



## Theology of Christian education on leading toward spiritual transformation in the frame of religious moderation in digital society context

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### DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.30995/kur.v9i2.746>

### Article History

Submitted: August 05, 2023

Reviewed: August 20, 2023

Accepted: August 31, 2023

### Keywords:

digital society;  
religious moderation;  
spiritual transformation;  
theology of Christian  
education

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**Abstract:** Christian education is being challenged by the transformation of culture in a digital society and some problems that still occur due to religious diversity in Indonesia, such as intolerance, discrimination, and radicalism. Religious moderation is one of the priority programs of The Ministry of Religion Republic of Indonesia to achieve harmony and peace in society. Therefore, this research aims to explore the Theological study of Christian education in leading toward spiritual transformation based on religious moderation in a digital society. Using a qualitative research methodology with a Library-research approach, this study explored studies and literature reviews on the Theology of Christian education, spiritual transformation, and religious moderation. Based on the results of the data analysis in the literature review, This research formulates spiritual transformation in the frame of Religious moderation, such as transforming into a righteous life, loving life, and good citizenship.

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## Introduction

Developments in the digital era have led to various changes in lifestyle in society and religion. Digital technology has provided multiple conveniences to support human activities daily and even to access vast amounts of information, so people are addicted to digital technology. Along with this development, Religious harmony is often disrupted because, firstly, issues of intolerance, discrimination, and radicalism, which rapidly spread through social media.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, open debates and inter-religions show the gap among religions; and thirdly, hoaxes often provoke other groups of religion.<sup>2</sup> Religion brings peace to mankind. Juwaini wrote that

<sup>1</sup> Heni Zaenudin and Suwatno, *Information Literacy For The Net Generation To Anticipate The Danger Of Intolerance*, Jurnal ASPIKOM, Vol. 4, No.1 (2019), 83-95. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.24329/aspikom.v4i1.480>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibnu Azka, et.al., *HOAX AND INTOLERANCE: Implications of Social Media Reporting on the Emergence of Intolerance in Muslim Communities in Indonesia*, Al-Adyan: Journal of Religious Studies, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2023),85-98.

religion is needed for the soul of humans to surrender to the Divine Rabbi.<sup>3</sup> Thus, religious life is the characteristic of the society. However, the harmony of religious life still often experiences conflict for various reasons.

Some relevant research about Christian Education and Religious moderation in digital society are: First, Lourine Science Joseph described that religious moderation in the family from the perspective of Christian Religious Education: balancing between loving God and others, having an attitude of tolerance and respecting differences, Building awareness to feel differences.<sup>4</sup> Second, Efendi Suratman et al., moderation based on the law of love will strengthen unity and unity within pluralism,<sup>5</sup> and third, Kertamukti et al. concluded that using social media is a strong strategy for Generation Z in building religious moderation.<sup>6</sup>

Based on the relevant research above, a study of spiritual transformation in a religious moderation framework is needed. Khoe Yao Tung wrote that the purpose of Christian education is to facilitate the maturation of the image and likeness of God.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it is necessary to build a theological foundation of Christian Education to sustain its calling in the midst of every change, which is Religious moderation and digital society. Therefore, this research aims to explore the Theological foundation of Christian Education on leading toward spiritual transformation in the frame of religious moderation in digital society. This theological foundation may contribute to Christian Education for strengthening religious moderation.

This research is using exploratory qualitative methods. It is exploring findings and exploring every possibility that exists because initial knowledge about the problem still needs to be improved; a literature-study approach (library research) analyzes a literature review of the theology of Christian education, religious moderation, and digital society. The data comes from library data in the form of text in books, articles, papers, and other written sources. This study describes and analyzes comprehensively Christian education in producing spiritual transformation within the framework of religious moderation. Biblical texts as a biblical source for building a theological foundation of Christian education to achieve the concept of strengthening Christian education to lead to spiritual transformation in the frame of religious moderation in Indonesia in the context of digital society.

## **Christian Education and Religious Moderation**

Thomas F. Edison wrote that the philosophy of Christian education is a basic Christian value for the future: the ability to develop human potential, love for God, love for fellow human beings, love for the country, and sensitivity to changing times.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Christian Education must be rooted in a Biblical foundation to build the theology of Christian Education. Officially, the Ministry of Religion Republic of Indonesia promotes religious moderation as the priority program, "Religious Moderation" is understood as a balanced religious attitude between the practice of one's religion (exclusive) and respect for the religious practices of other people of

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<sup>3</sup> Juwaini, *Moderasi Beragama Dalam Masyarakat Multikultural: Esoterisme, Toleransi Dan Dinamika Keagamaan Di Era Modernisasi*, (Banda Aceh: Bandar Publishing, 2023), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Lourine Sience Joseph, "Moderation of religion in the family from the Perspective of Christian Religious Education," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Kristen (JUPAK)* Vol.3, No. 2 (2023), 1  
<https://doi.org/10.52489/jupak.v3i2.146>.

<sup>5</sup> E.Suratman, et.al. *Moderasi Beragama dalam Perspektif Hukum Kasih*, Prosiding Pelita Bangsa, Vol. 1, No.2, (2021), 81–90.

<sup>6</sup> Rama Kertamukti, et.al., *Instagram Religious Moderation Dialogue Space for Generation Z*, *Nyimak Journal of Communication*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (2022), 229–250.

<sup>7</sup> Khoe Yao Tung, *Filsafat Pendidikan Kristen* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit ANDI, 2013), 324.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas F. Edison, *Pendidikan Nilai-Nilai Kristiani: Menabur Norma Nilai* (Bandung: Kalam Hidup, 2018), 48

different beliefs (inclusive).<sup>9</sup> Qowaid et al. wrote that in the Indonesian society context, religious moderation is mainly needed because Indonesian society is a multi-religious country. Exclusivism and radicalism are a threat to the unity and oneness of Indonesia. A moderate religious perspective is a middle way to fight partisan religious perspectives, such as left Islam (Islam Kiri) and right Islam (Islam Kanan), left Christian (Kristen Kiri) and right Christian (Kristen Kanan), and so on.<sup>10</sup>

Harls Evan R. Siahaan and Munatar Kause said that a passionate attitude is needed as an expression, an indicator of love and faithfulness of someone to their religious teaching; only the portion should not be excessive.<sup>11</sup> Further, Siahaan described that fanatical attitudes are stimulated to become bloated and lead to radicalism, which triggers the emergence of sentiments between groups and leads to horizontal conflict.<sup>12</sup> Andar Gunawan Pasaribu wrote that theological education in the frame of moderation must be able to direct students from an ethnocentric perspective to a perspective that sees multiculturalism as a necessity and a blessing from God.<sup>13</sup>

Failing to apply this fanatic attitude must be prevented in a life of religious moderation. Further, the basic principle in religious moderation is maintaining a balance, for example, the balance between reason and revelation, between the physical and spiritual, between rights and obligations, between individual interests and communal benefit, between necessity and voluntarism, between religious texts and the *ijtihad* of religious figures., between ideal ideas and reality, as well as the balance between past and future.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, an understanding of religious moderation can be determined when someone can stand in a balanced position. This understanding of balance becomes a frame for formulating the spiritual transformation based on the teachings of the Bible.

## Christian Education and Digital Society

Carlos Mondragon asserted that “No religion operates in a vacuum.”<sup>15</sup> thus the existence of Christian Education in digital society determines the reality of human context. Then Garner explained that, digital media is not created and used in a vacuum, but is rather a social construction and when used, is guided by social and institutional values.<sup>16</sup> Garner explained that technology is an instrument that may support the work of religion in a digital society context. Digital society is usually called a “*netizen or warrant.*” In a cultural study called the “digital tribe” and “digital native”. Marc Prensky used the term “digital immigrants,” he

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<sup>9</sup> Tim Penyusun Kementerian Agama RI, “Moderasi Beragama” (Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI 2019),18.

<sup>10</sup> Qowaid, Moh Murtadio and Supriyadi, “The Influence of Islamic Religious Education and the Intensity of the Use of Gawai toward the Religious Moderation” dalam *INRE*, 8-9 Oktober 2020, Doi: 10.4108/eai.8-10-2019.2294513.

<sup>11</sup> Harls Evan R. Siahaan dan Munatar Kause, *Hospitalitas sebagai Laku Hidup Menggereja dalam Bingkai Moderasi Beragama di Indonesia*, DANUM PAMBELUM: Jurnal Teologi dan Musik Gereja Vol. 2 No 2 (2022), IAKN Palangkaraya,

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Andar Gunawan Pasaribu, Peran Pendidikan Teologi Berbingkai Moderasi Beragama Dalam Pengembangan Sikap Toleransi Mahasiswa, *HARATI : Jurnal Pendidikan Kristen* Vol.3.No.1. April 2023, IAKN Palangkaraya.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid,19

<sup>15</sup> Carlos Mondragon, *Like Leaven in the Dough: Protestant Social Thought in Latin America, 1920-1950* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing House, 2011), 28.

<sup>16</sup> Garner, S., 2013, ‘Theology and the new media’, in H.A. Campbell (ed.), *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in new media worlds*, pp. 253–256, Routledge, Abingdon.

defined that “those of us who were not born into the digital world but had, at some later point in our lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology.<sup>17</sup> therefore, digital society emerges through learning and interaction with the digital environment, and this digital society influences all cultural tribes in society, so it becomes the common culture of all tribes immersed in society. Then, the environment of digital society is called Digital Space, also called cyberspace, the space where digital society exists.

Anthony Le Duc defined cyberspace as where people worldwide, with their diverse cultural, religious, and social contexts, can come together and engage in mutual exchange, sharing, and even support, reinforcing the idea that the human need for communion can and ought to surpass any hindrances. If relationships ought not to be restricted by culture, gender, or social status, they must also not be held back by any distance, whether physical or virtual.<sup>18</sup> The lifestyle of digital society prefers to be present in cyberspace. This scene happens almost everywhere, such as in houses, restaurants, public transportation, etc. The locality of digital reality is at the same time (UNK) nowhere,’ and at the same time “everywhere”. Therefore, internet connection is the primary way to be present in cyberspace; without connection, we live by ourselves without interacting with others.

Floridi formulated the significant transformations of the digital society in three forms: First, the blurring of the distinction between reality and virtuality; Second, the blurring of the difference between human, machine, and nature; and third, the reversal from information scarcity to information abundance.<sup>19</sup> Dreyer stated that, in a digital society, “people are connected to total strangers, with whom they never had any physical contact. People connect via networks in virtual reality. For many, virtual and digital connectedness had become more important than any physical reality or relationships.”<sup>20</sup> Floridi and Dreyer describe a major transformation in digital society as the movement of life from reality to virtuality. Heidi Campbell identified four common discourse strategies used to frame internet technology: first, a spiritual medium facilitating religious experience; second, a sacramental space suitable for sacred use; third, a tool promoting religion or religious practice; and fourth, a technology for affirming religious life.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, using internet technology in religious activities is one of the opportunities for Christian Education to answer the challenges in building spiritual transformation in the frame of religious moderation.

## **Spiritual Transformation in the Frame of Religious Moderation**

A. M. Marpaung explained the elements of Christian Education are God as the initiator of education, the Bible as the primary source of learning, Christ as the center of learning, and the Holy Spirit helps and leads in the learning process, and Growing and Equipping believers to be a disciple as the aim of Christian Education.<sup>22</sup> Marpaung concluded that growing and equipping are the aims of Christian education; therefore, Christian education needs to take breakthrough steps to work and have an impact in the midst of diversities to pursue religious

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<sup>17</sup> Marc Prensky, *Digital Natives & Digital Immigrants*, Proceeding : 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Virtual University Bratislava, 2007, 1–6.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Le Duc, *Cybertheology: Theologizing in the Digital Age*. SSRN Electronic Journal. 10.2139, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> L Floridi, ed., *The Onlife Manifesto: Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era* (New York: Springer, 2015), 7–16.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Heidi Campbell, *Spiritualising the Internet. Uncovering Discourses and Narratives of Religious Internet Usage* (Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet: Volume 01.1 Special Issue on Theory and Methodology, (2005), 20-21.

<sup>22</sup> A.M.Marpaung, *Gereja yang Belajar* ( Yogyakarta: Andi offset,2017), 22-34

moderation. Robert W. Pazmino quoted Lawrence Cremin, who wrote that Christian education produces change, renewal, and reformation in individuals, groups, and social structures due to the power of the Holy Spirit to make them more similar to God's will, which is stated in the Scriptures and the person of Jesus Christ, and all other results of this effort. According to Lawrence Cremin, 24 Christian Education produces three things: transformation, renewal, and reformation in individuals, groups, and society. Samuel Selanno wrote about Christian education in Religious moderation; he said that there are two basic entities, which are Biblical-based which is the basis for teaching (Didache), and social-based which is social issues (issue Oriented), including religious moderation<sup>23</sup> Selanno emphasizes that Biblical teaching leads people to have a spiritual transformation that brings impact in social life and religious life. In other words, a spiritual life based on biblical teaching can pursue a moderate spiritual life.

Therefore, Christian spiritual transformation in the frame of religious moderation becomes the uniqueness of Christianity in Indonesia: transformed into righteous life, transformed into loving life, and transformed into good citizenship.

### ***Transformed unto Righteous Life***

Christian education aims for people to know the truth about God, Jesus Christ, and the Bible and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior to pursue the behavior change called the character of Christ.<sup>24</sup> Another word that Christian education aims for is the righteous life. Being transformed into a righteous life must be consistent with Biblical teaching, It is the primary thing to have a spiritual transformation. Apostle Paul reminded his disciples about consistency: hold on to the doctrine (1Cor. 11:2; 2Thes. 2:15; 1Tim.4:16); emphasize worshiping Jesus Christ as God (Rom 16:27; 1Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6); Bible is the Word of God which inspired by God (2Tim 3:16); beware of the human tradition of the world and teachings of demons (Col. 2:8; I Tim. 4:1); avoid false prophets who eagerly deceive people into leaving God (2Cor. 11:13; 2Thes 2:9; 2Tim 4:14-15). Apostle Paul acknowledged his unchangeable doctrine about God's truth, though he interacted with various cultures of the people.

In the midst of a digital society with the new reality, Hwang Byung June commented that the Gospel does not change in Christian history, but the vessel in which it is contained can change.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Christian Education must emphasize understanding of Biblical teaching based on God's work through the life of Jesus as the foundation for having a righteous life. Consistency in Doctrine is one effort of Christian education to achieve transformation into a righteous life. Arthur Holmes popularized that "All truth is God's truth wherever it is found."<sup>26</sup> Holmes believed that God's truth is unchangeable everywhere. Norman L. Geisler described the Truth: Not only is truth correspondence, but truth is also absolute. Evangelical theology is predicated on the premise that the Bible is the truth (Jo. 17:17), not just a truth; it is God's Word (Jo. 10:34-35), and God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18; Tit 1:2). Thus Christianity is not just true for me, it is true for everyone. It is not only true subjectively, but it is also true objectively.<sup>27</sup> The Bible is the Word of God, which is the basic foundation of the teachings of the Christian

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<sup>23</sup> Samuel Selanno, Moderasi Beragama Dalam Bingkai Pendidikan Agama Kristen Kehidupan. *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan*, 8(13), (2022), 528-536. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6978815>

<sup>24</sup> A.M.Marpaung, 17.

<sup>25</sup> Byung-June Hwang, "COVID-19 New Normal Era, Pastoral Leadership in Need of Changes and Responses of Korean Churches," *Theology and Praxis* 75(2021): 459-487.

<sup>26</sup> Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth Is God's Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 8.

<sup>27</sup> Norman L Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Volume One* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publisher,2002), 78.

faith and the basic foundation of the practice of the Christian faith. It is not a matter of time, culture, or nation. God's Word is relevant every time and everywhere because it is timeless. It is reasonable that the Bible may exist until nowadays and continuously impacts the world.

### ***Transformed unto Loving Life and Good Citizenship***

Evans Dusep Dongoran wrote that Have a good attitude in society, such as a balance between loving God and loving others, building tolerance among religions without losing their identity, and accepting and appreciating the reality of differences in their relationship with society, including with friends at school.<sup>28</sup> Christianity is identified as loving life as the greatest and the most important commandment. Jesus says we shall love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind as the first and great commandment and our neighbor as ourselves (Mat. 22:37-39). This teaching urges Christians to Love God and all humans kind without exception; thus, openness to differences is an implementation of love for fellow human beings. Parker J Palmer said that the goal of knowledge from love is the reunification and reconstruction of broken selves and worlds. A knowledge born of compassion aims not at exploiting and manipulating creation but at reconciling the world itself.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, education is to strengthen with love. Further, Parmer said that knowing is an act of love, the act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own."<sup>30</sup> Thus, imparting sound teachings based on Bible truth generates abundant love for all, including others from different religions. Moreover, spiritual transformation is balanced between knowledge, belief, and behavior.

Sophisticated technology will not be able to restore intolerant relationships to become tolerant; only good and correct Religious Education can build an attitude of intolerance into strong tolerance as an implementation part of religious moderation.<sup>31</sup> Thus, in a digital society, many people experience spiritual vulnerability; in this situation, Christian education must prioritize a life of love as the primary goal in the learning process. To implement Spiritual transformation into a loving life, Christian education in digital society should exist in reality and virtual worlds. Existence in the context can be applied through upgrading the tools; Medrano stated that digital media are more than a medium to deliver a message, and, as a result, we need a new metaphor that conceives media as an environment, a context, a culture.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, upgrading the tool should be the priority of Christian education in the context of digital culture.

Religious moderation is not only the relation of inter-religious but also the relation between inter-religion and government. Thus, the Bible taught that Christians are commanded to be subject to the governing authorities, for they are God's servants who work for the good of the citizens. Paul writes, "Let every soul be subject to the higher authorities. There is no authority but God; God ordains the existing authorities. So that the one resisting the authority resists the ordinance of God; and the ones who resist will receive judgment to themselves" (Rom. 13:1-2). The word "subject" to government, in Romans 13:1 and Titus 3:1, uses the same

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<sup>28</sup> Evans Dusep Dongoran et al, "'Mananamkan Sikap Moderasi Beragama Melalui Pendidikan Agama Kristen Di SMAN 1 Bintan Timur,' REAL COSTER:," *Jurnal Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat* 3, no. 1 (2020): 7–11.

<sup>29</sup> Parker J Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (New York: Harper One Publication, 1993), 8.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> E.Suratman, et.al. Moderasi Beragama dalam Perspektif Hukum Kasih. *Prosiding Pelita Bangsa*, 1(2), (2021), 81–90.

<sup>32</sup> Medrano, A.M., 2004, 'Making religious media: Notes from the field', in P. Horsfield, M.E. Hess & A.M. Medrano (eds.), *Belief in media: Cultural perspectives on media and Christianity*, pp. 147–148, Ashgate, Burlington.

word in Greek “ὑποτάσσω (*hypotasso*); it indicates that Paul taught that there is an intimate relation between the government and divine power, and then he often refers to the government as a servant of God who conveys God’s will unto this world.<sup>33</sup> The phrase “subject to government” refers to spiritual transformation into good citizenship.

Therefore, religious moderation is one of the priority programs of the Indonesian Government. Religious moderation is described in three pillars: the thought of moderation, the action of moderation, and the movement of moderation.<sup>34</sup> As good citizens, Christians should participate in supporting the government to think, act, and move unto moderation to create an Indonesian society that lives in harmony and peace as a characteristic of a religious Indonesian society

## Conclusion

Christian Education is called for transformation, renewal, and reform in various contexts, including religious moderation and digital society. Through the analysis of all literature reviews and discussion, the theological foundation for Christian education aims the spiritual transformation in the frame of religious moderation in digital society as Transformed unto Righteous Life as the root of Christianity, Transformed unto Loving Life as the fruit of Christianity and Transformed unto Good Citizenship as the responsibility of Christianity. Based on this conclusion, this research gives recommendations for Christian educators to be equipped and give attention to strengthening Religious moderation as a contribution to the Indonesian Government. I hope this research may give the knowledge to inspire other researchers to develop the role of Christian Education in religious moderation.

## Acknowledgment

This research is a collaboration research with the names listed as the authors in this article. Thank you to the second author, Byung June Hwang, for joining in this research, who has given some references and ideas to elucidate the theoretical frame of this research.

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<sup>33</sup> Donald Guthrie, *Teologi Perjanjian Baru I* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2008). Hal 136-137

<sup>34</sup> Tim Penyusun Kementerian Agama RI, “Moderasi Beragama” (Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI 2019), 18.

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