

Religious Moderation in Interfaith Dialogue: Current Challenges and Hopes for the Future

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Abstract

Religious moderation is a vital concept in maintaining harmony within plural societies. However, many studies on interfaith dialogue remain limited to theoretical perspectives, lacking empirical evidence on how religious moderation is practiced at the grassroots level. This gap has created a need for research that not only examines the theological foundation of moderation but also explores its real-life application among diverse faith communities. This study aims to analyze the role of religious moderation in interfaith dialogue by integrating theological reflection with field-based insights. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected in July 2025 through a literature review and a field study involving semi-structured interviews with four informants, including Christian pastors, Muslim scholars, researchers, and FKUB representatives in Central Java. The findings highlight that religious moderation – manifested through tolerance, balance, and justice – can serve as a sustainable framework for present and future interfaith dialogue. This study concludes that embracing religious moderation is essential for nurturing social harmony, preventing conflict, and promoting a more inclusive religious narrative in an increasingly globalized world.

Keywords: *interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding, religious moderation, tolerance, pluralism*

Introduction

Religious issues have become a major factor during critical moments such as elections, serving as both a catalyst for shifts in government structures and an opportunity to advance other agendas. This is mainly because religion is deeply embedded in Indonesians' lives, who uphold Pancasila, with "Belief in the One and Only God" as its first principle (Maulana et al., 2024). According to a global analysis by the Pew Research Center published by Jonathan Evans, Indonesia ranks as the most religious country among 102 nations surveyed between 2008 and 2023. 98% of Indonesian adults say religion is very important in their lives, and 95% report praying daily, making Indonesia the global leader in religious devotion (Evans, 2024). This certainly shows that Indonesia is a country with a high level of religiousness.

Another vulnerability factor contributing to conflict in Indonesia is its diversity. With a population of 271.2 million, Indonesia is one of the most plural nations in the world (Pluralism, 2020). This is supported by the religiosity index, also known as the Religious Harmony Index (KUB), where Aida Chomsa's report explains that the Ministry of Religious Affairs released the KUB Index value based on a survey conducted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Research and

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Development Agency. The KUB Index was categorized as good in 2022. The score was at the national average of 72.39, an increase of 4.93 points from the previous year (Chomsah, 2022, p. 1). In an effort to improve this, the Indonesian government introduced a strategic roadmap to combat hoaxes, hate speech, and religious extremism (Al Qurtuby, 2022, p. 27). This is because inter-religious conflicts arise from misunderstandings and miscommunication.

This aligns with Jamil's study of the discourse surrounding the resurgence of political Islam in Indonesia. He found that using a social movement approach through issue framing is one of the three key factors (etc, in addition to framing the issue, two other factors that influence this are the political opportunity to control relative stability and instability and social mobilization of both financial and socio-cultural resources (Jamil, 2021), shaping the character and future of Islamism in Indonesia (Jamil, 2021, p. 103). This means that maintaining harmony within diversity requires collective effort from all levels of society—from top leadership to grassroots communities—to champion the movement of religious moderation.

Previous research by Tanio on religious moderation found a significant, positive correlation between the degree of religious moderation and interfaith tolerance (Tanio, 2023). In other words, religious moderation, as a means to foster kindness, brotherhood, and shared benefit, can be pursued through learning processes and community-based activities. These platforms help nurture patriotism, mutual respect, nonviolence, and fair appreciation for local traditions and cultures (Sahlan et al., 2022). This is also in line with Pajarianto's research, which emphasizes that education plays a vital role in upholding religious moderation. Religious institutions must actively promote religious moderation through education as a counterbalance to the rise of extremism and intolerance within the education system (Pajarianto et al., 2023, p. 1990).

Taufik and Alkholid discovered that religious moderation is crucial to maintaining harmony in societies marked by religious diversity and vulnerability to conflict (Taufiq & Alkholid, 2021). This view aligns with Imam Al-Ghazali's thinking, who emphasizes that religious moderation is a relevant approach to revitalizing Islamic education in a multicultural context, promoting a moderate, tolerant, and inclusive understanding of religion (Siregar, 2020). The release of the book *Moderasi Agama (Religious Moderation)* by the Minister of Religious Affairs in 2019 served as a catalyst for the implementation of Religious Moderation within the Ministry of Religious Affairs and across other institutions in society. This demonstrates the Indonesian government's efforts to strengthen interfaith harmony, including the issuance of Ministerial Regulation No. 18 of 2020, which outlines a strategic plan for the period 2020–2024 (Hutapea, 2022). The regulation establishes four key indicators: strengthening national commitment, promoting non-violence, accommodating local culture, and fostering tolerance. This balanced or middle path in religious practice effectively safeguards against extremism, fanaticism, and radical behavior.

Religious moderation gained national and international traction following the twin resolutions adopted during the United Nations General Assembly session on December 8, 2017. These resolutions, part of the "Declaration and Program of Action on a Culture of Peace," introduced the resolution titled "Moderation" and declared 2019 as the International Year of Moderation (Muhammad, 2020). The theme has since been globally promoted, with May 16 officially recognized as the "*International Day of Living Together in Peace.*"

Hutabarat, referencing a report by Tedi, Director of the Institute for Social and Religious Studies in Indonesia (Hutabarat, 2023), noted six recorded cases of religiously motivated violence rooted in intolerance. This presents a significant challenge for the church, which is called to serve as a space for nurturing its members' faith and to fulfill its mission as the salt and light of the world (Matthew 5:13–16). A church that fails to accomplish this mission, in essence, loses its true identity (Luke 14:34–35). The church is called to embody *Shalom* (Isaiah 61:1–2) by proclaiming the truth in accordance with its convictions. The *Shalom* brought by the Church is another side of the portrait of God, who is almighty, full of love and peace, as a normative example of the church

in interpreting its existence in the framework of its ministry, which can include various dimensions, whether physical, emotional, intellectual, social, or spiritual (Simanjuntak et al., 2021). This aligns with what Widodo, an informant from the Christian religious community at FKUB, stated, that the church, or in other words, Christians, can bring *Shalom* and that it is their mission to realize a prosperous life for every human being who believes in God and justice (P.W., 2025). The goal is to eliminate the seeds of hatred among religious communities, both in the present and for generations to come.

Religious moderation must begin with a revolution against doctrinal teachings that have infiltrated education as an act of religious defense (OK, 2021). The era of globalization further amplifies this threat, as it introduces external influences that can blur or uproot Indonesia's cultural heritage and local wisdom, traditions that have long served as bonds uniting communities across religious differences, free from the grip of dogmatic fanaticism. Indonesian culture offers an iconic context that contributes meaningfully to preserving social harmony (Masruroh, 2023). However, existing studies on religious moderation and interfaith dialogue in Indonesia have tended to focus on conceptual discussions, theological reasoning, or policy-level analysis. Although these works enrich the theoretical discourse, they often ignore the practical realities faced by religious leaders and community members in combating fanaticism, negotiating differences, and maintaining harmony in daily life through dialogue. This gap highlights the need for research that bridges normative theological reflection with real experiences in various interfaith contexts. By combining these two perspectives, this study introduces a new approach that situates religious moderation as both a theological principle and a concrete practice, offering new contributions to the academic world and insights that can be applied to foster interfaith peace in Indonesia through interfaith dialogue.

This study aims to develop an inclusive concept that thrives amid diversity, shaping an Indonesian society capable of balancing the pull of two opposing extremes. It rests on the belief that even within differing poles, there is common ground for pursuing collective welfare and a *Shalom* life together through open and ongoing interfaith dialogue.

Research Method

This study employs a method grounded in literature review and normative theological analysis. Data were gathered through discussions on religious moderation and interfaith dialogue (Zaluchu, 2020). To strengthen the relevance and empirical grounding of this study, a component was added by conducting interviews with several informants actively involved in interfaith dialogue across religious institutions. Informants included Christian leaders at PIKI (Kepala Bidang Mitigasi DPP Persekutuan Intelegensia Kristen Indonesia), Muslim scholars in JIAD (Kordinator Jaringan Islam Anti Diskriminasi Jawa Timur), Christian Scholars in FKUB (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama), and Indonesian education researchers from Brawijaya University PPI (Peneliti Pendidikan Indonesia Universitas Brawijaya). These interviews aimed to gather direct insights into how religious moderation is practiced at the grassroots level, the challenges encountered, and the strategies developed to foster inclusive dialogue. Field data collection was carried out in July 2025 using purposive sampling. Each interview lasted approximately 30–60 minutes and was recorded with consent for transcription and analysis. The interview protocol included open-ended questions focusing on three areas: (1) definitions and perceptions of religious moderation; (2) experiences and practices of interfaith dialogue; and (3) perceived obstacles and hopes for the future of religious harmony.

To achieve these aims, the research proceeded through several stages: First, it observed current phenomena related to religious moderation, including a review of government policies and relevant laws and regulations issued by ministries or authorities. Second, it examined various theories of religious moderation found in academic literature and previous research. Third, it

linked these findings to the social reality of the church, particularly its engagement with religious moderation in society. Fourth, it synthesized these insights to construct a conceptual framework that fosters national unity through religious moderation, positioning interfaith dialogue as a strategic approach for church engagement in the public sphere. This research aims to offer an inclusive concept that acknowledges the ongoing tension between societal poles while affirming that common ground still exists, even amid differing worldviews. This framework is a foundation for building collective well-being and living in Shalom through a dialogical strategy. Moreover, the use of verbatim quotations from participants adds authenticity and gives voice to the lived experience of religious practitioners as they navigate moderation amid sociopolitical tensions.

Results and Discussion

The phenomena occurring in society have prompted the Church to reevaluate and reclaim its role in accordance with its mission as an agent of transformation. This process begins with analyzing the root causes of the problems, particularly those related to the concept of religious moderation. The following is a summary of the results of interviews with four sources from diverse religious and professional backgrounds, who can be assumed to represent their respective groups or communities, and who present fundamental truths that support the concept of living in moderation.

The following information was obtained from several sources who expressed views representing various groups and circles, particularly in addressing (1) definitions and perceptions of religious moderation; (2) experiences and practices of interfaith dialogue; and (3) perceived obstacles and hopes for the future of religious harmony:

First, The concept of religious moderation is summarized from the perspectives of the four sources as follows: Source A (*initials DG*), a researcher in the field of education and an active member of civil society in education, emphasized the ability to hold firmly to one's beliefs without imposing them on others: *"For me, religious moderation means holding on to my faith while never forcing others to follow it."* (D.G, 2025). Source B (*Initials Gus A*), a Muslim cleric and interfaith activist as well as Coordinator of JIAD (Islamic Network Against Discrimination), rejects extremist attitudes and stresses openness: *"We must be open to differences; extremism only destroys our shared humanity."* (G.A, 2025). Source C (*Initials P W*), an academic and Christian leader in the FKUB (Interfaith Communication Forum) of Semarang, viewed moderation as self-restraint: *"Moderation means refraining from extreme positions and not monopolizing the truth."* (P.W., 2025). Meanwhile, source D (*Initials V R*), a government official, framed moderation as a national commitment: *"It's not about who is right, but how we can respect each other without sacrificing our beliefs."* (V.R., 2025). These diverse perspectives emphasize that religious moderation is not a singular concept but a value rooted in the expectation of differences with self-control and the preservation of each other's religious identities. *Second*, based on their experiences and practices in interfaith dialogue, the speakers described their roles in concrete terms. *"In education, I teach students to learn about other faiths objectively"*. Source B stressed the need for shared spaces: *"We need interfaith forums where leaders can sit down and talk peacefully"*. Source C described a pedagogical approach: *"Give young theology students the space to understand other beliefs—not to accept them, but to understand them"*. Source D recalled facilitating a local dialogue that prevented conflict: *"When people sit down and talk, conflicts can clearly be avoided"*. These narratives reveal that interfaith dialogue is an effective strategy for an inclusive approach, grounded in sincere and wise attitudes toward understanding differences. *Third*, the main obstacle to achieving religious moderation. Source A observed: *"When teachers don't understand the importance of tolerance education, seeds of hatred can grow from an early age"*. Source B pointed to frequent misunderstandings: *"Different sides often misinterpret tolerance"*. Source C highlighted potential tension between faith identity and openness to dialogue, while maintaining that they need not be mutually exclusive: *"Faith and openness can coexist if approached with*

humility.” Source D noted resistance from exclusive groups: “Some think tolerance is weakness and see themselves as religiously superior.” This view is both consistent with and contrasts with Rajagukguk’s findings. While Source D highlights the real challenge of exclusivism, which views tolerance as a weakness, Rajagukguk emphasizes that religious moderation is a strategy that allows people to hold on to their respective beliefs while remaining inclusive in Indonesia’s multicultural society. Rajagukguk shows that tolerance and interfaith dialogue do not weaken, but rather strengthen dialogue by reducing conflict, building harmony, and positioning oneself as a facilitator of dialogue and social transformation (Untung et al., 2025, pp. 1–7). However, amid false hopes, religious moderation is a long road. Source A emphasized that educators’ nationalist attitudes should be part of their social competence. Source B hoped for clear government regulations, in the form of guidelines, on the limits and direction of interfaith dialogue. Source C emphasized the importance of religious leaders setting an example of openness and humility. Source D hoped for the integration of the value of moderation into the education system as part of the curriculum and culture, not just as a policy slogan. The results of these interviews reinforce the spirit of religious moderation in Indonesia as a multidimensional value and virtue, encompassing theological, educational, policy, and leadership domains.

Religious Moderation

The perspective of religious moderation is one of the essential pillars for fostering harmony and shared well-being within a pluralistic society. It cannot simply stop at the emergence of a commitment to tolerance as a personal conviction—it must be realized through a long-term process that includes rejecting violence in the name of religion and embracing a moderate approach to religious practice (Muhamad Murtadlo, n.d., p. 31). Sumiati emphasizes that religious moderation is not merely an option but is necessary in a diverse nation like Indonesia in the digital era. A moderate religious attitude is the key to cultivating tolerance and harmony, sustaining a peaceful civilization. Thus, believers are encouraged to respect and accept others in their differences and to live together in harmony. This mirrors the ancestral cultural heritage, reflected in the spirit of *gotong royong*, mutual cooperation, as a form of local wisdom that must be preserved (Sumiati et al., 2025). Evident in local cultural wisdom, where the fulfillment of needs—such as building a house, farming, harvesting, or holding community feasts—is carried out collectively, selflessly, and with solidarity among neighbors.

Lubis, citing Hornby, defines moderation as an attitude that avoids extremism and maintains a quality of life free of harmful consequences (Lubis, 2021, p. 301). Jubba emphasizes a person’s awareness of reasonable limits by avoiding extremism through a calm, balanced attitude (Jubba et al., 2021). Pajarianto (Pajarianto et al., 2022) affirms that religious moderation is a personal understanding and awareness that every citizen must possess to engage in social life within a multicultural society. It requires a generous heart to acknowledge others who are different, adopt a tolerant lifestyle, respect differences, interact fairly, and reject coercion and violence. Patty adds another layer of understanding by referring to the Greek term (*Sophrosune, sun-phronesis*), which conveys wisdom or discernment—the intellectual ability to moderate, soften, mediate, seek the middle ground, know one’s limits, and practice self-restraint (Patty, 2022, p. 97). From these definitions, moderation can be understood as the wisdom to remain self-aware within reasonable boundaries, to maintain calm to avoid extremist tendencies, and, as much as possible, to avoid actions that might inflame tensions within a pluralistic society.

Differences Bringing Tolerance

The principle of interfaith harmony (*tolerance*) as it relates to religious moderation can be explored through the lens of the sociology of religion, particularly the theories of Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim. This exploration attempts to find common ground within a modern society

dominated by capitalist ideologies (Thierry & Tientcheu, 2021, p. 3), where religion is often viewed as having little relevance in resolving social problems. Religion has frequently been assumed to legitimize the oppression of the working class by the capitalist elite. This is in line with the strengthening perception that religion is merely an opiate for the oppressed, used to silence their voices by offering a false promise of heavenly joy in exchange for their earthly suffering (Pals, 2024, p. 55). Quoting the results of interviews with informants Gus Aan from JIAD (Islamic Network Against Discrimination) and a Gusdurian, the point of convergence between the differences that arise in the social situation of religion and the turmoil that continues to this day in Indonesia is that religion is used as a tool to oppress the weak and powerless (G.A., 2025). It can be considered that religion becomes the most powerful weapon in creating ongoing conflict if it is not controlled from the outset.

Emile Durkheim also emphasized the necessity of religion as a system of sacred beliefs. On the other hand, it fosters strong social bonds, rooted in the historical and cultural origins of religion that continue to be trusted and practiced (Karsten, 2020, p. 11). This perspective aligns with that of Indonesia's first president, Soekarno, who envisioned religiosity as a guiding force in people's lives (Suroso et al., 2023). While acknowledging that many religions originated outside the archipelago, he urged Indonesians to stay rooted in their own cultural identity: "If you are Hindu, don't become Indian. If you are Muslim, don't become Arab. If you are a Christian, don't become Jewish. Remain Nusantara people, with the rich traditions and culture of the archipelago (Febrian, 2022, p. 28)." This is also in line with the views of pluralism figure Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), who educated people about the unique concept of Islam in Indonesia, expressed through local culture. This expression is not symbolic but rather the result of deep reflection on religion, tradition, and culture through an indigenization approach, which has produced a blended, inclusive character of Islam in the archipelago (Burhani et al., 2020). Thoughts of these prominent figures hold significant social relevance within the context of Indonesia's diversity. It can be concluded that religious moderation is crucial for modern society in anticipating and addressing religious issues, which are often exploited as tools to divide national unity.

Dialogue Amidst Differences

Dialogue serves as one of the key strategies for fostering engagement in the search for alternative solutions that uphold the values of justice and equality for all groups, carried out with humility, openness, and dynamism. The acknowledgment made by a Dutch sociologist, Bertram Schrieke, as cited by Farid Alatas (Alatas, 2021, pp. 13–27), pointed to the roots of competition between Christianity and Islam in Indonesia, which stem from the historical rivalry between the two religions in the Middle East—what Ashdown refers to as the "burden of history" (Ashdown, 2020, p. 198), despite various government efforts and policies from the 1920s until today aimed at easing tensions and preventing potential conflicts. Strategies are noted for having achieved some success, particularly during the tenure of Mukti Ali as Minister of Religious Affairs, by fostering dialogues grounded in mutual trust and goodwill between religious communities (Puyu et al., 2025, pp. 1–14). Then Kasmuri Selamat highlighted the contributions of Tarmizi Taher, who served as Indonesia's Minister of Religious Affairs after Mukti Ali. During his tenure, Taher expanded the scope of interfaith dialogue by involving intellectuals, religious leaders, and representatives from various faith communities and religious organizations (Selamat, 2021, p. 361). This suggests real potential to revitalize interfaith dialogue, primarily through inclusive forums that involve religious leaders, prominent figures, and grassroots communities. The government's dialogue efforts to date have not been truly honest, sincere, or authentic, so they need to be addressed to improve future initiatives and ensure more effective, authentic engagement. In addition, this discussion will draw on works such as Habermas (1989), whose book "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere" is cited by Evan in discussing how society can engage in

rational dialogue and influence policy (Stewart & Hartmann, 2020, p. 170). The quote from Musahwi in Hendropuspito's (1983) work, "The Sociology of Religion," provides a sociological framework for understanding the role of religion in society, including its interactions with social and political structures (Musahwi et al., 2023, p. 17). Then Alwi Shihab (1998), in his work "Islam Inklusif: Menuju Sikap Terbuka dalam Beragama" (Islam Inclusiveness: Towards an Open Attitude in Religion), was quoted by Bosra. This work advocates an open and inclusive attitude towards religion, which is relevant to the role of civil society in promoting tolerance (Bosra & Umiarso, 2020, p. 117). These works provide relevant authority on the roles and limitations of civil society, communities, and/or the government in determining policies, especially regarding religious tolerance. While each group brought its own distinct identity, they were all interconnected through the form and substance of the dialogues, which were carried out across five levels: First, Parliamentary dialogue; Second, Institutional dialogue; Third, Theological dialogue; Fourth, Community and everyday life dialogue; Fifth, Spiritual dialogue. This suggests that interfaith dialogue is not simplistic, as Benaiah once implied (Benaiah, 2023, pp. 363–375).

Further building on this, Lubis proposed a strategic approach to dialogue aimed at neutralizing religious differences. *First*, by raising awareness within society, diverse beliefs can still peacefully coexist under the broader framework of the Republic of Indonesia. *Second*, religious leaders and community figures should be encouraged to embody the spirit of cooperation and act as role models who demonstrate social harmony in practice. *Third*, promote dialogue on multiple fronts—across faiths (Lubis, 2021, p. 356), within one's own religious community, and through collaborative actions guided by shared human values rooted in each religion's sacred texts.

Peace Studies Amid Diversity

In general, it is acknowledged that religious conflict requires dedicated efforts to achieve resolution, particularly through the promotion of harmony initiated by leaders or prominent figures of each faith. Utari argues that achieving this harmony demands a shared belief that all religions aim to promote the well-being of their adherents by cultivating inclusive religious understanding. This includes a willingness to accept, respect, and embrace one another in a spirit of brotherhood and kinship, deeply rooted in Eastern cultural values, such as the practice of *gotong royong* (cooperation) (Utari et al., 2023, p. 193). Furthermore, Firdaus concluded that the tendency to accept the existence of other religions reflects a commitment to religious moderation, as evidenced by attitudes of tolerance, respect, and religious freedom (Firdaus & Muflikhah, 2025).

Like many religious communities, Patty (Patty, 2022, p. 56) recognizes the foundational contributions of Abdurrahman Wahid and Nurcholish Madjid, who paved the way for an inclusive form of Islam—one that is peaceful, just, tolerant, and democratic. As Taufiq said, these efforts show a commitment to promoting religious moderation (Taufiq & Alkholid, 2021, pp. 134–147). Moderation is a central tenet of moderate Islam, which views religion as deeply relevant to the realities of a diverse society, whether in terms of faith, custom, ethnicity, or nationhood.

Religious Moderation Builds Peace

Peace is an atmosphere that must continually be nurtured, even amid differences. Lubis (Lubis, 2021, p. 327) proposes a strategy for "Weaving a New Pattern of Diversity" in his study of doctrinal differences and mental attitudes toward tensions arising from truth and salvation claims. Rather than fueling division, such claims can serve as a bridge, drawing on the shared roots of Islam and Christianity in Indonesia, both recognized as Abrahamic religions whose teachings are grounded in divine revelation. Throughout human history, horizontal conflicts within society often stem from diverse backgrounds, including race, ethnicity, or religion. In such contexts, the church, whether situated amid conflict or as a victim, is taught not to be consumed by hatred. This teaching

allows the church to play an active role in conflict resolution through its presence and engagement. One of the ways the church serves beyond its walls is by embracing moderation, defined here as fully accepting others who are different with a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect, without imposing beliefs through coercive means (Wijanarka & Sari, 2023, p. 169).

Dilla Agustin Nurul presents data from the SETARA Institute showing that throughout 2023-2024, the number of violations or cases of intolerance in Indonesia experienced an upward trend, totaling 477 incidents and 731 acts. Some people interpret this phenomenon as part of the reality of Indonesia's ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious diversity, or as a condition of dualism in views brought together (Ashfiya, 2025, p. 214). Whether this diversity leads to positive or negative outcomes depends heavily on society's perspective. Pluralism's negative potential can trigger disintegration, while its positive potential lies in its ability to inspire creativity and efforts toward meaningful dialogue and coexistence.

Pluralism as a Bridge Amidst Differences

Heiner Bielefeldt defines pluralism as a perspective rooted in mutual respect within a heterogeneous society comprising diverse ethnicities, races, religions, and social groups that encourages acceptance, active participation, and the development of traditional cultures and specific interests in communal life (Bielefeldt & Wiener, 2022, p. 5). A concept closely aligned with pluralism is inclusivism—the belief that one's own religious tradition holds complete (or perfect) truth, while acknowledging the partial truths in others' beliefs and traditions. David Basinger. It recognizes the existence of truths across religious traditions, positioning itself as the highest form of religious openness—an essential foundation for fostering harmony and peace among believers of different faiths (Basinger, 2021, p. 328). This means even within an inclusivist perspective, there remains space for partial truths from others.

Raja Cahaya Islam quotes John Hick's view and discusses exclusivism as a religious attitude that claims absolute truth exists only within the Christian Church tradition. This view is often criticized as a flawed or inappropriate approach to faith, as its inherently intolerant stance can become a source of interreligious conflict (Islam et al., 2021). Jesus Himself did not endorse the exclusivist mindset of some of His disciples, who believed that His presence and mission were meant only for them. This is clearly reflected in the accounts of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, where He repeatedly instructed His disciples to spread the news of His resurrection to other nations (Matthew 28:9–10, 19–20; Luke 24:9; John 20:17). In Christianity, exclusive claims such as Acts 4:12 (“there is no other name under heaven that can save”) are often used as a basis for considering other religions as “less true,” even though Jesus himself (Matthew 28:19) emphasized universal mission without denying the positive value of other traditions (Islam et al., 2021, p. 73). Islam also has a similar dynamic, where the concept of ummah and verses such as QS Al-Imran 19 are often interpreted exclusively, even though the Qur'an acknowledges the existence of “people of the book” (Sofia, 2021, p. 41). Buddhism, although generally considered inclusive, has a strong missionary tradition (for example, the spread of Mahayana Buddhism to East Asia). Some sects, such as Nichiren Buddhism, emphasize exclusivism by considering their teachings to be the only path to enlightenment (Anesaki, 2024, p. 72). Meanwhile, Hinduism, which is often considered pluralistic, also has reformist movements such as Arya Samaj or ISKCON (Hare Krishna) that are active in proselytizing and claim the superiority of Vedic teachings (Surpi, 2023, p. 217). Confucianism, although more of a philosophical system than a missionary religion, has historically been used as a tool of legitimizing power (e.g., imperial examinations in China) and is sometimes promoted as a “superior” moral foundation (Suhendra, 2022, p. 84). These exclusive claims can create cognitive biases, such as ethnocentrism or cultural superiority, which have the potential to trigger interreligious conflict or the marginalization of minority groups. However, according to Paul Knitter, many traditions have also developed pluralistic approaches in response to modern

criticism (Hutahaean, 2020, p. 201).

These commands highlight that Christ's message of salvation was not limited to a particular group or people but was intended for all of humanity. The universality of the salvation message affirms that no single group can claim exclusive ownership of Jesus. Every person, regardless of background or belief, has the same right to receive the good news. This concept of universal salvation points to the importance of openness and inclusivity as the foundation for meaningful, constructive communication among people of different faiths. It shows that dialogue and mutual understanding are essential in fostering a spirit of peace and unity across religious boundaries.

Church's Role in Religious Moderation

Since the early development of the Church, interfaith dialogue—as well as internal dialogue within the Church community—has been a continuing process, and it remains relevant today (Wijanarka & Sari, 2023). As Talupun observes, one of the most dominant issues in the context of religious diversity is the growing assertion of religious identity in public spaces. This often includes claims that one particular religion deserves recognition, respect, and state facilities more than others. Several issues illustrate this trend. *First*, public policies—both regulations and laws—have, in many cases, contributed to the polarization of religious groups at the regional level, often through discriminatory local bylaws. For instance, certain provinces may require students to wear uniforms bearing religious symbols specific to one faith. *Second*, the ongoing threat of terrorism in the name of religion continues to grow, fueled by ideologies that seek to replace Indonesia's foundational philosophy, Pancasila, with a religion-based state. *Third*, communal conflicts between religious communities often arise from attempts by one group to restrict or prevent the worship practices of another, sometimes leading to the closure of places of worship. *Fourth*, there are interfaith tensions stemming from accusations of blasphemy and difficulties in building houses of worship. In various regions, such efforts have faced legal obstacles, forced halts, or outright bans (Rumahuru & Talupun, 2021). Beyond these issues, aggressive missionary and proselytizing activities represent another critical challenge in Indonesia's religious landscape. As Hasan Bisri notes, such activities are often driven by universal claims about religious truth that can disrupt social relations, especially when carried out without regard for local sensitivities or interfaith norms (Husni & Bisri, 2024, p. 8361). The tension between the right to conduct missionary work and the need to maintain communal harmony highlights the urgency of government oversight and proactive interfaith initiatives to establish ethical guidelines for missionary work.

The content of religious moderation itself serves as fertile ground for proclaiming the Good News—moving from general discussions to specific contexts with an attitude of openness, humility, tolerance, and without prejudice. The implication of truth as a special revelation from God is, at its core, the result of personal understanding and experience of God's love for humanity. This love becomes the foundation for how the Church engages with society across various dimensions—economic, political, social, educational, cultural, and more. In this light, the special revelation of salvation cannot be separated from God's general revelation in everyday life. This is actualized in the Church's ministry practices, including its commitment to religious moderation, which resonates with Patty's view (Patty, 2022, p. 100) that the essence of religion is fundamentally expressed in love, justice, and peace.

Schumacher, as cited by Le Duc in *A Guide for the Perplexed*, emphasizes that the essence of the Church concerning religion and human activity lies in its responsibility to foster a spirit of togetherness amidst pluralism. This is realized through the facilitation of interfaith dialogues and discussions, serving as a concrete expression of the Church's mission to carry out God's will in spreading the good news and becoming a creator of peace (Le Duc, 2023, pp. 1–33). Active participation in religious moderation guides the Church to view Christianity objectively, focusing

on values and meanings of life that are inclusive and acceptable to all. This is because religious moderation is grounded in universal values. *First*, it upholds the sanctity of life and humanity. *Second*, it is based on mutual agreements within diversity. *Third*, it strives to create collective order and harmony.

When connecting the social context with the Church's role in the principle of religious moderation, it is essential to acknowledge that, as a legally recognized institution, the Church plays a crucial role in cultivating national spirit through religious moderation. This aligns with the Church's foundational mission and the meaning embedded in the Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, which means "called out" —not to remain inwardly focused, but to go outward and engage, by the Great Commission of Jesus (Matthew 28:19–20) (Widjaja et al., 2020). To fulfill its role in nurturing a spirit of nationalism through religious moderation, the Church must possess a deep and holistic understanding of its own essence. Patty (Patty, 2022, p. 43) strongly believes that the Church is called to develop both the will and the capacity to liberate itself from the dominance of inherited Western theological frameworks that are often irrelevant in diverse social settings. Daring to break free from these outdated traditions will positively impact Indonesia's socio-political landscape, particularly in strengthening interfaith relations and encouraging active participation in building a more cohesive society.

The Church's involvement in religious moderation is further affirmed as a form of service within society, particularly in nurturing a spirit of national unity. This significance was acknowledged by Ronny Mandang, Chairman of the Communion of Indonesian Evangelical Churches (PGLII), who noted Markus Saragih from PGI (Markus, 2021) that such participation reflects a modest but timely aspiration within the broader struggle for universal values.

Reflection and Critical Assessment

Religious moderation in interfaith dialogue in Indonesia requires not only theoretical understanding but also critical reflection on the normative practices adopted by religious institutions, including the Church, both at the universal and local levels. Field findings and interviews with four informants from different backgrounds—namely, Islamic and Christian religious leaders—revealed that claims of exclusive truth held by each tradition often become a major obstacle in efforts to build moderation. For example, informants from Christian and Islamic groups acknowledged that their internal teachings on "absolute truth" (such as John 14:6 in Christianity or the concept of *tawhid* in Islam) are often used to justify aggressive proselytizing or missionary practices, which, in turn, trigger tensions between religious communities. This is in line with the research by Sonny Zaluchu (Zaluchu et al., 2025), which shows that religious moderation in Indonesia must be built through conceptual reconstruction that takes into account local and cultural dynamics, rather than simply adopting a global normative framework that is often parochial and unresponsive to the context of Indonesia's plurality. It underscores the importance of a contextual approach that integrates local values as a means of reducing interfaith tensions. This confirms that religious moderation campaigns in Indonesia still tend to be "top-down" and are not yet fully inclusive of other religious traditions. This critical reflection leads to the conclusion that the Church, at both the universal and local levels, needs to conduct an in-depth evaluation of its theological and pastoral framework, especially regarding how truth claims are articulated in the context of plurality.

Conclusion

Religious moderation has undergone a process of discernment that results in practical wisdom expressed through morally and ethically grounded actions. Without it as an alternative path, religion risks falling into spiritual paralysis. In essence, the Church's role in a pluralistic society underscores the urgent need for religious moderation. First, the Church becomes a platform for

fulfilling the demand for religious moderation, especially since religious fundamentalism – with its tendencies toward radicalism and extremism has gone beyond acceptable limits. Second, religious moderation is necessary to safeguard pluralism from threats that seek to dismantle and erase diversity. Third, religious moderation is vital in a diverse society to encourage individuals to act as mediators or bridges across personal and group interests. Fourth, it counters teachings and theological interpretations that justify extremism, instead providing a theological foundation for moral and ethical values such as justice, equality, and peace. Fifth, religious moderation benefits society and the nation, acknowledging that religion is inherently fluid and flexible, capable of transformation and renewal in response to evolving social dynamics. Sixth, it fosters creativity and wisdom that prioritize the practice of daily life, emphasizing the art of human interaction cultivated through everyday social engagement. Seventh, this study confirms that both literature and field findings support the Church’s role as a dialogical and inclusive agent, capable of articulating a balanced theological perspective that affirms the dignity of all faith communities in Indonesia. Eighth, through field interviews, this study describes how grassroots actors from various religions practically define and apply religious moderation and demonstrate its proper function as a tool for social harmony, rather than becoming religious salespeople who sell themselves to vested interests.

Based on these findings, this study recommends several directions. First, in terms of scientific development, theological institutions are encouraged to integrate religious moderation and interfaith engagement into their formal curriculum, enabling future religious leaders to develop inclusive attitudes grounded in sound biblical and ethical principles. Second, for policy development, the state and religious institutions should continue to support spaces of encounter such as FKUB, not only for ceremonial purposes but as part of structured, sustained peacebuilding. Third, further research is encouraged to deepen empirical understanding by comparing models of religious moderation across provinces and among different denominations, especially in light of digital influences and political polarization. Fourth, the Church is encouraged to renew its public witness by embodying Shalom through practical efforts supporting justice, dignity, and reconciliation as marks of Christian mission in a pluralistic society.

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