

# Christian Mission Based on Dialogue for Promoting Tolerance in the Era of Digitalization and Religious Moderation

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This article examines the concept and implementation of dialogical Christian mission in the context of increasing religious tolerance, rapid digitalization, and the strengthening of religious moderation in contemporary society. The study aims to explore how Christian mission can be carried out through an inclusive, contextual, and relevant dialogical approach in a pluralistic and digitally connected world. Using a qualitative method with a library research approach, data were collected from biblical texts, theological writings, and recent academic publications related to mission, interreligious dialogue, digital culture, and religious moderation. The data were analyzed using content analysis to identify key themes and theological insights. The findings indicate that dialogical mission emphasizes mutual respect, openness, and collaboration rather than confrontation or conversion-oriented approaches. In the digital era, mission practices extend into online platforms, enabling broader engagement while also requiring ethical responsibility and sensitivity to diversity. Furthermore, the integration of religious moderation values strengthens the role of Christian mission as a bridge for peacebuilding and social harmony. This study concludes that dialogical Christian mission represents a relevant and necessary paradigm in the current context, as it promotes constructive engagement, fosters interreligious understanding, and contributes to a more tolerant and cohesive society.

**Keywords:** Christian mission, dialogue, tolerance, digitalization, religious moderation

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## 1. Introduction

The era of globalization and digitalization has brought significant changes to various aspects of human life, including religious practices and expressions. The development of information technology, particularly social media and digital platforms, enables interactions among individuals from different religious backgrounds to occur more intensively, openly, and without geographical boundaries. In Indonesia, as a country characterized by religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity, these dynamics are increasingly evident in everyday life, both in the form of constructive dialogue and the potential for friction due to differing perspectives.

The phenomenon of increasing interreligious interaction in digital spaces indicates that exclusive and closed religious approaches are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain in modern society. In practice, the dissemination of religious teachings, including Christian mission, is no longer limited to physical spaces such as churches, but has expanded into digital spaces that are public and heterogeneous. This condition requires adjustments in communication and interaction approaches in order to remain relevant to contemporary societal conditions.

In this context, the concept of religious moderation has become increasingly important as an effort to maintain balance, tolerance, and harmony amid diversity. Religious moderation encourages adherents of all faiths to prioritize mutual respect and avoid approaches that may trigger conflict. Accordingly, the church

is challenged to carry out Christian mission in a more dialogical, open, and respectful manner, without neglecting the essential values of the Gospel.

The urgency of this study lies in the need to understand how Christian mission is carried out within a society that is increasingly digitally connected and pluralistic. Changes in interaction patterns require approaches that are not only adaptive to technological developments but also sensitive to social and religious diversity. Without such adjustments, the practice of mission risks becoming disconnected from the realities of modern society.

The scope of this study is focused on examining Christian mission in the modern era, particularly in relation to dialogical approaches, the role of religious moderation, and the use of digitalization in its implementation. This study does not deeply explore theological aspects, but rather emphasizes practical approaches within a contemporary social context. Based on the above description, the objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the concept of dialogical-based Christian mission in modern society.
2. To analyze the role of tolerance and religious moderation in supporting mission practices.
3. To explain strategies for implementing Christian mission in the digital era.

## 2. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method, supported by a descriptive-analytical approach. This approach is selected because the study focuses on examining concepts, theological principles, and the relevance of dialogical-based Christian mission practices in a contemporary context, particularly in the era of tolerance, digitalization, and religious moderation. This is a qualitative study aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the concept of dialogical Christian mission. The descriptive approach is used to illustrate phenomena and developments in mission practices within modern society, while the analytical approach is applied to examine the relationship between mission, interreligious dialogue, and socio-religious dynamics in the digital era (Creswell, 2014).

### a. Data Sources

The data sources in this study are divided into primary and secondary data. Primary data are obtained from the Bible as the main source, which serves as the normative and theological foundation for understanding the concept of Christian mission. The Bible is used to examine the fundamental principles of mission, particularly those related to dialogical approaches in the ministry of Jesus and the early church.

Meanwhile, secondary data are obtained from various literature relevant to the research topic. These sources include theological and missiological books, scientific journal articles, and academic publications discussing interreligious dialogue, pluralism, and religious moderation. These literatures are used to strengthen the conceptual framework, provide theoretical perspectives, and support the analysis conducted in this study.

### b. Data Collection Techniques

The data collection technique in this study uses a library research method, namely collecting data through the exploration and review of written sources relevant to the research focus.

First, the literature study is conducted by identifying, collecting, and reviewing various references related to Christian mission, interreligious dialogue, and religious moderation. This process includes selecting sources based on their credibility, relevance, and contribution to the research topic.

Second, document analysis is carried out on various texts, including theological documents, academic writings, and policies related to religious moderation. This analysis aims to understand the content, context, and messages contained in these documents.

Third, theological study is conducted by interpreting biblical texts and theological thoughts critically and contextually. This approach is used to explore theological meanings relevant to the concept of dialogical mission within a pluralistic and digital society.

c. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study is conducted qualitatively using a descriptive-analytical approach. The analysis process is carried out through several systematic stages as follows (Sugiyono, 2018):

1. Data reduction, which involves selecting, simplifying, and focusing data obtained from various sources. At this stage, the researcher selects data relevant to the research questions and objectives, while eliminating irrelevant data.
2. Data classification, which involves grouping data into specific categories or themes, such as Christian mission concepts, interreligious dialogue, religious moderation, and digitalization. This classification facilitates the analysis process and meaning-making.
3. Theological interpretation, which involves interpreting the data using a Christian theological perspective. At this stage, the researcher relates the findings to the concept of *Missio Dei*, biblical teachings, and theological thoughts to gain deeper and contextual understanding.
4. Conclusion drawing, which is the final stage of data analysis, conducted by formulating research findings systematically and logically. The conclusions are based on the interpretation of the analyzed data and are directed toward answering the research questions.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### The Nature of Christian Mission in the Modern Era

1. The Nature of Christian Mission from a Biblical Perspective

In the Old Testament, the concept of mission is characterized by its universality, as seen in the calling of Abraham. God chose Abraham to be a blessing to all nations (Genesis 12:1–3), indicating that mission is universal rather than exclusive. Furthermore, God sent the prophets as messengers of justice, repentance, and His steadfast love. This mission encompasses moral and social dimensions, not merely religious rituals.

In the New Testament, mission becomes explicit and Christ-centered. Jesus serves as the primary model of mission (Luke 4:18–19). The Great Commission, as expressed in Matthew 28:19–20, becomes the main foundation for the church's mission practice, especially in connection with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In the development of the early church, Paul emerges as a cross-cultural missionary, and the church is understood as a missionary community.

2. The Nature of Christian Mission from a Theological Perspective

Theologically, the nature of Christian mission is rooted in the concept of *Missio Dei*, which affirms that God is the primary sender, while the church serves as an instrument and partner in God's work. In modern theology, mission is no longer understood merely as an activity of the church, but as participation in God's mission (*Missio Dei*), as emphasized by Bosch (1991). This understanding is further developed in contemporary missiology, which positions the church as an agent of both social and spiritual transformation (Goheen, 2014; Wright, 2006).

The modern era is marked by religious and cultural pluralism. Bevans (1992) emphasizes the importance of contextual theology, which involves communicating the Gospel in ways that are relevant to local cultures and realities. This approach values differences, prioritizes dialogue over confrontation, and avoids aggressive exclusivism.

A strong understanding of mission does not imply that Christians should neglect concern for the poor, the hungry, the sick, and those experiencing injustice. These issues must remain a concern for Christians.

However, such concerns should not lead to a loss of focus on proclaiming the Gospel to those who do not yet know Christ. Jesus Christ commissions believers to make disciples of all nations through the proclamation of the Gospel; therefore, this mandate must not be neglected due to an overemphasis on social objectives.

The Great Commission delivered by Jesus in Matthew 28 remains relevant to this day. The mission of the church is to make disciples of all nations. The church exists not for its own sake, but to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ. This mission continues until the end of time; therefore, the church in the contemporary world must maintain its primary focus on mission. The church is the most effective instrument through which God accomplishes His mission in the contemporary world.

Church leaders often discuss the importance of mission, particularly outreach beyond the church, yet its implementation in concrete actions remains limited (Mahfouz, 2018, p. 41). Therefore, the church must take deliberate and serious steps in mission outreach. Outreach refers to all efforts undertaken by the church beyond its denominational boundaries with the aim of bringing people to Christ (Ford, 2012, p. 16). The church must strengthen its role in mission outreach.

In carrying out its mission, the church must engage and serve contemporary society according to its sociological needs (Stott & Wright, 2016, p. 20). This requires the implementation of contextual mission. Contextual mission must be properly understood as the effort to communicate and explain the Gospel in ways that are easily understood within specific cultural contexts, without compromising the integrity of the Gospel message or the integrity of its messengers (Beville, 2016, p. 178).

The implementation of contextual mission represents the church's effort to bridge the gap within the contemporary world, similar to what was done by the early church in the first century (Mahfouz, 2018, p. 6). Building such bridges may require time, effort, and specific skills, but it is essential for the success of mission.

One practical effort in implementing contextual mission in the contemporary world is the development of strategic plans to reach communities surrounding the church. Outreach should begin from within the church community itself (Ford, 2012, p. 7). While traditionally the church has attempted to attract people from outside into its internal structure, in the contemporary context it is more effective to bring the presence of the church into society. The church must be willing and intentional in building Christian communities within the complex realities of modern society (Życiński, 2010, p. 65). Ultimately, the church must utilize all available resources to reach the surrounding community so that they may come to know the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Dialogue as an Approach to Mission**

Dialogue in mission is a process of open, honest, and respectful encounter between Christians and adherents of other religions, cultures, or perspectives, without losing one's faith identity. The characteristics of Christian dialogue include:

- a. Respecting differences
- b. Avoiding coercion
- c. Being grounded in love
- d. Openness to learning

In the Bible, God is portrayed as a dialogical God. In the Old Testament, God engages in dialogue with Adam (Genesis 3:9), with Moses (Exodus 3), and ultimately enters human culture through the "incarnation" in Jesus. In the New Testament, Jesus not only preached but also engaged in dialogue, such as with Nicodemus (John 3), the Samaritan woman (John 4), and others.

In the contemporary world, dialogue cannot be separated from the use of information technology, particularly among youth. This phenomenon occurs not only globally but is especially evident among young people in Indonesia. Christian youth in Indonesia have adopted digital culture. Approximately 51% of Indonesian youth read the Bible through the internet, a percentage significantly higher than the global figure of 36%. This fact indicates that Christians have embraced digital culture and reminds church leaders that denominational boundaries are becoming less relevant in the postmodern era (Barna Group, 2022).

Furthermore, a survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2021–2022 shows that adolescents aged 13–18 represent the highest internet users in Indonesia, with 99.16% having access to the internet (DataIndonesia.ID, 2022). These findings indicate that nearly all Indonesian youth are connected to the internet. Based on these facts, there are more than 18 million non-Christian youth in Indonesia who are interested in learning about Jesus, and nearly all of them are engaged in digital culture. The church must seize this opportunity by conducting contextual outreach to youth through the effective use of technology.

In the contemporary world, particularly within postmodern perspectives, the church is increasingly understood as an organism rather than merely an institution. Church leaders need to shift their mindset regarding how the church engages with the communities it seeks to reach. While a strong organizational structure remains important for maintaining the church's existence, in the context of mission and outreach, the church as an organism is more effective and relevant.

Postmodern societies tend to resist rigid institutional structures bound by strict rules. Instead, they are more attracted to communities formed by relationships, brotherhood, and love (Beville, 2016, p. 90). While the church must not compromise its doctrinal foundations, it needs to adopt greater flexibility in its organizational practices in order to effectively reach postmodern communities. Rather than focusing on bringing people into the institutional church, mission-oriented churches should prioritize embodying the church as a living presence within society.

Building dialogue in the contemporary world can serve as a strategic means of communicating the Gospel (Życiński, 2010, p. 64). Contemporary society, particularly those influenced by postmodernism, shows a strong interest in dialogue and discussion, even while holding the view that each individual possesses their own truth. Kieran Beville argues that postmodern individuals do not reject truth per se, but rather prefer truth that is embodied and practiced, rather than merely conceptualized. They perceive purely intellectual truth as abstract and insufficient, and instead seek lived truth as the authentic form of truth (Beville, 2016, p. 90).

This perspective aligns with Brian McLaren's view that, in the postmodern era, a Christian community whose life reflects the Gospel serves as the most effective form of dialogue and apologetics. Such a life represents incarnational truth (McLaren, 1998, p. 191). Postmodern society tends to value incarnational truth more than institutional truth.

In fact, this phenomenon has existed since the time of the apostles two thousand years ago. People did not accept the Gospel primarily because of the apologetic abilities of early Christians, but because they were attracted to the way Christians lived their incarnational truth which was well received by those around them (cf. Acts 2:47; 2 Corinthians 3:2–3). In the context of outreach, incarnational truth plays a crucial role. However, in the context of spiritual growth, institutional truth often expressed through doctrine or dogma remains necessary.

## Mission in the Era of Tolerance and Religious Moderation

The concept of religious moderation serves as a crucial foundation for maintaining harmony within Indonesia's pluralistic society. Through the principle of *wasathiyah* (the middle way), individuals are expected to avoid both extremism and indifference toward core religious values. The implementation of this principle requires full recognition of existing social diversity. Therefore, Christian mission must be redefined contextually in order to adapt to and be well received within diverse cultural dynamics.

According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2019), religious moderation is defined as "a perspective, attitude, and practice of religion in communal life by embodying the essence of religious teachings that uphold human dignity and promote the common good." This view emphasizes that religious expressions, including mission, should focus on peace and collective well-being rather than domination or confrontation.

Syarif and Purkon (2024) describe religious moderation as a national strategy to address radicalism and strengthen social cohesion. They emphasize that "religious moderation is a middle path that avoids excessive and intolerant attitudes" (p. 45). Similarly, Dasriansya and Naldi (2024) argue that the implementation of religious moderation in Indonesian society functions as "a safeguard against horizontal conflict and a means of fostering social harmony" (p. 112).

From the perspective of Christian mission, Sanderan, Senewe, and Tuhumury (2023) assert that mission must transform into a dialogical-based ministry. They state that "Christian mission in an era of plurality is no longer merely proclamation, but active involvement in building interreligious cooperation" (p. 89). Fransiska (2024) further demonstrates that Christian religious education in Bali can function as a form of mission that fosters tolerance from an early age, so that mission is not perceived as a threat, but as a blessing.

Within this framework, a dialogical paradigm of mission becomes highly significant. Dialogue in this sense does not imply abandoning one's beliefs, but rather creating a space for interaction that respects the identity of all parties. In line with the document *Together Towards Life* (World Council of Churches, 2013), mission is understood as a witness to God's love that upholds life and human dignity, rather than being solely oriented toward conversion. This perspective affirms that mission is not merely an effort to convert others, but a testimony of God's love expressed in ways that affirm life and dignity. Therefore, mission should be understood as a clear and communicative manifestation of faith, rather than simply a pursuit of conversion. Dialogical-based mission supports religious moderation in several ways:

1. Preventing Socio-Religious Conflict

Dialogical methods that prioritize honest and empathetic communication have proven effective in reducing the risk of conflict arising from misunderstanding. As emphasized by Paul F. Knitter (2002), interreligious dialogue is not a threat to faith, but a means of deepening one's understanding of faith through encounters with others.

2. Building Harmonious Relationships

A mission approach oriented toward relationships places individuals as active subjects rather than mere objects of conversion. This pattern of interaction, grounded in mutual respect, becomes the foundation for sustainable social harmony. This approach aligns with Banawiratma's (2010) concept of "relational theology" as a framework for engaging with pluralistic societies.

3. Manifesting the Love of Christ Contextually

The core of Christian mission is the manifestation of love. Within a diverse society, the love of Christ is no longer expressed through dominance, but through sincere service, empowering solidarity, and

a presence that brings peace. In line with David J. Bosch (1991) in *Transforming Mission*, mission must be understood as active participation in God's plan to bring reconciliation and peace across the world.

Thus, within the framework of religious moderation, Christian mission is no longer perceived as a threat to the existence of other communities. Instead, it functions as a transformative force that contributes positively to all levels of society, regardless of religious differences. This paradigm of dialogue and inclusivity strengthens social bonds and upholds the universal values of the Kingdom of God love, justice, and peace.

### Challenges and Opportunities of Digitalization in Mission

Nearly all aspects of human life have been influenced by the digital era, including the way the church carries out its role. With the advancement of communication and information technology, the church faces various challenges as well as strategic opportunities to carry out its mission in a contextual and relevant manner.

#### 1. Challenges of Digitalization in Mission

First, the spread of misinformation related to religion has become a major threat in the digital world. False information spreads rapidly through social media, leading to misunderstandings and even conflicts among religious communities. According to a study by Pew Research Center (2023), the uncontrolled flow of digital information, particularly through social media, can reinforce perceptual bias and misinformation regarding religious issues.

Second, polarization in digital spaces further deepens religious identity divisions. The algorithms used by digital platforms often create "echo chambers," where individuals are only exposed to perspectives that align with their existing beliefs. This phenomenon is consistent with Eli Pariser's (2011) concept of the *filter bubble*, in which internet users are primarily exposed to information that matches their preferences and viewpoints.

Third, the lack of digital ethical awareness among users presents a significant problem. Hate speech, intolerance, and a lack of respect for diversity often arise due to insufficient understanding of moral responsibility in online communication. In his study on digital religion, Campbell (2013) emphasizes the need for the development of new ethical frameworks for religious practices in the digital age. These ethical standards must evolve in line with technological advancements.

#### 2. Opportunities of Digitalization in Mission

On the other hand, the digital era offers significant opportunities for the church to carry out its mission. First, the message of the Gospel can be disseminated more widely and rapidly without geographical limitations through digital media such as YouTube, podcasts, and social media platforms. Research conducted by Barna Group (2020) indicates that church engagement in digital platforms, particularly among younger generations, has significantly increased both outreach and participation.

Second, especially since global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, online ministry has become an efficient way to reach congregations. Digital pastoral counseling, virtual communities, and online worship services represent concrete ways for the church to adapt to contemporary developments. According to Hutchings (2017), digital church represents a new expression of faith community, not merely a substitute for physical spaces.

Third, online platforms enable more inclusive interreligious dialogue. Interfaith interactions can be conducted in a more open and constructive manner through online forums, webinars, and social

media. This approach supports the spirit of religious moderation, which emphasizes dialogue, tolerance, and mutual understanding.

Therefore, the church needs to develop digital literacy, build healthy communication ethics, and design contextual mission strategies. The wise use of technology will enable the church to present the message of the Gospel in ways that are not only relevant but also transformative within the dynamics of digital society.

### **Dialogical-Based Strategies for Christian Mission**

Confrontational approaches to mission are increasingly irrelevant in pluralistic societies and in the current era of globalization. In contrast, dialogical approaches emphasize partnership, respect, and witness as the core pillars of ministry, making mission a more contextual and relational practice. Mission is no longer understood merely as an effort to transfer beliefs, but as a presence that brings love, justice, and peace into the lives of others. Several strategies that can be applied in dialogical-based Christian mission include:

#### **1. Relational Approach**

This approach emphasizes the importance of building genuine and sincere relationships with communities. Authentic relationships help avoid the impression of exclusivism and open space for deeper dialogue. Interpersonal relationships are considered a primary means of communicating faith values in contemporary missiological studies. As stated by Bevans and Schroeder (2004), a hospitable presence and commitment to the local context are key to effective mission. Furthermore, studies in the *International Review of Mission* indicate that equal partnerships enhance the acceptance of cross-cultural messages.

#### **2. Witnessing Life**

The most concrete and contextual form of communicating faith is through a lived witness. Values such as forgiveness, love, honesty, and humility function as a “universal language” that can be received by all people, regardless of their beliefs. According to Bosch (1991) in *Transforming Mission*, one of the most authentic forms of mission is the life of believers that reflects Christ. Research published in the *Journal of Missiology* shows that personal integrity has a greater impact in pluralistic contexts than verbal proclamation alone.

#### **3. Social Ministry (Diakonia)**

Diaconal service represents a tangible expression of Christ’s love that transcends identity boundaries. In practice, the church is called to engage in humanitarian issues such as poverty, education, health, and social justice without discrimination. Studies in the *Journal of Religious and Social Studies* indicate that inclusive social service can build interfaith trust and strengthen social cohesion. Therefore, diakonia is not merely a social activity, but also a relevant and contextual form of witness.

#### **4. Utilization of Digital Media**

The development of digital technology opens new opportunities for mission implementation. Social media, video platforms, and other digital spaces can be used to spread messages of peace, tolerance, and Christian values widely. However, the use of these media must be accompanied by strong digital ethics to avoid conflict or misinformation. According to research in the *Journal of Digital Religion*, the presence of the church in digital spaces that is dialogical and inclusive can effectively reach younger generations and build broader faith communities.

#### **5. Interreligious Dialogue**

Dialogical-based mission fundamentally depends on interreligious dialogue. Through dialogue, each party can learn from one another, develop mutual understanding, and appreciate differences while

maintaining their own beliefs. As emphasized by Knitter (2002), dialogue is not a threat to faith; rather, it is a way of discovering God's broader work in the lives of others. Additionally, studies published in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* show that constructive dialogue can reduce conflict and promote peace in pluralistic societies such as Indonesia.

Therefore, a dialogical approach to Christian mission requires a paradigm shift: from "dominating" to "presenting," and from "teaching" to "walking together." Mission is no longer merely a church activity, but a way of life that reflects Christ's love through inclusive relationships, tangible service, and constructive dialogue.

#### 4. Conclusion

Christian mission in the era of tolerance, digitalization, and religious moderation must be carried out through a dialogical approach, where dialogue serves as an effective means of communicating the Gospel without creating conflict. The church is required to adapt to contemporary developments, particularly in utilizing technology and strengthening the values of tolerance. Through this approach, Christian mission can remain relevant, contextual, and contribute to peace within society. Therefore, churches need to enhance the digital literacy of their members, provide training in interreligious dialogue, encourage further research on digital mission practices, and actively participate in promoting religious moderation.

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