith dialog and establish close relations with other religious organizations. The PGI and KWI also need to train church leaders on how to build relations with the community (pp. 138-139). Third, to those involved in the church construction, the potential for conflict should be handled as early as possible such as the signatures and ID cards required for the construction. In addressing the problem that arises, the church construction committee should consider carefully the decision on the use of media. On the one hand, it can be very useful while on the other hand it can also be counterproductive. This book suggested that the media should not be used when the scale of the problem is still small, as the main actors are usually people around the construction site, and there is no much involvement from the outsiders. The use of the media in such case will only deteriorate the situation (p. 139).

The conclusions of this book could be an important lesson to understand conflict or polemic of church construction in this country, even though the case studies were conducted in Jakarta. This book can be an important reference for many people, especially for students who are engaged in the study of comparative religion, or those who are interested in the study of pluralism and similar issues.