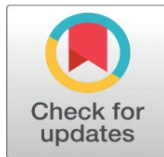


THE THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN THE CURRICULUM DESIGN OF CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITIES IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes a theology of religious moderation integrated into the curriculum design of Christian universities. Such a theological framework is expected to address the exclusive and intolerant attitudes still found among students. Christian universities bear a strategic responsibility to cultivate ethical awareness and civic responsibility in students from the perspective of Christian theology. The author employed a quantitative research method to collect data on the extent to which students at three Christian universities in Indonesia understand, internalize, and practice religious moderation. The findings reveal that intolerant, racist, and skeptical attitudes persist among students. Therefore, a theology of religious moderation is urgently needed to strengthen students' understanding, attitudes, and constructive engagement in a pluralistic society. This study recommends the integration of a theology of religious moderation into higher education curriculum design, explicitly linking Christian theological perspectives with civic responsibility in a diverse society.

Keywords: Public Theology, Curriculum Integration, Religious Moderation

1. INTRODUCTION

The term religious moderation has gained significant popularity in Indonesia since 2019, although the concept itself has long been known and practiced in various forms. Outside Indonesia, equivalent terms include interfaith harmony, interreligious dialogue, multiculturalism, pluralism, human rights, peaceful coexistence, and *wasathiyah* (particularly in the Middle Eastern context) [Mahbub \(2024\)](#). These terms all refer to efforts aimed at building a peaceful world by recognizing diversity, accepting and respecting differences, promoting equality and

justice, preventing intolerance, racism, and extremism, and fostering a balanced religious life through interfaith dialogue. As such, religious moderation constitutes a crucial global issue, deeply connected to sociopolitical stability, the sustainability of democracy, and global peace.

Etymologically, the word moderation is derived from the Latin *moderatio*, which means “moderateness” or the state of being neither excessive nor deficient. Thus, the term moderate is understood as the capacity for self-restraint, avoiding both extremes and deficiencies. When applied to religion, moderation implies a perspective, attitude, and behavior that position oneself in the middle of diversity with balance. From this perspective, the outcome of religious moderation is tolerance, which is essentially an expression of collective moral goodness aimed at maintaining peace in a pluralistic society and preventing various forms of violence [Kementerian Agama RI \(2019\)](#).

Given the persistent global threats posed by intolerance, radicalism, and terrorism, the promotion of religious moderation must be strengthened, especially in the digital era, where such threats often transcend national borders. Numerous countries have undertaken initiatives to reinforce religious moderation. For example, in various Asian countries, [Masykur et al. \(2024\)](#) report such efforts as Malaysia’s “One Malaysia” campaign, Singapore’s Harmony Centre at An-Nahdhah Mosque, Thailand’s traditional culture-based approach in Songkhla, and Indonesia’s “Religious Moderation Houses.” These initiatives aim to strengthen social bonds among communities of diverse ethnicities, cultures, and religions.

Such reinforcement must be pursued across multiple sectors and domains. One critical domain for the internalization of religious moderation is higher education. There are several compelling reasons for this: universities are often targeted as platforms for social manipulation or cultural invasion [Freire et al. \(2002\)](#), approximately 7.7% of the Indonesian population is potentially susceptible to radical movements if given the opportunity [Wahid Foundation \(2016\)](#), radical ideologies often infiltrate higher education due to the weak internalization of religious and national values among students; the lack of societal oversight and the fragile relationship between the government and private educational institutions make universities fertile ground for the growth of radicalism; and religious narratives are inherently open to multiple interpretations, which can foster fanaticism and trigger both intra- and inter-religious conflicts [Kementerian Agama RI \(2019\)](#).

One of the most strategic ways to anticipate and counter the spread of radical ideologies in higher education is through curriculum design. [Tuju et al. \(2022\)](#) recommend that a curriculum grounded in religious moderation be incorporated both as formal (core) curriculum and as hidden curriculum. The internalization of religious moderation can be embedded within each course through relevant content and learning activities, facilitated by appropriate teaching methods. This would enable students to appreciate pluralism as a natural consequence of cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. [Tarihoran \(2017\)](#) argues that a religious moderation curriculum must be grounded in several foundations, including: national philosophy and education principles; science and technology; sociocultural and religious contexts; student development; human (interpersonal) and ecological (bio- and geo-ecological) environments; as well as national development demands in welfare, law, defense and security, and economic sectors. [Akhmadi \(2019\)](#) further highlights the importance of educators who are both moderate and professionally competent.

In addition, designing a religious moderation curriculum within Christian higher education requires a robust theological foundation. A theology of religious

moderation is essential to ensure that Christian universities teach the Christian faith while also instilling the values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence amid diversity. This theological foundation serves as a witness and responsibility of the Christian community in responding to the challenges of disintegration at local, national, and global levels. When integrated into the curriculum, a theology of religious moderation contributes to forming a younger generation equipped to navigate a pluralistic and complex social reality.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research method to measure students' understanding and attitudes toward religious moderation. A validated questionnaire consisting of 30 Likert-scale items was distributed to 482 students from three Christian universities in Indonesia. The indicators used to assess religious moderation among students included national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodative attitudes. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Mann-Whitney U test to examine significant differences in responses, particularly between Christian and non-Christian students.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. FINDINGS

This study reveals a positive trend among students, indicating that their attitudes and perceptions regarding religious moderation at the three Christian universities fall within the high category. The overall mean score was 3.85 (on a scale of 1 to 5) with a standard deviation of 0.52, suggesting relatively consistent data distribution. Specifically, all aspects of religious moderation—national commitment, tolerance, rejection of violence, and accommodative attitudes toward local culture—showed positive tendencies. National commitment received the highest mean score (4.01), followed by tolerance (3.88), rejection of violence (3.76), and acceptance of local wisdom (3.74). These findings suggest that students at Christian universities in Indonesia possess a relatively strong understanding of the core values of religious moderation and that such values have been internalized in their daily religious practices.

Inferential statistical analysis, particularly independent samples t-tests and ANOVA, revealed no statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$) in the levels of religious moderation based on gender, region of origin, or faculty. However, a significant difference was found concerning year of study ($p < 0.05$), with third- and fourth-year students exhibiting higher levels of moderation than first- and second-year students. This suggests that longer exposure to the Christian university environment, which supports interfaith dialogue and reinforces national values, increases the likelihood of internalizing religious moderation values. Overall, these results affirm that Christian higher education—through both curriculum and campus social interactions—contributes significantly to shaping students' moderate religious attitudes. This becomes a critical asset for Christian education in responding to the challenges of religious diversity in Indonesia and in supporting national efforts to foster character and religious tolerance among the younger generation.

Nevertheless, the study also identifies a concerning trend: 48% of student respondents expressed uncertainty regarding Pancasila as the ideal national ideology, and 33% were open to the possibility of replacing it with another ideology. Based on descriptive data from item no. 1, "You value Pancasila as the ideology of

the Republic of Indonesia,” out of 482 respondents, 231 (48%) strongly agreed, 68 (14%) agreed, 10 (2%) were unsure, 83 (17%) disagreed, and 92 (19%) strongly disagreed. This indicates that 175 students (36%) expressed a lack of support for Pancasila. This trend is further confirmed by responses to item no. 2, “You agree with replacing Pancasila with another ideology,” where 160 students (33%) strongly agreed, 72 (15%) agreed, 17 (3%) were unsure, 122 (25%) disagreed, and 111 (23%) strongly disagreed. This shows that nearly 48% of students were open to changing the national ideology.

These findings are supported by previous research. Suharno, citing Hastangka (2018), observed that university students show limited interest in studying Pancasila thought [Suharno \(2022\)](#). A study by the Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta team (2019) reported that 19.37% of students from seven universities agreed with replacing Pancasila with Islamic Sharia ideology. Other research by Khoirunnisak and Hadi also indicated that Pancasila values are inadequately internalized by younger generations due to the effects of globalization, a lack of moral exemplars, and insufficient engagement with Pancasila as a guiding principle for social life [Khoirunnisak and Hadi \(2023\)](#). This lack of understanding of Pancasila values has serious implications for religious moderation. Therefore, strategic action is needed from universities to revitalize Pancasila values through both curricular and extracurricular academic activities. Students must be provided with opportunities to explore Pancasila creatively and treat it as a source of inspiration for meaningful contributions. In this way, they can move beyond being mere recipients to becoming active agents of change and promoters of national values.

Moreover, the findings also indicate a latent ambivalence toward pluralism among Christian students, raising questions about the effectiveness of current pedagogical strategies. In this regard, Christian universities are called to reaffirm theological reflection within the academic environment as a public vocation oriented toward the common good. Such reflection must encompass national identity, civic responsibility, and ethical commitments to living in a pluralistic society. A theologically grounded and contextually relevant curriculum is a crucial instrument for shaping future leaders who are rooted in the Christian faith and committed to civic responsibility.

3.2. DISCUSSION

The theology of religious moderation represents a Christian calling to engage with and respond to societal challenges. This theological perspective is a form of public theology, aligning with the foundational principles of public theology. The term public theology was first introduced by Lutheran theologian Martin E. Marty to describe Reinhold Niebuhr’s approach, which emphasizes theology’s engagement with socio-political issues [Golicz and Momeny \(2025\)](#). Public theology reflects the Christian faith’s response to public life, seeking to contribute theological values for the common good. Nanthambwe affirms the relevance of public theology in critically analyzing Christian traditions and interacting with social, political, and cultural issues through three key aspects: (1) evaluating and interpreting Christian teachings within contemporary contexts; (2) addressing issues such as justice, social inequality, poverty, and human dignity with theological insight; and (3) contributing to social transformation. Accordingly, public theology is inclusive, transcending ecclesiastical boundaries and actively promoting policies and actions that foster justice, peace, and social welfare [Nanthambwe \(2024\)](#).

The theology of religious moderation seeks to create balance and harmony among diverse religious groups, while engaging public life and responding to

sociopolitical realities. It aims to articulate Christian doctrine within a pluralistic society in a way that avoids extremism and intolerance, instead fostering interfaith communication and active participation in shaping just policies and harmonious coexistence. This theological approach expands religious consciousness to enhance communal life, reinforce peace, and uphold human dignity. In the context of educating younger generations in Christian universities, religious moderation theology is urgently needed to shape understanding and inspire praxis rooted in biblical theological values that reflect national identity, civic responsibility, and ethical mandates for life in a pluralistic society.

Rather than being solely personal and devotional, religious moderation theology is public and contextual. It is a theology capable of navigating religious diversity. This theology must be grounded in the conviction that Christian faith does not exist in a vacuum but is called to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13–16) in a pluralistic world. Scriptural teachings such as Romans 13:1–7, which affirms legitimate authority, Jeremiah 29:7, which calls believers to seek the welfare of their cities, and the commandment to love God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37–39), provide a strong biblical foundation for promoting peace, openness, and justice.

In Indonesia, where Pancasila serves as the state ideology safeguarding diversity and social cohesion, the theology of religious moderation must be grounded in loyalty to Pancasila. This allows the theology to strengthen inclusive, just, and peaceful national life. Such a prophetic calling reminds Christians of their responsibility to embody a harmonious and civilized national ethos aligned with God's will for all nations.

3.2.1. NATIONAL IDENTITY AS A DIVINE GIFT

National identity must be seen as a gift from God. It is the distinguishing characteristic of a nation and should not be interpreted exclusively but as a fraternal connection with other ethnic groups. [Faudillah et al. \(2023\)](#) assert that Indonesia's national identity emerges from a unique combination of geography, culture, and history, forming a plural yet unified nation. As a diverse archipelagic country, Indonesia's ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious variety shapes its national identity, forged both by objective factors (geography, demography) and subjective ones (historical, social, political, cultural). These elements have created shared national symbols: the red-and-white flag, Bahasa Indonesia, the Garuda Pancasila emblem, the national anthem Indonesia Raya, the 1945 Constitution, and regional cultures.

This foundation fosters religious, humanistic, and communal values, encouraging unity and shared interests. Awareness of pluralism must be instilled so that diversity becomes a source of unity rather than conflict. The motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* ("Unity in Diversity") affirms that the Indonesian people, though diverse, are united by a national identity that binds all elements of society into harmonious coexistence. This identity, formed over a long historical process, continues to unify and protect the Indonesian people.

From a Christian theological perspective, national identity is a divine gift within the created order. The diversity of nations, languages, and peoples—reflected in biblical narratives (Genesis 10; Acts 17:26; Revelation 7:9)—embodies God's intent for diversity within human unity. In this framework, maintaining national identity is a means for Christians to live out their faith in a specific historical-cultural context while bearing witness to the common good. Scripture affirms the place of nations in God's plan. Acts 17:26 declares that God made all nations and determined their

appointed times and boundaries. This verse affirms that nationality is not an accident of history but part of divine providence. Thus, national identity should not be rejected but preserved as a gift through which believers glorify God and serve others.

3.2.2. PANCASILA AND CHRISTIAN VALUES

One of Indonesia's key identity markers is Pancasila. Theologically, Pancasila is not in contradiction with Christian teaching. It embodies positive values—peace, humanity, harmony, deliberation, justice—that enhance collective welfare. It also serves as a governmental mandate to act in the people's best interests. Christians are called to remain loyal to Pancasila as the nation's ideology and to support state institutions as established by God (Romans 13:1–7), so long as these do not contradict Christian doctrine. The values of Pancasila align with Christian teaching. When implemented seriously, they can lead Indonesia to become a strong, just, and peaceful nation. Consistent application of Pancasila principles promotes a religiously moderate society.

According to [Intan \(2014\)](#), in applying both Christian teachings and Pancasila, followers of different religions must not dominate or exclude one another. Instead, they must unite in peace-building and interdependence. Religious communities must collaborate constructively for societal and national advancement.

3.2.3. NATIONALISM AND THEOLOGICAL ROOTS

National identity is grounded in nationalism, the ideological and emotional commitment to one's nation, expressed through shared language, culture, history, national symbols, and collective values. Biblically, concepts of nationalism are evident in the Hebrew words '*am*' (עַם) and *goy / goyim* (גּוֹי / גּוֹיִם) and the Greek terms *laos* (λαός) and *ethnos* (ἔθνος) distinguishing God's people from other nations. However, the biblical recognition of God as the Creator of all people underpins a theological foundation that all nations originate from God. Acts 10:34–35 emphasizes that God does not show favoritism but accepts those from any nation who fear Him and do what is right. Therefore, Indonesian nationalism can be theologically understood as part of God's providential work (*providentia Dei*), where national consciousness and the struggle for independence represent human participation in God's universal plan. Nationalism, in this sense, is divinely ordained [Ruhlessin and Parihala \(2021\)](#).

[Johnson \(2018\)](#) emphasizes the integral relationship between Christian and national identities. These should not be in opposition but critically integrated. Faithfulness to Christ leads believers to be good citizens, living out Gospel values in sociopolitical spheres without idolizing the state. [McIntosh \(2017\)](#) also underscores the importance of fostering civic responsibility rooted in moral and faith-based values within Christian education, particularly respect for cultural heritage and national identity.

3.2.4. CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY AND PUBLIC WITNESS

Christians are called to practice responsible citizenship. 1 Peter 2:13–17 exhorts believers to honor everyone and live as God's servants who do good in society. Christian citizenship should not be passive or exclusive but inclusive, active, and responsible in building a just society. Civic engagement is an expression of Christian witness in a pluralistic world. Religious moderation, in this context, goes

beyond tolerance; it includes readiness to collaborate with others in constructing a just social order.

Christian universities in Indonesia hold curricular responsibilities to integrate faith formation with critical and contextual civic education. Religious moderation education must encompass sociopolitical responsibilities as part of public spirituality. This ensures that graduates become not only pious individuals but also ethically and prophetically engaged citizens.

3.2.5. AGAPE LOVE IN A PLURAL SOCIETY

The ethical imperative to live in a plural society is grounded in agape—Christian love for all people, including non-Christians. Love is the foundational ethic for peaceful and just communal life. 2 Peter 1:7 highlights “love for everyone” as the pinnacle of spiritual growth, beginning with faith. Christian love must extend beyond the in-group to embrace those of different faiths, traditions, and worldviews. In New Testament theology, agape is unconditional, active, and self-sacrificial love. In pluralistic contexts, it is expressed through respect, dialogue, and interfaith cooperation for the common good. Volf argues that Christian love for “the other” does not erase difference but acknowledges it as a dynamic part of reconciliation and peace. This love is not passive tolerance but active participation in God’s peacemaking mission in a fractured world [Volf \(2019\)](#).

In contemporary public theology, agape is linked with inclusive citizenship and social solidarity. Emmanuel Katongole asserts that love rooted in the cross enables Christian communities to create shared spaces with those historically seen as enemies or strangers [Katongole \(2011\)](#). This is vital in religiously plural societies where love becomes a bridge for interfaith relations. [Treier \(2018\)](#) sees Christian love in pluralistic societies as a form of “public discipleship”—a spirituality lived out in concrete social engagement. He emphasizes that loving others, including those of different faiths, reflects the wisdom of Christ’s incarnational model. [McIntosh \(2017\)](#) adds that sound theological education must form individuals who are “ethically resilient and dialogically capable,” rooted in love and equipped to navigate complex social realities. Thus, student formation must prioritize not only theological orthodoxy but also social orthopraxis—living out love as the foundation for interreligious engagement.

3.2.6. IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

In Christian higher education in Indonesia, awareness of national identity must be integrated into students’ spiritual and academic formation. Curricula should cultivate appreciation for the nation’s history and culture as part of the Christian calling to seek justice, peace, and the common good. Religious moderation involves embracing national identity without compromising Christian distinctiveness and maintaining openness to interfaith cooperation for national development. Preserving national identity as a divine gift is not a form of secularizing the faith but a tangible expression of transformative public Christian spirituality.

The curriculum is not merely a vessel for knowledge transfer, but also a medium for articulating public theology—namely, theology that responds contextually to the socio-political challenges of life. The curriculum can include courses that integrate faith and public civility (e.g., Theology and Social Justice, Christian Public Ethics, Faith and Politics). Christian identity and national identity are not mutually exclusive; rather, they need to be critically and constructively integrated in the formation of students by developing biblically narrative-based

learning that emphasizes the *providentia Dei* in the nation's history and promotes a theological, not secular-exclusive, nationalism.

Religious moderation theology must become part of the core competence of graduates of Christian universities so that they are able to live, work, and witness ethically in a pluralistic society. Curriculum developers can integrate the theme of religious moderation into interdisciplinary curricula (e.g., theology, education, communication, sociology), and implement dialogical and collaborative interfaith pedagogy through seminars, projects, or interfaith community service programs.

Christian higher education must be rooted in *agape* love—an active, unconditional love that transcends identity boundaries—as the moral and spiritual foundation aimed at cultivating social sensitivity through courses that emphasize service, reconciliation, and restorative justice. The formation of moderate Christian character in students can be carried out through retreats, mentoring, and service practice in diverse communities.

The curriculum must be designed based on Indonesia's plural context and position Pancasila as a theological-reflective partner by developing contextual theology modules that incorporate Pancasila values theologically. Universities or higher education institutions should encourage student research on themes of Indonesianness, diversity, and social justice. Christian higher education must shape students as responsible citizens—socially active, publicly ethical, and prophetic in their witness. The curriculum must be based on service learning and civic engagement that integrates faith and social action, and provides forums for advocacy, ethical political literacy, and the development of public leadership rooted in the Gospel. The curriculum should cultivate an open, reflective, and transformative spirituality, which concerns not only the personal relationship with God but also social solidarity with others. Christian higher education should include theological reflection practices on students' social experiences, and promote participatory learning through case studies on pluralism, religious conflict, and peacebuilding.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Christian universities in Indonesia play a significant role in shaping students' moderate attitudes toward religious diversity through inclusive curricular and social approaches. While the majority of students exhibit positive attitudes toward the core values of religious moderation—such as national commitment, tolerance, nonviolence, and openness to local cultures—the findings regarding ambivalence toward Pancasila as the national ideology indicate the need to strengthen civic formation in Christian higher education. Within the framework of public theology, a theology of religious moderation must be strategically integrated into the curriculum as an expression of Christian faith in the public sphere. This integration should emphasize national identity as a gift from God, active civic responsibility, and the ethics of love as the foundation for communal life. Accordingly, Christian higher education is expected not only to develop robust theological understanding but also to produce graduates who are capable of becoming agents of social transformation marked by justice, peace, and inclusivity in a pluralistic society.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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