

Research Article

The Role of Christian Theology in Pluralism and Secularism in The Era of Globalization

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Abstract. This article examines the role of Christian theology in dealing with pluralism and secularism in the era of globalization. The era of globalization is marked by an increasing plurality of religions, cultures, and various perspectives on life that in many ways are moving away from a theocentric perspective. In that context, Christian theology is faced with the responsibility to be present as a reflective and transformative force that carries messages of peace, truth, and certainty of faith. This research aims to explore the role of Christian theology in an increasingly pluralistic society and influenced by the currents of secularism that have the potential to erode the values of faith. The method used is a literature study by analyzing various literature related to the concept of Christian theology, the impact of secularism on the life of faith, and various relevant theological responses in dealing with these challenges. The results of the study show that inclusive theological education, a conciliatory approach in interreligious relations, a holistic transformation of church life, and the active participation of the church in social service are concrete forms of the contribution of Christianity in a pluralistic society. Through this approach, Christian theology functions not only as a doctrinal framework, but also as a praxis that presents the values of the Kingdom of God in social life.

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1. Introduction

Indonesia is a country that has a very wide diversity, covering ethnicity, language, culture, and religion. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2023, more than 1,300 ethnic groups and around 700 regional languages are recorded throughout the

archipelago (Central Statistics Agency, 2023). This diversity makes Indonesia a pluralistic and pluralistic society. On the other hand, Indonesia's openness to global dynamics has also accelerated the entry of various influences from the international world. The development of technology and the increasingly intense currents of globalization not only bring progress, but also introduce various ideas, including secularism. As a result, people are increasingly exposed to perspectives that tend to separate religious values from public life.

Normatively, religious diversity should be the basis for the creation of a peaceful and harmonious life, considering that every religion in essence reflects God's love for the world. Similarly, technological advances should encourage humans to admire and realize God's greatness even more, because all forms of development are inseparable from His grace.

But in reality, the conditions that occur are not always like that. Religious diversity often gives rise to intolerance, while technological advances in globalization often contribute to the development of secularism, which tends to separate human life from spiritual and religious values. Sinaga and Duha said: Globally, Christian churches in various places are facing a decline in the number of congregations and a fading influence, largely due to a secular mindset that prioritizes worldly values and often overrides spiritual values. Meanwhile, the Setara Institute's 2024 Report on Religious and Religious Causes (KBB) revealed that there were 402 acts of violation of Freedom of Religion and Belief. SETARA highlights three main issues: the surge in acts of intolerance and discrimination, the increasing use of blasphemy articles, and the continued disruption to the establishment and operation of places of worship. One example of the latest intolerance event occurred on July 27, 2025 in Padang Sarai Village, Koto Tengah District, Padang City. The incident was in the form of persecution of members of the Indonesian Loyal Christian Church (GKSI) who were worshipping at the local prayer house. This phenomenon shows that intolerance and secularism do not appear automatically, but are social constructs that are formed as a result of a lack of adequate theological understanding. Limitations in comprehensively understanding theological teachings can lead to deviations in the perspective of diversity and the relationship between faith and public life.

In this context, the role of Christian theology has become very significant in facing the challenges of pluralism and secularism. Jesus Christ as the center of the Christian faith provides a concrete example in responding to diversity. He shows an inclusive attitude by respecting differences, both for those with different theological views, diverse spiritual status, and different social backgrounds. This attitude is reflected in His interactions with Samaritan women, tax collectors, and people considered sinners by the people of his day.

On the other hand, Jesus is also the main example in facing the current of secularization. He consistently held to God's word as the basis of His life and ministry. This was evident in the trial in the wilderness as well as in His suffering until His death on the cross. Moreover, in his teachings, Jesus often used the phrase "it is written," which affirmed his obedience to the authority of God's word, not to one's own ability.

Thus the role of Christian theology is very important in answering the challenges of Pluralism and secularism. Through this paper, the author wants to dig deeper into how Christian Theology can play a role as a foundation in building tolerance between religions and building a Christian faith that is not secularism.

2. Literature Review

Christian theology can be understood as a systematic study of the teachings and beliefs of the Christian faith centered on the person of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In this

framework, love is a fundamental principle that shapes and directs the lives of the people, thus encouraging the realization of mutual respect and love for others. Christian theology emphasizes God's universal work of salvation, thus encouraging its people to live a love that transcends the boundaries of a particular group or identity. Thus, this teaching of love becomes the basis for an inclusive and tolerant attitude in social life

The concept of love taught and practiced by Jesus Christ has significant theological implications in the face of secularism tendencies. The love in Jesus' teachings is not only ethical-horizontal, but also rooted in a deep relationship with God. Therefore, the practice of true love cannot be separated from the spiritual dimension and obedience to God's will. In this context, the teachings of Christ's love encourage Christians not to get caught up in a secular lifestyle that separates the life of faith from everyday reality. On the contrary, love becomes an integrative principle that unites faith and action, so that the life of the believer remains oriented to divine values in the midst of secularization.

The modern world is increasingly influenced by pluralism and secularism. Pluralism refers to the diversity of religions, cultures, and views of life in a society. On the one hand, pluralism can be a constructive space to build dialogue and deepen understanding between individuals and between religions. But on the other hand, pluralism also has the potential to test the integrity of faith if it is not responded to appropriately and wisely. On the other hand, secularism is an understanding that positions religion as a private affair that should not be involved in the public sphere. In practice, secularism often encourages a shift in values, where the role of faith in God is increasingly marginalized in social life and in the world of education.

Both realities present significant challenges. Christians live in a context full of various ideologies and value systems that often contradict the teachings of the Bible. Some of the forms of challenges that arise include the development of moral relativism that denies the existence of absolute truth, excessive practices of tolerance that have the potential to lead to syncretism, and a narrow understanding of theology that can trigger the emergence of intolerance.

Christian theology has a strategic role in shaping the attitude of tolerance of the people towards the religious diversity around them, as well as fortifying the faith from the influence of secularism which has the potential to reduce spiritual values in the life of the congregation. In this context, the church is understood as an agent of peace that plays an active role in encouraging interfaith dialogue and building mutual respect in the midst of a pluralistic society. The doctrine of love, which is at the core of the Gospel, provides a strong moral foundation to reject the practice of intolerance while counteracting the influence of secularism that tends to ignore the spiritual dimension of life.

Activities such as interreligious dialogue, cross-community social cooperation, and multicultural education are concrete manifestations of the application of Christian theology in building a harmonious and pluralistic society. Through an open and inclusive understanding and implementation of theology, Christians are not only able to avoid the influence of secularism, but also play an active role in maintaining harmony between religions and creating social peace. Thus, Christian theology is not solely understood as an academic discipline, but also as a contextual and relevant life praxis in the life of a pluralistic society.

3. Research Methods

This research is a qualitative research with a descriptive approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is relevant to examine social phenomena, theological

understanding, and the life experiences of Christians in the context of pluralistic societies and environments influenced by secularism. The purpose of this research is to gain a deep understanding of how Christian theology is understood and implemented in forming an attitude of tolerance between religious communities, as well as fortifying the people from the influence of secularism. The method used is library research, by collecting data from various sources such as theological books, scientific journals, articles, ecclesiastical documents, and other relevant sources. This approach allows researchers to critically analyze a wide range of theological thoughts as well as the reflections of experts related to the research topic.

Data Source

1. Primary data, i.e. Christian theological documents such as the Bible, the writings of contemporary Christian theologians, and official church documents.
2. Secondary data, namely other relevant literature such as scientific books, journals, previous research results, and articles related to religious pluralism and tolerance.

Data collection was carried out through document studies and text analysis. The researcher reads, notes, and analyzes various relevant literature sources to obtain information that supports the research objectives.

Data analysis was carried out by descriptive-analytical method. The data that has been collected is compiled, classified, and critically analyzed using a predetermined theoretical framework. The researcher interprets the content of the literature used to draw profound conclusions about the role of Christian theology in encouraging religious tolerance in pluralistic societies.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Definition of Christian theology

Etymologically, the term "theology" comes from the Greek, which is *theos* which means God and *logos* which means word, thought, or ratio. Thus, theology can be understood as a rational reflection on God. In the Christian context, theology not only addresses the existence and attributes of God, but also examines how God reveals Himself specifically through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christian Theology is a systematic and in-depth study of the main teachings of the Christian faith. This study focuses on the understanding of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the church, and eternal life, all of which are rooted in Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments.

Christian theology systematically teaches various fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, such as the Trinity, salvation, resurrection, and judgment. In addition, Christian theology also has a practical dimension that emphasizes the formation of the moral life and spiritual character of the people, as well as social life, so that theological teachings are not only understood conceptually, but also manifested in the practice of daily life. J.D. May said Christian theology does not only live as a doctrine, but as a praxis force that encourages the creation of a peaceful, just, and respectful society in diversity (John D'Arcy May 1998).

In the context of a society characterized by a diversity of religions, cultures, and views of life and influenced by the currents of secularism, Christian theology has undergone significant developments in its approach. Initially, Christian theology tended to be internal and exclusive, but in its development it has shifted to become more open to dialogue and social involvement across religions. The Church and theologians are increasingly aware of the importance of presenting a Christian faith that is able to respond to the reality of plurality and the influence of secularism, not only at the doctrinal level, but also through concrete actions

in the life of society. As a response to the diversity and dynamics of the times, a contextual theological approach has developed that considers local social and cultural conditions. This approach encourages Christians to actively actualize the values of love, justice, and peace, including in relationships with followers of other religions. In its implementation, various churches began to build cooperation in social activities, open spaces for dialogue, and engage in interfaith programs to maintain harmony in living together.

In addition to practical approaches, theologians also develop contextual methods of interpreting the Bible so that Christian teachings remain relevant and applicable in pluralistic societies, while fortifying the people from the influence of secularism. Through this approach, the Christian faith is not only understood as a personal belief, but also as a transformational force that is able to unite and bring peace in the midst of diversity.

Thus, the development of Christian theology in the context of a pluralistic society reflects a serious effort to make Christianity a force that encourages the realization of tolerance and social peace. Universal Gospel values, such as loving one's neighbor and living together peacefully, are used as the basis for building healthy interfaith relationships. The essential values of the Gospel are clearly reflected in the life and example of Jesus Christ. Through His life, Jesus demonstrated the practice of love, acceptance, and respect for others, thus becoming the basis for the realization of tolerance. At the same time, His consistent obedience to God's will affirms the integration between faith and life, thus becoming a model that fortifies the people from the tendency of secularism that separates the spiritual dimension from everyday reality.

The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches the concept of perfect love. The love taught by Jesus is fundamentally different from the concept of love that is commonly understood in the world's perspective. In general, the world tends to view love as a reciprocal response—loving those who love and hating those who hate. Rather, the love taught by Jesus goes beyond that principle of reciprocity. He taught that everyone should love the enemy and pray for those who are hostile. In addition, Jesus also emphasized not to repay evil with evil, but to repay it with goodness. Thus, love in the teaching of Christ has a higher ethical and spiritual dimension, which aims to restore relationships and bring peace, even in the midst of conflict.

The gospel of Jesus Christ also emphasizes the importance of respecting differences. In the practice of His ministry, Jesus did not limit himself to the Israelites alone, but also established relationships with other groups, such as the Samaritans, who at that time were viewed as ethnically and religiously different. In addition, Jesus also got along with and accepted those who were considered sinners and unclean by society. Through His attitude and actions, Jesus showed that every human being has equal worth before God. Therefore, the teachings of the Gospel encourage the people to develop an attitude of mutual respect, acceptance of differences, and build inclusive relationships in common life.

Jesus' life and ministry were not carried out according to worldly patterns or values (secularism), but were entirely based on God's will. In every aspect of His ministry, Jesus acted on what He received from the Father, so that all of His work was the embodiment of obedience to the divine will. He does not separate the task of service and the relationship with God, but integrates the two completely.

Thus, the Gospel taught by Jesus affirms the importance of unity between faith and action, so that the life of the believer is not affected by secularism that tends to separate the spiritual dimension from everyday life.

4.2 Pluralism in the Era of Globalization

Indonesia is known as a pluralistic country because it consists of various ethnicities, cultures, languages, and religions. This plurality reflects the reality of plurality that is the hallmark of the nation's life. Pluralism not only recognizes the existence of differences, but also requires an attitude of active acceptance and appreciation for these diversity. In a pluralistic society, every group has an equal right to live, express their views, exercise their beliefs, and participate in social life without discrimination.

The concept of pluralism as a recognition and appreciation of diversity becomes very relevant when applied in the Indonesian context. As a country with a very high level of pluralism, Indonesia is not only a place where differences are real and alive, but also a testing ground for the practical application of pluralism values. What is generally understood as pluralism—that is, accepting and respecting differences—must be truly applied in the social, political, and religious life of the Indonesian nation. Thus, the theoretical understanding of pluralism finds its practical form in the dynamics of a pluralistic Indonesian society.

However, the condition of this pluralistic society also has the potential to give rise to various social problems, including the emergence of intolerance that can disrupt a peaceful and harmonious life. Religious intolerance often has an impact on discrimination against minority groups. In such situations, minority groups tend to be in a vulnerable position, so they have to be more careful, and may even experience fear in expressing their beliefs and practices openly.

4.3. The Challenges of Secularism in the Era of Globalization

Secularism comes from the Latin word *saeculum* meaning "this age" or "worldly," which emphasizes aspects of life in the world that are considered separate from the spiritual or religious dimension. In general, secularism seeks to separate religious life from areas that are considered to be public domains, such as politics, law, and education, with the aim of maintaining state neutrality towards religion. This is done to ensure that no single religion has a dominant influence or authority in public decisions that affect all heterogeneous societies (Jamaluddin 2023) . However, secularism is not only about the separation between religion and the state, but also about a way of looking at the world that emphasizes more on rationality, science, and humanism (Francis Sili 2021) . Under the influence of secularism, the basis for determining moral and ethical values is no longer entirely derived from religious teachings, but rather rests on rationality and human experience. In this context, issues such as human rights, social justice, and individual freedom are often discussed in a secular framework, where the ethical foundation does not depend on religious texts, but on rational and universal principles

Secularism has a significant influence on daily life, by encouraging the view that faith is a private domain that should not be involved in the policy-making process or public decision-making. Supryanto and Rodiah said that secularism, as a view that places public life free from religious influence, is increasingly strengthened in various aspects of modern life. (Heri Supriyanto 2022) This condition can affect the way Christians see it, so there is a tendency to assume that scientific knowledge and rationality are the only valid approaches to understanding reality. Meanwhile, religious beliefs are seen as subjective and have little place in academic discourse.

4.4. The Contribution of Christian Theology in the Face of Intolerance and Secularism

The contribution of Christian theology in the face of plurality and secularism is rooted in a solid theological foundation and is manifested in the contextual praxis of faith life. One of the main foundations is the concept of *imago Dei*, which is the belief that man is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27). This understanding affirms that every human being has equal dignity before God, regardless of differences in religion, culture, or social background. Thus, Christian theology provides a normative basis for respect for diversity as well as rejection of all forms of discrimination and intolerance.

In addition, Jesus Christ's teachings on love are central to Christian ethics in responding to plurality. The love taught by Jesus is inclusive and transcends social and religious boundaries, as seen in His relationships with marginalized groups. This principle of love encourages Christians to develop mutual respect, build harmonious social relationships, and create a space for constructive dialogue with others of different faiths.

In the face of secularism, Christian theology also plays a role in affirming the importance of integration between faith and life. Through the formation of a strong faith, the people are equipped to understand and live Christian teachings in their entirety, so that they are not easily influenced by views that separate the spiritual dimension from public life. This coaching includes doctrinal teaching, character building, and strengthening spirituality rooted in God's word.

Further, Christian theology encourages active involvement in social life as a tangible manifestation of faith. Bendrio, PS said, the church does not only focus on the theological dimension, but also needs to be actively involved in real efforts that bring positive change to society (Bendrio Pandapotan Sibarani 2025) Participation in social actions, humanitarian services, and interfaith cooperation is a concrete form of the church's presence as an agent of transformation in the midst of a plural society. In this context, interreligious dialogue is also an important means to build mutual understanding, reduce potential conflicts, and strengthen social cohesion.

Thus, Christian theology not only provides a conceptual framework in dealing with plurality and secularism, but also presents a real praxis through love, respect, social engagement, faith building, and dialogue. All of these aspects show that Christian theology has a significant contribution to building a harmonious, inclusive, and socially based life based on divine values.

5. Conclusions

Christian theology has a very strategic role in facing the challenges of pluralism and secularism in the era of globalization. In the context of pluralism, Christian theology provides a theological basis for the appreciation of diversity through the concept of *imago Dei* and the teachings of Christ's love, which encourage tolerance, dialogue, and harmonious social relations between religious communities. Meanwhile, in the face of secularism, Christian theology emphasizes the importance of integration between faith and life, so that faith is not reduced to a mere private matter but remains relevant in the public sphere and daily life. Through strong faith formation, systematic teaching, and the development of contextual apologetics, Christians are equipped to defend their faith identity in the midst of modernity.

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