



RELIGIOUS MODERATION FROM BELOW: Defining Religious Moderation from the Perspectives of Catholic Religious Teachers

Alexander Hendra Dwi Asmara
Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Email: hendrasj@gmail.com

Abstract

Religious moderation has been envisioned by the Indonesian government since 2019. However, religious moderation has not been implemented successfully, especially in the field of Catholic Religious Education. The purpose of this research is to find how Catholic religious teachers perceive religious moderation in their teachings. This research paper employs a qualitative design. Data is collected using deep interviews with five Catholic religious teachers from Yogyakarta, Solo, Semarang, and Jakarta. The findings show that most of the informants are aware of religious moderation proposed by the government. Nevertheless, the informants shared that they were less motivated to implement religious moderation in their Catholic religious education subject because of several reasons, such as, the lack of support from school policy makers, the absence of government trainings or modules related to religious moderation, and the density of the curriculum in schools makes it difficult for teachers to add other material, including religious moderation.

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Introduction

Indonesia is known for its diversity. On one side, diversity can provide a uniting element that bonds differences; on the other side, diversity inherently has the potential to cause clashes between cultures, ethnicities, and religions.¹ The Indonesian motto, “unity in diversity” (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*), has undoubtedly provided a vision for Indonesian people. In 2019, inspired by the spirit of “unity in diversity,” Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, the Minister of Religious Affairs Republic of Indonesia, raised the concept of “religious moderation” as a strategy for creating religious harmony by building shared commitment among communities to respect each other.

¹ Marwa Marwa, Bambang Yudi Cahyono, Mohammad Adnan Latief, Johannes Ananto Prayogo, “ICC Assessments and Objectives Grounded from Indonesian English Teachers’ ELT Practices in Higher EFL Education: Are they Visible and Worthy.” *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 5, no. 4 (2018): 92-108.

In the educational setting, religious education (RE) plays an essential role in the whole project of religious moderation because RE has the task of nurturing peace and collaboration among religious communities.² As a way of teaching religion, RE has a strategic role in educating society about religious moderation. From the perspective of religious moderation, the outcome of RE should not only be devoted Muslims or Christians; RE should nurture a moderate way of expressing faith in the public realm characterized by several attitudes, such as tolerance, nationalism, anti-violence, and accepting local culture. Religion teachers have a strategic position as teachers and, at the same time, role models for their students regarding religious moderation.

Education is part of the ecosystem to develop religious moderation. Nevertheless, formal education in Indonesia have been infiltrated by radical ideologies and groups. These groups “take advantage of the atmosphere of the academic freedom to organize, campaign and recruit new members.”³ The strengthening of religious identity has also been growing significantly among students, which is often followed by discrimination and intolerance. The findings from the Ministry of Education and Culture shown that students tended to reject student council presidents who had different religions.⁴ This data is in line with SETARA Institute findings where almost 51,6% of respondents agreed to elect a student council president who is of the same religion even though they have different races and ethnicities. Research from INFID (International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development) on the Attitudes of Millennials and Generation Z towards Tolerance, Diversity, and Religious Freedom in Indonesia also shows that 40% of students agreed to apply a dress code according to the majority religion in their area. RE’s teachers also contribute in strengthening religious intolerance due to the scriptural, rigid, exclusive, and close-minded interpretation of religious texts brought by religion teachers.⁵

² Sutrisno, “Aktualisasi Moderasi Beragama di Lembaga Pendidikan,” *Jurnal Bimas Islam*, 12, no. 2 (2019): 323–348.

³ Zaki Mubarak and Siti Zuliha Razali, Preventing Violence and Extremism in Indonesian Educational Institutions: Policies and Strategies. in *4th International Conference on Education and Social Science Research (ICESRE)*, KnE Social Sciences (2022), 76–85.

⁴ Estu Suryowati (May 2017). “Origins of the Ministry of Education and Culture's Research and Findings of Intolerance in Schools.” look at <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2017/05/03/14380761/asal.muasal.penelitian.kemendikbud.dan.temuan.sikap.into.leransi.di.sekolah>.

⁵ Dirga Maulana, “The Exclusivism of Religion Teachers: Intolerance and Radicalism in Indonesian Public Schools,” *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, 24, no. 2 (2017): 395-401.

Researches on religious moderation from the Catholic perspective is mainly focused on exploring how this vision is related to the Church's documents on interreligious dialogue, such as, *Nostra Aetate* and *Fratelli Tutti*.⁶ These researches affirm that religious moderation has already been implemented by the Church, expressed in the teaching that "The Catholic Church does not reject anything, which in religions is all true and holy" (*Nostra Aetate*, art. 2). However, researches on how to implement religious moderation from the Catholic perspective is very limited.⁷ Thus, this article aims to fill the gap for research in religious moderation, especially on its implementation at school level by Catholic RE teachers. This article may provide a general description of Catholic religious teachers' perspective on religious moderation that can be used as solid indicators of the Church's readiness and willingness to participate in the government's efforts to implement religious moderation.

This research is focused on discussing the following questions: How do Catholic religious teachers perceive the religious moderation issues? What are the teacher's stances on religious moderation as expressed in their teaching practice?

Theoretical Background

In Bahasa Indonesia, religious moderation is translated as *moderasi beragama*. It is perceived as "reducing violence, or avoiding extremism."⁸ Thus, the term "religious moderation" basically means avoiding extremes in religious practice by finding the middle way. The Ministry of Religious Affairs defines religious moderation as an effort to "find the meeting point of two extremes poles in religion," namely, the exclusivists and the relativists.⁹

Since 2019, the Indonesian government has made a serious effort to disseminate the idea of religious moderation as part of the Indonesian participation in the global movement of "International Year of Moderation 2019."¹⁰ Aside from its global context, the issue of religious

⁶ Hadi Ignatius Untu, "Laity and the Integration of the Concept of Religious Moderation in Planning Pastoral Work Programs at the Holy Trinity Parish in Paslaten," *International Journal of Social Service and Research (IJSSR)*, Vol. 03, No. 12, December 2023; Bhanu Viktorahadi, "The Meaning of Religious Moderation According to Franz MagnisSuseno: A Phenomenological Approach," *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritualitas*, 12, no. 2 (2022).

⁷ Tomas Lastari Hatmoko and Yovita Kurnia Mariani, "Moderasi Beragama dan Relevansinya untuk Pendidikan di Sekolah Katolik," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Katolik (JPAK)*, 22, no. 1 (2022).

⁸ Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia Online

⁹ Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementrian Agama RI, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Kemenag, 2020), 7-8.

¹⁰ United Nations, "Resolutions Promoting Moderation, Establishing International Day of Living Together in Peace Adopted by General Assembly" <https://press.un.org/en/2017/ga11989.doc.htm>. 2017.

moderation also has its historical origins, particularly in the struggle to construct the state foundation. Since the Independence Day in 1945, the Indonesian government has envisioned a religious state, not an Islamic or a secular one.¹¹ The government's guarantee of religious freedom is stated in Pancasila Sila 1, "Belief in the One and Only God," which affirms that "Indonesia is founded not under Islamic law, but under the belief in One God." It acknowledged the importance of religion in Indonesia, as an essential part of people's lives. Therefore, all religion should maintain their moderate principle in the public life of Indonesian society.

In the Religious Moderation book of the Ministry of Religion Research and Development (2020), the Indonesian government argues that religious moderation can also be found in every religious tradition, including Catholicism. The Indonesian Catholic Church adopts and adapts the government's vision of religious moderation. The Indonesian Bishop Conference (*Konferensi Wali Gereja Indonesia/KWI*) underlines that religious moderation should not be understood as "moderating religion," but rather "moderating the way religious people practicing their religious beliefs" since "all religious traditions principally teach and offer values of moderation, peace, justice, and love to his/her adherents."¹² At its core, religious moderation means "bridging uniqueness" of people from different backgrounds.¹³ In the latest meeting of the National Catechetical Gathering XII (PKKI XII) from 9-14 September 2022 in Muntilan (Central Java), the Church reaffirms its support towards the religious moderation project. PKKI XII firmly states that religious moderation is rooted in the theology of incarnation; therefore, it is central to the way of being the Church in the Indonesian context:

Building religious moderation is an essential part of the Catholic Church vocation in following Jesus Christ. Incarnation story, God enters into history of humanity (John 1:1-5) is the sole foundation for the Church's vocation in Indonesia...religious moderation helps to develop tolerance, anti-violence, respect towards local culture, and love of nation. Religious moderation should not be merely a theory, but a force that put all Indonesians to work together for the nation.

The implementation of religious moderation has been one of the most discussed topics among the bishops, priests, and lay Catholics in Indonesia. Two popular perspectives can be pointed out. One perspective argues that religious moderation should be practiced by implementing "humanism" as the meeting point for all religions in Indonesia. Humanism is the

¹¹ Remy Madinier, *Islam and Politics in Indonesia: The Masyumi Party between Democracy and Integralism*. Translated by Jeremy Desmond (Singapore: NUS Press, 2015), 66.

¹² HIDUP Magazine, *Moderasi Beragama* 2021.

¹³ Franz Magnis-Suseno, *Menjadi Saksi Kristus. Di Tengah Masyarakat Majemuk* (Jakarta: Penerbit Obor, 2004)

common platform for Christians to cooperate not only with Muslims but also with members of other religions. Pope Francis also offers a programmatic approach to building humanism in society. He argues for solidarity because it preserves the rights of the individual and, at the same time, encourages the common good. Pope Francis also issued an encyclical on fraternity and social friendship, *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), where the Church should be the symbol of unity, build bridges, the symbol of hope and dialogue.¹⁴

Another perspective argues that the Church's participation in developing religious moderation should strengthen the sense of nationalism among Christians. The first Indonesian Catholic bishop, Msgr. Albertus Soegijapranata, SJ (1896–1963), said that being a Catholic and Indonesian citizen, cannot be contradicted. His quote inspired many Catholics to be nationalistic without being chauvinistic, as he states, “to be completely Indonesian, and at the same time, perfectly Catholic” (*100% Indonesia, 100% Katolik*).¹⁵ The concern for nationalism has initiated a model of a “diasporic” Church, a new way of being a Church that is involved in daily struggles at the local level and engaged in public witnessing. The Church in diaspora means that the Church should be actively participated in the Indonesian society. The Church is a public Church It must also be a public Church, that accepts responsibility for the common good. A diaspora Church “must be a Church of solidarity and mutual love; it must be a praxis-oriented community rather than a hierarchical organization.”¹⁶

Methodology

This study employs qualitative research that seeks to understand holistically the phenomena in Indonesian society. Qualitative research aims at finding and discovering data; therefore, in this approach, the focus is not on the generalization of data but instead on understanding and constructing the phenomenon.¹⁷ Qualitative research involves several steps, namely, emerging questions and procedures, collecting data, reducing data, displaying and interpreting data. In this article, I use descriptive qualitative research, which emphasizes

¹⁴ Francis, “Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti on Fraternity and Social Friendship” from http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_encyclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

¹⁵ Albertus Bagus Laksana, “Love of Religion, Love of Nation: Catholic Mission and the Idea of Indonesian Nationalism”, *Kritika Kultura*, 25 (2015): 92.

¹⁶ Mujiburrahman, “The diaspora Church in Indonesia: Mangunwijaya on nationalism, humanism, and Catholic praxis.” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 38, Iss. 4 (2001): 444-469.

¹⁷ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan: Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, R&D*. (Bandung: CV Alfabeta, 2019)

describing, understanding, and reflecting on people's opinions in order to find meaning to strengthen theories.

The informants were selected using non-probability sampling, where the researcher chose the participants based on his or her judgment. The researcher selected Catholic religion teachers (N=5) from 5 Catholic High Schools in Java Island. Both genders were represented; three of them were female, and two were male. Java Island was chosen as the research field because of its population, where the Catholic Church is not the dominant religion. Moreover, the polemic regarding religious moderation occurred mainly in provinces in Java Island. Interviews were conducted from March to May 2023 and they lasted approximately an hour each. Some interviews were implemented as remote interviews due to the Covid-19 situation. The researcher collected data using direct research, consisting of interviews, observation, documentation, and reference exploring.

Result and Discussion

Result

There are five informants selected for this research. Table 1 gives detailed information about the teachers and their working years. There are four indicators of religious moderation proposed by the government: 1) national commitment, namely, commitment to accept and follow the directions as stated in Pancasila; 2) tolerance refers to an attitude of respect, openness, and acceptance of religious diversity; 3) anti-violence, or the act of resisting hostility; and 4) acceptance of local tradition.¹⁸ The researcher measures the religious moderation of Catholic religion teachers based on these four indicators.

Table 1. Background of teachers

	Gender	Work experience as a Catholic religious teacher
01	Male	5 years
02	Male	10 years
03	Female	10 years
04	Female	15 years
05	Female	More than 15 years

¹⁸ Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, *Moderasi Beragama*, 10.

In this section, I continue the process of analyzing data using data reduction. Data reduction refers to the process of selecting and focusing the field notes and interview. I underline four main themes as the result of data reduction, namely, building commitment to Pancasila, respecting diversity, resisting violence, and appreciating local culture. These themes are displayed in narrative text.

Theme 1: Building Commitment to Pancasila

Most of the informants argue that the core vision of religious moderation is to bring all Indonesian citizen to have stronger commitment to Pancasila. Religious moderation, as one of the informants says, “is a reminder that we are united as a nation by our commitment to Pancasila” (Informant 4). Two of the informants give a deeper explanation and elaboration of their opinions about Pancasila:

As a Catholic, I believe that Pancasila is not contradicted with the Gospel. I remember Msgr. Soegija (Msgr. Soegijapranata, SJ) said about being 100% Indonesian and 100% Catholic, which encouraged every Christian to realize his/her vocation to be a good citizen and a good Christian. I also remember the song “Pancasila rumah kita” (*Pancasila is our home*), which expresses that Pancasila is the source of our existence as Indonesians (Informant 1).

As a Catholic, I find that following Pancasila heartfully is very urgent in Indonesia. I think Pancasila is not only a unitive ideology that unites diverse ideologies in Indonesian society but also “an over-arching principle” for all ideologies. Pancasila is a political and cultural negotiation that allows Indonesian people to live together (Informant 2).

Based on the interview, some informants also argue that the tendency to “absolutize” Pancasila should be avoided since it could threaten religious and cultural diversity in Indonesia. Pancasila, as the sole foundation of the nation, should not be manipulated as a means to repress ideological divergences (*aliran*) in Indonesia.¹⁹ Two of the informants share their opinions:

Commitment to Pancasila should not be imposed by the government on the Indonesian people. Otherwise, Indonesia will return to the situation it was in the Suharto

¹⁹ Zainal Abidin Bagir dan Jimmy Sormin. eds. *Politik Moderasi dan Kebebasan Beragama: Suatu Tinjauan Kritis* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2022).

era, where Suharto applied the authoritarian model. Strengthening Pancasila should, at the same time, support other ideologies to grow (Informant 4).

Pancasila should guarantee “unity in diversity” and not “unity above diversity,” where the importance of uniformity and conformity becomes absolute. I am afraid that Jokowi’s presidency does not hesitate to impose and strengthen Pancasila by violent means (Informant 3).

Theme 2: Tolerance

Tolerance (*toleransi* in Indonesian) is considered as one of the important elements in religious moderation by the informants. During the interview, I observed that informants understand different models of tolerance that are appropriate in the Indonesian context:

I think tolerance means an ability to communicate and understand each other. We do not need to discuss about our religious faiths or dogmas. I believe we have to discuss how to overcome social problems, such as poverty, illegal drugs, natural disaster, and others (Informant 5).

Based on my experience, tolerance should be based on the belief that one’s religion is true. However, this firm belief should not be accompanied by a violent attitude towards other believers. Claiming one’s truth should not hinder someone from respecting other religions (Informant 4).

The spirit of tolerance is to respect each other differences. Differences among religious traditions should not be mixed up, but rather, differences should be respected as uniqueness (Informant 1).

Some of the informants have tried to nurture tolerance through formal and informal ways, such as by integrating the topic of tolerance into the RE curriculum and by conducting interreligious extracurricular activities. I noticed that nurturing tolerance among students in an informal setting is more successful than in the formal setting:

To develop tolerance among students, I employ a model of a comparative approach, which I integrate into my teaching. For example, I ask my students to compare Catholic teachings with Islamic doctrines about one topic, such as interreligious dialogue, nationalism, human rights, etc. I ask them to present their findings to the class. This

method helps my students to develop tolerance and a better understanding of other religions, even though it is difficult for students and myself as a teacher (Informant 1).

I am surprised that some of my students share with me how they have deep relationships with their volleyball and basketball teammates. Even though they are Catholics, they like talking with their Muslim fellows and enjoy their friendship (Informant 3).

Informants also share that nurturing tolerance is more effective through extracurricular activities. One respondent shared about developing interreligious friendship through the model of “live-in” RE:

In our school, we have a “live-in” program as a model of RE where students immerse themselves in other religious communities so that they can develop deep relation and help them to engage in meaningful, direct interactions (Informant 4).

Theme 3: Resisting Violence

Informants share that religious moderation should create peace and harmony in Indonesian society. However, it seems that violence has been infiltrated every element of society, including education. Based on interviews, informants argue that anti-violence has not been implemented successfully as part of school culture. Informants mention about bullying in school as example of violence:

The school is not very strict on enforcing anti-bullying. I remember one of the students told me that he experienced verbal bullying from other students. School needs to develop a “culture of anti-violence” (Informant 4).

Bullying often occurs verbally among students. Even though this is considered normal, it shows that a culture of anti-violence has not been successfully formed (Informant 3).

Informants argue that Catholic RE should implement “love and compassion” as the core teaching of Catholicism.

As a Catholic religion teacher, I often give my students assignments to put into practice the teaching of love and compassion through daily activities such as giving alms, involving in social activities, etc. Then, I ask them to record and present it to the class. They are very proud (Informant 3).

As a Catholic, I think love and compassion have always been the central teachings of the Church. My friends who are not Catholic always say to me that Catholicism is a religion of love and compassion (Informant 1).

I always find that one of the uniqueness of Catholicism is love. Thus, at its core, Catholicism is always against violence. Even though we are often afflicted by violent acts from radical groups, the Church has been trying to spread its teaching of love (Informant 4).

Theme 4: Appreciating Local Culture

Appreciating local culture is considered as the implication of religious moderation by the informants. Based on the interview, two informants share their experience on how the Church adopts local culture, such as in liturgy:

As a Catholic, I experience that the Church is not only open but also respects local culture. I see how my parish has been accommodating Javanese culture in its liturgy, songs, and many others. (Informant 3).

Sometimes, I compare Catholicism with other religious communities. And I have an impression that the Church is more accommodative to local culture than other religions. And I cannot imagine if I have to abandon my culture for my faith (Informant 4).

Two informants shared how they managed to integrate cultural awareness in their Catholic RE:

I have been using *wayang* (*shadow puppet*) to teach my students about the Catholic faith. I use *wayang* figures to explain verses in the Bible and create *wayang* from figures in the Bible, such as Peter, James, and Paul. Based on the student's evaluation, *wayang* has helped to improve student learning activities. (Informant 1)

As a Catholic religious teacher, I often invite my students to pray in their own local dialect. Then, I ask them to translate it into the Indonesian language so that their friends can understand their prayers. From that simple practice, I hope that I can make them realize that, as a Catholic, they do not have to abandon their culture. (Informant 5).

Discussion

In the previous section, I have underlined four themes that emerged during the interview. In this section, these themes will be discussed by looking at them from the bigger perspective, namely, religious moderation in Indonesia and its challenges.

The first theme is commitment to Pancasila. This theme is closely related to the first indicator of religious moderation, namely, national commitment. National commitment is defined by the government as a “commitment to obey heartfully to Pancasila.”²⁰ In Indonesian context, Pancasila is considered a meeting point of religious diversity in Indonesia as well as the way of life.²¹ The Indonesian Catholic Church supports Pancasila as national ideology for all Indonesian citizens. The Church regards the values contained in Pancasila is not contradicted with the mission of the Church, especially in its first principal “Belief in the One and Only God.” Commitment to follow Pancasila actualizes Christian’s “dual citizenships” where they have to be responsible citizens inspired by the Gospel.²² It is interesting to notice that commitment to Pancasila also entails commitment to reject other opposing ideologies, such as, religious radicalism. Based on survey from *Lingkar Survey Indonesia* in 2018, the percentage of those who “pro Pancasila” decreases around 10% (from 85,2% in 2005 to 75,3%). On the contrary, the idea of “NKRI Bersyariah” (Indonesia for Sharia Islam) increases 9% (from 4,65 in 2005 to 13,2 in 2018). Thus, strengthening Pancasila should be the priority in Indonesia to counter the growth of “alternative ideologies,” particularly radical and violent ideologies.

The second theme is tolerance. Tolerance is the second indicator of religious moderation. Tolerance implies accepting or tolerating someone or something, particularly those who are different from you (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries 2020). Looking at informants’ opinions, tolerance primarily is perceived as interreligious tolerance or tolerance towards those who have different religions. However, intra-religious tolerance or tolerance for those who are regarded as members of deviating or blasphemous sects are not mentioned by informants. In Indonesia, there

²⁰ Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, *Moderasi Beragama*, 41

²¹ Jannah & Dewi “Implementasi Pancasila dalam Kehidupan Sosial Budaya di Masyarakat Abad-21.” *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai*, 5(1), (2021), pp. 931–936.

²² Francis. 2013. *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World*. No 220. VaticanWebsite. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

are some cases of intra-religious intolerance that leads to discrimination and violence.²³ Those who come from the mainstream religion tended to use the word *sesat* (heresy) to label those who are different. Tolerance as an attitude of respecting other beliefs should not be confused with relativism, which holds the view that every belief, custom, and moral is relative to an individual within his or her cultural context. On the contrary, tolerance demands total commitment to one's own faith. Therefore, the fear of "mixing religions" or syncretism in the name of tolerance appears to be the main concern for informants.²⁴

The third theme that appears during interview is resisting violence, which is closely related to anti-violence, the third indicator of religious moderation. Anti-violence is defined by the government as "a commitment to reject hostility to other people of different religions and the government."²⁵ There have been multiple studies of violence in Indonesia, such as studies on ethnoreligious conflicts in Maluku, Ambon, Poso, and Kalimantan. However, most of these studies focus on the massive violence without attending to the everyday violence in the school context, such as fighting among students from different schools (*tawuran*) and bullying. Data from the National Committee for Children Protection (Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia/KPAI) mentions that in 2021, there were 17 incidents of violence involving students, namely, 10 cases of violence among students (*tawuran*) and 7 cases of bullying. RE in Indonesia, especially in its confessional model, also contributes towards the growth of religious intolerance and violence.²⁶ In this model, students do not have experience of interreligious engagement with other students from different religious backgrounds. This situation can slowly develop ignorance, hatred, and violence.

The fourth theme is appreciating local culture which is the fourth indicator of religious moderation. In this perspective, religious moderation should help people to be more open towards

²³ There are some cases of intra-religious tolerance. In Indonesian context, violence towards the commonly perceived as deviating sects within religions, such as, Jehovah's Witnesses in Catholicism, and *Jemaat Ahmadiyah* in Islam seems to be growing. These groups are often designated as deviant (*aliran sesat*). See. Paul Marshal, "The Ambiguities of Religious Freedom in Indonesia" *The Review of Faith and International Review*, Volume 16, 2018 -Issue 1.

²⁴ One of the syncretic groups in Indonesia is called *Gafatar*, a combination of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The government forced *Gafatar* followers (more than 7,000 people) to leave their hometown on Kalimantan Island. See. Human Rights Watch. 2016. "Indonesia: Persecution of Gafatar Religious Group: Thousands Forcibly Evicted, Relocated, Detained," March 29. Accessed September 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/03/29/indonesia-persecution-gafatar-religious-group>.

²⁵ Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, *Moderasi Beragama*, 43.

²⁶ RE in Indonesia is regulated based on the Government Regulation [*Peraturan Pemerintah*] No. 55/2007: "Every student at every education unit deserves to receive religious education in accordance with his or her religion, imparted by a teacher from a similar religious background" (article 4.2.).

tradition and culture. Thus, religion and culture must openly develop dialogues and engagement. The vision of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity) plays an essential role as a sociocultural symbol, expressing the fundamental harmony and solidarity within the plurality of religious, and culture of the Indonesian people. RE in the school setting should also help the students to develop positive perceptions of cultural diversity in Indonesia and regard such diversity as *rahmat* (mercy) from God.

Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed the perspectives of Catholic religious teachers towards religious moderation using four indicators, namely, nationalism, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodating local culture. In general, informants strongly support and affirm the vision of religious moderation. Moreover, informants are also willing to be involved in this project by implementing the vision of religious moderation in the school context formally and informally through the curriculum of RE or extracurricular activities. Informants realize that their role as Catholic religious teachers provides a strategic position to be role models for their students.

Nevertheless, the gesture of full compliance from informants towards religious moderation should also be critically evaluated. *First*, as a national project, religious moderation needs to undergo a “public test” (*uji publik*), assessed by every group and community before being implemented nationally by the Indonesian government.²⁷ In the school setting, this task should be the teacher’s responsibility where they have to approach this project with a critical perspective. As a matter of fact, similar to other government’s policies, religious moderation has continuously been questioned, and its effectiveness doubted by several groups. *Second*, the informants of this research are Catholic religious teachers in Catholic schools. They certainly have less experience of interreligious dialogue and interreligious tolerance when compared to teachers in public schools. Thus, informants’ opinions might not be as rich as their colleagues who are in public schools. Informants should be aware of their bias since they understand religious moderation from one single perspective of Christianity. *Third*, as Catholic religious teachers, the informants represent the Church’s position in the public realm. Thus, by committing to religious moderation, they also put the Church in close ties with the government. While this fact is beneficial for the

²⁷ Bagir dan Sormin. *Politik Moderasi dan Kebebasan Beragama: Suatu Tinjauan Kritis*, 2022, 80.

Church as a minority group, nevertheless, it might be interpreted by other groups as the Church's efforts to gain political support from the government so that the Church has a more robust position politically. This situation might reawaken the "old wound" between the Church and Islam in Indonesia, which is counterproductive for the implementation of religious moderation.

Religious moderation has created three imaginary positions: right, middle, and left. Every religious individual and community have to accommodate the middle position referred to as moderation; otherwise, they can be suspected as religious radicals. However, constructing and describing clearly these three positions is not only tricky, but also dangerous in order not to label certain communities as extremely left or right.

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