

Social Theology in the Context of Modern Social Change: A Theological and Sociological Perspective

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<div>Submit :</div> <div>Revision :</div> <div>Accept :</div>	<div>Abstract</div> <p><i>This paper delves into the complex relationship between theology and modern social change, particularly focusing on the responses of religious traditions, specifically Christianity, to evolving socio-cultural contexts. It begins by examining how technological advancements, demographic shifts, and globalization have reshaped religious practices and societal norms. The impact of these changes on religious institutions is significant, as they navigate the tensions between tradition and innovation. By employing sociological theories of change, such as those proposed by Ogburn and Davis, the paper highlights how institutions are adapting to material and immaterial elements of culture, responding to challenges like urbanization, aging populations, and shifts in family structures. It also explores the role of technology in both facilitating religious engagement and raising concerns over its potential to dilute spiritual experiences. Furthermore, the paper discusses key theological frameworks, including liberation theology and ecological theology, and their efforts to address social justice, inequality, and environmental crises.</i></p> <p><i>The role of Christianity in promoting social justice, reconciliation, and environmental stewardship is emphasized as a vital response to modern social challenges. Theological perspectives are positioned as essential for navigating complex issues such as climate change, economic inequality, and migration. The article concludes that theology, particularly social theology, must continue to evolve to provide moral and ethical guidance, helping communities and institutions respond to the pressing challenges of modern society.</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>Social theology, social change, social justice, ecological theology,</i></p>
	<div>Abstrak</div> <p>Artikel ini mengkaji hubungan kompleks antara teologi dan perubahan sosial modern, dengan fokus khusus pada bagaimana tradisi keagamaan, terutama Kristen, merespons konteks sosial-budaya yang terus berkembang. Artikel ini dimulai dengan menelaah bagaimana kemajuan teknologi, perubahan demografi, dan globalisasi telah membentuk kembali praktik keagamaan dan norma-norma sosial. Dampak dari perubahan ini terhadap institusi keagamaan sangat signifikan, terutama saat mereka harus menavigasi ketegangan antara tradisi dan inovasi. Dengan menggunakan teori-teori perubahan sosial seperti yang dikemukakan oleh Ogburn dan Davis, artikel ini menyoroti bagaimana institusi keagamaan menyesuaikan diri terhadap unsur-unsur material dan immaterial budaya, serta menghadapi tantangan seperti urbanisasi, penuaan populasi, dan pergeseran dalam struktur keluarga. Artikel ini juga membahas peran teknologi dalam memfasilitasi keterlibatan keagamaan, sambil mengangkat kekhawatiran mengenai potensi teknologi untuk mengurangi esensi pengalaman spiritual. Lebih lanjut, artikel ini mengkaji kerangka kerja teologis utama, termasuk teologi pembebasan dan teologi ekologi, serta upaya mereka dalam menangani keadilan sosial, ketidaksetaraan, dan krisis lingkungan.</p> <p>Peran agama Kristen dalam mempromosikan keadilan sosial, rekonsiliasi, dan tanggung jawab ekologis menjadi sorotan penting sebagai respons terhadap tantangan sosial modern. Perspektif teologis diposisikan sebagai bagian penting dalam menavigasi isu-isu kompleks seperti perubahan iklim, ketidaksetaraan ekonomi, dan migrasi. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa teologi, khususnya teologi sosial, harus terus berkembang untuk memberikan panduan moral dan etis, membantu komunitas dan institusi dalam menanggapi tantangan mendesak di masyarakat modern.</p> <p>Kata Kunci: <i>Teologi sosial, perubahan sosial, keadilan sosial, teologi ekologi.</i></p>

Introduction

Social change is an inevitable phenomenon that affects various aspects of human life, including religious practices. As societies evolve, they encounter shifts in cultural, economic, political, and technological domains, all of which exert influence on how individuals and institutions perceive and engage with religion. These transformations are especially evident in a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected through the processes of globalization, technological advancement, and demographic shifts. Social theology offers a framework to examine these changes, particularly in how religious traditions, such as Christianity, respond to these new challenges (Soekanto, 2003). By providing moral guidance and addressing issues of justice and inclusivity, theology can play a significant role in shaping responses to contemporary social dilemmas.

Globalization, as one of the most prominent drivers of modern social change, has led to the rapid exchange of ideas, cultures, and values across borders. This global interconnectedness has not only

facilitated the spread of religious ideologies but also posed significant challenges to religious institutions. Christianity, for example, finds itself navigating the complexities of maintaining traditional beliefs while simultaneously engaging with diverse worldviews and cultural practices. The increased movement of people and ideas forces religious communities to adapt their theological perspectives to remain relevant in multicultural and pluralistic societies. Social theology, in this regard, offers a critical lens through which to evaluate these dynamics, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and tolerance in the face of cultural and religious diversity.

Technological advancements, particularly in digital communication, have also had profound effects on religious practices. The rise of the internet and social media has revolutionized how religious communities interact with their followers and conduct their religious activities. Virtual worship services, online prayer groups, and digital religious content are now common features of religious life. However, this shift raises important theological questions about the nature of

religious experiences in the digital age. While technology can democratize access to religious teachings and foster greater participation, it also risks diluting the sacredness and communal aspects of worship. Social theology seeks to address these concerns by exploring how technological innovations can be harmonized with traditional religious values and practices.

Demographic changes further complicate the landscape of religious life. Aging populations, urbanization, and migration patterns have significantly altered the composition of religious communities. For instance, urban migration has led to the decline of rural congregations and the rise of megachurches in urban centers, where religious practices often take on a more individualized and consumer-oriented nature. Additionally, immigration introduces new religious traditions into host societies, creating both opportunities for interfaith dialogue and tensions around cultural integration. Social theology provides a framework for understanding how religious institutions can adapt to these demographic realities while

promoting social cohesion and inclusivity.

One of the key themes that arise in the context of social change is the issue of social justice. As societies become more aware of issues such as economic inequality, racial discrimination, and environmental degradation, there is increasing pressure on religious institutions to take an active role in addressing these challenges. Christianity, with its long-standing emphasis on charity, compassion, and justice, is particularly well-positioned to contribute to these discussions. Social theology emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to justice—one that not only focuses on material well-being but also considers spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions. This perspective aligns with contemporary movements for social and environmental justice, advocating for a more equitable and sustainable world.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, focusing on a critical literature review and

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thematic analysis of existing scholarly works related to social theology and social change. The primary aim is to synthesize theological and sociological perspectives to understand how religious institutions, particularly within Christianity, respond to contemporary social challenges such as globalization, technological advancements, and demographic shifts.

The research begins with an extensive literature review of key theoretical frameworks in both theology and sociology. Academic sources such as books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and theological texts were analyzed to examine the intersections of religion and social change. This review includes foundational works from theologians and sociologists like Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, and William F. Ogburn, whose contributions are crucial for understanding the relationship between social justice, religion, and societal transformation.

Following the literature review, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and patterns across the

selected texts. The themes focused on were the role of religion in promoting social justice, the responses of religious institutions to technological advancements, theological reflections on environmental sustainability, and the adaptation of religious practices in response to demographic changes. The analysis helped to draw connections between theological concepts and real-world social phenomena, providing insights into how Christianity, in particular, addresses modern social issues.

Additionally, the study incorporates a case study approach by examining specific instances where religious institutions have actively engaged in social change. Case studies include examples of Christian organizations involved in advocacy for social justice, environmental stewardship, and digital engagement with congregations. These cases help contextualize the theoretical insights gained from the literature and thematic analysis, illustrating practical applications of social theology in contemporary society.

Data for this study was collected from secondary sources,

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including academic journals, theological treatises, and reports on religious engagement with social issues. No primary data collection, such as interviews or surveys, was conducted due to the conceptual nature of the research. The analysis was carried out through interpretative analysis, whereby the texts were examined in light of key research questions concerning the role of theology in addressing social change.

The study is grounded in both theological and sociological theories. Theologically, the framework draws from liberation theology, ecological theology, and public theology, emphasizing the role of religious belief in fostering social transformation. Sociologically, it utilizes theories of social change, including those proposed by Ogburn and Davis, to understand how religious institutions adapt to changes in society, particularly in the areas of culture, technology, and demographics.

Results and Discussion

A. Social Change and Its Impact on Religious Practices

According to Ogburn's theory of social change, societies evolve through changes in both material and non-material elements, which subsequently affect institutions and religious practices (Waluya, 2007). In contemporary contexts, advancements in technology and demographic shifts are significant factors influencing religious dynamics. Religious institutions face substantial challenges in maintaining their relevance amid these changes. This evolution requires rapid adaptation so that religious institutions can continue to meet the needs and expectations of society.

Social theology emerges as a response to these changes, aiming to bridge the gap between religious teachings and the ever-evolving social landscape. Social theology not only examines the impact of social changes on religious practices but also offers inclusive perspectives on emerging issues such as immigration, urbanization, and changes in family structures (Waluya, 2007). In this context, social theology plays a crucial role in redefining religious understanding to remain relevant and accepted in a rapidly changing society.

Rapid social changes also compel religious institutions to address new challenges, such as secularization and pluralism. Secularization often leads to a disconnection between religious values and contemporary cultural norms. In response, many religious communities are working to reaffirm their relevance by addressing modern issues directly, such as social inequality and human rights. This shows that religious institutions need to be more proactive in engaging with social changes to maintain their significant role in society.

1. The Role of Technology

Technological innovations, especially the rise of smartphones and digital platforms, have drastically transformed lifestyle and communication patterns. Technology allows for quick and broad access to information and facilitates more efficient communication. In this context, religious communities are reconsidering their approaches to ministry and worship by integrating digital platforms to reach a wider audience (Campbell, 2012). Digital tools like social media and mobile

apps are now used to conduct meetings, share religious content, and even perform worship services online.

However, technological advancements also bring challenges. There are concerns that dependence on technology may weaken traditional religious practices and diminish the depth of spiritual experiences. Critics argue that technology's role in religious contexts might lead to a reduction in the quality of spiritual interactions and interpersonal relationships within religious communities (Cheong & Chia, 2011). These concerns highlight the need for a balance between utilizing technology and preserving essential aspects of traditional religious practices.

On the other hand, technology also presents opportunities for religious communities to innovate and create new methods of teaching and ministry. By leveraging technology, religious communities can reach previously inaccessible groups, such as those in remote areas or with mobility limitations. If managed wisely, these innovations can enrich

religious experiences and expand the positive impact of religious institutions in society.

2. Demographic Changes

Demographic changes, such as an aging population, urbanization, and migration, play a significant role in social transformation and its impact on religious communities. An aging population affects the social structure of religious communities by altering the needs and expectations of members. For example, with an increasing number of elderly individuals, there is a greater demand for support programs and social services tailored to this demographic. Additionally, urbanization leads to a reorganization of social structures, influencing how individuals interact with religious institutions (Putnam, 2000).

International migration also has a substantial impact on religious communities by increasing cultural diversity within them. The presence of various ethnic and cultural groups within religious communities encourages religious traditions to adopt more inclusive approaches. This fosters a more open and tolerant environment and requires

adjustments in religious teachings and practices to accommodate diverse perspectives and needs (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2013).

Moreover, demographic changes provide opportunities for religious communities to expand their reach and develop more relevant programs for society's needs. For instance, churches in urban areas can develop programs that address urbanization challenges, such as poverty and access to healthcare. By responding to demographic changes with appropriate strategies, religious institutions can remain a relevant and impactful force in a transforming world.

B. Theological Responses to Social Change

Theological responses to social change are closely tied to religious doctrines and moral principles upheld by various faith traditions. Many religious traditions, including Christianity, view social justice as a fundamental principle that should be applied when addressing social challenges. Principles such as love, justice, and service to others are considered integral to the social mission of religion, thus forming the

basis for responding to emerging social issues (Gutierrez, 1973).

Liberation theology, in particular, offers a perspective that the church has a responsibility to defend the poor and marginalized. In the Latin American context, liberation theology emphasizes that social change and justice are theological imperatives. This approach calls for systemic reforms to address social injustices and positions the church as an active agent in promoting justice and equality (Boff, 1986). Thus, liberation theology functions as a response to structural injustices and supports the struggle for social justice.

Conversely, ecological theology reflects a theological response to social change with a focus on humanity's responsibility for the environment. Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, underscores the importance of climate justice from a theological perspective. Ecological theology links social justice with environmental sustainability, encouraging religious communities to act against climate change and promote sustainable development.

This theological reflection invites religious communities to actively address pressing ecological issues and contribute to holistic and sustainable solutions.

1. Liberation Theology

Liberation theology, which has gained prominence in Latin America, represents a theological response to social and economic injustices. This approach focuses on the church's responsibility to advocate for the poor and marginalized. Liberation theology places social justice as a central principle, believing that fundamental social change is a theological necessity (Boff, 1986). This perspective often involves critiquing social and economic structures perceived as oppressive and calling for systemic reforms to address injustices.

A key aspect of liberation theology is the emphasis on solidarity and direct action for social change. The church and religious communities are seen as proactive agents in promoting justice and equality in society. By combining religious teachings with social action, liberation theology aims to address issues such as poverty, oppression, and inequality. This

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approach also encourages engagement with social movements advocating for structural changes and fundamental human rights.

However, liberation theology also faces criticism, particularly from those who view it as overly political or too focused on social change at the expense of spiritual aspects. Despite these critiques, liberation theology remains an important part of religious discourse, emphasizing that faith should translate into concrete actions to improve social and economic conditions.

2. Ecological Theology

Ecological theology, which has gained increasing attention in recent decades, emphasizes humanity's moral responsibility toward the environment. This approach posits that caring for the environment is part of religious duty and that environmental justice should be integrated into the social mission of religious communities. Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, highlights the importance of climate justice and sustainable development from a theological standpoint (Pope Francis, 2019). This encyclical underscores the connection between social justice

and environmental health, advocating for collective action against climate change.

Ecological theology encourages religious communities not only to discuss environmental issues but also to take concrete actions to mitigate climate change and environmental degradation. This includes efforts to reduce carbon footprints, support renewable energy, and promote environmentally friendly lifestyles. This approach asserts that protecting the environment is both an ethical and religious responsibility.

Furthermore, ecological theology invites religious communities to engage in deep reflection about humanity's relationship with nature and the impact of human activities on the planet. By emphasizing environmental justice, ecological theology seeks to foster awareness and action to preserve the earth for future generations. This approach asserts that safeguarding the planet is integral to religious calling and moral duty.

C. Challenges and Opportunities

Religious institutions face significant challenges and opportunities in responding to social changes. One of the main challenges is secularization, a process through which society increasingly distances itself from religious values and practices. Secularization often results in a shift in values and cultural norms that diverge from traditional religious teachings, creating a disconnect between religious institutions and societal norms. This process can diminish the influence of religion in everyday life and affect membership and participation in religious activities (Voas & Crockett, 2005).

However, the challenge of secularization can also be seen as an opportunity for religious communities to renew and reaffirm their relevance. By addressing modern issues directly, such as social inequality, climate change, and human rights, religious communities can play an active role in providing solutions and influencing positive social change. For instance, many churches and religious organizations are now involved in social programs that address poverty, education, and social justice, demonstrating that

religion can make a meaningful contribution to contemporary issues (Moltmann, 2004).

Conclusion

This article explores the intricate relationship between theology and modern social change, with a particular focus on how religious traditions, notably Christianity, respond to evolving socio-cultural contexts. The study highlights the profound impact of technological advancements, demographic shifts, and globalization on religious practices and norms. These transformations present both challenges and opportunities for religious institutions as they strive to balance tradition with innovation.

The examination reveals that technology, while offering new platforms for religious engagement, also poses risks to the essence of spiritual experiences. The rise of digital communication has altered the way religious communities interact, necessitating a reassessment of how technology can complement rather than diminish traditional practices. Additionally, demographic changes

such as aging populations and migration require religious institutions to adapt their programs and outreach strategies to address the diverse needs of contemporary society.

Theological responses to social change, particularly through liberation theology and ecological theology, provide frameworks for addressing justice and environmental sustainability. Liberation theology emphasizes the church's role in advocating for the marginalized and addressing systemic injustices, while ecological theology calls for a religiously informed response to environmental degradation. Both approaches illustrate how theology can guide practical action in response to social and environmental crises.

Ultimately, the study underscores the necessity for social theology to continue evolving to offer moral and ethical guidance in the face of modern challenges. Religious institutions must remain proactive in engaging with contemporary issues such as social inequality, climate change, and migration to maintain their relevance and impact. By integrating traditional

values with new approaches, theology can effectively contribute to navigating the complexities of a rapidly changing world.

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