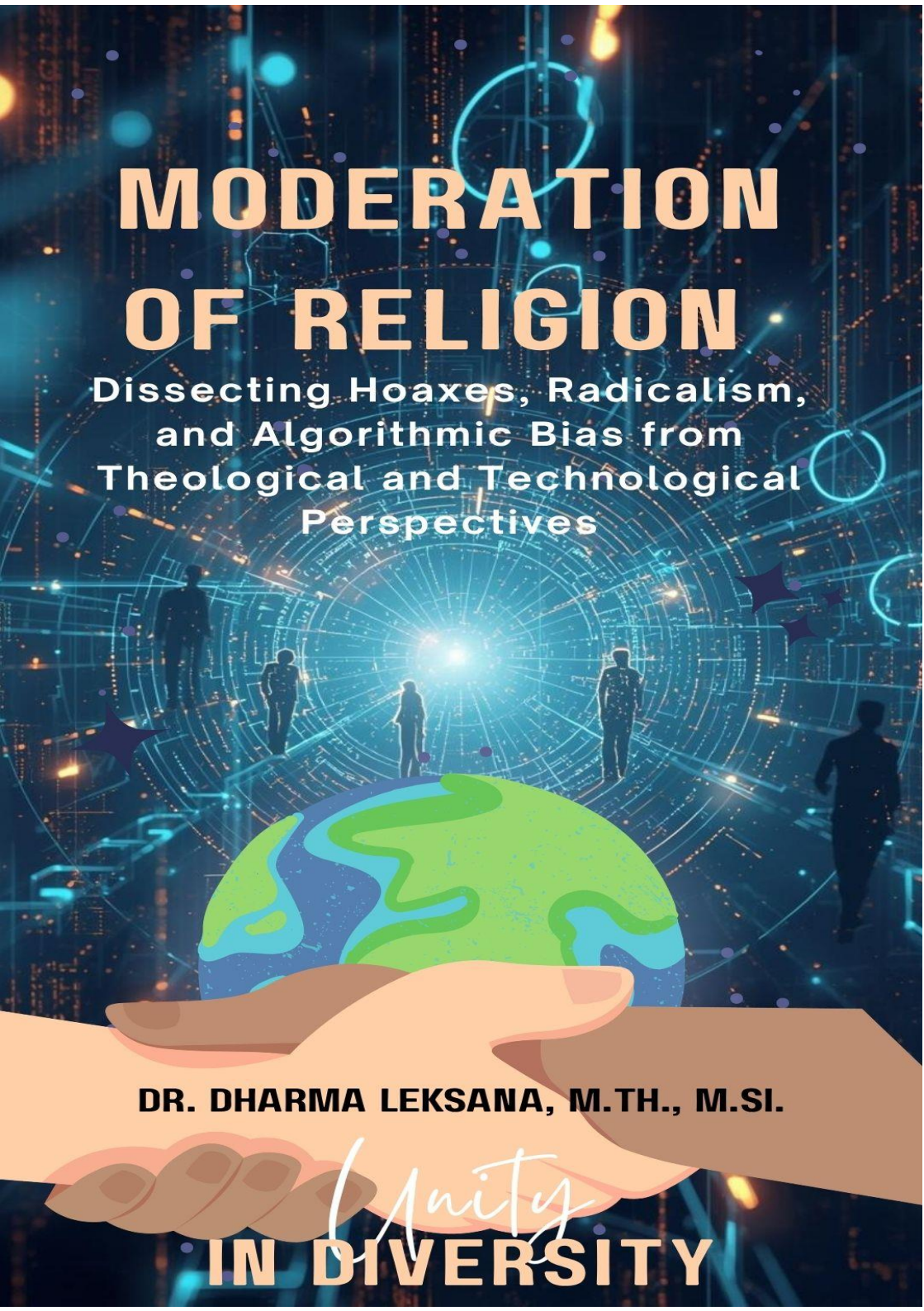
MODERATION OF RELIGION

Dissecting Hoaxes, Radicalism, and Algorithmic Bias from Theological and Technological Perspectives



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Unity IN DIVERSITY

Moderation of Religion in the Age of Information Disruption

Dissecting Hoaxes, Radicalism, and Algorithmic Bias from Theological and Technological Perspectives

By

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Preface

In an age when information moves faster than reflection and algorithms are often trusted more than conscience, modern humanity faces a new paradox: connectivity without depth, freedom of expression without wisdom, and faith that too often becomes trapped within the echo chambers of the digital world.

Religious Moderation in the Age of Information Disruption is not merely an academic project—it is a cultural one. It is an effort to restore humanity within the algorithm and to breathe life into faith amid the network. It arises from the awareness that technology, however neutral it may seem in its mechanics, is never morally neutral. Algorithms learn from our behavior, imitate our fears, and magnify our prejudices.

Thus, the spiritual responsibility of the twenty-first century is not only to believe in God, but to believe in truth amid the storm of information.

Religious moderation serves as a bridge between faith and reason, between sacred text and technology. It is not an ideological compromise but a moral discipline—to ensure that religion does not become a weapon of hatred or a tool of digital propaganda. From a reflective theological perspective, religious moderation means returning

to the essence: love, justice, and universal humanity that transcend the logic of the algorithm.

This book explores how the disruption of information—from hoaxes and online radicalism to algorithmic bias—has shaken the foundations of our ethical and religious life. Yet amid the turbulence, a new opportunity also emerges: the digital sphere as fertile ground for compassion, dialogue, and wisdom.

Religious moderation becomes a kind of *spiritual vaccine* against the infodemic. It teaches us not only what is true, but how to treat truth in an age of limitless connectivity.

As part of the nation's intellectual and spiritual journey, this book aims to offer new direction for religious leaders, scholars, and digital communities of all faiths—to collectively build a more humane information civilization. Harmony, after all, is not merely a matter of public policy; it is a way of life, a treasure that makes Indonesia unique among the nations of the world.

We now live in an era where "faith without algorithms" is nostalgia, and "algorithms without faith" are perilous. The middle path is ethical faith—faith that understands technology as an instrument, while keeping humanity as the center of meaning.

There, religious moderation finds its highest calling: to rehumanize technology and reaffirm the spiritual dignity of humankind.

Jakarta, October 1, 2025
Dr. Dharma Leksana, M.Th., M.Si.
Author

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All praise and gratitude I raise to God, the Source of Truth and Knowledge, who illuminates every mind that seeks meaning amid the complexity of the digital world.

This book was born from a long dialogue between theology, philosophy, and technology—three domains that may seem distinct, yet converge within a single human question: how can we remain whole persons in an age of disruption?

My deepest thanks go to my family and academic colleagues for their unwavering moral and intellectual support throughout this writing process. I am especially grateful to fellow researchers in the fields of digital theology, ethical journalism, and communication studies, whose conversations and critiques helped refine many of the ideas presented here.

I wish to express particular appreciation to the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, the Research and Development and Training Agency (Badan Litbang dan Diklat), as well as to institutions such as the Wahid Foundation, SETARA Institute, and the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo). Their surveys, data, and reports on religious harmony, digital literacy, and moderation have provided essential foundations for this study.

I also extend heartfelt gratitude to students, media activists, and interfaith community leaders who serve as living examples of how moderation can be practiced in digital spaces. They demonstrate that harmony is not merely a theory, but a daily practice rooted in love and wisdom.

Finally, I dedicate this book to all who continue to struggle for balance between faith and information—between the spiritual and the digital realms. May this humble work become a small contribution toward a greater national vision: an Indonesia that is peaceful, faithful, and enlightened.

Dr. Dharma Leksana, M.Th., M.Si.

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Chapter 1

Indonesia as a Plural Nation: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as a Blessing

1.1 Introduction: Plurality as the Lifebreath of Indonesia

No nation on Earth was ever built from a single color. Every country is a mosaic—but Indonesia is a mosaic that sings. It stretches across more than seventeen thousand islands, speaks over seven hundred local languages, embraces hundreds of ethnic groups, and recognizes six official religions that coexist within one civic home. Out of this diversity arises a unifying creed: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, tan hana dharma mangrwa*—"unity in diversity; there is no duality in truth."

This phrase is more than a political slogan; it is the social theology of the Indonesian people. It proclaims that diversity is not a threat to be feared, but a grace to be tended. As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1960) observed in his classic study of Javanese and Balinese culture, Indonesian pluralism embodies "a layered consciousness of unity"—a harmony of overlapping traditions that coexist without erasing one another.

The founders of the Republic understood this deeply. In his speech of June 1, 1945, Soekarno declared that Indonesia "is not one people, one religion, or one language, but one homeland and one ideal." His vision gave birth to an inclusive nationalism that rejected enforced uniformity and affirmed difference as the essence of Indonesian humanity.

Yet in the twenty-first century, this pluralism—once our greatest strength—faces the storms of information disruption: fake news, hate speech, and digital polarization that reshape how citizens perceive difference itself. To understand how religious moderation can flourish amid such storms, we must return to our roots—to the story of how Indonesia learned to live with diversity from the very beginning.

1.2 Conceptual Framework: Pluralism, Diversity, and Active Tolerance

The term *pluralism* is often mistaken to mean simply "many differences." Philosophically, it means active recognition of the existence and worth of the other. John Hick (1989) defined pluralism as "not merely a fact of diversity, but a positive response to that diversity."

In other words, pluralism is not a condition—it is an attitude. In Indonesia, it did not arise from a vacuum. It grew from a land shaped by encounter and exchange: the spice trade, migration, inter-island preaching, and cultural dialogue. Franz Magnis-Suseno (2019) emphasized that "Indonesia's diversity is not a demographic statistic but a moral foundation binding the nation together." He saw Indonesian pluralism as a moral project requiring spiritual consciousness, not merely political tolerance.

Abdurrahman Wahid—*Gus Dur*—popularized the notion of *pribumisasi Islam*, the indigenization of Islam. He argued that Islamic values can merge with local culture without losing their essence. This principle mirrors the broader pattern of religious inculturation that has long shaped the archipelago: Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and local traditions have historically met not through conquest but through adaptation.

Theologians such as Nurcholish Madjid (1992) viewed pluralism as *sunnatullah*—a divine law to be accepted, not resisted. Diversity, therefore, purifies faith from narrow fanaticism. The Christian writer Y.B. Mangunwijaya (1998) made a parallel claim: "True faith never grows in the soil of fear toward the other."

Philosophically, Indonesia's plural reality may be understood through the ontology of *being-with*—

the way human beings exist together. Emmanuel Levinas (1969) taught that the presence of the Other is an ethical summons: we become fully human only when we take responsibility for the Other. Diversity, then, is not merely social fact; it is moral vocation.

1.3 Historical Traces of Nusantaran Plurality

1.3.1 The Early Era: The Archipelago as a Bridge of Civilizations

Historical and archaeological evidence reveals that long before the modern state, the Indonesian archipelago was already a crossroads of cultures. The Chinese pilgrim I-Tsing, writing in the seventh century, described Śrīvijaya as an international Buddhist center where scholars from India and East Asia studied together. Artifacts found across Sumatra, Java, and Kalimantan display Hindu, Buddhist, and local motifs interwoven in spiritual syncretism.

The Dutch historian N.J. Krom (1931) noted that classical Javanese spirituality did not draw hard lines between Hinduism and Buddhism. The Majapahit-era poem *Sutasoma* by Mpu Tantular coined the phrase *tan hana dharma mangrwa*—"there is no dual truth." This non-dualistic vision

later inspired the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.

1.3.2 Syncretism and Adaptation

When Islam reached the archipelago in the thirteenth century through merchants from Gujarat and Arabia, it came not by the sword but through culture. The *Wali Songo*—the nine saints of Java—used local arts such as *wayang* theater, *gamelan*, and vernacular poetry to convey ethical teachings. This was not mere pedagogy; it was an early act of moderation—Islam translated into Nusantaran language and imagination.

Azyumardi Azra (2004) described how Indonesian scholars from the seventeenth century maintained wide intellectual networks with the Middle East while preserving local wisdom. This balance produced an Indonesian Islam that was open, humanistic, and unafraid of modernity.

Christianity, arriving later through colonial routes, also underwent localization. Indigenous churches grew attentive to local culture, as documented by Jan S. Aritonang (2008). Likewise, Balinese Hinduism developed a distinctive form that blended Indian metaphysics with ancestral traditions. Each world religion found a home here through dialogue, not domination.

1.4 Pluralism as a Modern National Project

At independence, Indonesia's founders faced a profound dilemma: how to forge one ideology from such vast diversity. The answer was *Pancasila*—a moral-political synthesis affirming that belief in God, humanity, unity, democracy, and social justice are not conflicting ideals but mutually sustaining ones.

Soekarno called *Pancasila* the *philosophische grondslag*—the philosophical foundation distilled from the lived wisdom of the people. Yudi Latif (2011) later explained that *Pancasila* is "an ethical platform guiding the encounter of different faith systems." Franz Magnis-Suseno (2019) described it as "public ethics for a plural society."

Pluralism thus serves as the glue of social life—not a weak compromise but a reflective strength. Anthony Giddens (1991) would call such a society one of *reflexive modernity*: constantly negotiating identity through interaction and discourse. Hence pluralism requires not just information literacy, but reflective literacy.

Even through political turbulence—rebellions, ideological schisms, and religious tensions—the national foundation endured, for pluralism had already become cultural ethos. As Mohammad Hatta (1952) observed, "This nation is not built

upon sameness, but upon the will to live together in difference."

1.5 *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as Moral Ideology

The phrase *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* first appeared in *Kakawin Sutasoma* by Mpu Tantular during the Majapahit era, affirming spiritual unity between Śaiva Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism: "They are indeed different, but they are one, for truth is not dual."

Importantly, this statement did not erase difference but embraced it as part of truth itself. In ancient Javanese cosmology, truth was not an exclusive possession but a cosmic harmony. Thus, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* articulated a theology of plural oneness.

When Soekarno and Mohammad Yamin adopted it as the national motto, its meaning expanded into moral ideology: an ethical commitment to honor diversity as the foundation of unity. Political philosopher Charles Taylor (1992) might call this a form of *communitarian pluralism*—a community bound by shared moral values rather than uniform belief.

In modern religious life, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* can be read as a "civic theology": an ethical

covenant among believers to coexist without denying one another's faith. Al Makin (2021) urges that this motto be interpreted dynamically—not merely as a relic of the past but as a living principle in today's digital world, where false information easily fragments the public mind.

1.6 The Challenge of Diversity in the Age of Disruption

Today pluralism confronts a new adversary: the algorithm.
Where the last century battled ideological and colonial domination, the present faces *data colonialism*—information flows governed by unseen algorithms that decide what we read, watch, and believe.

Eli Pariser's (2011) study of the *filter bubble* revealed how social-media algorithms trap users within echo chambers that reinforce their own convictions. In matters of religion, this leads to ideological homogeny and digital radicalization.

Azyumardi Azra (2017) termed this *cyber radicalism*—extremism cultivated not in classrooms but through online interactions. In this digital arena, religious moderation is tested at its sharpest edge: between freedom of expression and moral responsibility for truth.

Religious hoaxes—ranging from interfaith slander to apocalyptic conspiracies—now function as political and identity weapons. Government data (Kominfo 2023) record thousands of religion-related hoaxes annually, spiking during election seasons. The crisis, therefore, is not only technological but epistemic: people are losing the capacity to distinguish between opinion, belief, and fact.

From a theological lens, this new condition demands *digital moderation*—the ability to live faithfully within algorithmic space. As Paul Tillich (1957) wrote, genuine faith always concerns "the ultimate concern"—that which matters most to human existence. In our digital age, that ultimate concern now includes not only God but also truth itself.

Religious moderation must therefore expand into information moderation—the discipline of weighing, verifying, and contextualizing before believing. In Nurcholish Madjid's (1992) terms, this is modern *ijtihad*—the critical use of reason amid the flood of data.

1.7 Conclusion: Diversity as Gift and Responsibility

Indonesia stands upon a fragile yet beautiful foundation: a diversity bound by shared ideals. From Śrīvijaya to the digital era, from Mpu Tantular to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, from interfaith dialogue to social-media algorithms—the thread remains constant: the longing to live together without becoming identical.

Pluralism is not an inheritance to be passively received; it must be continually cultivated. In a world ruled by information disruption, the task of our generation is not merely to preserve difference but to educate reason so that it can understand difference critically.

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika is not a relic of the past but a spiritual program for the future. It calls believers to become digital citizens who are both faithful and rational, religious yet reflective.

As Gus Dur (1999) reminded us, "God does not need defending, but humanity must be protected." In today's context, that means faith is not threatened by difference, but by ignorance and fear born of hoaxes and hatred.

Indonesia's pluralism, then, is both a divine blessing and a moral duty. Religious moderation, as the following chapters will show, is the most rational and spiritual way to safeguard that blessing amid the storms of information disruption.

Chapter 2

The Legacy of Religious Harmony in Indonesia: From *Tan Hana Dharma Mangrwa* to *Pancasila*

2.1 Introduction: Faith as the DNA of the Archipelago

Indonesia is not merely a chain of islands—it is a chain of meanings.
Amid more than seventeen thousand islands, hundreds of languages, and countless belief systems, a single thread has bound this archipelago for millennia: the desire to live side by side in difference.

Archaeological and anthropological research shows that long before the arrival of the world's major religions, the peoples of the archipelago practiced an inclusive and adaptive spirituality. Belief in ancestral spirits (*animism*), reverence for natural powers (*dynamism*), and collective ritual practice formed the foundation of egalitarian, cooperative communities.

Clifford Geertz (1960) observed in his study of Javanese culture that Indonesians have historically drawn no strict line between "religion" and

"culture." The two have always existed symbiotically—religion incarnated in tradition, and tradition giving social form to faith. From this harmony emerged a multilayered religiosity, fluid rather than rigid: a *syncretic spirituality* that sees the sacred in the everyday.

2.2 Indigenous Spirituality Before the Arrival of World Religions

Archaeological findings from sites such as Gua Harimau in South Sumatra, Gilimanuk in Bali, and the megalithic complexes of Nias and Sumba reveal burial rites and ancestral offerings (Simanjuntak, 2015). These artifacts illustrate a worldview that sought balance between humanity and the cosmos.

Within this system of values, social harmony was considered more essential than dogmatic correctness. Conflicts over belief were rare, for each community developed its own local cosmology in which harmony itself was sacred. This was the seed of the archipelago's theology of harmony—an indigenous moral ecology that would later make possible the peaceful reception of foreign faiths.

2.3 The Arrival of Hindu-Buddhism and the Philosophy of "*Tan Hana Dharma Mangrwa*"

By the fourth century CE, trade routes connecting the Indian subcontinent and the Indonesian islands carried more than spices—they carried ideas. Hinduism and Buddhism entered not through conquest but through cultural encounter. Local societies did not reject them; they absorbed and reinterpreted them. Hindu deities received local names; Buddhist ethics were woven into agrarian life.

The synthesis reached its zenith in the fourteenth century under Majapahit, when the poet Mpu Tantular composed his famous *Kakawin Sutasoma*:
"*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika tan hana dharma mangrwa*"—
"They are indeed different, yet they are one; there is no dual truth."

This was not a political slogan but a profound theological declaration: that multiple paths of faith do not contradict truth but express it in different forms. *Tan hana dharma mangrwa* literally means "there is no twofold truth." Tantular articulated a theology of non-duality (*advaita*), rejecting religious absolutism. Śaiva and Buddhist worship were seen as two rays of one divine light.

This insight was exceptional for its time. In the fourteenth century, when much of the world—Europe and the Middle East included—was torn by sectarian conflict, the Javanese civilization chose the middle path: *syncretism over sectarianism*. Historian Denys Lombard (1990) called this the "civilization of compromise," a culture that maintained diversity through symbolic integration.

2.4 The Rise of Islamic Humanism: The New Tolerance of *Islam Nusantara*

When Islam arrived in the thirteenth century through merchants from Gujarat and southern Arabia, it encountered a society already plural. The early scholars and saints—*Wali Songo*—did not impose their faith by force; they dialogued with local traditions.

Sunan Kalijaga used *wayang* narratives from the *Mahabharata* to teach monotheism. Sunan Kudus forbade cow slaughter out of respect for Hindu neighbors. Sunan Bonang composed mystical *suluk* poetry blending Sufi contemplation with Javanese ethics.

The result was not an ideological Islam, but a cultural one. Fazlur Rahman (1982) would later describe this as *contextual Islam*—faith that lives

through social interpretation rather than rigid textualism. The Qur'anic principle of *rahmatan lil alamin* ("mercy to all creation") found practical expression in social cooperation and mutual respect.

In theological terms, *Islam Nusantara* viewed tolerance not as compromise with unbelief, but as the embodiment of faith itself.

2.5 Colonialism and the Struggle of Religious Identity

The sixteenth-century arrival of European colonial powers introduced a new dynamic: religion became entwined with politics. The Portuguese and Spanish brought Catholicism; the Dutch introduced Protestantism alongside their mercantile ambitions.

Yet rather than destroy existing tolerance, this encounter often deepened interfaith awareness among local elites. In Ambon, Minahasa, Batavia, and Central Java, Muslim and Christian communities interacted in trade, education, and public life.

By the nineteenth century, religious education became the seedbed of national awakening. *Pesantren*, *madrasah*, and Christian mission

schools alike produced leaders who fused piety with patriotism—figures such as H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, Ki Hajar Dewantara, and Ahmad Dahlan.

As Karel Steenbrink (1998) observed, religion during the colonial period became "a unifying force of spiritual nationalism." For Indonesians, God was not the justification of domination, but the source of liberation.

2.6 *Pancasila* and the Modern Consensus of Harmony

The proclamation of independence on 17 August 1945 was not only a political milestone but a theological one. The founders of the Republic deliberately chose not to establish a state based on any single religion, but a spiritual democracy grounded in inclusivity.

The debates of the BPUPKI (the Independence Preparatory Committee) demonstrated profound wisdom. The *Jakarta Charter* originally included the clause "with the obligation to observe Islamic law for its adherents," but this was later replaced with the first principle of *Pancasila*: *Belief in the One and Only God*.

This change was not political surrender—it was theological synthesis. It acknowledged that a plural nation can only live under a spiritual principle that embraces all paths to the divine.

Thus *Pancasila* reaffirmed the spirit of *Tan Hana Dharma Mangrwa* in modern form. It is not secularism in the sense of rejecting religion, but the placement of religion as a moral source for public life. Soekarno called it the *philosophische grondslag*—the philosophical foundation of togetherness (Soekarno, 1945/2005).

2.7 The Politics of Harmony in the New Order and Reform Eras

During the New Order regime, interreligious harmony was maintained through the state's doctrine of political stability. The government promoted the "three pillars of harmony": between religious communities, within each religion, and between religion and the state (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1980).

Yet this top-down approach often produced homogenized interpretations of faith. The Reform era (post-1998) opened the floodgates of free expression—and with it, new radicalisms and sectarian conflicts. The tragedies of Poso, Ambon, and Sambas reminded the nation that

pluralism must be sustained by continuous education in religious moderation.

Today, the challenge is digital. Social-media algorithms intensify polarization, turning religious discourse into viral content. Religious moderation must therefore adapt to this new information ecology lest its moral power be lost amid the noise of the network.

2.8 Reflection: A Spiritual Legacy in Constant Evolution

Indonesia's long history shows that tolerance is not a Western import, but a native spiritual gene. From the ancestral cults of the archipelago to the syncretism of Majapahit, from *Tan Hana Dharma Mangrwa* to *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*, Indonesians have repeatedly reinterpreted how to believe amid diversity.

Religious moderation today is thus not a bureaucratic program or mere social campaign—it is the latest chapter in a centuries-long theological journey that refuses the false duality of "us" versus "them."

As Mpu Tantular taught, truth does not divide itself. And as *Pancasila* reminds us, God contains all the human quests for meaning.

The legacy of harmony in Indonesia is therefore not static; it is a living tradition, a dialogue that must be renewed continuously in the digital age. The challenge now is to translate that ancient wisdom into the language of algorithms—to ensure that the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* remains alive in the screens and networks that shape our modern consciousness.

Chapter 3

Tolerance, Intolerance, and Religious Freedom in Indonesia: Root Causes and Solutions

3.1 Introduction: The Paradox of Tolerance in a Democratic Age

Every civilization must eventually face the paradox of tolerance: how to remain open to difference without being destroyed by it. In modern Indonesia—one of the world's largest democracies and home to more Muslims than any other nation—religious freedom stands as both a constitutional promise and a daily challenge.

The post-Reformasi era (after 1998) brought an explosion of openness. The press became free, religious organizations multiplied, and public discourse diversified. Yet this same freedom, paradoxically, also gave rise to new forms of intolerance. The democratization of information enabled not only voices of truth but also waves of hoaxes, hate speech, and radical narratives.

Thus, Indonesia today embodies a dual reality: a constitutional democracy sustained by *Pancasila*, yet simultaneously vulnerable to identity politics and sectarian populism amplified by digital technology.

As the philosopher Karl Popper (1945) warned, "Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance." The challenge, therefore, is not only political but moral: how to build a society that defends freedom of belief without allowing that freedom to be hijacked by hatred.

3.2 The Constitutional Foundation of Religious Freedom

Indonesia's constitutional framework for religious freedom rests primarily on two principles:

1. **Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution**, which guarantees freedom of religion and belief in the One and Only God (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*); and
2. **Pancasila**, which anchors belief in God as a unifying moral foundation rather than a divisive dogma.

This constitutional balance is unique. It is neither secular in the Western sense—excluding religion from the public sphere—nor theocratic in the Middle Eastern sense—subjecting the state to clerical authority. Instead, it is *theo-humanistic*: affirming the divine as a source of ethics while recognizing human pluralism as sacred.

Legal scholar Mahfud MD (2013) describes this as "a constitutional hybrid": religiously inspired but democratically grounded. Religious freedom in Indonesia, therefore, is not absolute individualism; it is framed by communal ethics and cultural harmony.

3.3 The Anatomy of Intolerance

Despite this strong foundation, Indonesia has repeatedly faced incidents of religious intolerance—from church closures and mob intimidation to online hate campaigns. To understand the root causes, one must look beyond religion as doctrine and examine religion as a *social identity* shaped by historical, economic, and technological forces.

3.3.1 Political Instrumentalization of Religion

Religion becomes intolerant when politicized. During local and national elections, religious identity is often weaponized for short-term political gain. Sociologist Saiful Mujani (2019) showed that "identity politics remains the most effective mobilization tool" in Indonesian elections, often deepening polarization along sectarian lines.

This phenomenon mirrors what Francis Fukuyama (2018) calls “the politics of recognition”—the human desire for dignity being hijacked by populism. When faith is reduced to electoral branding, theology is replaced by propaganda.

3.3.2 Economic and Educational Inequality

Intolerance also grows where poverty and limited education persist. Studies by the Wahid Foundation and SETARA Institute (2022) demonstrate that communities with lower education levels and limited digital literacy are more susceptible to hoaxes and extremist narratives.

In such contexts, religion often becomes a psychological refuge for dignity—a source of certainty amid economic uncertainty. When combined with online misinformation, this sentiment can easily be manipulated by ideological entrepreneurs.

3.3.3 Algorithmic Bias and Digital Radicalization

The twenty-first century has introduced a new actor in religious life: the algorithm. Social media platforms, designed to maximize engagement, reward content that provokes emotion rather than reflection. As a result, anger and fear—especially on religious topics—spread faster than empathy or nuance.

The *filter bubble* effect described by Eli Pariser (2011) and later confirmed by Oxford Internet Institute (2020) studies has created echo chambers where users see only information that reinforces their biases. For religious communities, this becomes fertile ground for digital radicalization—where moral conviction hardens into moral absolutism.

Religious intolerance, therefore, is no longer a purely sociological phenomenon; it is also a technological pathology.

3.4 Sociological Roots of Religious Freedom in Indonesia

Sociologist Robert Wuthnow (1988) proposed that religion always oscillates between "private piety" and "public meaning." In Indonesia, this oscillation manifests in how religion simultaneously guides personal morality and shapes national identity.

The colonial experience also left deep marks. For centuries, colonial governance used a *divide et impera* strategy—classifying populations by religion, ethnicity, and social status. This system subtly fostered suspicion among communities that continues to echo today.

After independence, national leaders sought to heal this inherited fragmentation through *Pancasila*, yet latent mistrust occasionally resurfaces, especially when global geopolitical tensions (such as Islamophobia or religious extremism abroad) are amplified online.

Hence, Indonesian religious freedom must be understood not merely as a legal issue, but as a historical struggle to rebuild trust among diverse faith communities.

3.5 The Psychology of Intolerance

From a psychological viewpoint, intolerance is rooted in fear—fear of losing identity, status, or sacred certainty. Gordon Allport's (1954) *The Nature of Prejudice* remains relevant: prejudice thrives on ignorance and authoritarian personalities.

In a world of constant information, cognitive overload leads people to seek simplicity. Religious extremism offers precisely that: a world divided neatly between "us" and "them." Psychologically, this dualism reduces anxiety, but spiritually it corrodes empathy.

Neuroscience adds another layer. Studies by Decety and Cowell (2014) show that moral

decision-making involves not only rational reasoning (the prefrontal cortex) but also emotional resonance (the limbic system). Extremist indoctrination works by hijacking empathy through repetitive fear conditioning—a process now accelerated by digital media.

Thus, combating intolerance requires not only argumentation but *affective education*—teaching emotional intelligence, empathy, and compassion alongside critical thinking.

3.6 Theological Dimensions of Tolerance

Tolerance is not a secular virtue—it is a religious one.
Every major faith contains an internal logic of compassion and humility toward difference.

In Islam, the Qur'an declares, *"For you your religion, and for me mine"* (Q.S. Al-Kafirun:6) and *"We have made you nations and tribes so that you may know one another"* (Q.S. Al-Hujurat:13). These verses express not relativism but divine pedagogy—difference as a means of learning, not enmity.

In Christianity, Jesus teaches, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39)—a command that presupposes the neighbor's

otherness. Hindu philosophy speaks of *Tat Tvam Asi*—"Thou art that"—asserting unity behind multiplicity.
Buddhism's *Karuna* (compassion) and Confucianism's *Ren* (benevolence) likewise elevate empathy as spiritual discipline.

Hence, intolerance represents not excess faith, but its corruption—faith detached from its own ethical heart.

3.7 Strategies for Strengthening Religious Freedom and Moderation

3.7.1 Education in Critical Faith

Religious education must evolve from doctrinal memorization toward *critical faith literacy*—the ability to understand one's own belief system while appreciating others'.
As Nurcholish Madjid (1992) insisted, *ijtihad*—creative reasoning—is essential for faith to remain alive. Schools, seminaries, and digital platforms should cultivate not only obedience but curiosity.

3.7.2 Strengthening Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is now a moral duty. The Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo, 2023) identifies digital literacy as key to

combating misinformation. Religious leaders, educators, and influencers must model responsible engagement: verifying sources, resisting sensationalism, and promoting dialogue rather than outrage.

3.7.3 Interfaith Collaboration

Empirical evidence shows that direct contact reduces prejudice (Allport's contact hypothesis). Interfaith collaboration—joint humanitarian projects, environmental campaigns, or online peace movements—creates shared narratives that humanize "the other."

Programs like *Pesantren for Peace* or *Young Interfaith Peacemakers Community* (YIPC) demonstrate that tolerance flourishes through experience, not merely instruction.

3.7.4 Ethical Regulation of the Digital Sphere

Freedom of speech must coexist with ethical responsibility. Governments and tech companies share a duty to counter online hate while preserving open discourse. Regulation should focus not on censorship but on algorithmic transparency and digital ethics education.

3.8 Conclusion: Toward a Culture of Reflective Tolerance

Religious tolerance in Indonesia is not a new invention—it is a moral legacy. Yet in the digital age, that legacy must be renewed through conscious effort.

Intolerance is not merely the absence of harmony; it is the failure to think deeply. Therefore, the antidote is reflection—critical, empathetic, and dialogical.

As Gus Dur once said, "Religion must make people peaceful, not frightened." That simple sentence encapsulates the essence of Indonesia's religious project: faith as a source of public tranquility.

To sustain that vision, Indonesia must cultivate *reflective tolerance*: a tolerance that does not drift into relativism, but anchors itself in understanding and shared humanity.

Religious freedom, in this sense, is not only a constitutional right—it is the heartbeat of Indonesian civilization. And in the age of disruption, it must be guarded not just by laws, but by conscience.

Chapter 4

Polarization, Extremism, and the Fragility of Digital Identity

4.1 Introduction: Living in the Age of Division

The digital age has democratized expression but fragmented understanding.
Where once people debated ideas in physical forums, they now battle algorithms on invisible battlefields. The internet, intended as a tool of connection, has paradoxically magnified division.

Indonesia—like the rest of the world—now inhabits what sociologists call *the polarized public sphere*. Political, religious, and moral discourses no longer meet in dialogue but in digital confrontation. Polarization is no longer confined to ideology; it has become a psychological state, a way of seeing the world through the lens of perpetual opposition.

Theologian Miroslav Volf (1996) described this dynamic as *exclusion and embrace*—the tension between protecting one's identity and opening oneself to the other. Digital culture intensifies this tension. Online, we encounter not persons but profiles; not conversation, but performance.

In this hyper-connected yet emotionally isolated world, extremism finds fertile soil.

4.2 Understanding Digital Polarization

Polarization refers to the process by which public opinion divides into opposing extremes, diminishing the middle ground. Cass Sunstein (2002) demonstrated that “group deliberation among like-minded individuals tends to produce more extreme versions of their initial views.”

Social media algorithms exacerbate this by tailoring content to user preferences—a process known as *algorithmic curation*. Over time, users are shown increasingly homogenous content, leading to *echo chambers* where dissenting voices vanish.

In Indonesia, digital polarization manifests vividly in religious and political discourse. Online debates about blasphemy, morality, or politics often devolve into hostility, where faith becomes a weapon rather than a wisdom.

This dynamic is not purely technological; it is spiritual. The internet amplifies what already exists within the human heart—the hunger for certainty, belonging, and superiority.

4.3 The Psychology of the Polarized Self

Polarization begins not with data but with emotion.
Human beings are tribal by nature. Evolutionarily, group loyalty ensured survival; psychologically, it provides identity. In the digital realm, this instinct mutates into *digital tribalism*—the creation of online communities united less by shared truth than by shared outrage.

Jonathan Haidt (2012), in *The Righteous Mind*, explains that moral reasoning is often post hoc—our emotions decide first, and our intellect justifies later. Social media accelerates this process. When outrage becomes currency, empathy becomes economically irrelevant.

Thus, polarization erodes not only civic discourse but also the moral architecture of the self. People no longer think *with* others, but *against* them. The digital ego becomes fragile—constantly needing validation through likes, shares, and the affirmation of one's digital tribe.

This fragility explains why correction or contradiction online is often perceived not as intellectual disagreement but as personal attack.

4.4 Religious Extremism in the Digital Era

Extremism, in essence, is a pathology of certainty.

It arises when conviction hardens into absolute exclusivity and eliminates the capacity for self-critique. In the digital ecosystem, extremism gains unprecedented reach and speed.

Online radicalization rarely begins with theology; it begins with emotion—resentment, humiliation, or fear. Algorithms detect these emotional patterns and feed users content that intensifies them, creating what Marc Sageman (2008) termed "the radicalization cascade."

In Indonesia, groups such as ISIS or other transnational movements have exploited this vulnerability through visual propaganda, apocalyptic narratives, and selective use of scripture. The combination of theological simplification and digital aesthetics—fast videos, heroic slogans, cinematic martyrdom—creates a potent form of *algorithmic evangelism*.

But extremism is not only violent. It can also appear as moral purism: an intolerance of ambiguity, an insistence that one's version of truth is the only valid one. Such attitudes thrive not just in radical groups but across mainstream digital culture.

4.5 The Construction of Digital Identity

Digital identity is not a reflection of the self—it is a performance of the self.
Erving Goffman (1959) described social life as theater: people play roles to maintain social coherence. Social media intensifies this dramaturgy. Users curate images, quotes, and affiliations to project belonging.

The problem is that this curated self is fragile. It depends on visibility, and visibility demands constant maintenance. When identity is tied to approval, any disagreement becomes existentially threatening.

In religious contexts, this leads to *performative piety*—faith practiced for the algorithm. Devotion becomes a spectacle; righteousness becomes content. The digital believer risks exchanging spiritual depth for viral resonance.

Theologian Jean-Luc Marion (1991) might call this the "idolization of the visible"—when the image replaces the invisible divine. Faith, reduced to display, loses its transcendence.

4.6 The Economics of Outrage

Social-media polarization is not accidental; it is profitable.

As Shoshana Zuboff (2019) reveals in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, digital platforms monetize human attention by turning emotion into data. Outrage keeps users engaged, producing longer screen time and thus greater advertising revenue.

This economic logic rewards divisiveness. The more sensational the message, the higher the engagement. The moral economy of truth is replaced by the financial economy of virality.

In Indonesia, digital extremism often intersects with commercial clickbait and political propaganda. Fake news factories, operating for political or economic gain, weaponize religion to attract attention. As a result, digital discourse becomes less about meaning and more about metrics.

In this environment, moderation struggles to compete—not because it lacks truth, but because it lacks spectacle.

4.7 The Erosion of Empathy

Empathy is the first casualty of polarization. The philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2010) argues that empathy is the foundation of justice—without it, laws become mere control mechanisms. Yet empathy requires time, attention, and

imagination—the very capacities destroyed by the speed of digital life.

Online platforms encourage reactive thinking: like, share, comment. There is no space for contemplation.
Religious discourse that once invited reflection now becomes sloganized, producing "fast theology" that fits into a tweet or meme.

This shallowness is spiritually dangerous. In Christian theology, the incarnation—God becoming human—is the ultimate act of empathy. In Islam, *rahmah* (compassion) is a divine attribute. To lose empathy, therefore, is not only a social problem but a theological crisis.

4.8 Paths Toward Digital Moderation

4.8.1 Reclaiming Slow Thinking

Philosopher Daniel Kahneman (2011) distinguishes between *System 1* (fast, emotional) and *System 2* (slow, reflective) thinking. Digital culture amplifies the first. To resist polarization, religious communities must cultivate the second—spaces for slowness, silence, and discernment.

Faith traditions already possess these tools: meditation, prayer, study, dialogue. In reclaiming them, believers reclaim their humanity.

4.8.2 Rehumanizing Online Dialogue

Moderation in the digital sphere requires *rehumanization*.
This means remembering that behind every username is a person with fears and hopes. Initiatives like *Digital Peace Santri*, *#BijakBersosmed*, and interfaith webinars show that digital ethics can be taught as spiritual discipline.

4.8.3 Ethical Digital Leadership

Religious and community leaders must become *digital shepherds*: guiding not only moral behavior but digital citizenship. Their authority should extend beyond pulpits into timelines, where misinformation spreads fastest.

4.8.4 Algorithmic Responsibility

Tech companies bear moral accountability. Algorithms are not neutral—they embody values. Ethical design, transparency, and the promotion of verified content are essential. Public theology must evolve into *algorithmic theology*—a reflection on how digital systems shape human faith and morality.

4.9 Conclusion: Rebuilding Integrity in the Age of the Algorithm

Polarization and extremism are not only social disorders; they are spiritual symptoms of a civilization overwhelmed by its own inventions. The fragile digital identity mirrors a fragile moral identity—seeking affirmation without reflection, belonging without understanding.

Religious moderation, in this context, becomes an act of digital redemption. It invites believers to use technology not as an arena of hostility, but as a platform for humility.

Indonesia, with its centuries-old wisdom of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, possesses a moral compass the digital world desperately needs: unity without uniformity, conviction without cruelty, and truth pursued through compassion.

As we shall explore in the next chapter, this challenge extends beyond theology into the very structure of our digital civilization. The question is not only how to moderate religion, but how to humanize technology itself.

Chapter 5

Religion on the Screen: Transforming Worship and the Virtual Public Sphere

5.1 Introduction: When Faith Goes Online

The global pandemic of 2020 accelerated a transformation that had already begun: the migration of faith into digital space. Worship services streamed on YouTube, sermons shared through Instagram reels, prayer meetings held via Zoom — religion, once bound to physical ritual, now flows through fiber-optic cables and wireless signals.

This transformation raises profound theological and sociological questions.
Can transcendence be transmitted through technology?
Is a digital congregation still a community in the theological sense, or merely an audience connected by screens?

Marshall McLuhan (1964) famously declared, "The medium is the message." If that is true, then the digital medium does not simply carry religion — it reshapes it. Faith becomes visual, immediate, and interactive; yet it also risks becoming superficial, transactional, and performative.

This chapter explores how religion on the screen transforms not only worship practices but also the very nature of belief and the structure of the public sphere.

5.2 The Digital Turn in Religious Life

The digital revolution has redefined almost every aspect of human existence: communication, politics, commerce, and identity. Religion, too, has entered what Heidi Campbell (2012) calls *networked religion* — a form of religiosity characterized by fluid boundaries, online communities, and user-generated theology.

Online worship is not merely a response to necessity; it reflects a new epistemology of faith. Religious knowledge, once transmitted vertically from institutions to believers, now circulates horizontally across networks. Authority becomes decentralized. Anyone with a smartphone can become a preacher, theologian, or prophet.

This democratization of discourse carries both promise and peril. On one hand, it expands access to spiritual learning. On the other, it erodes traditional gatekeeping structures, enabling the rise of "digital populism" in theology — where popularity may overshadow depth.

Theologian Paul Tillich might see this as faith's inevitable adaptation to the "conditions of ultimate concern" in a changing technological environment. Faith survives not by resisting change, but by reinterpreting its symbols in new contexts.

5.3 Online Worship and the Disembodied Sacred

In the classical understanding of religion, ritual is an embodied act — prayer, song, gesture, sacrament.
In the digital age, embodiment becomes pixelated. Worshippers sit alone before glowing screens, united by bandwidth rather than breath.

During the pandemic, churches and mosques adopted livestreaming to maintain spiritual connection. This virtualization created what Campbell and Tsuria (2021) call "mediated presence" — a paradoxical condition where believers feel spiritually together while physically apart.

Yet digital worship also raises ontological questions:
If the Eucharist is shared through a camera, is it still sacrament?

If the *azan* echoes through a recording, is it still a call to prayer or merely an echo of one?

In Christian theology, the Incarnation affirms the sacredness of the body — God made flesh. Digital mediation risks disembodying faith, turning it into information. Similarly, in Islam, communal *jama'ah* prayer emphasizes physical alignment as a manifestation of unity. Virtual prayer challenges that embodiment.

However, digital worship also expands inclusivity. The elderly, the disabled, and diaspora communities can now participate. Technology, in this sense, becomes an instrument of divine mercy — extending the reach of grace beyond geography.

The future of faith may therefore lie not in rejecting digital mediation, but in sanctifying it.

5.4 The Rise of the Virtual Congregation

Online platforms have birthed new forms of religious community — *cyber-congregations*. They gather not in temples or mosques, but in group chats, Facebook pages, and livestream comment sections.

Sociologist Christopher Helland (2015) distinguishes between "religion online" (information about religion) and "online religion" (ritual and spiritual engagement performed online). Indonesia exhibits both phenomena vividly.

From online *pengajian* groups to virtual Bible studies and Hindu devotional streams, believers form networks that transcend geography and denomination. These digital congregations often display high levels of participation and creativity — yet their relationships are volatile, fragile, and susceptible to algorithmic influence.

In such communities, belonging is measured by activity, visibility, and emotional resonance. The danger is that faith becomes quantified: more views, more blessings.

Nevertheless, this shift also represents a democratization of community life. Religious belonging, once limited by institutional boundaries, now flows through voluntary association. The challenge is to cultivate *digital ecclesiology* — a theology of community fit for the era of connectivity.

5.5 The Algorithmic Sermon: How Platforms Shape Belief

Every sermon streamed online passes through an invisible pulpit — the algorithm. YouTube's recommendation system, Facebook's feed ranking, and TikTok's *For You Page* act as unseen curators of spirituality.

Algorithms determine which sermons go viral and which vanish. In effect, they become a form of theological editing — privileging messages that entertain, provoke, or confirm biases. As a result, digital religiosity tends toward emotional extremity and simplicity.

The sociologist Taina Bucher (2018) calls this "algorithmic power" — systems that govern visibility while claiming neutrality. For religion, this raises an urgent question: who truly mediates the Word — the preacher or the platform?

Some Indonesian clerics and pastors have begun to respond creatively. They use storytelling, music, and visual metaphors to communicate faith in ways that are algorithmically appealing yet ethically grounded. This blending of theology and media literacy may define the next phase of religious communication — where preachers become both prophets and content creators.

However, the risk remains: when religion adapts too eagerly to digital logic, it risks becoming *theological clickbait* — faith reduced to fragments.

5.6 Religion as Digital Performance

Social media has transformed religious expression into public performance. Prayer selfies, inspirational reels, and hashtag piety (#blessed, #Hijrah, #ChristianVibes) illustrate how devotion becomes aesthetic.

Sociologist Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory finds new relevance here: believers perform their faith before a digital audience, managing impressions through curated content. The line between authenticity and display blurs.

This phenomenon can be double-edged. On one side, it normalizes faith in the public sphere, encouraging witness and testimony. On the other, it risks transforming spirituality into spectacle — faith as brand.

Pierre Bourdieu (1990) would describe this as the commodification of *religious capital*. Likes and followers replace liturgy as signs of legitimacy. The sacred becomes data.

To navigate this, digital believers must reclaim interiority — the hidden life of the soul that does not need validation. In an era obsessed with visibility, true faith may be the courage to remain unseen.

5.7 The Virtual Public Sphere and Religious Discourse

Jürgen Habermas (1989) envisioned the *public sphere* as a space where rational debate shapes collective understanding. The digital realm initially promised a global public sphere — yet it has devolved into fragmented micro-audiences.

Religious discourse online often mirrors this fragmentation. Instead of dialogue, we witness monologue; instead of debate, denunciation. Nevertheless, the digital sphere remains a vital arena for interfaith engagement and moral discourse — provided it is guided by ethical literacy.

Initiatives such as *Ngaji Literasi Digital* (Digital Literacy Study), interfaith podcasts, and moderated online dialogues demonstrate how technology can host genuine encounters across differences.

For Indonesia, where religious life is integral to civic identity, nurturing an ethical digital public sphere is not merely a technical issue — it is a national moral project.

5.8 The Theology of Mediation: Between Presence and Absence

All religions grapple with mediation — between God and humanity, spirit and matter, word and image. The digital era adds a new mediator: the screen.

Theologian Walter Ong (1982) observed that each medium reshapes consciousness. Oral culture fosters memory and participation; print culture encourages reflection and authority; digital culture generates simultaneity and immediacy.

In this new medium, God is encountered not in silence but in streams, notifications, and pixels. This does not negate transcendence but reframes it. As theologian David Tracy (1987) might say, the sacred now "appears in fragments" — glimpses of divinity scattered through data.

The danger is not that God disappears, but that we forget how to pay attention.

The practice of faith in the digital age, therefore, must cultivate *digital contemplation* — learning to discern presence amid distraction.
To scroll without losing the sacred is perhaps the new spiritual discipline.

5.9 Conclusion: From Broadcast to Communion

Religion on the screen marks both crisis and opportunity.
The crisis lies in the risk of superficiality — faith reduced to entertainment.
The opportunity lies in the rediscovery of community and creativity — the chance to translate timeless truths into new languages.

Indonesia, with its long tradition of *religious adaptation* — from Hindu-Buddhist syncretism to *Islam Nusantara* and contextual Christianity — has the cultural DNA to navigate this transformation wisely.

Faith need not vanish in the digital age; it must evolve. The screen can become not a barrier but a bridge — a new altar for human encounter and divine imagination.

As the next chapter will explore, this evolution leads us to a deeper question: how can religious

moderation serve as an ethical compass for the entire digital civilization, ensuring that information technology remains not merely intelligent but humane?

Chapter 6

Digital Civilization and the Challenge of Religious Moderation: Hoaxes, Radicalism, and Algorithmic Bias

6.1 Introduction: The Information Flood and the Collapse of Certainty

The twenty-first century did not merely produce new technologies; it produced a new human condition.
We now live not *in* information but *under* it — submerged in an endless flow of messages, memes, and claims competing for attention.

In this digital deluge, truth is no longer self-evident. Data overwhelm discernment; emotion outpaces verification.
Jean Baudrillard (1994) warned of *hyperreality*: a world where signs no longer represent facts but replace them. Today's "truth" is not what happened, but what trends.

For religion — the oldest custodian of meaning — this is an existential crisis. When hoaxes become scripture and algorithms act as unseen priests, theology must confront the machine.

Religious moderation, therefore, is not simply a social virtue. It is a new epistemology: the art of remaining wise in an age of endless noise.

6.2 The Architecture of Digital Civilization

Digital civilization is not a metaphor. It has infrastructure (networks), institutions (platforms), laws (algorithms), and citizens (users). Its geography is invisible, yet its power is global.

Manuel Castells (1996) described this transformation as the rise of the *network society*, where communication becomes the primary form of social organization. In such a world, whoever controls the flow of information controls perception itself.

In the analog age, authority rested on position — the priest, the scholar, the teacher. In the digital age, authority rests on visibility — the influencer, the trending voice, the viral post. Truth becomes a matter of *reach*, not reason.

This new civilization offers extraordinary potential: access to knowledge, democratization of ideas, and instant connection across continents. Yet it also harbors a dark side — the *algorithmic empire* that shapes human behavior through invisible design.

6.3 Hoaxes: The Theology of Falsehood

The word *hoax* might seem modern, but deceit is as old as humanity. What has changed is scale and speed.
In Indonesia, hoaxes about religion — from false fatwas to fabricated miracles — spread within minutes, reaching millions before any verification occurs.

A 2023 Kominfo report documented more than **11,000 religion-related hoaxes** circulating on major platforms in just one year. Many of these messages exploit fear, anger, or moral outrage — emotions that travel faster than facts.

The structure of a hoax mirrors that of myth: it provides coherence in chaos, certainty amid complexity. Yet unlike myth, it lacks transcendence. It pretends to explain the world while secretly shrinking it.

From a theological perspective, hoaxes constitute *sin against the logos* — a betrayal of the Word, which in many faiths represents divine truth. The Qur'an condemns *fitnah* (slander) as worse than killing (Q.S. Al-Baqarah:191), while Christian ethics equate false witness with moral corruption.

Thus, combating hoaxes is not merely about fact-checking; it is spiritual resistance — a form of digital asceticism, where believers discipline themselves to verify before sharing.

6.4 Radicalism and the Seduction of Certainty

Radicalism thrives in the same soil that nurtures hoaxes: anxiety, grievance, and the longing for moral clarity.
In times of rapid change, absolutism offers psychological comfort. The digital environment intensifies this desire by feeding users content that confirms existing beliefs.

Marc Sageman (2008) and J.M. Berger (2018) both describe online radicalization as a process of *social contagion*: exposure → engagement → echo chamber → extremism.

In Indonesia, this process often follows a recognizable trajectory:

1. **Exposure** to emotional religious content or conspiracy theories.
2. **Engagement** through discussion groups or encrypted apps.
3. **Isolation** within ideological communities that reject mainstream interpretation.

4. **Activation**, where belief transforms into social or political hostility.

The tragedy lies not only in violence but in the erosion of thought. Radicalism replaces reasoning with rhetoric and transforms spiritual yearning into political weaponry.

Yet moderation must not respond with mere prohibition. The antidote to bad theology is not censorship, but *better theology* — one that integrates reason, compassion, and self-critique.

As the Qur'an reminds, *"And thus We have made you a middle nation (ummatan wasatan)"* (Q.S. Al-Baqarah:143) — moderation as divine command, not compromise.

6.5 Algorithmic Bias: The Invisible Hand of the Machine

Behind every digital encounter lies a silent decision-maker: the algorithm. An algorithm is a mathematical instruction set, yet in practice it functions as moral infrastructure. It decides what deserves attention and what does not.

Safiya Noble (2018), in *Algorithms of Oppression*, shows how search engines reproduce social biases

— privileging dominant narratives while marginalizing others. Algorithms learn from human behavior; if society harbors prejudice, the system amplifies it.

This phenomenon, known as *algorithmic bias*, extends to religious content. In Indonesia, sensational or divisive materials often receive disproportionate visibility, while nuanced, moderate voices are buried by the logic of engagement.

In effect, digital platforms have become *new pulpits* governed not by ethics but by metrics. The theologian Paul Ricoeur once spoke of the "hermeneutics of suspicion" — the need to interpret beneath appearances. In the algorithmic age, that hermeneutic must now include code.

Religious moderation must thus evolve into *algorithmic discernment*: the spiritual art of questioning how our digital environment shapes belief.

6.6 The Erosion of Truth and the Rise of Emotional Knowledge

Digital civilization has altered not only how people find truth but how they *feel* truth. Cognitive scientists call this *post-truth cognition*

— when emotional resonance outweighs factual evidence.

In the online sphere, what feels authentic often replaces what is accurate. This epistemic shift undermines the foundations of both science and religion, which historically rest on disciplined pursuit of truth.

Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1937) warned against "cheap grace" — faith without commitment. Similarly, we now face *cheap truth* — information without verification.

To counter this, digital education must go beyond technical literacy. It must nurture *epistemic virtue*: intellectual humility, curiosity, and the courage to admit uncertainty.

6.7 The Ethics of Moderation in the Digital Age

Religious moderation is not neutrality; it is moral intelligence.
It requires balancing conviction with compassion, faith with reason, and freedom with responsibility.

In the digital context, this translates into three interwoven practices:

1. **Verification as Virtue** — checking before sharing, discerning before judging.
2. **Dialogue as Discipline** — engaging rather than attacking, listening as an act of worship.
3. **Empathy as Epistemology** — understanding others not as opponents but as fellow seekers of meaning.

Indonesia's national program of *Moderasi Beragama* embodies this ethos: promoting tolerance, justice, and digital ethics as part of spiritual maturity.

The future of the internet may well depend on such moral literacy — the capacity to navigate information without losing integrity.

6.8 From Hoaxes to Harmony: Toward a Theology of Digital Compassion

The ultimate response to digital chaos is not more data, but more wisdom.
If algorithms amplify emotion, then let them amplify compassion. If networks spread narratives, then let them spread understanding.

Theology must become *cyber-theology* — not to baptize the internet, but to humanize it. Pope Francis (2019) urged believers to practice "digital

fraternity": transforming networks of wires into networks of care.

In Indonesia, this vision resonates deeply with *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* — unity through empathy. Moderation in the digital age is therefore not merely the regulation of expression, but the restoration of conscience.

6.9 Conclusion: Reclaiming Humanity in the Algorithmic Age

The digital world mirrors the human soul — creative yet chaotic, connected yet lonely, intelligent yet often unwise.
To live faithfully within it is to practice discernment: to scroll without surrender, to connect without conforming, to believe without fanaticism.

Religious moderation stands as the moral compass of digital civilization. It reminds us that truth is relational, not algorithmic; that humanity is sacred, even in virtual form.

As Indonesia continues to navigate this age of disruption, its ancient wisdom — from *Tan Hana Dharma Mangrwa* to *Pancasila* — offers a prophetic message to the modern world: technology may change our tools, but not our task

— to be human among humans, and to seek truth with compassion.

Chapter 7

Humanity, Faith, and Information: Toward a Transcendent Digital Ethics

7.1 Introduction: When Information Becomes Destiny

We are living through the most radical shift in the history of consciousness since the invention of writing.

For millennia, human beings sought truth in revelation, reason, and experience. Today, we seek it in data.

Information has become destiny. It shapes elections, identities, and even our understanding of what is real.

Yet beneath this technological splendor lies a spiritual vacuum: we know more, but understand less. We are connected, yet increasingly isolated.

The challenge of our age, therefore, is not how to collect more data, but how to recover meaning. And meaning, as every theologian and philosopher knows, cannot be coded. It must be lived.

Thus emerges the need for a **transcendent digital ethics** — a moral framework that unites faith and information, ensuring that the networked world remains human-centered rather than machine-driven.

7.2 The Post-Human Paradox

Digital civilization has birthed a paradox: machines that imitate intelligence, yet humans who imitate machines.
Artificial intelligence learns from our data, but we increasingly learn from its predictions. Our moral imagination is outsourced to algorithms.

Philosopher Luciano Floridi (2014) calls this the *infosphere* — a world where existence itself is informational. In such a realm, the human person risks being reduced to a node in a network, a dataset among datasets.

But theology insists on a deeper truth: humans are not mere processors of information; they are bearers of meaning.
The image of God (*imago Dei*) in Judeo-Christian thought, or the *fitrah* in Islamic philosophy, represents precisely this — the innate capacity to create, to discern, and to love.

Technology may extend our capabilities, but it cannot replace conscience.
A society that forgets this becomes efficient but soulless — a civilization of code without compassion.

7.3 The Crisis of Meaning in the Information Age

Philosophers from Viktor Frankl to Byung-Chul Han have warned that abundance of information leads not to enlightenment but to exhaustion. The flood of data fragments attention, while algorithms reward immediacy over insight.

Religious faith, by contrast, operates through rhythm — prayer, reflection, repetition. It teaches patience in a culture of instant reaction.
In this sense, faith offers what technology cannot: continuity amid chaos.

Digital modernity tempts us to believe that knowledge equals wisdom, yet the ancients knew better. The book of Proverbs declares, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom.” Knowledge informs, but wisdom transforms.

Hence the task of transcendent digital ethics is not to reject knowledge but to sanctify it — to restore its orientation toward the good.

7.4 Toward a Theology of Information

If God is the Word (*Logos*), then creation itself may be understood as divine communication. The cosmos, as Augustine wrote, is "the book of God written in the language of being." In the digital age, humanity becomes co-author — creating secondary worlds of code and simulation.

But co-creation demands responsibility. In Genesis, the human being is entrusted to "tend and keep" creation; in the digital sphere, this means cultivating an ethical infosphere — protecting dignity, privacy, and truth.

From an Islamic perspective, this stewardship (*khilafah*) implies accountability (*amanah*). Every click, post, and algorithm carries moral weight. Digital ethics, therefore, is not an optional etiquette but a spiritual duty.

When we code, we participate — however faintly — in the creative act. The question is whether our creations lead toward liberation or domination, communion or control.

7.5 Transcendence and Technological Humility

Modern technology often disguises itself as omniscience. It promises prediction, perfection, and even immortality through data. Yet such promises border on the theological. The myth of the algorithmic God — all-knowing, all-present, all-powerful — is a secular echo of metaphysical longing.

But unlike the divine, algorithms lack compassion. They calculate, not contemplate. This is why technology requires theology — not to baptize machines, but to remind humans of their limits.

The 20th-century theologian Reinhold Niebuhr warned that every human achievement carries the seed of pride — the illusion of self-sufficiency. Digital civilization magnifies this temptation. We build systems so intelligent that we risk forgetting wisdom.

Transcendent digital ethics begins with humility: the recognition that no code can contain conscience, and no algorithm can define love.

7.6 The Role of Religious Moderation in Digital Civilization

Religious moderation, in this new context, must expand beyond interfaith dialogue into the domain of digital ethics.
Its mission is to humanize information — to infuse technology with moral intelligence.

Moderation means resisting both extremes: technophobia (the fear of progress) and technolatry (the worship of machines).
It teaches discernment — when to trust data, and when to question it.

In practice, this involves three principles:

1. **Inclusivity of Access** – ensuring technology serves equality rather than privilege.
2. **Integrity of Information** – defending truth as a moral good, not a political convenience.
3. **Intimacy of Humanity** – preserving empathy amid automation.

Indonesia's tradition of *Pancasila humanism* — rooted in faith, cooperation, and respect — offers a cultural model for this global challenge. Moderation here becomes not merely a doctrine of religion, but a philosophy of civilization.

7.7 Toward a Transcendent Digital Ethics

A transcendent digital ethics is not content with regulating behavior; it seeks to transform consciousness.
It views technology as an extension of moral being, not its replacement.

Such an ethics rests on three interdependent pillars:

- **Truth as Covenant** — recognizing that every exchange of information is an act of trust.
- **Compassion as Code** — designing systems that foster empathy rather than exploitation.
- **Wisdom as Goal** — orienting innovation toward human flourishing, not mere efficiency.

This ethical vision demands interdisciplinary dialogue — between theologians and coders, philosophers and engineers, policymakers and spiritual leaders.
As artificial intelligence advances, this dialogue must move from theoretical to practical, shaping how we program values into machines that increasingly shape our world.

In this sense, digital ethics becomes the frontier of theology — where questions of soul, responsibility, and destiny are reframed in binary language.

7.8 Humanity Reimagined: The New Covenant Between Faith and Information

The story of humanity is, at heart, the story of communication. From cave paintings to the printing press to the internet, we have always sought to transcend isolation.
Yet each technological leap also expands moral responsibility.

The next covenant, therefore, is not between humans and machines, but between faith and information.
Faith must teach technology compassion; technology must teach faith precision.

The theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin envisioned evolution moving toward *the Omega Point* — a convergence of consciousness and spirit. In a similar vein, digital civilization may become either a new Babel or a new Eden. The outcome depends on whether we build towers of control or networks of care.

Indonesia's philosophical legacy — *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* — reminds us that unity does not require uniformity. Applied globally, this could mean building a digital world where difference becomes dialogue, not division.

7.9 Conclusion: Faith, Information, and the Future of the Human Spirit

The future will not be written on stone or paper, but in data. Yet what we inscribe there will determine whether technology becomes a blessing or a curse.

Religious moderation offers the compass: Faith without reason leads to fanaticism; reason without faith leads to nihilism. Moderation reconciles both — grounding intelligence in ethics and power in compassion.

The task of the 21st century is therefore theological as much as technological: to ensure that our inventions reflect our humanity rather than replace it.

Digital civilization must not only be *smart*; it must be *wise*.

As long as faith still whispers within the circuits — reminding us that truth requires humility, that compassion is stronger than data, and that every human being is more than the sum of their code — the digital future can remain deeply, beautifully human.

And perhaps, in that synthesis of faith and information, the ancient word will find new form: *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

Appendices

Appendix 1. Statistical Data on Religious Harmony and Hoaxes in Indonesia

A.1.1 National Overview

Indonesia's vast religious diversity remains one of its greatest strengths — and challenges. Data collected by the **Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama RI)**, the **SETARA Institute**, and the **Wahid Foundation** reveal both progress and tension in recent years.

Indicator	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 (est.)
Index of Religious Harmony (IKH, scale 0–100)	73.8	75.5	77.1	77.4	78.0
Cases of Interreligious Conflict (reported nationally)	47	39	33	31	28
Verified Religious Hoaxes (Kominfo)	7,822	9,109	10,301	11,075	11,600

Indicator	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 (est.)
Public Trust in Religious Leaders (surveyed, %)	84	82	85	88	90
Social Media Literacy Index (average national score)	49	53	57	61	65

Interpretation:
The data suggest a paradoxical trend: religious harmony has gradually improved, yet digital threats — particularly hoaxes and misinformation — have grown even faster.
This confirms that the frontline of interreligious peace has shifted from the physical sphere (houses of worship, neighborhoods) to the **digital sphere** (social media and messaging platforms).

A.1.2 Typology of Religious Hoaxes

Research by the **Center for Digital Society (CfDS UGM, 2023)** categorizes the most common types of religious hoaxes in Indonesia:

1. **Doctrinal Distortion** — Misquoting scripture or misinterpreting fatwas to incite hostility.
2. **Historical Fabrication** — Inventing or twisting historical facts to delegitimize another faith group.
3. **Identity Manipulation** — False claims of conversion, persecution, or blasphemy.
4. **Political Exploitation** — Framing electoral issues as theological conflicts.
5. **Apocalyptic Alarmism** — Circulating fabricated prophecies or divine punishments to fuel fear.

Each type exploits psychological vulnerabilities — fear, anger, and in-group loyalty — to weaponize faith for ideological or commercial purposes.

A.1.3 Reflections

The data call for a new kind of literacy: **spiritual-critical literacy** — the ability to recognize not just factual falsehood, but moral distortion.

Religious moderation must thus expand into *digital ethics education*, enabling believers to discern truth not only in texts but in tweets.

Appendix 2. Glossary

(Selected key concepts used throughout the book, rendered in English academic-theological terminology)

Algorithmic Bias — Systematic distortion in digital systems that privileges certain viewpoints or identities, often reinforcing social inequality or prejudice.

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika — The Indonesian national motto meaning *Unity in Diversity*, originating from the 14th-century Majapahit poem *Kakawin Sutasoma*.

Cyber Radicalism — The process by which individuals adopt extremist ideologies through online interaction and exposure to digital propaganda.

Digital Ecclesiology — The theological study of how faith communities form, function, and worship within digital and virtual environments.

Digital Moderation — Ethical and spiritual discipline applied to online behavior, emphasizing balance, empathy, and verification before judgment.

Epistemic Virtue — A moral quality related to knowing — including humility, honesty, curiosity, and courage in seeking truth.

Filter Bubble — The algorithmic isolation of users within personalized information environments that reinforce existing beliefs.

Hoax (Religious) — Fabricated or misleading information exploiting faith to manipulate social, political, or emotional responses.

Moderasi Beragama (Religious Moderation) — The Indonesian framework for promoting balanced, tolerant, and inclusive religious understanding in society.

Post-Truth — A condition where emotional appeal and identity outweigh factual accuracy in shaping public belief.

Technolatry — The worship or uncritical exaltation of technology as inherently salvific or self-justifying.

Transcendent Digital Ethics — A moral-philosophical approach integrating technological awareness with spiritual wisdom to humanize digital civilization.

Appendix 3. Action Guide: Seven Steps of Digital Moderation for Faith Communities

This guide translates the book's philosophical reflections into practical commitments — steps that faith communities, educators, and digital citizens can adopt to embody moderation in their online and offline lives.

Step 1: Cultivate Digital Awareness

Understand that every online action — posting, liking, or sharing — carries moral consequence. Awareness is the first act of moderation: to be conscious of one's influence within the digital ecosystem.

Step 2: Verify Before You Amplify

Make *verification* a spiritual discipline. Cross-check information from at least two credible sources before sharing. Treat digital truth with the same reverence as sacred truth.

Step 3: Practice Compassionate Dialogue

Engage with disagreement respectfully. The purpose of dialogue is not victory but understanding.

Respond to provocation with patience; reply to insult with reason.

Step 4: Build Bridges Across Beliefs

Collaborate on digital campaigns that celebrate shared values — kindness, justice, environmental care, and peace.

Faith in the digital era is measured not by dogma defended, but by humanity extended.

Step 5: Strengthen Digital Literacy in the Community

Include digital ethics in religious education, sermons, and youth programs.
Equip congregations to detect bias, identify hoaxes, and resist online manipulation.
A well-informed believer is the best guardian of interfaith harmony.

Step 6: Model Integrity in Leadership

Religious leaders must embody transparency, humility, and accountability online.
When they admit mistakes, verify claims, and encourage open dialogue, they set moral precedent for their followers.

Step 7: Reclaim Silence and Reflection

Moderation begins where noise ends. Encourage moments of digital fasting — stepping back from screens to recover depth, prayer, and perspective.
A quiet mind is the sanctuary of truth.

Closing Reflection

Religious moderation in the digital era is not a doctrine to be memorized, but a discipline to be lived.
Its essence lies in reuniting what the modern world has torn apart: information and wisdom, speed and depth, connectivity and compassion.

Faith communities, scholars, and digital citizens must stand together as architects of a humane infosphere — a civilization where data serve dignity, algorithms serve empathy, and every click becomes an act of conscience.

As Indonesia continues to walk this middle path — guided by *Pancasila* and inspired by *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* — it offers not just a national model, but a global moral compass:
that even in a world governed by machines, the human heart must remain the source of light.

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(Key Names, Terms, and Concepts Referenced in the Book)

Author Profile

Dr. Dharma Leksana, M.Th., M.Si.

Dr. Dharma Leksana is a theologian, senior journalist, and pioneer of digital Christian media in Indonesia. He earned his Bachelor of Theology from the Faculty of Theology, Duta Wacana Christian University, Yogyakarta, in 1994, before pursuing a Master of Social Sciences (M.Si.) with a focus on media and society. He later completed a Master of Theology (M.Th.) with a thesis titled *"Digital Theology: Translating the Missiology of the Church in the Era of Society 5.0."*

His academic journey reached its pinnacle with a Doctorate in Theology (D.Th.) from Dian Harapan Theological Seminary, Jakarta, graduating *cum laude*. His groundbreaking dissertation, *"Algorithmic Theology: A Conceptual Map of Faith in the Digital Age,"* introduced the concept of Algorithmic Theology as a new locus for contextualizing faith in today's digital reality. Through this research, he argued that algorithms can be understood as a new *locus theologicus*, while the Logos—the Word of God—remains the central axis of Christian faith, even in an age dominated by algorithmic logic.

This dissertation has since been published in two editions:

- *Teologi Algoritma: Peta Konseptual Iman di Era Digital* (Indonesian)
- *Algorithmic Theology: A Conceptual Map of Faith in the Digital Age* (English)

His earlier academic work at the master's level has also been published as *"Building the Kingdom of God in the Digital Age."*

Beyond academia, Dr. Leksana is a prolific writer who has authored hundreds of works ranging from scholarly research and popular books to collections of poetry and novels. His writings can be found through PWGI Bookstore and other platforms.

Organizational and Media Leadership

In the field of media and ecclesial service, Dr. Leksana is:

- Founder and Chairman of the Indonesian Church Journalists Association (PWGI)
- Founder of numerous Christian digital media outlets, including:
    - **wartagereja.co.id**
    - **beritaoikoumene.com**
    - **teologi.digital**
    - **marturia.digital**

    - and many more under PT Dharma Leksana Media Group (DHARMAEL), where he serves as Commissioner

He also leads and advises several institutions and companies, including:

- Director of PT Berita Siber Indonesia Raya (BASERIN)
- Commissioner of PT Berita Kampus Mediatama
- Commissioner of PT Media Kantor Hukum Online
- Founder & CEO of **tokogereja.com**
- Chairman of Yayasan Berita Siber Indonesia
- Director of PT Untuk Indonesia Seharusnya

Works and Influence

As both a thinker and practitioner, Dr. Dharma Leksana positions himself as a bridge between theology, digital communication, and social transformation. He is an active writer, speaker, and resource person in church, academic, and media forums.

Among his widely read works are:

- *Seeking the Face of God in the Digital Wilderness*
- *The Missionary Steps of the Early Church*
- *Religion, AI, and Pluralism*
- *Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology in the Digital Era*
- *Alvin Toffler and Digital Theology*
- *The Algorithm of God: Reflections on the Programmer of the Universe*
- *Prophetic Journalism in the Digital Age*
- *Digital Theology through the Lens of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Ethics*

Continuing his vocation as a digital theologian, prophetic journalist, and faith educator, Dr. Leksana remains committed to building Christian communication that is contextual, transformative, and attuned to the challenges of the digital age.

Synopsis

In an age where truth travels at the speed of a click, and conviction is measured by virality, *Moderation of Religion in the Age of Information Disruption* asks a question that defines our digital civilization: how can faith remain wise, compassionate, and credible when information itself becomes chaotic?

Blending theology, philosophy, communication theory, and digital ethics, **Dr. Dharma Leksana** explores how Indonesia's ancient wisdom—embodied in *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) and *Pancasila*—can guide humanity through the moral turbulence of the algorithmic age.

Across seven chapters, the book traces the transformation of religion from a sacred narrative into a contested digital spectacle. It begins by examining Indonesia as a plural nation, where harmony is both heritage and struggle, then moves through the philosophical lineage of tolerance from *Tan Hana Dharma Mangrwa* to modern interfaith cooperation.

In the middle chapters, Dr. Leksana dissects the anatomy of intolerance and polarization, showing how digital platforms amplify division and reward extremism. He introduces the reader to the logic of the "algorithmic pulpit," where unseen systems

decide which voices of faith are heard and which are silenced. Hoaxes, radicalism, and the subtle tyranny of algorithmic bias emerge not merely as social problems, but as theological challenges—calling believers to reclaim discernment as a sacred virtue.

The book's final synthesis proposes a vision of **"transcendent digital ethics"**: an integrative moral framework that unites faith and information, spirituality and science. Here, moderation is redefined not as passive neutrality, but as *active wisdom*—a dynamic balance between conviction and compassion, reason and reverence.

Drawing from thinkers such as Jean Baudrillard, Jürgen Habermas, Paul Ricoeur, and contemporary scholars of digital culture, the author argues that religious moderation must evolve into digital literacy and ethical awareness. The future of interfaith harmony depends not only on dialogue between religions, but on the moral design of information itself.

Rich with Indonesian philosophical imagery and informed by global scholarship, the book concludes with a practical action guide—**Seven Steps of Digital Moderation for Faith Communities**—and a statistical overview of religious harmony and online hoaxes in Indonesia.

Ultimately, *Moderation of Religion in the Age of Information Disruption* offers a rare synthesis: it is both a theological meditation and a manual for moral survival in an age of machines. It invites readers to rediscover faith not as an echo chamber of certainty, but as a luminous space of discernment where the human spirit can remain free, even in the shadow of algorithms.