
Theology Of Relations In A Multireligious Space: Building Peaceful Communities In The Midst Of Plurality

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Abstrak

Dalam konteks dunia yang semakin plural dan multireligius, relasi antarumat beragama menjadi tantangan sekaligus peluang bagi teologi Kristen untuk menghadirkan wajah Allah yang penuh kasih dan damai. Teologi relasi berangkat dari pemahaman bahwa manusia diciptakan menurut gambar dan rupa Allah (*imago Dei*) yang pada hakikatnya bersifat relasional. Relasi ini bukan hanya dengan Allah, tetapi juga dengan sesama manusia tanpa memandang latar belakang agama, budaya, maupun etnis. Melalui pendekatan teologi kontekstual dan dialog antar iman, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali makna dan implikasi teologi relasi dalam membangun komunitas damai di tengah pluralitas agama, khususnya dalam konteks masyarakat Indonesia yang majemuk. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan analisis teologis terhadap konsep-konsep relasi dalam Alkitab dan pemikiran para teolog seperti Jürgen Moltmann, Miroslav Volf, dan John Zizioulas yang menekankan pentingnya relasi, rekonsiliasi, dan komuni dalam kehidupan beriman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa teologi relasi berperan sebagai paradigma etis dan spiritual untuk menghadirkan perdamaian di ruang publik yang multireligius. Relasi yang didasarkan pada kasih, penerimaan, dan penghormatan terhadap perbedaan dapat menjadi fondasi bagi terbentuknya komunitas damai (*shalom community*). Gereja diundang untuk menghidupi teologi relasi dengan menumbuhkan dialog, kerjasama lintas iman, dan pelayanan sosial yang inklusif sebagai wujud kesaksian iman yang kontekstual. Dengan demikian, teologi relasi bukan hanya konsep teoretis, melainkan praksis hidup yang merefleksikan kasih Allah dalam kehidupan bersama yang plural dan dinamis.

Keywords :

*Theology of Relationships;
Religious Plurality; Interfaith
Dialogue; Peaceful
Community; Contextual
Theology; Inclusivity*

Abstract

In the context of an increasingly plural and multireligious world, interreligious relations are both a challenge and an opportunity for Christian theology to present the loving and peaceful face of God. Relational theology departs from the understanding that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (imago Dei) which is essentially relational. This relationship is not only with Allah, but also with fellow human beings regardless of religious, cultural, or ethnic background. Through a contextual theological approach and interfaith dialogue, this research aims to explore the meaning and implications of relational theology in building a peaceful community in the midst of religious plurality, especially in the context of a pluralistic Indonesian society. This research uses a qualitative approach with theological analysis of the concepts of relationship in the Bible and the thoughts of theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann, Miroslav Volf, and John Zizioulas who emphasize the importance of relationships, reconciliation, and communion in the life of faith. The results of the study show that relational theology plays a role as an ethical and spiritual paradigm to bring peace in a multireligious public space. Relationships based on love, acceptance, and respect for differences can be the foundation for the formation of a peaceful community (shalom community). The Church is invited to live the theology of relationships by fostering dialogue, interfaith cooperation, and inclusive social service as a contextual form of witness to faith. Thus, relational theology is not only a theoretical concept, but a living praxis that reflects God's love in a plural and dynamic common life.



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INTRODUCTION

Relationship theology places both vertical (with God) and horizontal (with others) relationships as central to theological understanding and ecclesial practice. In this perspective, the doctrine of the Trinity and imago Dei is not merely an abstract doctrine but a normative source for coexistence: God is dynamic as a relation, and man created in His image is called to relate justly and lovingly. Contemporary thoughts on relational theology affirm the ethical and sociopolitical implications of relation: reconciliation, acceptance, and communion are the basis of theological action in the public sphere (Brint Montgomery, Thomas Jay Oord, 2012).

When relational theology is applied to multireligious spaces, the focus shifts to the ways in which the Christian faith builds dignified relationships with believers of other faiths through dialogue, social cooperation, and a commitment to shared justice. In the pluralistic Indonesian context, these practices include local dialogue initiatives, joint humanitarian action, and public education that prioritizes religious moderation; These models seek to translate the principles of relational theology into societal

practices that can foster a 'peaceful community'. Recent empirical and policy studies show an increasing focus on religious moderation and interfaith dialogue in public policy and academic research (Approach et al., 2024).

This research positions relational theology as a conceptual bridge between classical theological reflection (Moltmann, Volf, Zizioulas) and contemporary ecumenical/interreligious practice. By combining theological-textual analysis and contextual case studies, the study seeks to formulate concrete theological strategies and pastoral practices, e.g. dialogue models, interfaith character education programs, and forms of shared social service—which are able to strengthen social cohesion without obscuring the theological identity of each community (Volf, 1996a).

In the problems in practice and theory, it is explained: First, Theoretical Ambivalence, Theoretically, relational theology is widely praised for its ability to open up spaces for dialogue that is inclusive, intercultural and cross-cultural. This idea is rooted in the understanding that God Himself is relational in the Trinity, so that relations become the model for all of creation (Zizioulas, 2006). However, there has been criticism of the boundaries of inclusivity that are often blurred: how to maintain the doctrinal integrity of the Christian faith without being trapped in theological relativism? Some theologians consider that some relational theological discourses tend to obscure the distinctions of the Christian faith with a universalistic approach that is too loose on theological differences (Kärkkäinen, 2021). This challenge requires the development of a theological framework that is able to affirm the identity of faith dialogically: open to others, but still based on a solid Christological foundation. Thus, relational theology needs to find a balance between truth claim and relational openness, so that the dialogue of faith does not lose its theological direction or ethical meaning (Oord & Fuller, 2023).

Second, Practical Challenges in the Field, In the realm of preliminaries, various interfaith dialogue and collaboration initiatives often face complex obstacles. Historical mistrust between peoples, socio-economic inequality, and politicization of religious identity are often stumbling blocks to efforts to build peaceful relations (Journal, 2024). In Indonesia, although the religious moderation policy launched by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019–2024) has brought progress in building public awareness, the fact is that cases of intolerance, social segregation, and local resistance to diversity still emerge (Barton, 2023). As a result, the practice of relational theology often operates only at the level of academic and institutional elite discourse or activities, not yet fully penetrating the grassroots context. The failure to translate relational theology into concrete community practice shows that this theology requires a new pragmatic strategy that is more grounded, participatory, and contextual in bringing about peace in a pluralistic society.

Third, Methodological Gap, From the methodological side, there is still a gap between normative theological theories of relations and social studies that empirically highlight the dynamics of interfaith life. Theological studies often get stuck in abstract dogmatic reflections, while social research tends to ignore aspects of spirituality and

the motivation of faith behind social action (Lartey, 2020). In fact, to understand interreligious relations in its entirety, an interdisciplinary approach is needed that combines practical theology, religious studies, and sociology of religion. This approach allows for an epistemological dialogue between theological norms and social reality. This kind of research model will help evaluate the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue programs, measure social impact, and assess the sustainability of interfaith collaboration in the context of multifaith communities (Barnett, 2023). Thus, the methodological gap is not only a technical problem, but also an epistemological challenge for the renewal of the study of relational theology to be more relevant to a plural and dynamic world.

Furthermore, several previous studies will explain, F. Hutabarat's (2023) research in *ej-theology.org* highlights the dynamics of religious plurality in Indonesia through a sociotheological approach that emphasizes the importance of local culture as a medium to build social cohesion. In his analysis, Hutabarat shows that harmony between religious communities is not solely determined by formal regulations, but by the ability of the community to internalize the values of local wisdom such as mutual cooperation and deliberation. This approach shows that social relations in a multireligious context must be rooted in people's own life experiences, not just in theological normative discourse. The research provides an important basis for relational theology to affirm that interfaith dialogue needs to respect local cultural and historical dimensions, not just academic or institutional discourse.

Meanwhile, the study (Kurniawan, 2025b), published in the *Journal of Islamic and Christian Studies*, UMY, examines the practice of interfaith dialogue in rural communities in Central Java. This study shows that dialogue initiatives carried out by local figures such as religious teachers, village heads, and interfaith youth are more effective in building trust and social solidarity than formal projects on a national scale. Kurniawan emphasized that grounded relational theology must take into account the dynamics of local actors and social networks at the grassroots level. These findings reinforce the thesis that interfaith relationships are not sufficiently approached theoretically, but need to be translated in contextual and inclusive collaborative praxis.

On the other hand, public policy articles on religious moderation and plurality in Indonesia (RI, 2024), discussing the government's latest policy related to religious moderation as a strategy to maintain national harmony. This article assesses that the success of moderation policies depends on the ability of the theology to construct a relational narrative that unifies, rather than merely administratively tolerant. In a global context, the work *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction* (Montgomery et al., 2014), provides a conceptual foundation for relationships as the core of Christian theology that is applicable to social ethics and ecology. This concept resonates with Miroslav Volf's embrace theory (Volf, 1996; 2023 revised ed.), which describes reconciliation as the process of opening oneself to the "other" without losing the identity of faith. Recent studies that apply Volf's thinking in the context of interfaith conflicts such as studies by (Kim, 2023), in the *Journal of Interreligious*

Dialogue, shows that relational approaches have real utility in building peace and overcoming identity tensions in multireligious spaces.

Previous studies have documented theological foundations (relational theology) and the practice of social dialogue/interaction at various levels, but there is still a gap between normative theory and long-term empirical evaluations of relational programs: few studies combine in-depth theological analysis with evaluations based on indicators of social change (e.g., reduction of prejudice, increased interfaith economic cooperation, and sustainability of initiatives). This gap demands interdisciplinary research—measuring the concrete impact of relational theological practice while reflecting on its theological consequences (Eka & Kusmayani, 2023).

This study is relevant because religious plurality remains a central characteristic of many societies including Indonesia and because religion-based conflicts or tensions have the potential to undermine social cohesion and public stability. The urgency is increasing: both global dynamics (migration, digitalization of discourse) and local policies (the encouragement of religious moderation) demand effective and sustainable models of relationships. Academically and practically, this research contributes to the development of an applicable theological theory of relations and provides policy recommendations and pastoral models for churches and interfaith organizations working to build peaceful communities (Approach et al., 2024).

This research aims to: (1) identify and analyze the theological foundations of relational theology and its relevance to multireligious contexts; (2) document and evaluate practices of interfaith dialogue and collaboration that have the potential to build peaceful communities; and (3) formulate a theological-practical model that bridges doctrinal integrity and relational openness in order to strengthen social cohesion in a pluralistic society.

Based on the above background, the research formulates the main issues: How relational theology can be formulated and implemented theologically and practically to build peaceful communities in multireligious spaces, particularly in the Indonesian context; what factors strengthen or hinder the implementation; And what intervention models are effective in reducing prejudice and strengthening interfaith cooperation?

METHODS

Research Methods and Approaches, This study uses an interdisciplinary qualitative research framework that combines ethnographic/case study methods, in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document/archive analysis to capture the dynamics of interfaith relations at the community level; This approach allows researchers to trace the meanings constructed by local actors and the ritual/social practices that form cohesion or conflict. In order to maintain theological integrity as well as empirical validity, a cycle of theological reflection that links field experience (praxis), reading of sacred texts, and normative reflection is integrated into the analysis so that empirical findings are also interpreted theologically (practically). This kind of design is in line with general qualitative research guidelines (case studies,

phenomenology, grounded theory) and best practices in practical theology that emphasize dialogue between social data and systematic theological reflection (Bevans, 2002).

The Contextual Theology approach, which was chosen refers to the contextual models of theology developed by Stephen B. Bevans, e.g. translation, praxis, and synthetic models that emphasize that theology must be "read" from and for the local cultural context; that is, doctrine, biblical narratives, and liturgical practices are reinterpreted to make them relevant to the social, political, and historical experiences of the communities being studied. This method works dialectically: it takes traditional theological material (Bible, tradition, doctrine) and tests it against local experience (plurality reality, local wisdom, the need for reconciliation), and then formulates a theology that is both contextual and critical (not merely accommodating). Bevans' approach has been widely used in plurality studies because of its ability to maintain theological integrity while responding critically and creatively to local circumstances (Knitter, 2002).

Interreligious Dialogue Approach, For the aspect of interfaith dialogue, the research uses a dialogical approach based on contemporary religious theological models (e.g. Paul Knitter, Phan): starting from theoretical dialogue (comparative doctrine), practical dialogue (social collaboration), to spiritual dialogue (experience of worship/prayer together in a proper form); In practice, this approach emphasizes the principles of mutual respect, reciprocity, and clear theological boundaries so that dialogue does not lead to syncretism. Field methods for dialogue include participatory action research with interfaith couples, deliberative workshops, and dyadic interviews to capture the process of trust formation, attitude shifts, and the development of shared norms. This approach places dialogue not only as a theoretical discourse but as a social praxis whose impact on community cohesion can be measured (Knitter, 2002).

Theological Qualitative Analysis Data analysis was carried out using qualitative analysis techniques modified for theological purposes: (1) transcription and open coding of interviews/observations to find empirical themes (e.g., prejudice, solidarity practices, narratives of suffering/hope); (2) axial coding to associate empirical themes with theological categories (imago Dei, reconciliation, pastoral vocation); and (3) theological synthesis through theological reflection cycles linking experiences, biblical texts, ecclesiastical traditions, and contemporary contexts so that field findings are reflected into contextual and normative theological claims. This analytical approach blends qualitative methodological guidelines (Creswell; Charmaz/Grounded Theory when relevant) with the literature of practical theology that promotes reflective methods as a means of linking social data and theology. Validity is improved through data triangulation, member-checking, and researcher reflexivity (Creswell, 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF RELATIONSHIPS

The Concept of Relationships in Christian Theology

The concept of relationship in Christian theology is rooted in the understanding of the Triune God which is the community of love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This relationship is not just a functional relationship, but the ontological essence of God himself *Deus est relatio* (God is a relation). Trinitarian theology affirms that the life of God is a communion of self-giving love (*perichoresis*), in which each divine Person lives in a reciprocal relationship without losing his identity (Zizioulas, 1985). Therefore, human beings as *imago Dei* were created to live in relationship with God, others, and creation. Relationality is not only a human social character, but a theological call to reflect divine life in everyday life. In view (Moltmann, 1981), these relationships are the basis for social solidarity and God's involvement in the history of human suffering—a theology that makes relationships a space for living and dynamic expression of God's love.

In the perspective of theological anthropology, relationships are the main medium through which human beings experience salvation and self-identity. (Barth, 1956), emphasizing that human beings cannot be understood individualistically, because their existence is determined by their relationship with God and others. Humans are creatures called to respond to God's initiative in a dialogue of love. Therefore, sin in the theological sense is not just a moral transgression, but a severance of relations with the source of life itself (McFadyen, 1990). The concept of relationships in Christian theology contains an existential and ethical dimension: love of God is inseparable from love of neighbor. Relationships become a space in which faith is manifested in concrete actions, and the fellowship of God's people (*ekklesia*) is understood as a community that bears each other's burdens and builds equality in love (Yong, 2019). Thus, the Christian faith is relational and performative, not just conceptual.

The concept of relationships in Christian theology also has far-reaching social and public implications. Relationships do not stop at the spiritual realm, but extend to the social space as a call to build a just and peaceful community. Theologians such as (Volf, 1996a) and (Yong, 2019), interpreting relationships as the praxis of reconciliation and embracing the act of opening oneself to the "other" without losing the identity of faith. The Church as the body of Christ is understood as a relational community living in the midst of a plural world, called to be a sign of God's *shalom* through dialogue, service, and cross-border solidarity. In the context of contemporary relational theology, the open love of God demands that the church live out the spirituality of interdependence and social empathy. Therefore, relationships became a new paradigm of mission: not domination or conversion, but participation in God's work that reconciles the world (2 Corinthians 5:18–19). Relational theology thus serves as a

bridge between faith and pluralistic public life, affirming that encounter with the "other" is an integral part of obedience to Christ.

The Relationship between God and Man as a Theological Model

The relationship between God and man in Christian theology is rooted in the initiative of God's love that creates, calls, and saves man. This relationship is not the result of man's efforts towards Allah, but a gift that begins with Allah Himself. In the creation story, man was formed "in the image and likeness of God" (Genesis 1:26–27), indicating man's calling to live in fellowship with the Creator. According to (Rahner, 1990), human beings are existentially "beings open to God" (*homo capax Dei*), meaning that all human existence is marked by relationality to the Transcendent. (Moltmann, 1985), affirms that man's relationship with God is not hierarchical but rather a dialogical of God who descends and is present in human history, especially through the incarnation of Christ, making the relationship personal and historical. Thus, the model of the relationship between God and man displays a pattern of openness, dialogue, and love that invites humans to respond freely and responsibly.

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ is the culmination of God's model of relationship with man. In Christ, the transcendent God becomes immanent; The distant God is near. Through Jesus' life, suffering, and resurrection, God showed concrete solidarity and love for fragile humanity. According to (Volf, 1996a), Christ's act of "embracing" sinful man becomes a relational model that rejects exclusion and affirms unconditional acceptance. This relationship is transformational in that it transforms human identity from being alienated to being part of God's family (Ephesians 2:19). Thus, the relationship between God and man is restorative and reconciliatory. (Williams, 2018), emphasizing that the incarnation is not only a theology of salvation, but also a model of relational ethics that God exists not to conquer, but to ally and heal the disconnection of relationships between human beings. This affirms that every act of love and social justice is a reflection of God's incarnate relationship in the midst of the world.

The relationship between God and man is the basic paradigm for all social and ecclesial relations. Because God establishes an open and loving relationship, humans are also called to emulate this relational pattern in life together. In contemporary theology, the God-human relationship is understood as the basis of a community ethics that emphasizes mutuality, empathy, and social responsibility (Oord, 2015). (Yong, 2019), developed this idea by calling it relational pneumatology, which is the work of the Holy Spirit that connects people across religious, cultural, and national boundaries as a manifestation of God's presence in the plural world. This concept places the relationship between God and man not only as a personal-spiritual relationship, but also as a model for solidarity and social peace. Divine relations are a source of inspiration for contextual theological praxis that fosters justice and peace in a multireligious society. Thus, relational theology does not stop at the contemplation of faith, but leads people to live in a spirituality of dialogue and encounter.

Imago Dei and Human Relationality

The concept of Imago Dei (image of God) in the Christian tradition not only establishes the dignity of the individual human being, but in contemporary discourse is increasingly understood as a relational construction: to be in the image of God means to be called to live in relationship with God, others, and all creation. The relational approach affirms that the image of God is most authentically manifested in reciprocal relationships rather than in mere internal attributes such as ratios or souls so that human identity is formed and expressed in communion and ethical responsibility towards others. Contemporary theological studies affirm that reading the Imago Dei relationally helps bridge Trinitarian theology (God as communion of relations) and ethical anthropology that demands solidarity, respect for dignity, and social justice in the public sphere (Of & Leadership, 2002).

In the academic literature, three models of Imago Dei reading are known: structural (human characteristics), functional (human tasks/mandates), and relational (orientation to relationships). The relational model does not negate the structural or functional dimension, but rather places the relationship as an integrative framework that explains why rational ability or the mandate of management (dominion) must bear fruit in the ethics of relationships: the human ability to "relate" loving, empathizing, and communizing is the main indicator of the reflection of the divine image. Recent empirical and theoretical research confirms that this emphasis on relationships is relevant to contemporary issues such as racial justice, inter-religious dialogue, and environmental ethics, as they concern the way humans treat the "other" who also hold the image of God (Henriksen, 2020).

Viewing man as a relational imago Dei carries broad praxis implications: first, it ethically demands a rejection of exclusive structures and degrading practices because degrading others means damaging the image of God; second, in the field of ecotheology emphasizes ecological responsibility due to human relations; third, in the context of a multireligious space, the relational basis of Imago Dei provides a theological basis for the ethical inclusiveness of interreligious encounters seen not as a threat to identity, but as an opportunity to uphold common dignity. Therefore, Imago Dei-based relational theology provides a strong normative argument for the practice of reconciliation, dialogue, and interfaith cooperation in building peaceful communities (Nepil, 2020).

Theology of Love and Peace in Scripture

Scripture places love and peace (shalom) as central themes that cross the Old and New Testaments; Both are intertwined with the demands of social justice and relationship restoration. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew term shalom signifies the overall welfare of peace, abundance, and order of a cosmological and social nature (e.g. Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3; Psalm). Prophets rebuke when injustice, oppression, and idolatry destroy community relations and tear away God's shalom (Isaiah 58; Amos

5). On the other hand, the New Testament articulates love as the center of Christian ethics of love for God and neighbor (Mark 12:29–31; John 13:34) and relate it to Christ's mission of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18–20). Jesus' teaching of "blessings" (Matthew 5) and the example of sacrifice on the cross affirm that true peace is not simply the absence of conflict, but the restoration of deep relationships and sacrifice for the sake of others.

Theologically, the Christian tradition develops the idea that divine love is the source and standard for human peace: self-sacrificing love (*agape*) becomes a model of reconciliation and redemption. Contemporary theologians such as Moltmann emphasize the eschatological dimension of peace—hope-shaped peace—in which the future of the Kingdom of God directs current action toward social transformation; while (Volf, 1996a), emphasizing the concept of embrace as a form of love that demands openness to the "other" without losing identity (reconciliation that nourishes identity). In addition, the pastoral-tradition (Brueggemann, 2001), affirming that the liturgy and community practices (prayer, confession, sharing) shape the people into agents of peace who embody truth and compassion. Thus, the theology of love and peace is not just an abstract teaching but a normative framework that moves practical action: advocacy for justice, protection of the vulnerable, and reconciliation dialogue as a form of Christian ministry in the public sphere.

When applied to a multireligious context, Scripture's love-peace theology provides a normative foundation for the practice of dialogue, mutual humanitarian assistance, and interfaith ethical cooperation. Gospel-based love encourages respect for the dignity of its interlocutor and a commitment to structural justice rather than just procedural tolerance so that interreligious dialogue is directed towards a shared transformation that promotes the well-being (*shalom*) of the community as a whole. Ecclesiastical practices that imitate Christ's sacrifice (ministry in the periphery, advocacy of pro-poor policies, building networks of solidarity) are concrete instruments for the realization of peaceful communities. In a situation where religious tensions are rooted in historical wounds and social inequality, a theological approach that blends confession, forgiveness, and practical reconciliation built on a foundation of biblical love becomes a path to restoring trust and moving cross-faith collaboration toward sustainable peace.

Theologians' Views on Relations and Reconciliation

In an effort to understand relationships and reconciliation as the core of Christian theology, a number of contemporary theologians make important contributions through their thought that emphasize the trinitarian, ethical, and ecclesiological dimensions of the life of faith. The views of theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann, Miroslav Volf, and John Zizioulas show that relationships are not merely a social aspect of religiosity, but an ontological reflection of the relational existence of God himself. They affirm that the experience of the Christian faith is inseparable from the dynamics of love, acceptance, and fellowship that live in the Triune God. In a world

fraught with fragmentation, exclusivity, and identity conflict, their theology offers a conceptual framework that helps the faithful understand that reconciliation is not just a moral imperative, but rather a participation in the life of a loving and restorative God. This approach opens up space for reflection for the church today to reinterpret its calling as a relational community that brings peace in the midst of social and religious plurality (Moltmann, 1981; Volf, 1996; Zizioulas, 1985).

1. Jürgen Moltmann: Relations in Trinity Theology

Jürgen Moltmann places relations at the heart of Trinity theology, rejecting the hierarchical model and replacing it with the concept of perichoresis—the indwelling relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as the ontological basis for the human community. In *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, Moltmann asserts that God is not a stand-alone "divine monarch," but rather a "divine community of love" that is open to creation. Thus, human social relations must reflect a dialogical and participatory trinitarian attachment. God's relationship of giving and receiving each other becomes a paradigm for a just, inclusive, and non-dominative society structure (Moltmann, 1981). In an ecclesiological context, Moltmann interprets the Church as a reflection of the communion of the Trinity *communio sanctorum* that lives from God's love and freedom (Moltmann, 1992). This thought affirms that human identity can only be found in a relationship of love that builds up and serves one another, just as God lives in a relationship of eternal love.

2. Miroslav Volf: Reconciliation and Common Space

Miroslav Volf emphasized that reconciliation demands the creation of a "common space" where the wounded and the wounded can embrace each other without losing identity. In his monumental work *Exclusion and Embrace* (1996), Volf argued that Christian love must be embodied in the act of embracing, active acceptance of others, reflecting God's action in Christ embracing humanity without denying justice. For Volf, true reconciliation is only possible if there is an authentic process of confession, justice, and forgiveness; Not just the superficial elimination of conflict (Volf, 1996a). He also emphasized the importance of remembering the wound in a way that is redeeming, not revenge as part of community healing (Volf, 1996a). Thus, Volf's theology was instrumental in establishing an ethical framework for social and interfaith peace rooted in God's restorative love.

3. John Zizioulas: Communion and Relational Identity

John D. Zizioulas introduced the concept of being as communion "existing as communion" which affirms that human existence cannot be understood individualistically, but only in the context of communal relations that reflect the Trinity. In *Being as Communion*, Zizioulas argues that the person (*prosopon*) finds his existence not through substance, but through the relationship with others in the Holy Spirit. The Church, for Zizioulas, is an icon of the communion of the Trinity in which each person is recognized and accepted in unity without uniformity (Zizioulas, 1985).

This understanding rejects social atomization and affirms human relational identity as participation in God's love. Thus, Zizioulas' theology invites the church to build a communal spirituality that fosters solidarity, mutual forgiveness, and openness to the "other" as a reflection of divine reality.

4. Theological Synthesis: Relationships, Reconciliation, and the Trinity as the Basis of Theology Relational

A synthesis of the thought of Jürgen Moltmann, Miroslav Volf, and John Zizioulas suggests that relational theology is rooted in the reality of the Trinity, in which the living God is a God who relates, loves, and restores. In *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, (Moltmann, 1981), exposing God as a community of love that dwells with each other (perichoresis), becomes the ontological basis for human social relations. (Volf, 1996a), through the concept of embrace in *Exclusion and Embrace*, affirms that divine relationships call human beings to open up space for others through acceptance and reconciliation that redeems wounds. (Zizioulas, 1985), adds an ecclesiological dimension to the concept of being as communion, where human existence has meaning only in participation in the communion of God's love. Together, they present a relational paradigm that rejects individualism and theological exclusivism, replacing it with a vision of a community lived by love, forgiveness, and solidarity. Thus, the Trinity is not just a metaphysical doctrine, but an ethical and social model for human existence and church life in the plural world. Through restorative relationships and reviving reconciliation, humans are called to reflect a living God in love and openness to others.

MULTIRELIGIOUS SPACE AS A THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

This chapter discusses the multireligious space as a real context for the praxis of relational theology, in which the encounter of interfaith is not only a social phenomenon, but also a field of theological reflection. In a pluralistic society like Indonesia, interreligious interactions form a complex living space filled with the potential for peace as well as identity tension. Therefore, theology cannot be understood exclusively in the internal space of the church, but must be present in the midst of dialogue and encounter between religious people. This chapter will examine how the reality of plurality becomes a place where love, reconciliation, and theological relationships are tested and concretely realized. With a contextual approach, the multireligious space is understood as the locus theologicus where God works in history and interhuman relations that challenges the church to present an open, participatory, and peace-oriented theology (Knitter, 2002); (Race & Hedges, 2008).

The Reality of Religious Plurality in Indonesia and the World

Religious plurality is an inherent reality in the dynamics of global society, where diversity of beliefs can no longer be separated from social, political, and cultural life. Historically, religious plurality has been an integral part of the development of human civilization; However, in the era of globalization, inter-agency interactions are

increasingly intense and complex. Globalization, migration, and advances in communication technology bring together different religious identities in the same public space, often giving rise to both the potential for dialogue and conflict (Knitter, 2002);Hedges, 2010). At the global level, studies have confirmed that the biggest challenge to plurality is not just theological differences, but how society manages those differences ethically and peacefully. (Phan, 2017a), emphasizing that in a multireligious world, the Christian faith is called to be a humble and dialogical witness, not domineering; while (Hick, 2004), sees pluralism as "a theological response to the inevitable fact of faith diversity." Thus, the reality of global plurality invites church and theology to move from exclusivity to enriching interfaith dialogue.

In Indonesia, religious plurality has a strong historical and constitutional dimension. Since its inception, Indonesia has recognized religious diversity as part of its national identity through the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and the guarantee of religious freedom in the 1945 Constitution. However, this plurality does not always run harmoniously, there is still frequent friction, intolerance, and social polarization due to narrow interpretations of religious identity (Hefner, 2011);Syamsuddin, 2020). Research (Hutabarat, 2023), shows that interfaith relations in Indonesia are strongly influenced by local contexts: mutual cooperation culture and indigenous values are often bridges that foster social cohesion in the midst of differences. Although the government has implemented a policy of religious moderation, social reality shows the need for a more in-depth and dialogical approach, so that plurality does not stop at passive tolerance, but rather develops into active relationality—an encounter that restores and builds true peace (Kurniawan, 2025a). Thus, the Indonesian context is an important field for the development of relational theology that is rooted in God's love and fruitful in a just and peaceful coexistence.

Theology of Dialogue as a Path to Peace

Dialogue theology views interfaith dialogue not as just a communication technique or a tool for compromise, but as a theological practice rooted in respect for the image of God in every human being and the belief that theological truth can be enriched through honest encounter. This approach demands epistemological openness, a willingness to learn from the other, as well as a theological awareness of the boundaries of dialogue so as not to lead to syncretism that erases the claims of the truth of each tradition (Phan, 2017a). Within such a framework, dialogue becomes a means of reconciliation: through ethical meetings, parties to conflict can acknowledge each other's historical wounds, reconstruct redeeming common memories, and build practical commitments that uphold social justice are all essential elements for sustainable peace.

Practically, dialogue theology succeeds in building peace when organized as a long-term process that combines theological learning, shared humanitarian work, and conflict transformation mechanisms (e.g., restorative justice, truth-telling, and social service cooperation). Case studies in various contexts show dialogue combined with

Bersama projects e.g. Humanitarian aid, interfaith education programs, or public deliberative forums are more effective in reducing prejudice and building social trust than dialogues that only take place at the academic elite level. This approach is seen in the reconciliation and peace literature that emphasizes that dialogue must be linked to the structure of justice and material change in order to produce substantive peace, not just rhetorical reconciliation (Lederach, 1997).

Relational Theology as the Basis of Public Ethics

Relationship theology provides a normative foundation for public ethics because it places relationships, not domination or instrumentalization, at the core of human life. If human identity is understood as relational (*imago Dei*), then public policies and social practices must be evaluated on the extent to which they foster interdependence, dignity, and common well-being. Conceptually, the theological model of relations responds to modern public challenges (individualism, marginalization) by affirming principles such as mutuality, subsidiarity, and respect for plurality as common ethical norms (Bevans, 2002). From this perspective, the formation of just policies is not only a technocratic affair but the concretization of relational ethics rooted in theological tradition.

In the practical realm, relational theology encourages churches and religious institutions to play the role of public actors who promote pro-justice policies such as advocacy for vulnerable groups, inclusive policies in education, and initiatives to reduce economic inequality as a manifestation of relational faith. The literature on Christian public ethics emphasizes that when a faith community articulates its public position through a relational lens, it tends to favor policies that strengthen social institutions that maintain harmony, rather than simply those that demand formal compliance. Thus, relational theology provides a powerful theological language for social transformation: a public ethics that demands structural reconciliation and the recognition of the dignity of the individual (Hauerwas & Wells, 2019).

Inclusive Spirituality and Openness to Others

Inclusive spirituality derived from relational theology emphasizes a spiritual praxis that opens itself to the experience of other faiths without sacrificing theological depth. It is not a theoretical pluralism that negates the claim to truth, but rather a spiritual attitude that places prayer, contemplation, and service as a means of forming a heart capable of meeting the "other" with respect and empathy. This approach was developed in the study of contemporary spirituality that links spiritual practice with the moral capacity to listen, feel the suffering of others, and act for the common good. Together a form of spirituality that is productive for interfaith dialogue (Phan, 2017a). Inclusive spirituality demands liturgical and theological practices that shape the identity of the community in order to be able to accommodate diversity while being rooted in its own traditions.

In ecclesial practice, inclusive spirituality manifests itself through collaborative programs such as sensitive shared worship, interfaith retreats for community leaders, as well as empathy training and dialogue facilitation that emphasizes shared spiritual experiences in the realm of humanity (poverty, disasters, the environment). Research shows that ethically facilitated collective spiritual experiences increase the capacity for mutual trust and open up the possibility of long-term cooperation, for example, shared service to disaster victims or advocacy of environmental protection policies that are concrete forms of theological openness to others (Yong, 2019). Thus, inclusive spirituality is a moral-practical foundation for collective action that builds peaceful communities.

Practical Implementation: Relationships, Collaboration, and Reconciliation

The implementation of relational theology in the field requires practical strategies that combine trust-building, structural collaboration, and reconciliation mechanisms. The first stage is to build personal and institutional relationships through regular communication forums, shared service projects, and interfaith educational initiatives that focus on common issues (water, health, education). The second stage is to form a formal collaboration e.g. Cooperation agreements between religious organizations for social services that provide space for accountability and sustainability of programs. The third stage involves a process of reconciliation: confession of wounds, apology, symbolic/practical reparations and restoration rituals that help restore the community's sense of security (Lederach, 1997). The combination of these three elements answers the criticism that theological dialogue without joint action is prone to becoming a symbolic ritual without social impact.

Concrete examples from the peace literature show that projects that balance interpersonal relationships and structural change are most effective: restitution programs or co-driven policy advocacy (religion A + religion B) tend to reduce structural conflict; Meanwhile, conflict management workshops and community leader training strengthen local capacity to resolve disputes before they erupt into violence. Empirical evaluation emphasizes the importance of participatory design and monitoring based on social indicators (e.g., reduced prejudice, increased interfaith economic cooperation) and the involvement of local actors as determinants of sustainability (Harris & Rees, 2018). Thus, practical implementation requires a blend of relational facilitation skills, collaborative project management, and context-sensitive reconciliation theory.

Model of Church Relations in the Midst of Religious Plurality

An effective model of ecclesiastical relations in a plural environment features several key elements: (1) a clear but dialogical theological identity of the church understanding who it is so that it can speak with integrity; (2) bridge-building capacity through leadership trained in dialogue; (3) a network of interfaith partnerships for shared social services; and (4) liturgical and educational practices that form the

members of the congregation into agents of relations. This model can take the form of synergistic programs between churches, civil society organizations, and interfaith institutions that focus on common issues such as poverty alleviation, children's education, and disaster response. This approach emphasizes the balance between maintaining a faith identity and a commitment to social solidarity, a crucial balance so that relations do not become a compromise of identity or a political tool (Swinton & Mowat, 2016).

Field studies from different countries and local contexts show concrete variations of the ecclesiastical model: some churches choose the role of community catalyst (facilitating interfaith forums and social services), while others take an advocacy role (pushing for protection policies for minorities and marginalized). The success of this model often depends on the capacity of church organizations to forge equitable partnerships, mobilize local resources, and implement transparent accountability so that collaboration is not perceived as a one-party monopoly. Practical literature in practical theology and peace studies recommends an adaptive model of the church that is able to adapt its role to social needs while still living from its spiritual source—as the most sustainable strategy in the context of religious plurality (Kurniawan, 2025c).

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This chapter is a synthesis space of the entire previous discussion with the aim of exploring theological reflection and formulating the practical implications of Relational Theology in the Multireligious Space. After exploring the biblical foundations, the views of theologians, as well as the reality of religious plurality, this chapter focuses on how the principles of relational theology translate into the praxis of faith and social life. Theological reflection here is not only conceptual, but also performative encouraging concrete action for the construction of a peaceful community that reflects God's love. Through reflection on the values of the Trinity, love, and reconciliation, this chapter affirms that the Christian faith finds its meaning precisely in relation to the "other." In the context of a pluralistic society such as Indonesia, relational theology is a spiritual ethos that leads the church to be actively involved in peace, interfaith dialogue, and the formation of inclusive public ethics (Amaladoss, 2019a).

Theological Reflections on Relations and Peace

Theological reflection on relationships and peace is rooted in the belief that God Himself is the source of true relationships and peace. In the Trinitarian framework, the love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit becomes a divine model for human relationships that accept each other, give space, and make peace. (Moltmann, 1981), in *The Trinity and the Kingdom* affirms that the Trinity relationship is not just a metaphysical doctrine, but an ethical paradigm for human communities where differences do not negate unity, but rather enrich common existence. Thus, peace is

not just the absence of conflict, but the presence of love that enables human beings to live in reconciliation and mutual forgiveness (Volf, 1996a). In the context of a world plagued by identity violence, this reflection affirms that peace is a theological call that comes from God's relational nature.

Further (Volf, 1996b) Through the concept of Embrace, it interprets peace as a theological act of accepting the "other" without losing one's identity. This process reflects the work of Christ that restores the relationship between God and man, as well as between people. Relational theology thus places peace not on the fringes of faith, but at the heart of Christian spirituality as a form of people's participation in God's love that reconciles the world (2 Corinthians 5:18–19). This reflection leads the church not only to teach peace, but to present it in social, political, and interpersonal praxis.

Implications for Contextual Theology in Indonesia

Relationship theology has great relevance for Indonesia's multicultural and multireligious context. In contextual theology, the Christian faith must be lived in a dialogue relationship with other cultures and religions. (Pieris, 1988), affirming that Asian theology must be sourced from the "two realities" of poverty and religious plurality so that the Christian faith becomes a liberating and reconciling good news in the real context of the people. Through a relational approach, Indonesian theology can find an inclusive form, respect togetherness, and reject exclusivism that negates the other.

Contextual theology in Indonesia also demands the active involvement of the church in building a national narrative rooted in spiritual solidarity. (Phan, 2017b), saying that plurality is not a threat, but an opportunity to manifest God's universal love. Therefore, the church in Indonesia is called to be a dialogue actor and guardian of a peaceful public space. Relational theology acts as a bridge between faith reflection and social praxis in the context of Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika.

The Role of Christian Education in Building Dialogue

Christian education plays a central role in fostering relational awareness and shaping interfaith dialogical attitudes. Within the framework of transformative learning, faith education is not only doctrinally oriented, but also the formation of an open and loving character (Mezirow, 2000). The theological learning process must integrate the values of justice, peace, and social responsibility, so that students are able to become agents of reconciliation in the midst of a pluralistic society.

Furthermore, (Holmes, 1998), emphasizing that true Christian education must teach a biblical worldview that views all creation in the light of God's love. In a multireligious context, this means developing a critical cross-faith understanding, but still rooted in the Christian faith. The curriculum of Christian education in Indonesia needs to be directed towards religious literacy, empathy skills, and dialogue ethics, so that the younger generation is able to face plurality with wisdom and love.

The Church's Call to Realize a Peaceful Community

The Church as the body of Christ is called to be a witness of peace in a world divided by identity conflict. In an ecclesiological framework (Moltmann, 1977) and (Volf, 1998), the church is not just a religious institution, but a relational community that lives the love of the Trinity in the world. The Christ-centered Church is called to be present in the midst of social wounds as a sign of hope and reconciliation. This task is not an addition to the mission of the church, but rather the essence of the gospel calling.

In the Indonesian context, this call is realized through active involvement in peace movements, social justice advocacy, and interfaith programs. As affirmed by (Amaladoss, 2019b), the church must go beyond institutional exclusivity and become a "sacrament of dialogue" where everyone can experience God's love. Through service that prioritizes empathy and interfaith cooperation, the church contributes to the formation of a more just and peaceful society.

Challenges and Opportunities for Future Theology of Relations

In the future, relational theology will face challenges from two directions: globalization that gives rise to cultural homogenization, and religious exclusivism that is increasingly hardened. This tension requires theology to find a new language capable of bridging faith and multicultural realities. (Knitter, 2002), emphasizing the importance of mutual transformation, which is interreligious dialogue that does not stop at tolerance, but produces mutual change. In the midst of technological advances and information flows, faith relations must also enter the digital space as a new field of theological dialogue.

But on the other hand, great opportunities are open for relational theology to contribute to the building of a peaceful civilization. Relational theology can be the basis of a global ethics that glorifies life, as affirmed by (Volf & McAnnally-Linz, 2016), in *Public Faith in Action*. By living a love that transcends religious, cultural, and ideological boundaries, Christians can become transformative actors in a world that continues to turn into a "bridge of love" in the midst of the abyss of differences.

CONCLUSION

First, for the academic world of theology, it is necessary to develop a more interdisciplinary theological study of relations, integrating theological reflection with social, anthropological, and educational research. This approach allows for a more complete understanding of how interpersonal relations can be constructed theologically and practically. Second, Christian educational institutions in Indonesia need to strengthen a theological curriculum that is oriented towards interfaith dialogue and peace ethics, so that prospective church leaders are equipped to become actors of reconciliation in a pluralistic society (Banawiratma, 2018; Heryanto, 2022).

Third, the church is expected to play an active role in pioneering interfaith collaborative activities not just as discourse, but as concrete social actions: for example,

humanitarian programs, joint education, and social justice advocacy. Through these steps, the theology of relationships becomes alive and real as a spirituality of service and solidarity. Finally, the church must continue to renew itself so that it is not trapped in exclusivity, but dares to be a space for dialogue of love that opens the way for God's peace in the world.

The relevance of this research to the life of the church lies in the understanding that the church is not only a community of worship, but also a community of dialogue and peace. In the context of a multireligious society like Indonesia, the church has a spiritual and social responsibility to be a witness to Christ's love that restores relationships between human beings. As Zizioulas (2006) emphasizes, the identity of the church comes from relationships and communion, so openness to the "other" is not a threat, but an expression of true faith. A Church that lives in the love of the Trinity will reject violence, intolerance, and exclusivism, and seek social harmony through tangible action.

Meanwhile, for the wider community, relational theology offers a framework of public ethics that fosters mutual trust and empathy. When relational theological values are internalized in social life, there is a possibility of creating a more peaceful, just, and inclusive social order. The theology of relations is an important contribution of Christianity to global civilization, a call to live together in difference on the basis of love and reconciliation. In a world marked by polarization and radicalism, this message becomes relevant and urgent to be embodied in common life.

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