Faith in Action: Examining Religious Responses to 21st Century Socio-Economic Challenges

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Abstract:

In the era of globalization, the complexity of social, economic, and environmental challenges has resulted in the decline of the role of traditional religious institutions, as well as the emergence of secularism and religious pluralism. This study aims to reveal the response of religion to the phenomena of secularization, conflict, and economic inequality in the 21st century with a qualitative approach through literature studies. The results of the study indicate that secularism has become a contemporary issue, with a decline in religious affiliation among the younger generation, especially in Europe; however, projections for 2050 show a resurgence of religious adherents and an important role for religion in society. In addition, increasing religious diversity creates challenges and tensions between communities, but many religions respond by building solidarity through dialogue and peace campaigns. Amidst the increasing economic gap, religions respond by reviewing relevant teachings and principles, such as the simplicity movement that combines spiritual values with ways of earning a living, ethical education in business, and playing an active role in anti-poverty campaigns and other social issues. This paper adds insight into the role of religion in building sustainable social solidarity and economic ethics amidst contemporary challenges.

Keywords: economic inequality; globalization; religious pluralism; secularism; social solidarity.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, the challenges faced by religion are increasingly complex, especially in social, economic and environmental contexts (Torres, 2020). The shift in local values and identity is threatened by the dominance of Western culture and the development of technology and social media, which accelerate the spread of information. For example, approximately 80% of films shown in Latin America are Hollywood films, reflecting how strong the influence of Western culture is in shaping local preferences (Fisher & Rinehart, 2017, p. 495). This phenomenon leads to a decline in the role of traditional

social institutions such as family and religion, which function as a link between government and society and create alienation between them.

Another consequence of globalization is secularism. Secularism increasingly dominates world society. Data from the Pew Research Center shows that 30% of adults in Europe no longer identify with a religion, and 52% of adults in the US claim they do not go to church regularly. This raises an urgent need to explore how religion can function as a unifying force amidst these challenges, as well as how the dynamics between secularism and religion can interact with each other. In addition, increasing religious pluralism faces serious challenges from fundamentalism and interreligious conflict, especially after major events such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks that triggered polarization in society (Gould, 2016). These tensions require deeper understanding and tolerance, as well as continued efforts to create interfaith dialogue (Rahman & Setia, 2021).

On the other hand, developments in contemporary issues, such as economic inequality, require religious responses to be examined. According to Oxfam, the gap between rich and poor continues to increase, with the 85 richest people in the world having wealth equivalent to the 3.5 billion poorest people (Fisher & Rinehart, 2017). Religion can play a role in encouraging social awareness and making a positive contribution to creating global harmony and social justice (Rahman, 2010). Early theorists such as Max Weber have demonstrated that religion can function positively. He gave the example of the Calvinism sect as a religious group that has wealth (Weber, 1992). The question is, how will religion respond to the phenomena of secularization, conflict and pluralism, as well as economic inequality in the 21st century?

It is important to see how discussions about religion are in this contemporary era. Several previous studies have explained the role of religion in various social, economic and political contexts in the 21st century but have not fully answered the complexity of interactions between religion, secularism, social inequality and inter-religious conflict in a comprehensive manner. For example, Berry (2009) emphasizes the importance of spirituality in environmental contexts but does not discuss in depth how religion can respond to increasing social inequality and interreligious conflict. Ozturk (2021) examines the relationship between religion, identity and power in the Turkish and Balkan regions, but his approach is limited to the regional geopolitical context, thus providing less understanding of the challenges of religion on a global scale, especially in the face of secularism and economic inequality.

Wilcox (2021) focuses his study on the Christian rights movement in the United States and its impact on politics, but this research does not adequately explain the role of religion in responding to social inequality or creating interreligious dialogue. Likewise, Devir (2022) analyzes the adaptation of Christianity in Africa, but this research is limited to legal and theological issues without paying attention to broader challenges such as social injustice and religious polarization. Yukich & Edgell's (2020) research on religion and race in the United States also focuses on the local context, and does not provide a broader analysis of global issues such as secularism or interreligious conflict. Campbell dan Tsuria's (2021) research provides insight into how religion can function as a source of solidarity amidst religious pluralism, but this study has not comprehensively explored how religion responds to broader challenges, such as deepening social inequality or increasing secularism in various countries. Meanwhile, Wuthnow (2017) highlights the challenges faced by traditional religions in dealing with secularism, especially in Western countries, but does not discuss much about how religion can encourage interreligious dialogue in the context of increasingly complex global conflicts.

Therefore, this paper aims to fill the gap in the literature by offering a comprehensive approach to how religion can respond to contemporary issues such as secularism, social inequality, and interreligious conflict on a global scale. This article integrates social and economic perspectives, highlighting the role of religion as a unifying force amidst social tensions caused by economic inequality and increasing religious pluralism. Apart from that, this study also explores how religion can play a role in creating social justice and encouraging more inclusive dialogue amidst inter-religious conflict, as well as offering new ways for religion to respond to the challenges of secularism in the 21st century.

METHOD

This paper uses a qualitative approach with a systematic literature study method, which aims to explore how religion responds to various contemporary challenges in the 21st century. Data was collected from various sources, including books, journal articles, research reports, and official documents relevant to

the topic of religion and current socio-economic challenges. The main book used in this writing is Living Religions by Mary Pat Fisher and Robin Rinehart (Fisher & Rinehart, 2017), which provides a view of the world's major religions and their role in responding to social and cultural change. This book is an important source because it offers insight into the dynamics of religion in the face of pluralism, modernization and secularism. Researchers carry out the research process by identifying literature that is relevant to issues faced by religion, such as secularism, social inequality and inter-religious conflict. The literature search was carried out systematically, using keywords related to religion in the 21st century and contemporary issues (Kersteins, 2024; Rahman, 2016). The data analysis technique used in this paper includes data reduction, where researchers filter the most relevant information from the sources that have been collected. After that, data was categorized based on emerging themes, such as the impact of secularism, the role of religion in overcoming social inequality, and the dynamics of inter-religious conflict. Then, thematic analysis was carried out to identify significant patterns and relationships between the data found in this literature study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Secularism and Religious Responses

Secularism can be understood as a condition where public spaces and various areas of life—such as economics, politics, culture, education, and professions—have been separated from religious values or references to the highest reality, including God (Calhoun et al., 2011). In carrying out activities in these fields, the norms and principles used tend to refer to the internal rationality of each field, for example, optimizing profits in the economy or achieving the greatest benefits in politics. This is different from the previous period, where religious beliefs and religious values were more dominant in influencing decision-making.

Secularism, in the modern context, refers to a view where religion has no influence on public life and community decision-making. The separation between religion and state became the main principle, as displayed by Charles Taylor, who mentioned three forms of secularism. First, an empty public space where economic, political and educational activities do not involve God or religious beliefs. Decisions are taken based on rationality and interests, which is often seen in government policies taken without considering religious values (Fisher & Rinehart, 2017). Second, a decline in religious practice manifests when people begin to reduce their involvement in religious activities. In Western Europe, although there are individuals who still invoke God, many are not active in religious practice. This phenomenon shows that modernization and social change often trigger people to move away from traditional religious practices, replacing them with more materialistic and pragmatic activities. Third, Religious belief as a choice indicates that many individuals no longer feel tied to one particular belief. Today's young generation tends to choose not to be tied to a particular religion, feeling that other alternatives are more relevant to them. In this context, secularism not only changes the way people view religion, but also shapes social identities that are more oriented towards individual choice. "Belief in God is no longer something certain. Other options can be taken. This also means that, in some environments, maintaining one's beliefs can be difficult. Some people may feel compelled to renounce their faith, even though they are sad to do so. There are also many people who may never see faith as an option worth considering" (Fisher & Rinehart, 2017, p. 497).

The emergence of criticism of religion from Western thinkers also marked this change in perspective. Books like "The God Delusion" by Richard Dawkins and "God Is Not Great" by Christopher Hitchens reflect a growing wave of skepticism. According to Berlinerblau (2021) criticism of religion is not only an attack on religion but also reflects the assessment that religion can be considered irrational and irrelevant in the modern world, which relies heavily on science and rationality. Secularism, as a consequence of modernization and rationalization, has become a dominant phenomenon in social and religious thought in the 20th and 21st centuries. The theory of secularization, which was initiated during the Enlightenment era, suggests that modernization will lead to a decline in the role of religion in people's lives (Mahmood, 2017). Early social science theorists, such as Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, collectively believed that religion would be marginalized amidst the dominance of science and rationality, which would give birth to a new social order. This theory argues that as society moves towards modernity, reliance on religion will decrease as scientific and materialistic values take over the role previously held by religious beliefs.

Auguste Comte argued that society would go beyond the theological stage to the positivist stage (three-stage law), where scientific knowledge became the basis for new morals and ethics. Comte argued

that modernization would create conditions in which religion would become irrelevant, and its influence would recede as science developed (Lucién, 2020). This is in line with the view of Karl Marx who saw religion as the "opium of society"—having a negative function, namely something that masks material reality and diverts attention from class struggle. In this view, religion is considered a tool used to perpetuate the status quo and maintain existing power (Lucién, 2020). Various sociologists and social scientists subsequently developed the secularization thesis by arguing that modernization would lead to the "death" of religion. Max Weber, for example, argued that modernization would cause religion to experience "disappointment" because material and rational values would no longer provide room for spiritual beliefs (Marotta, 2024).). Sigmund Freud, in his psychological approach, claimed that religion was only "the greatest neurotic illusion" that would disappear with the progress of human knowledge and awareness (Freud, 2012).

In the mid-20th century, social scientists believed that the process of secularization was proceeding rapidly. Research shows that in developed countries, trust in religious institutions is declining, and secular values increasingly dominate people's lives (Rahman, 2021). For example, Anthony Wallace (2013) in his view, states that the future evolution of religion is heading toward extinction, showing that secularism is not just a temporary trend but a deep evolutionary process. In this context, Crawley (2022) underlines that religion is the basis of primitive life, and its extinction is only a matter of time. Research in Europe shows that more and more people are no longer religious. For example, a survey in England by the National Center for Social Research in 2021 showed that more than half of the population, namely around 53%, claimed to have "no religion". This figure is even higher among the younger generation, with 71% of those aged between 18 and 25 not identifying with any religion. This trend shows that religious beliefs are waning, especially among the younger generation who are more exposed to secular values. This survey reflects a fundamental change in people's mindset towards religion in the UK (BBC.Com, 2021b). Not only in England, data from 12 other European countries shows a similar trend, especially among the millennial generation. For example, in the Czech Republic, approximately 91% of young people aged 16 to 29 do not follow a religion. This trend is also visible in countries such as Estonia, Sweden, and the Netherlands, with between 70% and 80% of young people claiming no religious affiliation. The survey also revealed that around 80% of the young generation in these countries have never attended a place of worship or carried out regular religious practices. This decline in religious affiliation confirms that the traditional norm of considering religion as an integral part of European society has changed drastically, and this trend is expected to continue in the coming decades (BBC.Com, 2021a).

However, this secularization thesis is not completely universally accepted. Peter Berger (P. L. Berger, 2002), who previously supported this thesis, withdrew his support in the 1990s, stating that although many people assume that religion will disappear, in reality, there are still believers in the 21st century, although in smaller numbers and often functioning as an exclusive sect that opposes secular culture. This indicates that the response to secularism is not only passive but also active, where religious groups try to maintain their identity and beliefs amidst the dominance of materialistic values. In addition, recent developments show that religion still has an important place in society. The constitutional secularism adopted by countries such as the United States and India (Laborde, 2021) shows that despite the separation between religion and state, individuals still have strong beliefs. Peter Berger (2021) in this case gives an example of the American constitution, for example, emphasizing that no religion takes precedence in government, even though many individuals are actively involved in religious activities. This shows that despite secularization trends, religion still plays an important role in individual and community identity.

Therefore, as time goes by, there is recognition that religion has the capacity to provide social meaning. Many religions are experiencing a revival, and in some cases, religious groups are becoming involved in politics, indicating that secularism has not completely removed religion from the public sphere. Religious leaders involved in politics emphasize that despite efforts to maintain the separation between religion and state, religion remains an important factor in social dynamics. For example, in the context of the Islamic revival in the Middle East, the rise of revivalist groups demanding the implementation of sharia is a clear example of how religion is again playing a significant role in political life. One figure such as Kamal Habib, who was involved in the assassination of President Anwar Sadat, firmly stated that Koranic law, sharia and political authority have an inseparable organic relationship. For him, true security can only be achieved if political authority is based on God's sovereignty. Similar statements also appeared in the context of Judaism, where Zionist spiritual leaders such as Rabbi A. I. Kook emphasized that Zionism cannot be

separated from its theistic essence. In this case, politics in Israel must be guided by religion, and for some Jewish revivalists, these religious values not only influence individuals but also entire countries. This phenomenon shows that secularism, especially in its liberal form, often fails to anticipate the emotional and psychological appeal offered by religion in its traditional form. Religion provides transcendent meaning, absolute authority, and a strong sense of identity—elements that are particularly attractive to those who feel alienated or marginalized, including young people and populist groups in many countries. In this respect, the rise of authoritarian populist parties in Eastern Europe, which propose the victory of ethnic and religious majorities over liberal individual rights, provides another example of how religion and tradition can exert an appeal that liberal secularism cannot match.

However, when liberals try to adopt the approach of "critical engagement" towards religious traditions, they are often caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, they sought to link liberalism with religious traditions to appeal to traditionalists. However, this often leads to giving place to chauvinist, misogynist and intolerant elements in religion, which actually strengthens the rise of revivalism. In the case of Israel, secular institutions that initially aim to engage the public in critical discourse on Judaism often become entry points for hyper-nationalism and religious conservatism. This represents a major risk when religion is given space in politics without clear critical scrutiny, thereby facilitating the rise of revivalist forces that are at odds with the values of liberal egalitarianism. Therefore, in the context of a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, it is important to protect religion from excessive political influence. On the one hand, religious traditions can be adopted to counter revivalist revivalism if necessary. However, when religious traditions are unable to provide progressive solutions, they must be confronted openly, without giving room for the exclusivist influences that are often inherent in traditional religious revivalism.

Another refutation of secularism arises from a number of empirical evidence and demographic projections. One of them is a projection made by Eric Kaufmann, a Canadian politics professor who specializes in political and religious demography. Kaufmann predicts that the population growth of religious communities will be higher than the secular population. According to him, in 2050, there will be more people who embrace religion than those who have no religion. This prediction is also supported by the Pew Research Center which estimates that the number of religious people in the world will increase from 84 percent in 2015 to 87 percent in 2050, with the majority of this increase coming from China and other developing countries.

In Western Europe, demographic trends show a religious revival, both Christian and Islamic. In Finland, for example, there has been an increase in the number of Lutherans, and in the Netherlands, Orthodox Calvinists have also experienced growth. Religious immigrants from Eastern Europe and developing countries, especially Muslims, who generally have large families, have also contributed to the growth of religion in the region. On a global scale, religious populations in developing countries and former Soviet bloc countries are also expected to continue to increase. This phenomenon shows that secularism has not completely succeeded in separating religion from the public sphere, especially amidst faster demographic growth in religious communities. In fact, in developed countries such as the United States and Singapore, religion persists even though modernization and economic development have progressed rapidly. Singapore, for example, even though it is known as a modern country with an advanced economy, still has a high level of religious attachment based on global values surveys. Thus, Kaufmann's projection confirms that by the end of the 21st century, religion could again become the dominant force in global social and political dynamics, replacing secularism as the main ideology in many parts of the world. This highlights how religion, in its various manifestations, remains relevant and even has the potential to increase in the future, reflecting the resistance of religion to the pressures of modernization and urbanization that secularization theory has long predicted.

In response to secularism, religion is adapting in new ways that are relevant to the modern context. Various religious movements have emerged that promote a synthesis between religious values and the challenges of modernity. For example, some religious leaders and spiritual movements integrate science and technology into their understanding of faith, seeking to create a bridge between modern beliefs and knowledge. Garry R. Bunt (Bunt, 2009) in his book i-Muslims for example, claiming that one of the religions most adaptive to modern culture is Islam. The penetration of the image of Islam through Al-Jazera and other major media causes Islam to become widely known. Thus, even though secularism is considered a threat to the existence of religion, many religious communities are finding ways to adapt and survive in the changing social landscape.

The question that arises is why the secularization thesis often underestimates the important role of religion in modern life? According to Stark, there are five reasons underlying this assumption. First, modernization is a machine that causes the "retirement" of God due to industrialization and rationalization, which reduces belief in religion. Second, Secularization functions to separate religion and state in the life system, which ultimately reduces the relevance of religious institutions and religious leaders. Third, the secularization produced by science causes religion to experience death because science is considered capable of providing a more rational explanation than religious dogma. Fourth, secularization is a system of social life that cannot be contained; Once absorbed into people's lives, it is difficult to let go. Finally, secularization does not only apply to Christianity but also to all religions and beliefs in the world, indicating that its impact is global. While these arguments provide a strong theoretical framework, it is important to remember that the realities of people's lives are complex. Many individuals and communities still find meaning and purpose in their religious practices, despite the challenges of modernization. Religion, in many contexts, remains a source of hope, identity, and community, despite shifts in values and priorities in society. Therefore, the relationship between secularism and religious responses exhibits complex dynamics. Although secularism has been a powerful force in shaping social and religious thought, the mixed response from religious communities shows that religion continues to have a significant role in modern society. Efforts to understand and address the challenges facing religion in this secular context will continue to be an important part of future discussions.

The Role of Religion in Building Solidarity Amidst Pluralism

In an increasingly connected and complex global context, religion plays an important role in building solidarity amidst pluralism. As religions increasingly spread to new areas, religious pluralism becomes an unavoidable reality. The geography of religion has changed significantly, and religions are no longer confined to their regions of origin. For example, Islam is currently more widely practiced in Indonesia than in Saudi Arabia, and there is a large Russian Orthodox Christian congregation in the United States (Fisher & Rinehart, 2017). These developments show that religions are increasingly global, as seen by the popularity of Buddhism in Europe and America. This not only shows that religions developed in places different from their origins, but also illustrates the dynamic nature of religious beliefs that continue to evolve and adapt to new cultural contexts. With increasing religious diversity, the challenges faced by society also increase. The spread and diversity of religions reflect that no one religion is dominant globally. Christianity, despite being the largest religion in the world, has many variations and sects. On the other hand, many new religions and reforms of old religions have also emerged (Fisher & Rinehart, 2017). This shows that religious beliefs are not static, but are dynamic and develop along with social, cultural and technological changes. New religious movements, which promote a synthesis between religious values and the challenges of modernity, also enrich this landscape of religious pluralism. For example, some religious leaders and spiritual movements integrate science and technology into their understanding of faith, seeking to create a bridge between modern beliefs and knowledge. This shows that religion, in its various forms, is trying to remain relevant amidst the challenges of modernity.

However, the response to the spread of these religions was not always positive. Some countries and societies respond to religious pluralism with concern and resistance. An example is Switzerland, which banned the construction of mosque minarets in 2009 due to concerns about Muslim domination (Fisher & Rinehart, 2017). This ban reflects tensions that arise in communities that feel their identity or traditional values are threatened by other religions. This kind of tension does not only occur in Europe but also in other parts of the world, such as in Nigeria, where clashes between Muslims and Christians often occur over the implementation of sharia law. Conflicts like these show that religious pluralism, although offering the potential to enrich social life, also presents challenges to social cohesion (Fisher & Rinehart, 2017).

The 9/11 terrorist attacks exacerbated interreligious and ethnic tensions, with many Muslims and immigrants subjected to discrimination (Fisher & Rinehart, 2017). The media exacerbates this situation by magnifying local conflicts into global issues, as in the conflict in Nigeria. The phenomenon of suicide bombing, often linked to religion, shows that the motivation of the perpetrators is driven more by extreme ideology than economic factors. Meanwhile, the United States' post-9/11 military policy initiated by George Bush, instead of suppressing it, was seen as triggering the rise of radical groups (Brooke, 2008). Suicide bombings continue to fall. Suicide bombers from organizations such as Al Qaeda and Hamas in Palestine show that the perpetrators of these attacks are often highly educated and come from fairly good economic

backgrounds (Turner, 2015). They are not people who are easily exploited because of poverty or ignorance, but rather they are driven by strong ideological beliefs. The same applies to pilots who drop bombs or soldiers who treat prisoners cruelly. They believe that their actions are an effort to fight evil, such as "fighting terrorism". On the other hand, there are also those who commit violence without clear moral reasons, for example, because of uncontrolled emotions or for money, without caring about ethics.

Seeing the diversity of religions in the world and the extremism brought about by some of their adherents, many are asking whether a global "clash of civilizations" will occur in the future, as in Huntington's thesis? (Huntington, 2000). However, according to Fisher and Rinehart, the real problem is not inter-religious conflict but rather "a clash of ignorance". They argue that a rigid exclusive attitude does not reflect the core teachings of any religion (Fisher & Rinehart, 2017). However, many religious leaders, both Muslim and Christian, emphasize that violence is not supported by religious teachings. Muslims explain that jihad is a spiritual struggle, not violence, while Christian leaders condemn terrorism as a deviation from religious values. Roman Catholic theologian Vimal Tirimanna explains that everyday human experience shows that terrorism can never be a moral good because of the terrible crimes it causes to human lives and property (Tirimanna, 2010). Don't forget here that terrorism also damages the existence of the terrorist himself as a human being with other people; it demeans their basic human dignity.

Inter-religious dialogue and peace campaigns are widely carried out in the world to promote peace. Various initiatives in various countries demonstrate the commitment of religious leaders to promote harmony and reduce tensions between communities of different faiths. For example, the initiative undertaken by the Global Peace Foundation (GPF) Nigeria and the Christian Rural and Urban Development Association of Nigeria (CRUDAN) in the project "Promoting Interfaith Dialogue for Sustainable Peace and Social Cohesion in Bukuru Town, Jos South Local Government Area (LGA) of Plateau State" describes real efforts to build understanding and cooperation between religions. Through this program, various communities interfaith involved in peacebuilding training and community-based initiatives that empower women, giving them space to contribute to peace and social prosperity in their areas.

Additionally, at the global level, Muslim leaders have actively condemned violence in the name of religion and collaborated with colleagues from other religious traditions to advance interfaith understanding. For example, a letter addressed by Muslim leaders to Pope Benedict XVI in 2007, "A Common Word Between Us and You," highlighting efforts to build bridges of dialogue and collaboration to create sustainable peace (Demiri, 2018). This approach not only provides space for discussion but also encourages the development of moderate and tolerant interpretations of Islam as a response to the challenges of radicalization and violence that occur in various parts of the world.

In this context, it is important to note that each actor in interreligious dialogue has a different strategy, influenced by theology interfaith and the interaction between state and religion in their home countries. For example, the Gülen Movement in Türkiye displays interreligious dialogue through civil society which is Sunni-Sufi oriented and provides an inclusive approach that helps build alliances with various parties, including political parties and non-Muslims (Akyeşilmen & Özcan, 2014). On the other hand, the initiative A Common Word in Jordan aims to establish an official moderate Islam among society while controlling radical elements and promoting a positive image in the Western world. In Saudi Arabia, government-led interfaith initiatives, rooted in Wahhabi views, focus on introducing Islam to non-Muslims and fighting extremism. It shows how integrating political and religious authority can shape the state's approach to interreligious dialogue while seeking to control religious discourse and discredit radical groups.

In addition, interfaith dialogue and collaboration in building peace are very important, especially when involving the younger generation. For example, at the Emerging Peacemakers Forum (EPF) graduation ceremony in Geneva, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, gave a speech that underscored the important role of young leaders in challenging prejudice and discrimination in their communities (Harlander et al., 2017). This forum, which was initiated by Prof. Ahmed Al-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, aims to build bridges of cooperation between young people from various religious backgrounds, showing that interfaith dialogue is not only relevant for leaders but also for young people who will be agents of change in the future. UNHCR's support for the EPF is part of a broader effort to foster collaboration with religious leaders of various faiths, encouraging joint advocacy, conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Through initiatives like this, young people can create opportunities for change and fight for justice and humanitarian values in their societies, which in turn can bring greater peace at the global level. Through these various initiatives, it is clear that interreligious dialogue is not just a formal activity, but is also an

integral part of efforts to strengthen peace and create social cohesion amidst diversity of beliefs. Although challenges remain, these efforts demonstrate the potential of dialogue as a tool to promote tolerance, understanding, and cooperation among different communities, as well as create space for future generations to live in harmony.

Furthermore, countries in the world respond to religious pluralism in different ways. Some countries set strict restrictions on certain religions. In Russia, for example, the law prohibits new religions that have not existed for 15 years from distributing religious material. In France, religious symbols are banned in public schools, reflecting the country's strict secularism. The clash between religion and modern values often triggers conflict, especially when there are groups that reject modernism because they are seen as threatening traditional religious values. This is also apparent in India, where Hindu extremism commits violence against Muslim mosques in an attempt to maintain the majority's religious identity. Despite tensions, religion also plays an important role in building solidarity and peace amidst pluralism. Interfaith initiatives are one way in which religions seek to create dialogue and cooperation. History shows that interfaith dialogue has long existed and played an important role in building solidarity. In 1893, the first Parliament of World Religions was held in Chicago, where Swami Vivekananda emphasized the importance of religious complementarity. He stated that all religions share part of the same universal truth, a view that became the basis for many future interreligious initiatives. Additionally, in 1986, Pope John Paul II invited 160 religious leaders from around the world to assist in praying together for peace, demonstrating the efforts of religions to work together on broader global issues.

Interfaith initiatives not only occur at the global level but also at the local level. In England, the Leicester Faith Council set up a multifaith welcome center, organized counseling, and provided religious and political information. Initiatives like these help create spaces where different communities can work together and support each other in overcoming social and political challenges. Elsewhere, interfaith initiatives were implemented directly to resolve conflict, such as in Northern Ireland, where Protestants and Catholics worked together to reduce religious tensions. This shows that interfaith dialogue and cooperation can play an important role in reducing conflict and building solidarity. Apart from that, religion is also involved in mobilizing solidarity at the international level in facing global issues such as climate change and poverty. In 1990, Moscow became a meeting place for spiritual leaders, scientists and parliamentarians to combine scientific and spiritual values for the survival of the planet. This meeting shows that religion and science do not have to be at odds with each other, but can work together to overcome global challenges. The declaration on global ethics made at the 1993 meeting of the Parliament of the World's Religions also emphasized the importance of universal values such as the "Golden Rule"—treating others as we would want to be treated. This declaration shows that despite religious differences, there are moral principles that can be accepted by all religions, which can be the basis for building solidarity amidst pluralism. However, challenges remain. One of the main challenges in interfaith initiatives is religious representation. With so many branch religions, new movements, and indigenous religions, the question arises about which religions should be represented at these meetings. Another concern is whether marginalized groups, such as women, the poor, and enlightened society, will be represented in these initiatives.

To overcome this challenge, efforts are being made in the digital and educational worlds. The internet has been used to disseminate accurate information about various religions, such as through the site www.religioustolerance.org. In addition, educational curricula about peace values and interfaith education, such as the series "Living in Harmony" from Oxford University Press, were developed for children, helping them understand and appreciate religious diversity from an early age. In conclusion, religion has great potential to build solidarity amidst pluralism, through interfaith initiatives, dialogue and education. Although challenges remain, these efforts show that religion can be a positive force in creating a more peaceful and inclusive world. Religious pluralism does not have to be a source of tension but can be an opportunity to create broader solidarity, where religions work together to create a more just and harmonious world.

Economic Inequality and Religious Responses

Max Weber (Weber, 2002), in his famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, suggests that religion—especially the doctrine of Calvinism developed by John Calvin—can encourage humans toward economic success and even support the development of capitalism. Weber saw that Calvinist teachings, such as hard work, total thrift, and rationality, had an important role in shaping the spirit of modern capitalism. "Work as calling" or "work as God's calling" is the main basis in this ethos, where

work is not only considered as an activity to earn a living, but also as a meaningful form of worship. However, what Weber describes is not entirely the case today where economic inequality is one of the pressing issues faced by global society today. Bryan Turner said Weber overgeneralized religious communities, by only portraying one sect within Protestantism. Despite progress in various aspects of development, the gap between rich and poor continues to increase, creating major challenges to social integrity and economic stability. A report from Oxfam in 2014 stated that only the 85 richest people in the world have the same wealth as the 3.5 billion poorest people. These stark disparities reflect a capitalist system that, while providing opportunities for some, simultaneously exploits and ignores the basic needs of many others. In this context, religions around the world are starting to respond to this challenge by reviewing their relevant teachings and principles.

The capitalist system, which places more emphasis on profit than collective welfare, has generated various criticisms from religious observers. Christian theologian Sallie McFague, for example, states that capitalism separates humans from each other and other living creatures, thus leading to ever-deepening economic injustice. This view is in line with the criticism of William J. Byron, who highlighted that modern business culture often does not prioritize integrity. The 2008 global financial crisis was caused by lending practices subprime Irresponsibility is a clear example of this problem, where short-term interests dominate decisions that should be ethically oriented. Amid these challenges, many religions seek to overcome economic inequality by referring to traditional teachings that emphasize moral and ethical values. For example, in Confucianism, neoliberalism is seen as a cause of moral disorientation. In the Buddhist view, the main problem lies not in wealth itself, but in the attachment that arises towards that wealth. Dhammapada teaches that wealth can be a source of destruction if not used wisely. In this context, the spiritual values that underlie various religious traditions become important as a guide in overcoming the inequalities that plague society.

One of the emerging religious responses was the temperance movement, in which individuals and companies began to ponder ways to combine spiritual values with ways of earning a living (slow living). The concept of "voluntary simplicity" is growing in popularity, inviting people to live more simply, share with others, and slow down from an overly busy lifestyle in order to achieve inner peace. Kabir emphasized that businesses that only focus on short-term profits without paying attention to moral principles will not last long. In this view, companies must treat people well to create a positive image and a greater impact on society.

Ethics education in business is also an important focus in responding to economic inequality. Some educators, such as Professor Syed Anwar Kabir in India, teach ethics-based management to their students, including meditation as a tool for wiser decision-making (Fisher & Rinehart, 2017). Kabir emphasized that businesses that only focus on short-term profits without paying attention to moral principles will not last long. In this view, companies must treat people well to create a positive image and a greater impact on society. Furthermore, many religions play an active role in anti-poverty campaigns, against racism, violence and injustice. In Uganda, various religions, including Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam, united to address the HIV/AIDS problem with the ABC program (Abstinence, Be Faithful, Condom). This joint effort reflects the awareness that inequality is not only related to economic aspects but also to individual health and quality of life. Campaigns like these show that when religions unite, they can create a greater impact and achieve broader social goals (Cohen & Tate, 2006).

However, the challenges of economic inequality are not limited to one geographic region or cultural context. In many cases, these problems are rooted in corruption and poor management, which means poverty alleviation programs fail to reach those who truly need them. In this context, religions throughout the world are expected to act as agents of change who advocate transparency, accountability and social responsibility. By using their platforms, religions can give voice to the marginalized and demand action from policymakers to create a more just economic system. Meanwhile, attention to climate change and its impact on economic inequality is also increasingly pressing. Many religious leaders are calling for collective action to address this issue, as seen in global calls made by interfaith leaders at various forums, including the Global Religious Leaders Summit on Climate Change. These leaders emphasize the importance of accelerating the energy transition, protecting the Earth, as well as the rapid adoption of clean energy as concrete steps to combat the negative impacts of climate change that are increasingly being felt, especially for vulnerable groups (Wells, 2023). At the Global Faith Leaders Summit in Abu Dhabi, representatives from various religions, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism, signed an appeal to the political leaders present. They urged concrete action to tackle the climate crisis while emphasizing the need

for harmony between humans and nature. This call also shows the commitment of the religious community to support initiatives such as the Faith Pavilion and similar gatherings in the future as a form of their moral responsibility to preserve the environment.

Figure 1. Global Faith Summit Abu Dhabi, 2023.

Source: Wells, 2023

This collective stance not only underscores the moral responsibility to care for creation but also the urgency of the climate crisis itself (Abdullahi et al., 2024). Religious leaders from various traditions have voiced the need to work together and fight for climate justice, especially in the context of the injustices experienced by poor countries that are more severely affected by climate change, even though they are not largely responsible for this environmental damage (Sinaga et al., 2023). Therefore, economic inequality is a complex issue that requires a collaborative response from various parties, including religions. By reviewing their teachings and prioritizing moral and ethical values, religions can contribute to overcoming this challenge. Through ethical education, anti-poverty campaigns, temperance movements, and collective efforts in confronting social issues, religions can create a positive impact and strengthen social cohesion. Economic inequality is not a problem that can be overcome individually but requires collective awareness and joint action to create a more just and sustainable world for all (Elmes, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that although the era of modernity brings many changes in the religious landscape, which often results in the role of religion being increasingly minimized, on the other hand, this actually encourages the growth and adaptation of religion itself, which remains relevant in the modern context. Secularism is emerging as a contemporary issue for religious societies, with a significant decline in religious affiliation, especially among the younger generation in Europe. However, projections for 2050 show that the number of religious people is expected to increase, confirming that religion continues to have an important role in society, supported by the rise of religious adherents, both Christianity and Islam. In the face of increasing religious diversity around the world, the challenges facing society are increasing, creating tensions between various communities. Nonetheless, many religions are responding to this challenge by building solidarity through interreligious dialogue and peace campaigns, as a letter by Muslim leaders to Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 shows, "A Common Word Between Us and You," which aims to create sustainable peace. In addition, the ever-increasing economic gap between rich and poor also creates challenges for social integrity. In this context, various religions began to respond by reviewing their teachings and principles, such as through the simplicity movement, which invited individuals and companies to combine spiritual values with ways of earning a living. Ethical education in business as well as active participation in anti-poverty campaigns and other social issues, including climate change, are increasingly emphasized. These steps aim to encourage the protection of the Earth and a clean energy transition in order to achieve shared prosperity. Thus, this research confirms that despite the challenges it faces, religion has the potential to contribute significantly to creating a more just and sustainable society.

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