



Humanitarian Catholicism: Practical Theology and Interreligious Dialogue in the Indonesian Context

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Abstract: This study examines practical social theology in the Catholic Church, particularly in accounting for the content of faith in the face of science and religious diversity. The primary focus is on addressing the tension between humanitarian and doctrinal religious approaches by proposing religious moderation as a middle path. This moderation is crucial for constructive interfaith dialogue, which often gets limited to shared values and conceptual agreement. Extreme doctrinal stances can lead to violence and radicalism. The study employs a qualitative method with library research, based on Catholic Social Teaching (CST) as interpreted by Armada Riyanto's Dialogical Catholicity. The findings indicate that CST is effective as a practical social theology in facilitating more concrete and profound interfaith dialogue. Thus, CST offers an approach to addressing concrete issues in Indonesia while communicating the faith with other religions.

INTRODUCTION

Religion needs to account for the content of its faith before the rational world, including science and other religions. The Catholic Church has grappled with the accountability between faith and knowledge in the encyclical "Fides et Ratio," published on September 14, 1998, by Pope John Paul II. When addressing accountability before other faiths, much of this was articulated maturely in "Nostra Aetate," published in the context of the Second Vatican Council in October 1965. However, the reality shows that people entering interfaith dialogues often debate interests that differ significantly from what is determined by the doctrines and rules of their respective Churches, religious institutions, and communities. Interfaith dialogue often results in two religious sides within one religion: "humanitarian-oriented religion" and "doctrinal-oriented religion." When these two are opposed, they lead to two extremes in religious life: indifference or fundamentalism. Religious leaders always find reasons why some religions become humanitarian while others are doctrinal. Humanitarian religions seem to want to apply the truths of faith teachings to all humans, regardless of faith and doctrinal faith experience. Meanwhile, doctrinal religions tend to exclude those who do not adhere to orthodox or pure doctrine. In this context, adherents are challenged to choose attitudes and dispositions towards religious life, which are accountable before the Divine and fellow humans.

This observation is relevant because religious adherents must confront the gap between theological ideals and empirical reality. From a pastoral perspective, a religious adherent must not only bridge this gap but also acknowledge it as a reality with theological dignity in each

religion. This means that empirical reality is what is called "locus theologicus," or in other words, it is in the empirical reality that theological struggles must occur. Today, the awareness of interfaith dialogue is being echoed again, along with the growing disruptions in communal life in the form of fundamentalism, religious radicalism, terrorism, religious stereotyping, persecution in the name of religion, blasphemy, intolerance, and more (Fradisa et al., 2022; Habibi, 2022). These disturbances have made Indonesians realize that the religious moderation movement, previously discussed, articulated, and implemented (Hefni, 2020), has not yet deeply resonated among religious adherents, especially in Indonesia. This has raised awareness that religious moderation cannot be confined to agreements among intellectuals and religious leaders alone (Amiruddin et al., 2022).

The tension between the empirical reality and theological ideals, along with existing differences, brings frustration to those less educated. The spread of hate speech in the name of religion shows that the interfaith dialogue promoted by religious leaders has not yet manifested in the broader community, as attempted through the establishment of the *Rumah Moderasi* (House of Moderation) (Hefni, 2020). The prevalence of hate speech under the guise of defending a particular religion leads to vigilante actions. Unethical behavior in words and deeds is considered justified by invoking sacred reasons in the name of religion. However, such actions do not reflect the values of any religion in the world. This reflects doctrinally exclusive religious adherents who are often uneducated. The failure of religious moderation to take root in society, especially among the less educated, necessitates a reevaluation of efforts to actualize religious moderation.

The Catholic Church has a faith that aligns with the indicators of religious moderation: "national commitment, tolerance, anti-radicalism, and non-violence" (Habibi, 2022). Moreover, the Catholic Church has been actively involved in global concerns for centuries, clearly evident in the Catholic Social Teaching (CST) (Riyanto, 2014). CST is not just a set of abstract universal concepts but a call for practical theological action based on the Church's faith teachings. The application of CST involves all humanity, meaning the Catholic Church seeks a joint effort to address the world's problems. This shows that Catholicism presents itself as a more humanitarian-oriented religion while maintaining its pure doctrinal theology.

Previous studies on interfaith dialogue have focused on the attitude of tolerance (Afryansah et al., 2022; Amiruddin et al., 2022; Habibi, 2022; Lede, 2022; Rizki, 2022; Santoso et al., 2022). Additionally, efforts to instill religious moderation have been carried out through a constructivist approach (Afryansah et al., 2022), which has been implemented in literature education. Literature education serves as a means to instill religious moderation, as it contains human experiences and knowledge. When literature contains the ideology of tolerance, students are led to understand and relate these values to their lives. Various other efforts have also been implemented in educational institutions through moral education and the cultivation of tolerance values (Anwar, 2022; Destriani, 2022; Hatmoko & Mariani, 2022).

Research on interfaith dialogue has also been conducted in social media to assess the level of religious moderation (Aini et al., 2022; Anwar et al., 2022; Hefni, 2020; Pratiwi et al.,

2021; Sefriyono, 2020). Such presentations of religious moderation have effectively reached young people in public spaces. However, the issue of religious moderation does not end with awareness at the intellectual level alone (Gultom, 2022a). Religious moderation will continually face obstacles when there are still subjective and fanatic attitudes, resulting from limited and narrow perspectives (Amiruddin et al., 2022). In other words, while the conceptual framework of religious moderation can be realized through various media, its implementation has not fully materialized, as evidenced by existing phenomena of intolerance (Anwar et al., 2022; Gultom, 2022b). Research on religious moderation drawn from local cultures shows that the values of religious moderation originate from local cultural activities (Fradisa et al., 2022).

In the study "Religious Moderation and Multiculturalism in the Views and Teachings of Academics at UIN AR-Raniry and UIN Antasari" (Amiruddin et al., 2022), interfaith dialogue arises from a deep understanding of Islamic teachings aimed at bringing mercy to all of creation. This desire is not limited to Muslims but extends to all humanity. However, the study also found differences in perspectives among academics. Additionally, research results showed that two students remained rigid in their interactions with other groups, influenced by their previous education. In the digital world context (Anwar et al., 2022; Destriani, 2022; Mahyudin et al., 2022; Rijal et al., 2022), interfaith dialogue can only be realized when there are no tendencies or negative prejudices towards a particular religion in the virtual realm. This also means a willingness to accept the existence of others. Moreover, digital platforms can disseminate the values of religious moderation.

Based on previous research in the Indonesian context, interfaith dialogue is built primarily by fostering a moderate attitude in understanding one's faith. Prior research indicates that this moderation is pursued through intellectual engagement and the development of the concept of moderation itself, both in the digital and societal realms. However, the attainment of religious moderation often stops at the intellectual level. Religious adherents agree on understanding but, when confronted with the empirical reality of theological differences, they do not know how to engage in dialogue with other religions and account for their faith. This represents a research gap: there is little discussion on how interfaith dialogue is realized in direct encounters and how it presents an experience of God in life. Interfaith dialogue manifested in practical actions will provide a tangible experience of a God who genuinely cares for all people, regardless of their faith or beliefs.

Addressing this research gap, this study proposes to examine "Catholic Practical Social Theology as a Humanitarian-Oriented Religion in the Context of Interreligious Dialogue in Indonesia." This study aims to highlight how Catholic theology is practically accounted for in human life influenced by science and spiritual diversity. The practical realization of theology is found in Catholic Social Teaching (CST). The research questions posed include: (1) How does the Catholic Church realize practical theology in CST? (2) How is practical theology in the Catholic Church implemented in the Indonesian context? These two issues will guide this research. The topic differs significantly from previous studies or similar research, which have focused more on theological content than practical actions based on Catholic theology,

particularly in CST. The realization of CST will be emphasized as a means of fostering interfaith communication and a vehicle for social accountability regarding the content of faith.

METHOD

The method used in this study will be a qualitative research method, emphasizing relevance (Sugiyono, 2018). The author positions themselves as the research instrument, focusing on content analysis based on the phenomenological foundation according to Riyanto (2020). This type of research is library research. The literature review will refer to books and scholarly articles from both Catholic perspectives (Church documents) and other religions. The study will focus on the theological paradigm aimed at reviewing how faith engages in dialogue with contemporary issues. Faith dialogue does not stop at the conceptual level of universal religious values; it prioritizes a concrete response to human life situations. Issues such as racism, discrimination, inequality of minority rights, and various concrete human problems require practical implementation. To address this, the theological framework used in this research will be the Catholic Social Teaching (CST) method within *Dialogical Catholicity* according to Riyanto (2014). This framework includes the steps of seeing, judging, and acting.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Practical Theology of the Catholic Church in Catholic Social Teaching

The self-revelation of God is the starting point of theology. When this revelation is to be translated into practical terms in human life, it presents God acting through people. However, this does not mean that God's role is merely functional (Firmanto, 2016). On the contrary, God's role remains primary, even if it is manifested through human actions. In this context, when the Catholic Church seeks to express the truth of faith through humanitarian actions, it is essentially displaying the face of God, who cares for human life throughout time. This is the aim of the Church in its Social Teaching. The term "Catholic Social Teaching" is another name given by Riyanto to the common term "Social Teaching of the Church" (Riyanto, 2014). Catholic Social Teaching contains the teachings of the popes regarding the contextual situations occurring in the life of global society. Catholic Social Teaching does not discuss concepts and abstractions about how goodness is manifested in communal life. Instead, it seeks to address concrete issues to be faced together practically and with careful planning. These concrete issues are presented as common concerns for all humanity.

The call of Catholic Social Teaching is fundamentally never exclusive to Catholics alone. Instead, it seeks to raise awareness among all people without exception. The phrase "all people of good will" in Catholic Social Teaching indicates that the Catholic Church aims to involve as many people as possible in the Church's mission to respond to the signs of the times, as God Himself is present in human faces and saves humanity. This is proof that through the historical life of humanity, God reveals Himself (Firmanto, 2016). This becomes important and urgent because the world is the shared dwelling place of all people (Francis, 2016). What happens to the world can no longer be responded to with indifference. Human problems must be borne together because humanity, in its diversity, is brothers and sisters before God the

Creator. Based on this belief, the Catholic Church does not remain idle regarding the problems faced by other believers. This belief stems from an eschatological hope that not only keeps Catholics from remaining idle but also involves them in building the kingdom of God on earth (Firmanto, 2016).

The problems in this world are caused by many interconnected factors. "Labor injustice, poverty, corruption, social oppression, or discrimination through legislation, and so on" (Riyanto, 2014). These issues are the responsibility of all humanity without exception. The Church itself highly values humanity based on the understanding of *imago Dei* (Tinambunan & Budiono, 2022). Therefore, a new and universal solidarity is needed (Francis, 2016). Global solidarity is highlighted in Catholic Social Teaching. In this regard, the Church takes action by issuing documents on Catholic Social Teaching. In these documents, the Church "teaches, proclaims, and promotes the values of justice, which are Gospel values" (Riyanto, 2014). Furthermore, the Church itself has a scheme for action.

The scheme of Catholic Social Teaching is sourced from the document *Mater et Magistra* by John XXIII (1961), which discusses the Church's efforts to realize justice and social progress. The most fundamental scheme in Catholic Social Teaching begins with observing or listening to the issues at hand. The Church needs to understand the events that are taking place. To do this, the Church gathers data and facts. The collected materials are studied thoroughly to find an understanding of the issues. "To see" means the Church opens its horizons as in the spirit of *aggiornamento* in the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The Church no longer closes itself off from the world previously seen as less religious. The Church's concerns cannot be limited to rules and rituals. The Church must pay attention to human daily life. Therein lies the call for the Church, in line with the etymology of the Church itself, namely *ekklesia* meaning people are called out. The faithful are called out to see what is happening outside the "shell" of the Church.

The second step is to provide judgment. The Church has a foundational basis (*lex aeterna, lex humana, regula fidei*) for assessing something as good or bad. Issues that have been observed and understood are judged from the Catholic Church's perspective. At this stage, the Church conducts theological reflection, assessment, analysis, criticism, and discussion of the matter's developments. By judging issues based on facts and the light of Faith and moral teachings, the Church can determine where it should stand. The Church's stance is not based solely on pity. Instead, the Church's stance is an expression of compassion grounded in Gospel values. This is similar to how Jesus judged what was necessary and good for salvation, even if it seemed to violate regulations.

The third step concerns and the Church's assessment of the world's concrete situation do not stop at formulating judgments of right and wrong. The Church does not stop there. At the "to act" stage, the Church invites and even urges God's people and all people of good will to practically and concretely implement what the Church proclaims. The call for justice amidst the oppression of workers is not just the Church's voice; it should become the voice of all humanity, whether believers or people of good will. Here, everyone is invited to proactively

participate in promoting the value of justice. All people are invited to become stakeholders. This means everyone needs to consider, decide, and participate in implementing shared goals or the common good (*bonum commune*).

Catholic Social Teaching itself has themes that are the Church's focus. According to Riyanto in the book *Dialogal Catholicity*, there are eight themes in Catholic Social Teaching (Riyanto, 2014). These themes will be presented as the basis for implementing religious moderation based on Catholic Social Teaching.

The first theme is the imperative of love. Love is the most fundamental foundation in faith in Jesus Christ. The command to love finds its manifestation in solidarity with refugees, victims of war, victims of totalitarian political oppression, and others. The commandment of love is essential and urgent. The dire global situation urges everyone to truly implement this commandment, especially for those in the dark shadows of the future due to war, abuse, and various forms of oppression and torture.

The second theme is the defense of human values. Human values have been reduced to mere appendages or accidents. For example, skin color, race, group, and religion are used as reasons to legitimize violent actions, whether verbal abuse, social bullying, isolation, or practical actions that can lead to death. The noble value of humanity as **imago dei** is easily forgotten due to economic and political interests. This situation urges everyone to remember that the dignity of every human being is equally valuable, regardless of accidental differences. Therefore, all people are called to respect each other.

The third theme is the option for the poor and vulnerable. The option for the oppressed is very biblical. "The oppressed cries out, and the LORD hears; He delivers them from all their troubles" (Psalm 34:7). This expression shows that siding with the oppressed is substantial. Therefore, the Church and all people of good will are called to have real concern for their issues. The option for the poor, which is also a pastoral orientation, needs to be realized by all parties without exception. If some people still maintain a hedonistic, consumerist, materialistic lifestyle while wasting food and goods for trivial reasons, it will only hinder the efforts built into the option for the poor.

The fourth theme is the promotion of justice and peace. Justice and peace are always relevant across ages. Two things are often absent in communal life. As a result, communal life is filled with many inequalities. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening. In one part of the world, some people are very wealthy and enjoy life, while others are on the verge of starvation. Some can easily escape the law, even though they are guilty, while others are innocent but punished. In such situations, the Church and all people of good will need to promote the values of justice and peace. This promotion should not only be in words but also through collective action.

The fifth theme is the improvement of world development and progress. The rapid advancement in technology is something to be grateful for. However, there are still adverse effects such as digital-based crimes. Fraud using digital devices, such as hacking, scamming, phishing, and others, has led to a new form of war known as proxy war. Besides, the truth and

facts are blurred by many lies and hoaxes designed for political gain. In this global flow, the Church is challenged to be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16). World progress can be a useful tool for fulfilling the Church's mission alongside all people of good will. On the other hand, the Church needs to voice the importance of being careful and wise when dealing with world advancements, especially in technology.

The sixth theme is the promotion of environmental protection. Along with technological advancement and development, there has also been significant environmental degradation. Natural ecosystems are increasingly damaged. Flora and fauna are threatened with extinction because their habitats are destroyed or hunted recklessly for profit. Various types of pollution have also brought their own difficulties to human life. This situation is exacerbated by numerous natural disasters and indifference to waste and pollution. The ailing earth has cried out with terrifying natural signs. In this situation, the Church not only raises its voice but also actively participates in restoring creation together with all people of good will.

The seventh theme is the analysis of various ideological political interests and their consequences. Ideology is always linked to an interest. Furthermore, different ideologies often conflict with each other. This leads to ideological wars, such as populism, a movement that claims to fight for the interests of the entire population. The presence of this ideology needs to be thoroughly studied with sharp and accurate analysis.

Eighth theme is participation in political, economic, and cultural life. Although the Catholic Church hierarchy does not engage in practical politics, it is still essential to encourage the faithful to actively participate in political, economic, and cultural fields. This is where the contextualization of the Catholic Church's teachings on faith and morals takes place. Through this participation, believers bear witness to their faith through good and righteous behavior, words, and actions. The faith they profess should manifest itself in the lives of the people who practice it.

Based on the eight themes of Catholic Social Teaching, it can be said that the Catholic Church has addressed three challenges related to the practice of religion in the public sphere as presented by Habermas (Pasi, 2021). First, the correlation between the religious vision of one community and that of other religious communities. Religious moderation means trying to find connections between the visions of different religions. Theologically, there may be differences, but concerning the universal values contained in each religion, there is always the possibility of finding common ground. This is similar to what is expressed in religious moderation in the field of education. Religious education should teach compassion, respect, love, and mutual assistance in good deeds (Prasetya, 2022; Wahyuddin, 2022). The teachings conveyed in religious education generally contain universal values that are present in all religions in Indonesia. Likewise, the eight themes of Catholic Social Teaching contain universal values that are connected with the teachings of any religion.

Second, the principles of religious doctrine are not contrary to the principles derived from the development of knowledge. Catholic Social Teaching itself emphasizes the

integration of faith teachings with knowledge. Catholic Social Teaching does not blindly follow all the interests of modern knowledge. However, the principle of serving life (Fransiskus, 2016) is also a principle of Catholic Social Teaching. It is evident in the eight themes of Catholic Social Teaching that what is practiced within these teachings is a service to life itself.

Third, the overall doctrine of faith is not contrary to the principle of equality of every individual and universal morals. The Catholic Church has always opposed discriminatory actions based on ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group differences (Darung & Yuda, 2021). This is why the Church consistently fights for the rights of the oppressed, especially refugees who face severe discrimination and oppression worldwide (Fransiskus, 2019). In the context of Indonesia, the struggle against discrimination is also a focus addressed directly or indirectly (Aini et al., 2022; Habibi, 2022).

The Context of Realizing Practical Theology in Indonesia

Practical theology starts from responding to the concrete needs of people. Translating theology into practical action allows individuals to truly experience God in their lives and struggles (Denny Firmanto, 2016). To realize Catholic Social Teaching (CST) in Indonesia, it is first necessary to understand the concept of *locus theologicus*. Indonesia has three distinctive loci theologicus in Asia (Helle, 2018): the socio-political context, religious and cultural pluralism, and poverty. These three contexts will serve as domains for concretely implementing CST in Indonesia.

The first aspect is Indonesia's socio-political context. Indonesian politics has evolved over time, from the Old Order with Guided Democracy, the New Order with Pancasila Democracy, to Liberal Democracy after the reform era (Saidurrahman & Arifinsyah, 2020). Indonesia is still in transition and has not fully adopted Liberal Democracy. This transition is marked by four crises. 1) Formal democracy: The political system operates democratically only in a procedural sense. While democratic instruments and mechanisms are in place, substantial democratic values are often absent, indicated by social inequality, injustice in the legal system, a tendency toward anarchic social order, and other issues. 2) Self-interested political contestation: Entering politics is often seen as an investment rather than a calling for service. Politics as an investment aims for returns, both for individuals and groups. 3) Pragmatic power struggles: Political relationships, whether coalitions or opposition, are heavily influenced by interests, leading to a "zero-sum game" mentality where the winner takes all and the loser loses everything. 4) Sentimental rather than rational politics: Indonesian politics is often driven by promises and branding that appeal to emotions and create utopian dreams, leading to unrealistic expectations. These crises result in an unhealthy political environment and neglect the people's needs. In this situation, political movements emerge from those marginalized by the failures of the democratic system.

The second aspect is religious and cultural pluralism. Long before Indonesia's national ideology, the *Pancasila*, was formulated, the archipelago had already been home to diverse

beliefs and cultures. This diversity is a distinctive characteristic of the nation, upheld by the founding fathers. The motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) illustrates that Indonesia is inherently diverse, unified by a collective decision and a sense of shared destiny, aiming for independence. However, despite this ideal notion of pluralism, challenges persist. Ethnic primordialism and religious fundamentalism continue to grow, reflected in desires to secede from the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) and homogenization movements in populist practices. Moreover, strong religious sentiments often lead to exclusive group formations, providing a sense of security and comfort. This also fosters radicalism. Exclusivism is exacerbated by religious practices focused more on formalism and ritualism rather than on universal morals and values.

The third aspect is poverty. One of the perennial issues is the gap between the rich and the poor, a phenomenon of poverty. As of March 2022, Indonesia's *gini ratio* was 0.384 (Midayanti, 2022), indicating significant inequality. With this disparity, poverty conditions worsen. As of March 2022, the poverty rate in Indonesia was 9.54% (Larasati, 2022). While Indonesia's *gini ratio* and poverty rate are relatively low compared to World Bank benchmarks, these numbers do not fully capture the grim reality of poverty. Poverty is a life-and-death struggle for survival. Even one person living in poverty is a serious issue that requires attention.

The goal of Catholic Social Teaching is not merely to formulate doctrines but to inspire real action. The movement for Catholic Social Teaching should start from the eight themes of CST, which aim to achieve the common good (*bonum commune*). This is highly relevant to the situation in Indonesia. Pasi emphasizes the importance of religious actors promoting universal values to improve public life for the common good (Pasi, 2021). However, it is not enough to stop there. An inclusive attitude must be demonstrated by all religions, meaning there should be room for cooperation with other religions and community groups. This cooperation serves as a means to unite global concerns, which are a focus of the Catholic Church (Fransiskus, 2019). By engaging and working together, all religious actors and Indonesians can become aware of shared concerns. There should no longer be a globalized indifference, especially in Indonesia (Fransiskus, 2016). This concern is based on a mandate rooted in the nature of humans as God's creation (Tinambunan & Budiono, 2022).

The implementation of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is oriented towards achieving the *bonum commune* (common good). This needs to be demonstrated through substantiation (Latif, 2015). This process emphasizes the prioritization of substantial values over mere appearances. These values are evident in the fact that the pursuit of the *bonum commune* involves many people from various religious, cultural, and academic backgrounds (Pasi, 2021). With such holistic involvement, the values advocated by CST will be enriched intertextually due to the inclusion of other values that also contribute to the *bonum commune*, especially in Indonesia's civil society.

This type of involvement is the foundation for grassroots implementation. The understanding of CST, synergized with other religious values, should not remain at the

intellectual level alone (Du et al., 2021; Firmanto, 2017; Ampur et al., 2023; Yuliano et. al., 2022). These values should not only satisfy and comfort elites among religious or cultural leaders. Beyond that, these values need to be realized through the involvement of the grassroots community. This involvement is not abstract but concrete and contextual. Therefore, it needs to be translated into specific activities tailored to the context of life in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Practical theology is the application and embodiment of theological concepts. The content of faith is not merely seen as a collection of doctrines and concepts but as a guide for action. By actualizing Catholic Social Teaching (CST), the Catholic Church can account for the content of faith while communicating it with other religions. Contextually in Indonesia, the practical theology of the Catholic Church through CST can be realized by addressing concrete issues faced by Indonesian society. Addressing these issues requires the involvement of various societal elements. In this regard, CST serves as a means for interreligious dialogue, as cooperation with the community becomes a way to communicate faith and bear witness to the Triune God believed to be active in the concrete lives of people.

Phenomenological studies based on literature concerning CST are still very limited. Many aspects require further exploration through qualitative research, particularly concerning the phenomenon of interreligious dialogue occurring within the framework of CST. This research will help gauge how non-Catholics experience the presence and providence of the Triune God as believed by Catholics. This will be highly beneficial for assessing the extent to which the Catholic Church serves as an intermediary of God's action for humanity and the extent to which actions based on CST are effective. Understanding this will enable the Catholic Church to determine the next practical steps to more contextually realize CST in communal life, fostering closer relations with believers of other faiths.

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