

**THE IGNATIAN SPIRITUAL EXERCISES  
AS A PRACTICE OF INTER-RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

***LATIHAN ROHANI IGNASIAN SEBAGAI PRAKTIK  
PENDIDIKAN LINTAS AGAMA***

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**ABSTRAK**

*Latihan Rohani Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) memberikan perspektif penting bagi teori dan praktik pendidikan agama. Penelitian ini membahas bagaimana spiritualitas itu dapat dipraktikkan sebagai pendidikan lintas-agama tanpa mengabaikan sifat keyakinan teologis. Dengan pendekatan studi pustaka, penelitian ini menganalisis Latihan Rohani (LR) melalui kerangka teologi komunikatif yang dikembangkan Matthias Scherer dan Bernd Jochen Hilberath. Kerangka teologi komunikatif menyokong pendidikan lintasagama karena mengasumsikan keyakinan dasar panenteistik, pendekatan sinkronis dan diakronis dengan tiga level teologi dan empat faktor identitas religius, dan tindakan komunikatif nonverbal. LR memenuhi asumsi teologis ini karena memuat keyakinan dasar untuk Tuhan dalam segala, pendekatan cura personalis, dan doa pribadi. LR dimungkinkan menjadi model pendidikan lintasagama melalui paradigma pedagogi Ignasian, yang berbasis lingkaran konteks, pengalaman, refleksi, aksi, dan evaluasi. Paradigma ini dapat diintegrasikan dalam model fraktal yang menunjukkan dinamika identitas religius yang terbangun oleh empat faktor (I, We, It, dan Globe) yang hadir dalam level pengalaman konkret, refleksi eksperienzial, dan refleksi saintifik yang mengatasi memori kolektif atas tradisi keagamaan tertentu.*

**Kata kunci:** *azas dan dasar, cura personalis, pandangan panenteistik, pendidikan lintas agama*

**ABSTRACT**

The Spiritual Exercises (SpEx), written by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), provide significant perspectives on religious education theory and practice. This research addresses how such a spirituality can be practiced as interreligious education without overlooking its confessional nature. Employing library research, it offers a content analysis of SpEx through the framework of communicative theology developed by Matthias Scherer and Bernd Jochen Hilberath, which facilitates interreligious education by presupposing fundamental panentheistic ideas, employing synchronic and diachronic approaches through its three-level theology and four-factor religious identity, and incorporating nonverbal communication actions. SpEx fulfills these religious principles by embracing the conviction that God is to be discovered in all things, employing a cura personalis approach, and engaging in personal prayer. SpEx can serve as a model for interreligious education by drawing on the Ignatian educational framework, which



includes the phases of context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. This paradigm can be incorporated into a fractal model illustrating the dynamics of religious identity, constructed from four factors (I, We, It, and Globe) that manifest at the levels of concrete experience, experiential reflection, and scientific reflection, transcending the collective memory of a specific religious tradition.

**Keywords:** *cura personalis*, inter-religious education, panentheistic view, principle and foundation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary ideas of religious education in Indonesia encompass a variety of educational, theological, philosophical, and psychological viewpoints. Some references substantiate that modern religious education increasingly prioritizes pluralism and cultural integration, and focuses on peace and justice rather than dogmatic methodologies. From the dynamics of the Christian community, there is a strong position for confessional religious education to be aware of context, recognizing students' cultural backgrounds, and fostering inclusivity, tolerance, and national unity, thereby shifting from solely doctrinal instruction to a pluralistic and socio-culturally integrated pedagogy (Siswantara et al., 2023; Triposa & Roy Kolibu, 2024). Likewise, the Islamic community advocates a more engaging and critical pedagogy that integrates inclusive and multicultural ideals into Islamic religious education in public schools. Such an ideal aligns more closely with a justice-oriented, pluralistic educational mandate than with the simple transmission of a religious tradition (Jasminto & Rofi'ah, 2024; Lestari, 2024). Meanwhile, research on "shared religious education" suggests transformative pedagogies that foster engagement and solidarity with others (Nelson et al., 2025). Recent intercultural, theology-based studies advocate religious instruction as a lived, embodied, and dialogical practice rather than as mere information. Along with those characteristics, recent studies endorse critical self-awareness, sympathy with the marginalized groups, and a dedication to social justice (Skrefsrud, 2023). Hence, these diverse, modern academic examples substantiate the transition from orthodoxy to inclusive, culturally responsive, and justice-oriented religious education.

However, shifting from orthodoxy to praxis-based religious education does not necessarily mean dismissing religious teachings or traditions as if there were practices of faith divorced from orthodoxy. Instead, it represents an acknowledgement that orthodoxy emerges from and within a believing community, and no orthodoxy exists outside the community. The emergence of orthodoxy has a twofold role in the interest of internal clarification and external

plausibility (Scharer & Hilberath, 2012). In this respect, orthodoxy is rooted in fundamental principles but remains dynamic over time. Thus, despite its basic principles remaining intact, its forms, interpretations, and emphases evolve in response to historical context, cultural influences, and the lived experiences of religious communities.

Accordingly, any encounter with different religious communities does not necessarily pose a threat to respective fundamental religious principles. On the contrary, it can provide an opportunity to apply religious principles across contexts, thereby enhancing their capacity to address diverse challenges. Interreligious education, then, is a means of strengthening religious principles, not by reinforcing one's own voice in an echo chamber. Instead, it does so by welcoming other perspectives that resonate with their approach to appropriating religious insights. However, such interreligious hospitality cannot emerge from a dogmatism that absolutely depends on a particular formulation, one that is not open to reinterpretation within a communicative process.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to provide a theoretical framework for interreligious education that respects religious doctrines without becoming entangled in religious dogmatism. Such a framework could make a breakthrough within a mono-religious education model that is legally and systematically adopted in Indonesia. Additionally, it provides an example of the Spiritual Exercises (hereafter SpEx), written by Ignatius of Loyola, as an open model for practicing interreligious formation, departing from a particular religious tradition, without excluding the richness of insights from other religious traditions.

## **2. METHOD**

To achieve its objective, this article pursues two avenues, corresponding to the formal and material objects of the discourse, both of which are the results of library research on the so-called communicative theology and the Ignatian SpEx. Drawing on content analyses of communicative theology developed by Matthias Scharer and Bernd Jochen Hilberath, this article constructs basic principles of interreligious education as the formal object of interfaith education. Then, content analyses of the Ignatian SpEx provide depth to these fundamental principles within a more practical context as the material object of interreligious education. These two avenues enable the practice of spiritual exercises as a form of religious education that incorporates a confessional, experiential, phenomenological, constructivist, critical, and transformative approach, along with an interreligious perspective.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the two avenues explored in this research, the findings will be divided into two halves, followed by a discussion. The first section addresses some fundamental principles of interreligious education, which serve as the formal object of interfaith education. The second deals with the respective principles within the Ignatian SpEx as the material object of interreligious formation.

#### 3.1. Fundamental Principles of Interreligious Education

The Communicative theology developed by Matthias Scharer and Bernd Jochen Hilberath is taken as the formal object of interreligious education, as it has been practiced within ecumenical formation involving Christians and Muslims (Scharer & Hilberath, 2012). Such a collaborative effort would have been impossible without fundamental convergence in theological assumptions and their practicalities. The following are the interreligious convergences conducive to interfaith education.

##### 3.1.1. *Panentheistic Belief*

Matthias Scharer and Bernd Jochen Hilberath develop a communicative theology, positing that a living theology can be achieved only through a process of communication, in which communication attains ontological status. In this respect, theology is not a particular formula that is to be communicated or transmitted. Instead, it is the process of constructing the formula through communication among the involved parties. Included in such a communicative process is God as the central focus of theological inquiry (Hilberath, 2016; Scharer & Hilberath, 2008). In this respect, God's immanence characterizes divine omnipresence. However, on the other hand, *si comprehendis, non est Deus* (if you fully understand it, then it is not God). God cannot be reduced to what humans can objectify as creation (Scharer & Hilberath, 2012).

Hence, human understanding of God reflects a panentheistic outlook, which posits a particular relationship between God and creation, in which God becomes 'all in all' (cf. 1 Cor 12:28). Everything is in God, whose presence fills everything, transforming it. In this respect, one cannot exclude any creation, including the modern category of (world) religions, as a medium through which God communicates with other creations. In Fazlur Rahman's words: "Things and humans are, indeed, directly related to God just as they are related to each other, and (...) God is not an item among other items of the universe or just an existent among other

existents. He is “with” everything; He constitutes the integrity of everything” (Rahman, 1999, p. 3). In this respect, God’s communication is never outside the human social context. It permeates the universe in one way or another, though God escapes being entrapped in any creation.

Therefore, religious superiority or exclusivism cannot stand on a responsible claim since a hierarchical relation only exists between God and the creation. Claiming religious superiority assumes the highest degree of hierarchical expertise implied by the objectivist myth of knowledge. On the contrary, panentheistic belief endorses every religious community as a community of truth, in which all members participate in a dynamic, non-hierarchical relationship (Palmer, 1998). Hence, each member’s religious identity is shaped by an interplay among four factors — self, community, object, and context — which, in communicative theology, are sequentially designated as I, We, It, and Globe (Scharer, 2017). The interplay character does not allow any community of believers to be fixated on physical boundaries since God, on whom they center their lives, transcends them, revealing the truth not in dogmatic, static, partial knowledge, but “truth in relationship” (Scharer & Hilberath, 2008).

### ***3.1.2. Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches***

The second principle reinforces the concept of “truth in relationship,” which can be practiced through the synchronic and diachronic approaches of communicative theology. The synchronic elaborates on God’s relations with the four interrelated factors of religious identity at the same level of theology (empirical experience, experiential reflection, or academic/scientific enterprise). In this case, “truth in relationship” is determined by the interplay between God and the creation in a particular religious Globe. However, the experience of prayer, for instance, can be attributed to individuals across various religious traditions. In this case, the Globe may not always be exclusively aligned with a particular religion. Still, it can transcend religious boundaries, allowing a broader scope to be addressed, including public education, economic, cultural, and political systems. Hence, the synchronic approach can juxtapose different Globes existing at the same level of theology.

However, the synchronic approach alone cannot address differences at the same level of theological inquiries, which may sometimes give rise to fundamental conflicts among religions. The Trinity, for instance, at the empirical level of theology is unthinkable for Muslims but, at the same time, misunderstood by Christian lay persons. In this respect, while Christians owe themselves an internal clarification of the doctrine of the Trinity, Muslims require a responsible

epistemological account of the plausibility of the Christian belief in the Trinity, which appears to contradict the Islamic doctrine of *tawhid*. Such a twofold task cannot be accomplished merely by juxtaposing the worldviews ascribed to Islam and Christianity at the same level of theological analysis. Still, it implies an approach that can elaborate on the causal trajectories underlying worldviews that have been established as distinct religious doctrines.

Therefore, another approach is needed to resolve the fundamental conflicts at a particular level of theology, one that allows it to connect with other levels. Such a diachronic approach functions as a bridge between three levels of theology. Hence, “truth in relationship” is defined by the dynamic interplay between God and creation across the various Globes at different levels of theology. For example, the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be fully understood by other religious believers in academic inquiry without considering the empirical and experiential aspects of its teachings. On the other hand, Christians can misunderstand the Trinity if they overlook empirical and experiential reflections, thereby confusing dogmatic language with historical religious events and collective memories (Banawiratma, 2025). Hence, the synchronic and diachronic approaches together accommodate the integrity of universal concerns with respect to particular dynamics of religious communities.

### **3.1.3. Nonverbal Communicative Actions**

Substantiating universal concerns while respecting the particular dynamics of religions within a communicative theological framework cannot be achieved solely through verbal discourse, which is often associated with the rational, scientific enterprise. The practice of communicative theology shows that seemingly incommensurable differences can be addressed through specific modes of nonverbal communicative action as catalysts for breakthroughs. For example, animals' gestures and prayers, as personifications of particular group members, may inspire religious people to delve into the heart of spirituality. Indeed, the animal prayers are not addressed to each other. Nevertheless, they are transformative for those who perform them within their respective group. Here, the focus on refusing others' interests shifts to recognizing the need to self-transform, even at the cost of the comfort zone (Scharer & Hilberath, 2012).

Thus, the path to substantiating universal concerns is constructed indirectly through struggling for self-transformation within the internal dynamics of group members. Such a transformation may not occur through rational reasoning alone, but through nonverbal communicative actions that intuitively connect religious people to the Transcendent. In this respect, communication is not instrumental to the participants' interests but to the concerns that

relate the community to the Transcendent, with the aim of creating a “communion” that is not necessarily defined by physical boundaries (Scharer & Hilberath, 2012). This ‘vertical’ connection enables revisiting differences or disagreements found in a synchronic approach within a comprehensive diachronic approach.

The result of such an intuitive approach is neither the negation of desiring the universal concerns nor the rejection of dogmatic teachings, but rather a new understanding of dogmatic language as it applies to particular collective memories in their relationship with the peculiarities of other religious communities. First, nonverbal communicative actions are addressed to the Transcendent, which is alleged to have an interest in the salvation of all creation. Second, such an intuitive approach fosters a contextual interpretation or hermeneutical autonomy, enabling people to connect or disconnect dogmatic language with their respective collective memories. Third, a new understanding of dogmatic language does not alter the formulation; rather, it situates it within a historical context to examine the universal concerns that underlie it. Hence, outsiders can grasp the plausibility of other points of view, while insiders can clarify their religious teachings within a broader Globe. Accordingly, an interreligious relationship emerges from genuine nonverbal communication. In this respect, there is no interreligious encounter without, for instance, prayers.

### **3.2. Interreligious-Friendly Ignatian Spiritual Exercises**

The Ignatian Spiritual Exercises were not, in fact, written as an interreligious endeavor. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), the author of this spiritual heritage, lived during an era marked by significant historical and theological friction between Christianity and Islam. Although the Crusades ended centuries earlier, their spiritual and cultural repercussions endured well into the early modern era. The *Reconquista* ended in Spain in the early 1490s, and the rising Ottoman Empire posed a significant political and religious challenge to Christian Europe. In such a Globe, the early years of Ignatius were characterized by a chivalric imagination imbued with concepts of warfare, fidelity, and honor. These are elements that would significantly influence his SpEx and other spiritual writings (Colombo & Shore, 2023; Prosperi, 2015; Villagrán, 2018).

However, rather than sustaining the external conflict between Islam and Christianity and the internal feud among Catholic orders, Ignatius internalized and reframed them, shifting the focus from geopolitical struggles to psychological ones, from the defense of Christendom to the conquest of the soul (Cline, 2017; Tyler, 2022). Emanuele Colombo notes that, even after

the establishment of the Society of Jesus in 1540, Ignatius consistently maintained an equivocal stance toward Islam, shaped by his familial background and the Catholic Church's direction, in contexts where warlike and pacifistic attitudes coexisted. Despite this ambiguity, Ignatius' SpEx offered a distinct approach to Muslims owing to their universality. In this respect, Colombo recalls Jerome Nadal's argument that Ignatius' SpEx could be understood by everyone, even by infidels and Muslims (Colombo, 2014a; O'Malley, 1993). SpEx can pedagogically serve for the formation of interiority (the interior part of persons) and lead to praxis (communication by actions). The following sections present elements that, in accordance with the fundamental principles of interreligious education grounded in the practice of communicative theology, reflect the universality of Ignatius' SpEx.

### **3.2.1. *Finding God in all things***

The most obvious element of panentheistic belief in SpEx is reflected in Ignatius' second point to ponder in the fifth week (SpEx 235): "God dwells in creatures; in the elements, giving them existence; in the plants, giving them life; in the animals, giving them sensation; in human beings, giving them intelligence; and finally, how in this way he dwells also in myself, giving me existence, life, sensation, and intelligence" (Ganns, 1991, p. 177). In this respect, all exercitants are invited to find God in all things. It is noteworthy that, despite this panentheistic nuance, finding God in all things not only reflects a speculative understanding of God but also indicates spiritual growth that enables "ease in finding God" as a fruit of the personal spiritual journey that follows the whole dynamic of SpEx (Ganns, 1991).

The Muslim world, particularly among those eager for the spiritual or mystical dimension of Islam, focusing on purification of the soul and closeness to God —i.e., *taṣawwuf*—is not unfamiliar with such a panentheistic belief. The theme of seeing God in all things and all things in God recurs among the Sufis in various forms. Maurice de Fenoyl considers al-Ghazali's perception of the whole world as God's book. Whoever believes it to be God's work will love it as God's work, and will see nothing but God, and love nothing but God. He also recalls Ibn Ata Allah al-Iskandari's reflection: "You who are the one God. You have made Yourself known to all things, and nothing is ignorant of You anymore. You have made Yourself known to me through all things, and I have seen You appear in all things, O You who appear in all things. He who has known God sees Him in all things. What veils God from you is the very excess of Proximity" (de Fenoyl, 2018).

Such a panentheistic view of God has consequences for those engaged in SpEx. First, they are expected to conform to a particular principle and foundation (SpEx 23) that serves as the point of departure for self-transformation in their relationship with God and creation. Parmananda R. Divarkar perceives that the Principle and Foundation urge participants to engage in a profound faith experience, in which they encounter God and discover their true selves and all of creation within God. Hence, the formulation of the Principle and Foundation by no means reflects speculative, philosophical propositions but proper dispositions of faith in one God, who reaches out to the creation in love (Divarkar, 1990). Understandably, the Ignatian principle as a basic spiritual attitude to welcome other perspectives in the SpEx becomes the first spiritual requirement before entering the SpEx: “great spirit and generosity toward their Creator and Lord, and by offering all their desires and freedom” to God so that their persons and all they possess in whatsoever way can be engaged according to God’s will (SpEx 5). Without such a positive, foundational attitude toward this Principle and Foundation, no one can begin, let alone advance their journey within SpEx (Burke & Burke-Sullivan, 2009).

Second, the presence of the spiritual guide—the one who gives SpEx—never supplants God but rather resembles a community built with the learner or participant. In this respect, there is no hierarchical relationship between the spiritual guide and the learner. Both the spiritual leader and the learner are subject to a ‘direct’ relationship with God, in which the spiritual leader becomes a discreet helper for the participant. Understandably, Ignatius offered a lengthy explanation (SpEx 1-20) to clarify SpEx as a practice that aids both the one who gives SpEx and the one who receives it (Ganns, 1991). Ignatius also presupposed that both the giver and the receiver of SpEx ought to prioritize the positive interpretation of an interlocutor’s words over their condemnation. If a positive interpretation is unattainable, one should endeavor to comprehend the intended significance. If the understanding is erroneous, it should be rectified with kindness, employing all suitable measures to maintain the statement’s affirmative connotation (SpEx 22).

### **3.2.2. *Cura Personalis***

The participants’ conformity to the Principle and Foundation, along with the egalitarian relationship between the learner and the spiritual guide, imply specific boundaries for both parties, thereby creating space for God’s work through the Spirit within the SpEx process. They are not supposed to exhaust God’s will so that their goals are not to decide the will of God for them, but to ascertain that such a decision is not taken through some disordered affection (SpEx

21), such as attachments, inclinations, or likes and dislikes (Ganns, 1991). In this respect, the SpEx process assumes a care for the person (*cura personalis*) that enables participants to experience an encounter with God even amid the siege of various external impositions (Kolvenbach, 2007). Through such a *cura personalis*, both the giver and the receiver of SpEx are expected to accord primacy to the interior journey toward God and to order all other desires, attachments, and engagements in reference to God, thus relativizing them before the Creator.

Such a way of proceeding may be understood through a definition of taṣawwuf that characterizes this indifference in a positive light: living with God, possessing nothing, and not being possessed by anything; knowing poverty after wealth, humiliation after honor, and self-effacement after fame (de Fenoyl, 2018). Understandably, what mainly matters in SpEx is not so much the result or decision, but how they are attained in the most conducive manner to meet the purpose of the participants' life inscribed in the Principle and Foundation (SpEx 23), that is, "to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of this to save their souls" (Ganns, 1991, p. 130). On the one hand, the spiritual guide is not supposed to give superfluous explanations to those doing the Exercises (SpEx 2). On the other hand, the receivers of SpEx are urged to engage with great spirit and generosity, surrendering all their aspirations and autonomy to God (SpEx 5), but discouraged from previewing the subject matter that is supposed to be exercised in the following process (SpEx 11). This note also applies to the spiritual guide (SpEx 9). Both suggestions are based on the belief in divine providence, which cannot be reduced to the cognitive dimension of human knowledge (SpEx 3). In this respect, what nourishes and fulfills the soul lies not in extensive knowledge, but in a profound comprehension of facts and an internal appreciation of them (*non multa sed multum*, SpEx 2).

Accordingly, to ensure an appropriate disposition of the decision in accordance with the Principle and Foundation, the spiritual guide serves as a process observer, focusing not on the content of the receivers' SpEx but on how they proceed in accordance with SpEx procedures (SpEx 15, 16). In doing so, however, the giver should adapt SpEx to the recipients' actual conditions. Ignatius delineates the primary ways SpEx can be tailored to diverse groups and individual situations. The principles articulated in SpEx can be conveyed using numerous methods and media (SpEx 17-19). John W. O'Malley notes, "No single method is prescribed in SpEx—different methods helped different people" (O'Malley, 1993, p. 48). Hence, SpEx also implies *cura personalis* for the recipients, aligning with their personal backgrounds to support their holistic growth. In this regard, Philip Endean suggests that adaptations or, perhaps better, applications of SpEx should emerge from authentic engagement rather than prescriptive

frameworks in recognition of the dynamic character of spirituality (Endean, 2001). Furthermore, Achille Glagiardi (1537-1607) elaborates on the need for both the instructor and the recipient to remain indifferent to personal biases regarding spiritual paths, thereby allowing each individual to be guided by their own divine calling without imposing one's experiences or aspirations on them (Glagiardi, 2023).

Historically, Colombo contends that Islam and the Muslim world were closely aligned with Ignatius' concerns. He maintains that they were significant to Ignatius, as evidenced by the metaphorical "underground river" that represents his fervor for Islam (Colombo, 2014a; Villagrán, 2018). Indeed, proselytism was the initial context for Ignatius' generation, just after the prolonged crusades in the Middle Ages, so that SpEx became a strategy for converting Muslims. Upon arrival in Jerusalem, he was inclined to remain and attempt to convert Muslims, although the Franciscans then dispatched him to Europe (Burke & Burke-Sullivan, 2009; Maryks, 2014). The Jesuits, after Ignatius, were also involved in proselytizing Muslim slaves in Europe (Colombo, 2014b). However, treating SpEx as a form of proselytism grounded in such an original context may commit a genetic fallacy by overlooking critical reviews of SpEx.

Gonzalo Villagrán argues that the apostolic zeal initiated by Ignatius of Loyola has been transformed into a dialogue with Islam. The Ignatian tradition incorporates a dimension of apostolic zeal, highlighting active participation in Christ's mission as a crucial element of outreach to Muslims. This encompasses the dissemination of faith and the establishment of inter-religious dialogue as integral components of the Church's mission for justice and peace. The Ignatian approach promotes structured dialogue, awareness of cultural contexts, and recognition of the Spirit's influence within Muslim traditions. These characteristics collectively establish a framework for Ignatian interaction with Islam, promoting a dedication to evangelization while honoring Islamic ideas and customs (Villagrán, 2018).

### **3.2.3. Personal Prayers**

The respect for different religious traditions does not necessarily neglect the characteristics of SpEx as "every method of examination of conscience, meditation, contemplation, vocal or mental prayer, and other spiritual activities" (SpEx 1). Such characteristics underscore the formation of interiority, which, in the context of the Church Reformation, was presented as a method for reform from within, exemplified by Ignatius, who reformed himself. Furthermore, the development of the inner self is evident in the dynamics of the whole SpEx, which allows the exercitant to transform through their personal encounter with

Christ, as contemplated in the Second, Third, and Fourth Weeks. Hence, prayers within SpEx cannot be understood as a religious obligation that varies across religions, but rather as an interior activity that resembles a personal relationship with God and serves as a moment of discernment.

From an Islamic perspective, such prayers represent personal undertakings that are closer to the *sunnah* than to ritual *salat*, which spiritual activities may exemplify through *fikr* and *dhikr* (de Fenoyl, 2018). Accordingly, prayers are not performed in a ritualistic, communal manner but in a manner conducive to the recipients' attainment of the goal of SpEx. In this respect, SpEx suggests some forms of prayer to train the receivers' awareness and intimacy with God: meditation (SpEx 239-248), contemplation (SpEx 249-257), and mental prayer (SpEx 258-260). However, despite the personal character of prayers within SpEx, they are not intended to nurture individual piety but rather to foster an interior knowledge that enables recipients to love God more closely (SpEx 104). Such knowledge does not depend on human effort but on the grace asked by the receivers of SpEx, which enables them to reflect on their states of life before God, whether they are undergoing consolation or desolation. Through such an awareness, by considering SpEx's guidelines for the discernment of spirits (SpEx 313-327 for the First Week, SpEx 328-336 for the Second Week), the receivers of SpEx may arrive at decisions that align with God's will. In so doing, the recipients of SpEx engage in personal prayer as a formative moment to enter into the mystery of God's creative act.

The interior knowledge (SpEx 63, 104, 233) gained through personal prayer is a constitutive element of the transformation process, based on the three powers of the soul (memory, understanding, and will), which operate during the SpEx process and continue to function in daily life. It can also be understood through the third mode of knowing elaborated by Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, called *al-irfan*, which is based on direct esoteric understanding imparted through inspiration or revelation from the divine, which cannot be achieved via analogy or rational demonstration (al-Jabri, 2011). Hence, despite some forms of prayer in SpEx implying an exertion of mental efforts, their practice assumes the interior knowledge that gives space to the Divine's work, which, in turn, empowers the receivers of SpEx to love more in deed than in words (SpEx 230). Attached to personal prayers is their reflection based on the three powers of the soul: memory, intellect, and will (SpEx 45-54). In this respect, SpEx's pedagogy reflects the primacy of actions and praxis, supported by the meditation on the "Three Classes of Persons" (SpEx 149-157) and the introductory point of the contemplation to attain love (SpEx 230). Both Exercises lead the receivers to be the exercitant of spiritual depth in

real, daily life, so that no true spiritual experience is without praxis. Through such a modality, the receivers are never justified in approaching the subject matters of SpEx as objects of cognition alone. SpEx itself is “not to be read but to be made” (Classen, 1977; O’Malley, 1993, p. 37).

### **3.3. Making Ignatian Spiritual Exercises as a Practice of Interreligious Education**

Doing SpEx in a dedicated time and place for a retreat may be less problematic than integrating it into religious education, not to mention an interreligious model within a country that maintains a mono-religious education system, such as Indonesia. This can be understood by noting that, despite promoting “the rules for thinking, judging, and feeling with the Church” (SpEx 352-370), SpEx shows no interest in transmitting religious tradition—a primary feature of the mono-religious education model. However, SpEx, as a practice of interreligious education, remains worth considering within a mono-religious educational context, since it promotes the formation of interiority and enhances human quality by creating a space for God (*cura personalis*) in which everyone can meet and walk together in the depths of religiosity.

#### **3.3.1. The Possibility of Integration**

Since SpEx is “every method of examination of conscience, meditation, contemplation, vocal or mental prayer, and other spiritual activities” (SpEx 1), practicing SpEx as a mode of interreligious education offers great potential for two reasons. First, a bridge has been built between SpEx and the educational milieu since the beginning of the first Jesuits’ formation and mission through the so-called *Ratio Studiorum*, or plan of studies (O’Malley, 2000). Its recent development, the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, does not leave SpEx as the root, but instead adapts it through five steps of the learning process: context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation (Brenkert, 2023; Marek & Walulik, 2022; Traub, 2009). Indeed, there is resistance to adopting these pedagogical methods due to their religious roots. However, the broader applicability of Ignatian pedagogy offers a viable framework within contemporary educational discussions about moral and spiritual learning. Mountin and Nowacek argue that the foundation of this pedagogy not only enriches Jesuit institutions but also serves as a valuable resource for educators committed to students’ holistic growth. Consequently, Ignatian pedagogy emerges as a multifaceted and adaptable educational approach capable of fostering both intellectual rigor and ethical responsibility across diverse educational landscapes (Mountin & Nowacek, 2012). Other research shows that Ignatian pedagogy integrates spiritual development with

intellectual growth, enabling students to navigate a changing world (Królikowska, 2024; Marek & Walulik, 2022; Satō & Itō, 2021).

Second, within the communicative-theology-based framework of interreligious education, diverse religious roots do not necessarily threaten the integrity of any particular religion. Still, it advances religious understanding through encounters with diverse reflections on religious experiences, supported by academic or scientific reflections. Hence, even particular religious traditions can be applied and integrated with various fields (Beste, 2019; Callahan, 2013; Caruana, 2014; Crisp, 2006; Gumz, C., & Grossman, 2003; Lecourt & Pauchant, 2011; Leighter & Smythe, 2019; Prevot, 2017; Rothausen, 2017; Wilson, 2013). Logically, without such encounters, religious identity cannot develop (Martina et al., 2022), and religious people remain living in an echo chamber, producing and listening to their own voices while claiming that the voices come from God. Such a mechanism contradicts panentheistic belief, rejects synchronic and diachronic approaches, and overlooks genuine prayers.

Furthermore, it is also against SpEx, whose practical method helps ensure that human experience is “both authentic from God and respectful of human reason and dignity” (Gray, 2000). Theologically, the point of integration, from the perspective of SpEx itself, is the Incarnate God emphasized by St. Ignatius, with attention to the incarnation and the cross. In light of such a theology, there is an integration of human spirituality and divine humanity, revealing the necessity of faith as foundational to understanding our existence and emphasizing that both God’s freedom and humanity’s true identity lie in reciprocal gift-giving amid the challenge of faith embodied in the cross, exemplified by the crucified Christ (Hanvey, 1985). Accordingly, applying SpEx in interreligious education is not necessarily a form of simplification but rather a genuine sign of spiritual depth.

### **3.3.2. Fractal Model**

Understandably, when applying the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm to interreligious education, its five cyclical steps require adjustment. Firstly, within an interreligious encounter, no single participant’s religious affiliation can be excluded from determining context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. Thus, the five steps always take the form of a shared step, even if the ‘shared’ inquiry reflects only an *allo*-interpretation perspective (Sterkens, 2001), as exemplified in this article, which does not impose a co-interpretation. Accordingly, no shared reflection exists without a shared experience, and no shared experience

exists without a shared context, and so on. Secondly, shared context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation do not necessarily follow a five-step cycle. Alternatively, in an interreligious context, they can be conceptualized as five interrelated categories that contribute to participants' religious identity. In so doing, all participants are enabled to address their religious issues in relation to others, whether within (intra-) or across (inter-)religious traditions. Thirdly, instead of a five-dimensional step, a fractal model can be proposed to accommodate the interrelated dynamics of religious identity. Jordan and Ward, along with Schmidt-Leukel, have introduced such a geometry-inspired imagination to interreligious education (Jordan & Ward, 2023; Schmidt-Leukel, 2024).

Such a recursive pattern across different, dynamic scales (micro-, meso-, macro-levels) of religious identity suggests possible interrelated factors concerning God, which can be found in anything insofar as it serves life (Scharer & Hilberath, 2012). Within such a fractal model, SpEx can be given to anyone regardless of their religious affiliation, as long as the participants — i.e., the giver and the receiver — hold historical consciousness of their different religious beliefs (micro level) and collective memories (meso level), and are open to other perspectives (macro level) to construct their religious identity. In this respect, considering the note of SpEx 18, the giver of SpEx, as part of the community (We), with whom the receivers of SpEx (I) interact, may give particular subject matter (It) within their shared context (Globe). The receivers of SpEx may reflect on their experiences regarding the subject matter, aware that their understanding (I') within their religious context (Globe') strongly influences their perspective or mode of reflection as a collective memory (We') about the subject matter (It'), and, in turn, that their religious context is the result of a particular evaluation of past actions inspired by specific experiences of certain individuals (I'') in their community (We'') in dealing with the subject matter (It'') within a particular context (Globe''), and so on.

The three-dimensional figure below depicts four layers of interrelationships among the four factors of religious identity, both synchronically and diachronically. The lower layer, the more proximal to experience, or the more empirical. On the contrary, the higher the layer, the more closely it aligns with academic or scientific reflection. Hence, the figure indicates an interconnection among three levels of theological reflection. By design, however, the figure omits lines connecting all elements to the panentheistic God and potential cross-connections among elements (for instance, the I'' may influence the We' and, in turn, the Globe; the We'' potentially has an impact on the Globe', which subsequently influences the I) to avoid excessive complexity. From a chronological perspective, conducting an academic reflection on the

primordial religious experience solely based on data grounded in the second level of theology is anachronistic. Such an anachronism in religious studies and theology arises when concepts relevant to one historical context are naively applied to another, leading to misinterpretation, spurious continuity, or simplistic appropriation. In the fractal model, responsible interpretation requires prioritizing the historical and symbolic contexts of the text or practice before undertaking modern recontextualization.

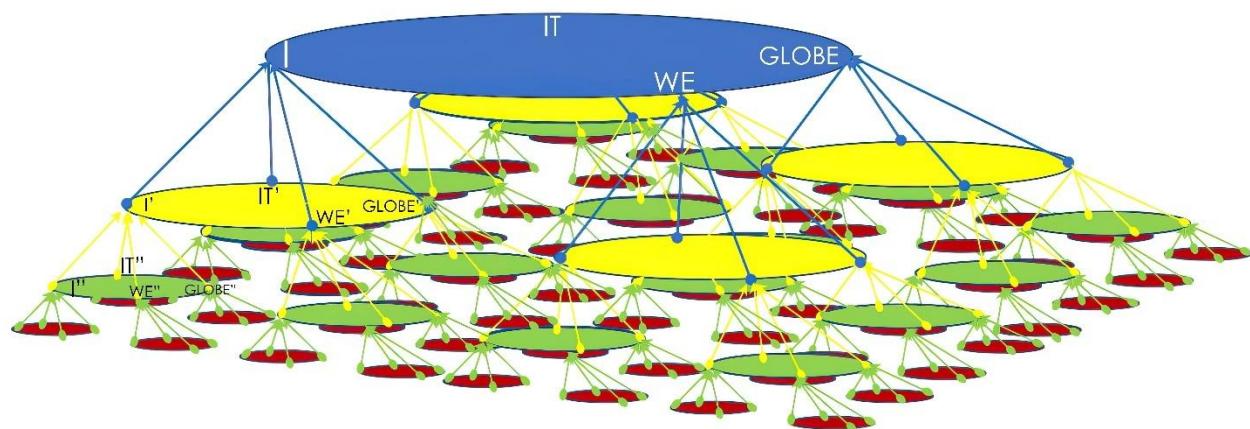


Figure 1. 3D Fractal Model of the four-factor religious identity within their synchronic and diachronic relationship

Thus, in an acronym, the fractal model comprises seven steps of inquiry (F.R.A.C.T.A.L.): factual experience, reflective conscience, academic competence, compassionate point of view, transmutative collaboration, action-oriented commitment, and linkage to a greater community. The fractal model begins with factual experiences as primary data. As primary data, the factual experiences are not confined to the material object sensibly given to the contemporary subject. Instead, it also applies to any historical agent involved in the formal object, which, at best, serves as the purported primary data. However, such differentiation falls within the third step. The second step is the reflection on the primary data in light of conscience, informed by theological insight. This second level of theology establishes a particular standpoint grounded in the religious tradition and shaped by the collective memory that determines the religious identity.

The third step proceeds through scientific reflection on the second level of theology, in faithful adherence to the primary data. In this respect, the academic competence necessitates an interdisciplinary approach within a historical consciousness. Such an interdisciplinary approach shifts the focus from any single discipline or religious tradition as the purported

primary data toward shared human concerns. By incorporating methods from the social sciences, psychology, and hermeneutics, for instance, theology becomes more attuned to historical contexts and diverse experiences, including the religious experiences of other traditions. In this respect, academic competence prioritizes lived religion over institutional/normative religion, thereby enabling a common analytical framework across distinct traditions. Such a shared analytical framework assumes a compassionate perspective that strongly encourages the scientific scrutiny of diverse perspectives, not to pretend being others but, in Farid Esack's analogy, to be participant observers as "the friend of the lover" (Esack, 2007).

The next step identifies the compassionate point of view that primarily entails mutual intelligibility rather than agreement. In this respect, the task of identification does not focus on seeking a commonality, but precisely the differences that may contribute decisively to the shape of the 'truth in relationship', where all participants are challenged to take a stand in their internal and external conflicts (cf. Cobb, 1999; Scharer & Hilberath, 2012). Such a compassionate outlook enables collaboration that resembles a transmutation: the process by which cognition of an integrated perspective can emerge from micro-processes at the human scale within the cosmos (Faber, 2003). In this regard, the transmutative character of collaboration concerns unity rather than aggregation, thereby transcending concerns with quantity and uniformity. Hence, the fifth step focuses on determining what unites diverse perspectives in the service of shared concerns.

Such a transmutative collaboration is meaningful only insofar as it leads to action. However, one need not reduce action to something observable and measurable, since what counts in this respect is intentional engagement with reality. Such an engagement is not exhausted by a tangible deed detached from the whole process of action. Thus, the penultimate step is to establish an action-oriented commitment. Nevertheless, such a commitment does not resemble an ideological standpoint that otherwise excludes others. Consequently, the final step that animates the fractal movement characterizes openness to a new relational identity by determining its linkage to a potentially larger community.

### ***3.3.3. An Example: Social Justice***

The following two-dimensional fractal model exemplifies an interreligious education of social justice that aligns with the steps of F.R.A.C.T.A.L. previously outlined. First, in learning about social justice, Catholics must allow the factual experience of inequality and suffering to

challenge, disturb, and reshape their understanding. Second, in reflecting on the factual experience of social injustice, they, consciously or not, employ a particular magisterium and tradition, inscribed in their conscience and taught in the Catholic community as their home base at the micro level. Third, academic competence scrutinizes historical explanations of magisterial Catholic social teachings and traditions, thereby revealing that the Catholic concept of social justice is rooted in the struggle to realize the common good in accordance with natural law. Hence, social justice serves as a normative framework that guides public life through the principles of the common good, solidarity, subsidiarity, and the preferential option for the poor. Fourth, complementary to this objective and structural approach to social justice is relational inquiry, which, based on the Scriptures, characterizes the Protestant Churches' ethical responses to social justice issues. Fifth, despite slight differences between Catholic and Protestant Scriptures, the focus of further elaboration is the central figure to whom the Scriptures refer: Jesus of Nazareth. Sixth, given that the Scriptures are the collective memory of Jesus' events, the academic step remains to examine Jesus' movement in an interdisciplinary manner, which may reflect a Christian perspective on social justice. Hence, at this meso level, Catholics and Protestants may build a new community of believers who understand social justice as the Kingdom of God, as preached and embodied in Jesus' movement. Seventh, at the macro level, a Christian perspective on the Kingdom of God may be linked to an Islamic perspective on social justice, rooted in the Prophet Muhammad's movement, whose understanding of social justice cannot be separated from the principle of *tawhid*. Hence, Christians and Muslims may establish a new community in their struggle for social justice, without losing their respective traditions, on a different level of fractal informed by the spirit of the Kingdom and the principle of *tawhid*.

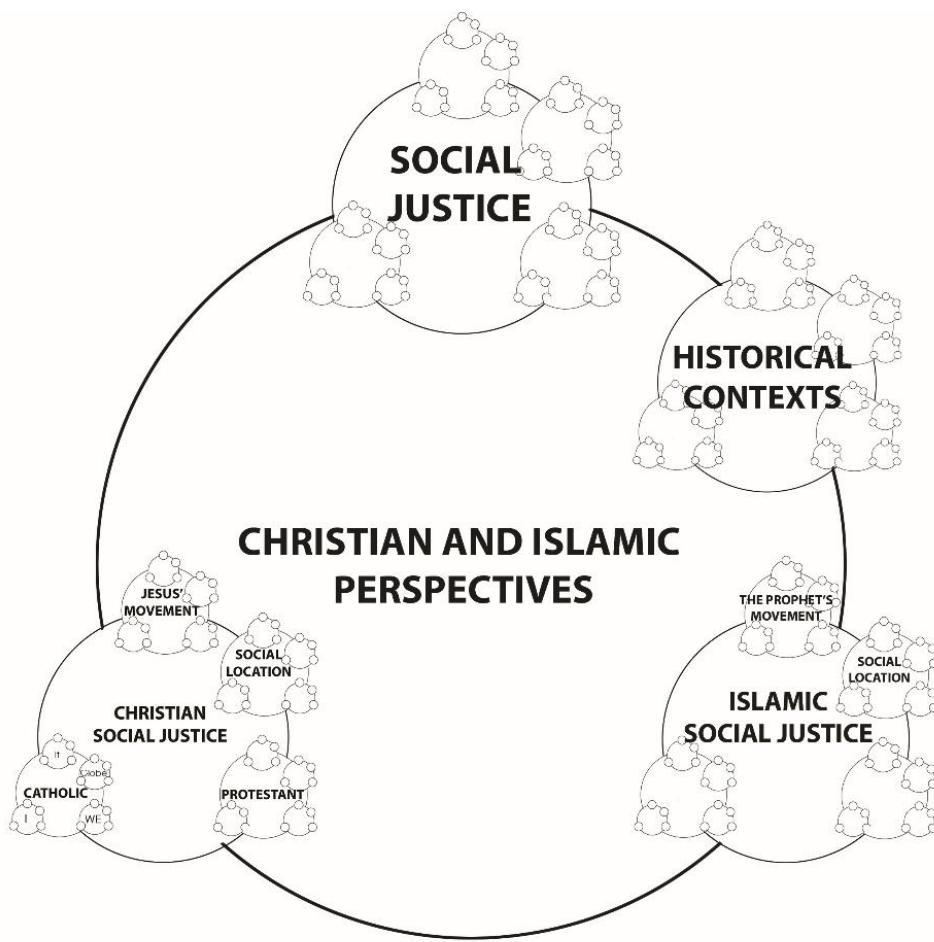


Figure 2. A two-dimensional fractal model of social justice from Christian and Islamic perspectives

Within the SpEx context, such an elaboration is brought into a personal relationship through prayers guided by a spiritual leader, who, in the pedagogy of accompaniment, serves as a companion on learners' journeys, fostering personal growth and reflection. In so doing, by listening to the reflections of SpEx recipients, the giver may gain a clearer understanding of how God acts in others who elaborate on social justice from different religious perspectives. On the other hand, by following the guidance of the giver of SpEx, receivers may clarify their religious understanding and relate it to the call to action through their SpEx process. Hence, SpEx is revealing itself as a practice of interreligious education for both the giver and the recipients.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The Ignatian SpEx, with its applicability across various fields, is open to integration into interreligious education, as it does not primarily aim to preserve stable religious dogmatic

teachings but rather invites all religious people to achieve spiritual freedom, including the appropriation of their respective religious traditions. SpEx may enable a shift from traditional orthodoxy toward a more pluralistic, contextual approach that fosters inclusivity across faiths. To do such adaptation, some principles of interreligious education can be drawn from a theoretical framework grounded in communicative theology: panentheistic belief, synchronic and diachronic approaches, and nonverbal communicative action. From the perspective of SpEx, interreligious education can be understood as the formation of interiority and spiritual depth, characterized by the practice of creating God's space within every participant and respecting God's intervention (cf. SpEx 15). The Ignatian SpEx, while originally Roman Catholic, represents a model adaptable to interreligious contexts, drawing connections between different faiths, particularly through the shared pursuit of understanding God in all things, *cura personalis*, and personal prayer. By integrating SpEx into religious education, an alternative model of the five-cyclical Ignatian pedagogical paradigm can be proposed to embrace diversity and foster interreligious dialogue within a mono-religious education system such as that of Indonesia. The proposed fractal model suggests that interreligious educational encounters can dynamically influence participants' religious identities, allowing meaningful interactions that respect and enrich each individual's spiritual journey.

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