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A proposal of multicultural relation: Christian religious education and religious moderation



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The multicultural context of Indonesian society has prompted the idea of religious moderation as a defense mechanism for harmonious relations. However, peace, both in practice and academically, continues to evolve through various dialogues and studies to create a harmonious society. This study aims to present peace-based Christian religious education for religious moderation in Indonesia within the context of multicultural society. Using a descriptive qualitative analysis approach, various references such as books, articles and other sources are utilised as primary materials in constructing arguments. In conclusion, peace-based Christian religious education offers an alternative approach for religious moderation in Indonesia within its multicultural context.

Contribution: This article supplies new insight to the religious moderation through Christian Religious Education pathway, which could share harmony and peace to the society with multicultural context in Indonesia. Also, the insight provides peace-based Christian religious education that could be linked to the study of religion and theology.

Keywords: religious moderation; harmony relation; multiculturalism; Indonesia; Christian religious education.

Introduction

The relationship between religion in the context of multicultural society in Indonesia remains a central focus in various fields of study, including theology of religions, anthropology, sociology and comparative religion studies. The diverse religious and cultural landscape in Indonesia sparks significant interest in understanding the interactions among different religious adherents and their impacts on the social, cultural and political dynamics in the country. In the field of theology of religions, attention to interreligious relations encompasses understanding the principles of interfaith dialogue, efforts to deepen knowledge of beliefs and practices of other religions and exploration of universal values found in various religious traditions (Hutahaeen 2020; Sirait & Istinatun 2022; Zamakhsari 2020). Anthropological and sociological studies also highlight the dynamics of interreligious relations in Indonesia by examining factors influencing religious tolerance, interreligious conflicts and how communities manage religious diversity in daily life (Fitriani 2020; Kurniasih, Rohmatulloh & Ayyubi 2022; Suryana 2011). Meanwhile, comparative religion studies provide a foundation for understanding the differences and similarities among various religious traditions in Indonesia and their implications for social interactions and power structures in society (Halim 2015). Thus, the theme of interreligious relations in multicultural society remains a significant focus in various fields of study, enriching our understanding of the complexity and dynamics of Indonesia's diverse religious landscape.

Conflict, both in practical and academic realms, continues to occur in Indonesia, prompting the need to introduce the paradigm of religious moderation as a solution (Manullang 2014; Syukron 2017; Yunus 2014). The slogan 'religious moderation' has emerged as terminology offering a middle path to bring peace in the multicultural society of Indonesia (Abror 2020; Jahroni & Munhanif 2019). This approach emphasises the importance of interreligious dialogue, appreciation of diversity and the cultivation of awareness of tolerance as keys to addressing conflicts and building social harmony. By adopting the approach of religious moderation, it is hoped that Indonesian society can find common ground amid differences in beliefs and build a solid foundation for peaceful and inclusive coexistence.

Various paths have been pursued to achieve the ideal religious moderation. One investigative avenue that can be taken is through religious education. For example, Faozan (2020), Suryadi (2022)

and Habibie et al. (2021) have embarked on the path of Islamic religious education for multicultural society, Faisal (2020) explored from the perspective of Islamic education management, and Abidin (2021) investigated through Ministerial Regulation No. 37 of 2018. Then, from the perspective of Christian religious education, there are several similar studies that have been published in local and international journals (Boiliu 2022; Jura 2020; Selanno 2022). However, research using the approach of Christian peace religious education has never been conducted by previous researchers.

Therefore, this research attempts to offer the path of peace Christian religious education as an alternative for peace or another way for religious moderation in creating harmonious relations with the multicultural society in Indonesia. Thus, the research question posed in this study is, what can be learned from peace Christian religious education that can contribute to the concept of religious moderation and its relevance to harmonious relations in the context of Indonesia's multicultural society?

Discussion

Understanding and essence of religious moderation

The term 'moderation' is derived from the word 'moderate'. Moderate is an adjective derived from the word moderation, which means 'not excessive or moderate'. In the Big Indonesian Dictionary Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), moderation means 'as a reduction in violence, or avoidance of extremism'. The term moderation comes from the word moderacioun, which means the quality of being moderate or the ability to take the middle path or reduction from rigid attitudes. The term moderation, moderari or moderatio (English) means to regulate, reduce, restrain or dampen. Moderation challenges radical or extreme views or attitudes (Patty 2021:42). The term moderation means a reduction in violence and avoidance of extremism, being able to take a moderate stance, not excessive or simple both in action and perspective. Implicitly, moderation means a person's ability to control oneself or self-restraint. Someone who is moderate is able to do something within the limits acceptable to reason and ethical morals in society. In Greek, the word moderation, sophrosunes, comes from 'sun-phronesis', which means wisdom or practical wisdom, namely the intellectual ability to moderate, mediate and take a middle ground. Thus, understanding sophrosunes as a person who has a pattern and attitude that knows limits and can self-regulate (Patty 2021:42).

According to Lukman Hakim Saifuddin (2019:7), the spirit of religious moderation is to seek a middle ground between two extreme poles in religion. On the one hand, there are religions who extremely convince that their teachings and theologies are absolute while others are infidel (kafir). It is so because one believe that there is only single interpretation of the scripture. They understand the scripture in extreme way. This group is commonly referred to as ultra-conservative.

On the other hand, there are also religious believers who are extreme in deifying reason to the point of disregarding the sanctity of religion or sacrificing the fundamental beliefs of their religion for misplaced tolerance towards followers of other religions. They are commonly referred to as extreme liberals. Both need to be moderated.

In Latin, the word 'moderatio' means 'moderation' (neither excess nor deficiency). The word also means self-control (from extreme attitudes of excess and deficiency). The Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) provides two meanings of the word moderation, namely: (1) reduction of violence and (2) avoidance of extremism. If it is said, 'that person is moderate', the sentence means that the person behaves reasonably, ordinarily and not extremely. In English, the word moderation is often used to mean average, core, standard or non-aligned. In general, moderate means prioritising balance in beliefs, morals and temperament, both when treating others as individuals and when dealing with state institutions.

In general, moderation implies that in this era, there needs to be a balance in beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, order, morality and the natural character of social relations in society, along with a sense of humanistic concern. When it comes to religious practices, moderation entails a balanced approach, meaning not being excessive in all matters, not being extreme in beliefs and not being arrogant or selfish (Muhamad et al. 2019:16). In religious practices, there should be a balance between scripture and context, revelation and reason as both originate from God; thus, neglecting either one means abandoning part of God's truth.

'Religious moderation can be understood as a perspective, attitude, and behavior that always takes a middle ground, always acts justly, and avoids extremism in religious matters'. Moderation should be understood as a collective commitment to maintaining perfect balance, where every member of society, regardless of their ethnicity, culture or background, learns to manage and overcome differences. Thus, religious moderation is closely related to fostering unity by having a sense of empathy, a heritage that teaches us to understand and empathise with those who are different from us (Saifuddin 2019:v).

The goal and urgency of religious moderation

Religious moderation has become a crucial principle that must be practiced in human life. The United Nations itself designated the year 2019 as the International Year of Moderation. Two years prior to that, the Global Moderation Movement initiative was also announced at the United Nations, resulting in a resolution entitled 'Moderation' in 2017 (Bagir & Sormin 2022:15). In Indonesia, religious moderation has been ratified as part of the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) for the years 2020–2024, established through Presidential Regulation No. 18/2020 (Bagir & Sormin 2022:45). The RPJMN outlines five priority activities, namely:

1. Strengthening the middle-path perspective, attitude and religious practices

2. Augmenting harmony and mutual respect among religious communities
3. Boosting the relationship between religion and culture
4. Improving the quality of religious life services
5. Development of the economy and religious resources

The core or focus of religious moderation is the 'middle path' and 'harmony', where the effort to seek the middle path is believed to strengthen harmony. This is based on the context of Indonesia, which is diverse or multicultural. In the understanding of religious moderation, it is a balanced religious attitude between adherence to one's own religion (exclusive) and respect for the religious practices of others with different beliefs (inclusive). Therefore, there needs to be a balance or middle path in religious practice. Thus, religious moderation aims to achieve harmony and harmonisation or peace, starting from the societal order at the local, national and global levels. To achieve balance for the preservation of civilisation and the creation of peace, the choice in religious moderation is to reject extremism and liberalism in religious life.

Thus, this will answer why religious moderation is a crucial matter in the life of Indonesia's multicultural society because:

- The 'teaching of balance' is believed to be able to serve as the main teaching of religions to uphold human dignity. Because in religious moderation, humanitarian values are highly respected.
- Religious moderation, rooted in the teaching of balance and respect for humanitarian values, is essential in upholding human dignity and fostering harmony in a diverse society. As our cultural strategy, it nurtures Indonesian identity amidst multiple interpretations and potential conflicts.
- In the context of Indonesian society, religious moderation is important in the practice of life; this is our cultural strategy in nurturing Indonesian identity.

In facing various threats of extremism and terrorism with various views, attitudes and actions that use religion as a pretext, religious moderation is a solution that is a key to creating a peaceful, harmonious and balanced religious life, both in personal life, family, society, especially in human life together as a whole (Saifuddin 2019:12). Pancasila is the ideology and philosophy of life of the Indonesian nation as a shared home in the life of the nation and state. The existence of Pancasila provides values regarding the importance of diversity as a context in Indonesia that must be approached openly. Mutual respect, respect and maintaining harmony are attitudes based on a worldview in the Bible and also in the values of Pancasila. In the context of plurality, the most important thing is an attitude that prioritises social and community interests.

There are several reasons why religious moderation is important. Firstly, considering the pluralistic and multicultural conditions of the Indonesian nation, it is crucial for its people to have a wise attitude, one of which is the presence of moderate religion. The characteristics of moderate religion

include: (1) understanding the reality of creation, (2) providing ease to others in practicing religion (this is also reinforced by the 1945 Constitution that grants freedom to the Indonesian people to choose their religion), (3) comprehensively and holistically understanding religious texts, (4) being open to the outside world, prioritising dialogue and adopting a tolerant attitude, (5) not harbouring bad prejudices and (6) prioritising collective interests over personal and group interests (Suharto 2021:284). Pluralism becomes dangerous because its view of religion does not have a single truth that can explain everything or a truth that can be believed in its certainty (Suharto 2021:331). However, each religion has its own unique characteristics that cannot be equated between one religion and another. This pluralistic attitude will eventually form relativistic and syncretistic attitudes in viewing religion. Secondly, there is the existence of exclusivist attitudes that ultimately make someone feel that their religion is the most correct and consider other religions as incorrect. This attitude can be called extremist because the person has not been able to understand the teachings of their religion correctly.

Religious moderation aims to seek a common ground between the two extreme poles in religion. There are some articles that have been shared in order to offer alternative for the harmony and tolerance between religions (Hutagalung, Rumbay & Ferinia 2022; Pangalila, Rotty & Rumbay 2024; Rumbay & Hartono 2021) but it also applies to religion and local culture (Berdame, Pinontoan & Rumbay 2024; Rumbay 2021; Rumbay & Siahaya 2023). It is characterised by openness, acceptance and cooperation among diverse groups. Therefore, everyone must be aware of listening to each other, training each other's ability to manage and overcome religious differences (Faozan 2022:56). Hence, every religious individual must have adequate and extensive religious knowledge to think and act wisely, control emotions to avoid exceeding limits, always be cautious and not consider oneself to have the interpretation of absolute truth. The goal of religious moderation is to promote peace, empathy and mutual respect for every difference in belief. Thus, religious moderation serves as a platform to cultivate tolerance in societal life to realise 'Trikerukunan Umat Agama' (Tri Harmony of Religious Communities) in Indonesia, which consists of internal harmony among religious communities, harmony among religious communities and harmony between religious communities and the government (Simanjuntak 2023:130). Without tolerance, the goal of religious moderation will not be achieved.

Another important aspect of religious moderation is, firstly, one of the essences of the presence of religion is to uphold the dignity of human beings as noble creatures of God. This means that religious moderation upholds human values, which means not belittling other religions for the sake of one's own religious interests. Secondly, the increasingly complex conditions of humans who have many problems and thoughts. Thirdly, it becomes a cultural strategy to preserve the 'Bhinneka Tunggal Ika'.

The principles and meanings of religious moderation

Two principles in religious moderation are fairness and balance. One of the basic principles of religious moderation is always maintaining balance between two things, such as the balance between reason and revelation, between the physical and the spiritual, between rights and obligations, between individual interests and communal welfare, between obligation and voluntariness, between religious texts and religious leaders' interpretation, between ideal concepts and reality and the balance between the past and the future.

Being fair means placing everything in its proper place and executing it well and promptly. Meanwhile, being balanced means always being in the middle between two poles. In terms of worship, for example, a moderate believes that practicing religion is a form of devotion to God by following His teachings, which are oriented towards efforts to honor humanity. According to Darji Darmodiharjo, fairness primarily means that a decision and action are based on objective norms, not subjective let alone arbitrary (Darmodiharjo 1979:47). In terms of religion, it means being fair in attitude and action towards differences in beliefs, not subjectively measuring the truth of other religions. Because, by evaluating the beliefs of other religions according to one's own standards, what is obtained is certainly the truth of one's own religious beliefs and the falsehood of others.

The second principle is balance. It is a term to describe a perspective, attitude and commitment to always side with justice, humanity and equality. The tendency to be balanced does not mean having no opinion. Those who have a balanced attitude mean they are firm, but not harsh because they always side with justice, only their advocacy does not go as far as depriving others of their rights, thus harming them. Balance can be considered as a form of perspective to do something in moderation, not excessively and also not deficient, not conservative and also not liberal.

Religious moderation is an approach that fosters harmony and respect among religious communities, promoting dialogue that values mutual respect and tolerance among them. Its main goal is to reduce conflicts and enhance understanding and cooperation among different religious communities. Religious moderation is a complex approach that involves collaboration from various parties. It requires commitment from religious leaders, civil society organisations and governments to create an environment that promotes interreligious harmony and minimises conflicts based on religion.

The main aspect of religious moderation is the ability to control oneself and the necessity to know oneself. Humans must first understand themselves as individuals with a moderate soul, so they have the ability to control themselves. A person with a moderate spirit will have views and

arguments based on strong rational and spiritual foundations in their life. They will be open to various issues and challenges and open to the development of science and technology. A person with a moderate spirit is realistic about diversity and appreciates the dynamics of diversity in society.

Religious moderation in the view of the Bible

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament provide insights into the understanding of religious moderation. It begins with the story of God's calling to Abraham (previously Abram). God called and sent him to leave his country, relatives and even his own family. Abram himself did not yet know which country he would go to or where he would go. This would later be shown by the Lord God (cf. Gn 12:1-9).

From the story of Abram, Albertus Patty cites Paul Tillich's view in the book 'Theology of Culture', providing an analysis of Abram's calling and mission within the framework of understanding religious moderation (Patty 2021:61). The story of Abram being called and sent by the Lord God to leave his country, relatives and family provides an understanding that God asked Abram to abandon his perception of primordial God, namely the family God, the tribal God and the God of his ancestral land. Abram's understanding of the primordial God, who only ruled the tribe and of course, his religion, had to be relinquished. The concept of the primordial God is a polytheistic God, where each tribe has a God who protects and guards them. Until now, many people like Abram believe that every tribe and every religion have an exclusive God.

In the call and commissioning of Abram, he came to understand that God could no longer be identified with his relatives or with his country. The God who spoke to Abram was neither a local God nor a primordial tribal God; instead, God was universal, transcending boundaries and not limited to any specific group, tribe, religion or region.

Still within this perspective, the 'chronic' illness experienced by religious communities is identifying God with their own group, whether it be family, religion or tribe. As a result, the exclusive and primordial God tends to create exclusive communities that feel triumphant or 'righteous' and get trapped in the absolutism of belief. This attitude reinforces the belief that 'I am right and others are wrong' or 'I am better than others', both in terms of faith and religion within their family, tribe or group. Thus, this attitude becomes an entry point for religious extremism. The call and commissioning of Abram to leave his relatives and go to the place that God would show him sends a message to relinquish claims of exclusivism and primordialism of 'ownership' over God. Abram's decision to leave his relatives is a spiritual journey to move away from narrow exclusivism and absolutism to encounter and face various valuable experiences.

Another story in the New Testament is the story of Peter and Cornelius (see Ac 10:24-35). In this story, it provides insight into a positive response to religious moderation in the

experiences of Peter and Cornelius. Initially, Peter had a narrow and exclusive understanding of religion, but he was transformed by God in a vision and conversation. In this vision, God showed Peter that he should not call anyone impure or unclean in relation to his encounter with Cornelius.

Rantung (2016:117–118) explains in the teaching of Peter's story that God educated Peter to be more open to people of different religions and critical of his own religious teachings. God commanded Peter to go, even stay overnight, at the house of Cornelius, a Roman army officer, a good officer but according to Peter's religious teachings considered as an unbeliever. Peter felt hesitant to carry out this command, in his understanding that visiting and then eating together with unbelievers was forbidden. God prepared Peter three times until his heart was ready and accepted God's command with an open heart.

God sent Peter to meet Cornelius, who had different religions and beliefs as well as different tribes, but Peter refused on the grounds that they were of different tribes and religions. This was already ingrained in his thinking, so then God gave him a vision of 'forbidden' food, which Peter rejected because it was forbidden. However, God also said, 'What God has made clean, do not call common' (Ac 10:15). God changed Peter's polarisation of views towards religious traditions with the actual situation in the field, namely people who needed help. Finally, Peter was transformed by God by prioritising humanity.

Christian Religious Education and peace education

Many problems arise because of differences in society. Differences often become triggers for conflict and violence, hence the importance of peace education in Christian Religious Education (CRE) as a preventive measure and to address conflicts and violence. Wiryadinata and Rumbay (2020) argued the dilemma faced by CRE in Indonesian context led to negative disruption. Therefore, the task of peace is a task entrusted by Christ to all people in creating an atmosphere of harmony, peace, justice and prosperity for all of God's creation. As Paul expressed in his apostolic mission, 'All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation' (2 Cor 5:18).

Christian Religious Education should develop education on attitudes of mutual respect, honour and humanistic solidarity by understanding, recognising and engaging in dialogue with one another. For instance, Rumbay et al. (2022) and Jura et al. (2024) proposed an integration between CRE and local culture in Minahasa. It implies to the schools and churches, educational activists that should create an atmosphere of harmony with everyone. Loving relationships across religions, ethnicities and statuses should be built and fostered. Such encounters enable people to get to know, understand and respect each other, avoiding ethnocentric attitudes, suspicion and behaviours that uphold the radical truth as belonging exclusively to certain groups.

Interaction in a diverse society needs to be maintained in an atmosphere that promotes national and state brotherhood. The implementation of CRE is expected to develop a universal attitude. Students and all church members are encouraged to socialise with anyone outside their own group. Everyone is given equal opportunity and treated equally. The story of the Good Samaritan can serve as a biblical foundation for learning (Lk 10:25–37). The CRE is a response to the task of peace education, where the Church, in which the people of God serve as peacemakers everywhere, to anyone regardless of background and differences. The peacemaking ministry is a task entrusted by Christ to His people (the church). Therefore, all church members have a responsibility to carry out the mission of Christ, which is the mission of peace, just as Christ made peace for all people with His love. Those who bring the mission of God's peace are called children of God. Peace education is important in every individual's life and begins in the family, church and community environment. Essentially, peace education teaches non-violence, love, compassion and respect for all life, as well as understanding the causes of conflict and providing knowledge and alternative ways of handling conflict (besides violence). Rantung states that peace education also seeks to change and transform the current human condition by changing the social structures and patterns that produce it and hopes to create human awareness to seek and find peaceful ways to solve problems.

The CRE has a specific component dedicated to developing peace education. Peace education is greatly needed, especially in Indonesia, where society is highly diverse (plural), consisting of various backgrounds including differences in religion, race, ethnicity, language, nationality, social class or group. The CRE in peace aims to enable learners to carry out the tasks of peace themselves, namely love, justice, truth, compassion, forgiveness, care, harmonisation, reconciliation, appreciation for all creatures and the environment for the integrity of creation by actualising knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to bring about behavioural change with the aim of preventing conflict and violence as well as conflict resolution (Rantung 2017:5).

Meanwhile, Nganggung (2001:260) argues that education (including religious education) serves the function of helping prevent conflicts from arising within diverse communities. Education also functions to create a more peaceful situation within diverse communities. The functions of education within society include:

- Preserving the culture of a society and transmitting it to the next generation. Schools are buildings of knowledge. Educational institutions reflect the dominant values of a society.
- Schools are the primary agents of socialisation. After the family and playgroups, schools continue the process of socialisation. Education instills values, norms and societal expectations in individuals. Education teaches individuals to acquire habits, appreciation and perspectives on life. Education teaches individuals' self-control.
- Education is where people learn the 'principles' that will underpin their behaviour as members of society.

However, in addition, the cultivation of important values in peace needs to be studied as a form of discipline of assessment. Firstly, this needs to be critically understood when we assess the situation and/or circumstances around us to see if peace has been achieved and what is needed to achieve it. Secondly, what we need to learn is the radical discipline of life like Christ, that forgiveness is part of peace, and having attitudes and patterns that do not harbour resentment and do not behave wickedly towards fellow human beings.

Conclusion

Christian peace education has great potential to offer religious moderation to the multicultural society in Indonesia. Through Christian peace education, individuals are encouraged to understand fundamental values such as love, forgiveness and tolerance taught by Jesus Christ. Thus, Christian peace education not only provides a deep understanding of religious teachings but also teaches the importance of building harmonious relationships with others, regardless of beliefs. This creates a strong foundation for the practice of religious moderation, where awareness of unity and equality among all members of society is emphasised. Through this education, individuals are expected to become active agents of peace and promote the creation of respectful and tolerant relationships amid the diverse religious communities in Indonesia.

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Author's contribution

D.A.R. declares that they are the sole author of this research article.

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