

## Religious Moderation and Hospitality in the Context of Jeremiah 29:7

Tri Oktavia Hartati Silaban<sup>1</sup>, Herowati Sitorus<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Toraja; Hoseo University

<sup>2</sup>Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Tarutung; Hoseo University

Correspondence: [trioktaviasilaban@gmail.com](mailto:trioktaviasilaban@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** A multicultural and multireligious society demands the existence of social harmony that underlies the order of life together. Therefore, it is necessary to take proactive actions to achieve inclusive togetherness among religious communities. The teaching of Jeremiah 29:7 provides instructions for taking that proactive action. The verse instructs His people to "seek the welfare of the city where they live" and "pray for the city to the LORD." In this view, religious moderation and hospitality are the keys to achieving this goal. This article is qualitative research to examine the biblical-theological ideas in Jeremiah 29:7. This study aims to strengthen the understanding of religious moderation and hospitality in the context of Jeremiah 29:7. The results of the study show that religious moderation and hospitality refer to respect for religious beliefs and the beliefs of other people without ignoring one's own religious identity. In addition, hospitality emphasizes the importance of sharing compassion and understanding when serving others.

**Keywords:** Christian hospitality; Jeremiah 29:7; religious moderation



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### INTRODUCTION

Creating inclusive togetherness amidst religious and cultural differences is an urgent challenge in an increasingly multicultural and multireligious society. Indonesia is a country with a diverse population, culture, and religion. As a multicultural and multireligious country, Indonesia has various cultures and religions. According to statistical data, in 2010, the number of ethnic groups in Indonesia was 1,340.<sup>1</sup> The number of religions in Indonesia is 6, namely Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Besides these official religions, there are also tribal religions known as streams of belief. For example, in *Toraja*, the religion is *Aluk Todolo*; in *North Tapanuli*, the religion is *Parmalim*. As a plural nation with diverse religions, ethnicities, and cultures, Indonesia shows its identity with the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, different but one. However, in recent years, there have been incidents of religious intolerance conflicts that have occurred in several regions in Indonesia. Religious intolerance in the Indonesian nation requires openness to respect and accept one another amidst the diversity of Indonesian society.

In Indonesia, most of the population embraces Islam. This means that they are the largest group of religious groups. Other people in Indonesia believe in different religions,

<sup>1</sup> INDONESIA.GO.ID, "Suku Bangsa," *Indonesia.GO.ID*.

but they are not as many as followers of Islam. The issue still developing today is the problem of the majority and the minority. The majority religion in Indonesia is Islam, while Christianity and other religions are minority religions, where the number of adherents is far from the number of followers of Islam. The total population of Indonesia, which is Muslim, reaches 86.9% or around 237.53 million people of the total population.<sup>2</sup>

As a minority religion, Christianity has duties and responsibilities throughout its existence. Jesus' command in the New Testament is to love one another; even Jesus commanded to love one's enemies. In the Old Testament, the Prophet Jeremiah commanded the Israelites to pray and seek the welfare of the city where they lived (Jer. 29:7). At that time, the Israelites were exiled to Babylon. This matter was carried out to establish religious harmony to create tolerance, prosperity, and peace. The above explanation is similar to the Israelites in exile, as a minority nation among the Babylonians. God commanded the Israelites to seek prosperity in exile. This is also the case with Christians who are currently in Indonesia as a minority group amid the majority. As a minority group, how can Christians in Indonesia seek prosperity for the Indonesian people?

Literature review, Literature review, the need to teach children to "accept each other" in the context of religious tolerance Institut Agama Kristen Negeri (IAKN), by Rinto Hasiholan Hutapea Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan, located in Palangka Raya. This research examines how Christian students from IAKN Palangka Raya interact with Muslim students from IAIN Palangka Raya and Hindu Kaharingan students from IAHN Palangka Raya in a community service program. This activity was explicitly conducted in Bukit Sua Village and Mungku Baru Village. In addition, the study aimed to evaluate and analyze how the Christian education principle of "mutual acceptance" from Romans 15:7 is applied in the context of religious moderation. The researchers used empirical investigation as a strategy to achieve these objectives.<sup>3</sup>

Harls Evan R. Siahaan describes hospitality as a practice of church life within the context of religious moderation in Indonesia. In the past twenty years, there has been an alarming amount of disruption in religious life due to an increase in violence that results in murder and sadism in the name of religion. The Indonesian government, acting through the Ministry of Religion Affairs, launched an inclusive religious pattern that can embrace and value variations; the result is known as religious moderation. This was done in response to the crisis sparked by religious fundamentalism and radicalism. This article is a qualitative study that uses the early church's activities as a model to provide a practice of religious moderation.<sup>4</sup>

Developing religious moderation in the millennial generation from the perspective of Ezra Tari in the New Testament. This research was inspired by tensions over ongoing interfaith disputes, fueled by truth claims about biblical teachings and people's belief that their faith is the most accurate. Misunderstandings and differences in viewpoints are the cause. Religious people continue to have exclusive attitudes and a lack of respect for the

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<sup>2</sup> Yuangga Yahya et al., "Hospitalitas Kristen Sebagai Landasan Relasi Mayoritas-Minoritas Di Desa Segaran, Kecamatan Wates, Kediri," *Societas Dei: Jurnal Agama dan Masyarakat* 9, no. 2 (2022).

<sup>3</sup> Rinto Hasiholan Hutapea, "Nilai Pendidikan Kristiani 'Terimalah Satu Akan Yang Lain' Dalam Bingkai Moderasi Beragama," *KURIOS (Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen)* 8, no. 1 (2022): 58–67.

<sup>4</sup> Harls Evan R. Siahaan and Munatar Kause, "Hospitalitas Sebagai Laku Hidup Menggereja Dalam Bingkai Moderasi Beragama Di Indonesia," *Danum Pabelum: Jurnal Teologi Dan Musik Gereja* 2, no. 2 (November 30, 2022): 232–240, <https://ejournal.iaknpky.ac.id/index.php/pabelum/article/view/146>.

teachings of other religions. For Christians to collectively understand their religion, this study aims to provide insights into religious moderation from a new covenant perspective for the millennial generation. This perspective encourages Christians to place a high value on moderation.<sup>5</sup>

## METHODS

This research establishes the methodology of the literature study with a descriptive-analytic approach. The research step is divided into several stages: searching for library sources, selecting sources based on themes, processing the data by analysis, and descriptive reporting.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Religious Moderation and Hospitality

The Indonesian nation is multicultural and consists of various religions, ethnicities, cultures, and languages. Such a situation shows that Indonesia has distinctive characteristics from other nations. This can have both negative and positive impacts. Therefore, to prevent adverse impacts, a strategy is needed to prevent inter-religious conflicts. Inter-religious conflict is an important issue faced by humanity today. There are claims of truth and safety from each adherent of a religion, resulting in conflicts between religious communities, which harm the social order of community life.<sup>6</sup> Strategies that can be carried out to prevent inter-religious conflicts are through religious moderation.

Religious moderation, namely (1) reduction of violence, (2) avoidance of extremes. Widodo & Karnawari explained that the Indonesian government initiated religious moderation through the Ministry of Religion to prevent conflict in the name of religion as an excess of fundamentalism and radicalism, whose cases are increasing daily.<sup>7</sup> Cases of conflict and tension between religious, ethnic, and ideological communities gave birth to an international decision through the United Nations, which designated 2019 as the International Year of Moderation. This decision is related to the Ministry of Religion's commitment to continue promoting religious moderation.<sup>8</sup> Religious moderation is a balanced attitude between adherent religious practices (exclusive) and respect for religious practices of different beliefs (inclusive). This creates a harmonious relationship between religious communities and groups to avoid extreme attitudes.<sup>9</sup> So, it can be concluded that religious moderation is a middle-way strategy in religious pluralism in Indonesia.

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<sup>5</sup> Ezra Tari, "Mengembangkan Moderasi Beragama Di Kalangan Generasi Milenial Melalui Perspektif Perjanjian Baru," *KURIOS* 8, no. 1 (April 30, 2022): 114, <https://sttpb.ac.id/e-journal/index.php/kurios/article/view/474>.

<sup>6</sup> Juwaini et al, *Moderation of Religion in a Multicultural Society* (Banda Aceh: Bandar Publishing, 2023), 163-164.

<sup>7</sup> Siahaan and Kause, "Hospitalitas Sebagai Laku Hidup Menggereja Dalam Bingkai Moderasi Beragama Di Indonesia."

<sup>8</sup> Salma Mazidah, Agus Supriyanto, and Nurullia Diani Maulivi, "Religious Moderation in Indonesia's Diversity," in *Proceeding International Seminar "Implementation Of Religious Moderation In Islamic Studies,"* vol. 1, 2022, 181-190.

<sup>9</sup> Mirzon Daheri et al., "Strengthening Religious Moderation: Learning from the Harmony of Multireligious People in Indonesia," *Journal of Population and Social Studies [JPSS]* 31 (2023): 571-586.

## Jeremiah and His Calling

Jeremiah is a prophet among the Israelites. As a prophet, he was sent to convey the will of God. Jeremiah could see and feel with God's eyes and heart.<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah was sent into a complex world full of challenges and opportunities. God sent Jeremiah in the context he faced: the context of various religions and cultures, the context of suffering and natural disasters, the context of poverty, the context of injustice, and the context of ecological damage.<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah lived in three periods, viz.<sup>12</sup>

Based on the text of Jer.1:2, Jeremiah was called to be a prophet and started his work. The period of Jeremiah's work/service can be divided into four periods, namely during (1) the beginning of Josiah's reforms in 621 BC; (2) the reign of King Jehoiakim in 609 BC; (3) the reign of King Yoyakim in December 598-March 597 BC; and (4) the reign of Zedekiah in 597-587 BC.<sup>13</sup>

Jeremiah attacked King Jehoiakim because he openly destroyed his father's reforms and violated the provisions of the book of the law found in the LORD's temple (Jer. 7:5-10, 30-31). Jeremiah also criticized Jehoiakim's foreign policy.<sup>14</sup> Necho, who had been victorious at Megiddo, now controlled Judah and its surrounding area. At this time, also Jeremiah delivered prayers to the LORD, which were complaints about the rightness of the LORD's ways (cf. Jer. 11:18-20; 12:1-6; 15:15-18; 18:19-23; 20:7-18).

## Religious Situation in Book Jeremiah

The exiled condition of the Israelites affected all aspects of their lives, including their religious life. Religious life and political life cannot be separated. The political life they are facing has an impact on their religion. Leaders or kings who rule are people who submit to God, so the Israelites will also worship God, and vice versa; if the leader does not fear God, then the people will worship the god Baal. Carrol emphasized, "The King is to make both a political and a religious statement simultaneously."<sup>15</sup> During the exile, the Israelites also experienced difficulties carrying out their religious practices to Yahweh because they did not have a temple. Some Israelites did not lose their identity as God's people. Israel's belief in God is closely related to their identity as a national group as well as God's people. Their life as slaves in Babylon pushed them to continue to struggle with the lives and habits of the majority in Babylon.<sup>16</sup>

Jeremiah is an OT prophet who is genuinely very influential. He was born in Anathoth, a small town north of Jerusalem. He came from a priestly family (1:1) but did not serve as a Priest. Jeremiah was called to prophetic work when he was still a youth (*na'ar*) in 627 BC (Jer. 1:2). Blommendaal, Paterson, Otto Kaiser, Otto Eisfeldt, W. Wahono agree that

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<sup>10</sup> Stella YE Pattipelohy, *Carrying Out a Mission with Yereimia: An Interpretation of Jeremiah 29:7 From a Public Theological Perspective* (GPIB 2019-2020 Socialization at the GPIB Filadelfia Congregation, Medan, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Yesri Esau Talan and Veronika, "Examining the Calling and Ministry of the Prophet Jeremiah in the Context of the Book of Jeremiah and Its Implementation for Servant of God in the Present," *Sesawi Journal*, Volume 4, No 1 2022, STT Sabda Agung, 82-99

<sup>13</sup> Kaiser Otto, *Introduction to The Old Testament: A Presentation of Its Results and Problems* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 246-247.

<sup>14</sup> Lasor, WS, Hubbard DA, 319

<sup>15</sup> Herowati Sitorus, "Refleksi Teologis Kitab Yereimia Tentang Pesan Sang Nabi Bagi Orang-Orang Buangan," *BIA': Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristen Kontekstual* 1, no. 2 (2018): 267-280.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Jeremiah began his calling as a prophet in 627 BC. Jeremiah began his prophetic work between the years 627-628 BC.<sup>17</sup> However, Holladay argues that 627 BC was the year Jeremiah was born, and his activity as a prophet began when King Jehoiakim ascended the throne in 609 BC.<sup>18</sup> Many prophets conveyed the message of the LORD, and Jeremiah was one of them. Jeremiah's message is the most complete record in the Bible. His message was essential, namely, confirming the agreement between the LORD and the Israelites.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Seeking Prosperity for the Babylonians***

The Israelites who were exiled to Babylon were a minority nation. They are directed to seek the good of the country where they are captive (verse 7), pray, and seek prosperity. Even though Babylon was a heathen place, idol worshippers, oppressors, and enemies of God, yet because Babylon gave them protection, they must be loyal to the king and live quietly and peacefully under his rule. Their loyalty does not mean they forget the God of Israel. Still, God's people must also carry out their obligations by guarding and maintaining order and security in the country. Apart from carrying out their obligations as part of good citizens, the most essential value is that they do it as a form of respecting and obeying Allah. So, honoring, obeying, and worshiping God is not only through prayer and other ritual activities. But even in good things, it is a form of respect and obedience to God.

Jeremiah appealed to the people to seek the country's good by praying. If they pray and seek rest for the land where they were banished, and the country prospers, they will also prosper in it. *Sejahtera*, in the Hebrew language *shalom*, means peace, prosperity, safety, health, good, right, just, and prosperous; nothing is missing, no division, and completeness. What welfare means here is comprehensive in all aspects of life. It concerns both spiritual and social matters. If the country they live in is safe and peaceful, then their lives, both spiritual and physical, will be better. The whole country is prayed for, not only the Babylonians but also the leaders of the people, who are among them, described in verses 8 and 9. Jeremiah advised the Judahites to continue their lives in exile in his letter. First, build a house and plant a garden (Jer. 29:4-5). Second, marry and have children (Jer. 29:6). Third, seek the welfare of the city and pray for the city (Jer. 29:7). Fourth, do not listen to false divinations, false dreams, and false prophecies (Jer. 29:8-9).<sup>20</sup>

When other nations are present and live in togetherness with them, assimilation will occur, which can affect and even obscure their religious values towards God.<sup>21</sup> Israel tends to turn away from God (Jer. 2:5) and follow the god of vanity. They no longer ask where the LORD led them out of the Land of Egypt, who led them in the desert, in a dry and desolate land, who brought them to fertile land and enjoy the fruit and all that is good from that land? The prophets prophesied for Baal's sake (Jer. 2:8, cf. Jer. 23: the emergence of false prophets).

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<sup>17</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Tradition*. Vo. II trans. DMG Stalker (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 191.

<sup>18</sup> W.L Holladay, *Jeremiah: Spokesman Out of Time* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1974), 18-24.

<sup>19</sup> J.A Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 14-15.

<sup>20</sup> Stella

<sup>21</sup> RK Harrison, 1243.

**The Meaning of the Word *Shalom* According to Jeremiah**

הָעִיר	הָאָרֶץ נְהַגְתָּ טוֹהַת
A	B
...work for the welfare of the city	...work for the welfare of the country/land

Variation A uses nouns הָעִיר(city). In the B variation, the Septuagint uses הָאָרֶץ נְהַגְתָּ טוֹהַת (country/land). Possible variation A only looks at the micro context of the people in exile, where the city must be comfortable. Though not necessarily an uncomfortable country, it guarantees a prosperous city life. Thus, in variation B, the Septuagint may look not only at the comfort of the city but also at the macro level, the country/land where the people were banished. When the country lives in a prosperous atmosphere, all will be prosperous, including the cities they live in.

Variation A is supported by Indonesian texts such as BIS, ENDE TB, TMV and English texts such as ASV, CJB, CSB, DBY, DRA, ERV, ESV, GWN, JPS, KJG, KJV, NAB, NAS, NAU, NET, NIB, NIV, NJB, NKJ, NLT, NRS, RSV, RWB, TNK, WEB, and YLT, which use city nouns. Variation B in the Septuagint translation uses the noun country/land and is only supported by 3 (three) Indonesian texts, such as SB, FAYH, and TL, and 2 (two) English texts, such as BBE and LXE. However, with the explanation above, variation B in the Septuagint translation may be the most precise and close to the original text. Therefore, the writer chose the Septuagint translation using the noun country/land.

The word shalom (welfare) has many meanings. The word shalom (welfare) comes from the Hebrew shalom(שָׁלוֹם), which means peaceful, prosperous, safe, healthy, sound, suitable, just, and prosperous, nothing is lost, no splits, and completeness. In Arabic, it is called *salam*, which means peace or safe. It is called peace, peace, tranquility, or good things in English. It is used instead of hello and goodbye. Shalom is usually translated with peace. Greetings are translated as peace, peace, safety. Shalom is socio-political; peace means not war (cf. Jer. 14:13; 1 Chron. 22:9; 1 Ki. 2:13; 5:4). In the Indonesian language holy book (LAI) there are other translations, for example safe (Gen. 29:6; 43:27; Hak. :23; 1 Sam. 25:6; 2 Sam. 18:28, etc.), serene (Ps. 4:9), contentment (Ex. 18:23), which expresses more of a personal experience, even of an inward nature.<sup>22</sup> Shalom can also have a social-personal meaning: friendly (Gen. 37:4), good relations (Judg. 4:17), friendship (Josh. 9:15), even a close friend (Ps. 41:10; Jer. 20:10; compare 38:22; Ob 7; Deut 23:7).

There is also a greeting of shalom for you, which is similar to greeting *aleikum*, also prosperous (1Chron. 12:18), even don't be afraid, don't worry (dan. 10:19; Judg. 19:20; Gen. 43:23), even what news? (2 Ki. 9:11) or called greeting (also 2 Ki. 10:13). It should be noted who gave the word shalom and to whom it was delivered. If the angel says greeting *aleikum* to people in heaven, the word greeting there has a vibrant meaning. Likewise, in the Scriptures, God is called the One who holds shalom (peace) in His high place (Job 25:2). In 1 Ki. 2:33 David, his descendants, his family, and his throne will receive shalom (safety) from the LORD forever (cf. Ps. 35:27: God is great; he desires Shalom (the salvation of His servant). Ps. 122:6 says: Pray for shalom (prosperity) in Jerusalem, and then shalom is practically the same as a blessing there. To the extent that Gideon said, God is shalom (Judg. 6:24).

<sup>22</sup> Tom Jacobs, *Shalom Greetings Congratulations* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 32).

The overall state of shalom (welfare) comes from God Himself and is given to individuals and His people. Peace is an attribute of God. Gerhard von Rad states that shalom manifests itself as external well-being. It is further said that shalom is a social concept. Generally, it refers to the prosperity of a group rather than individuals. But apart from that, shalom is also a religious concept. This includes the sacredness of GOD Himself. All the goodness and values associated with shalom always point to the LORD of Israel in their prayers or acknowledging that they are gifts from Him. Shalom (prosperity) can mean adequacy in excess; it can also mean security.<sup>23</sup> Shalom (welfare) describes well-being in general, meaning a satisfactory condition exists. Shalom (prosperity) is associated with life and is used in many ways. For humans as social beings to exist, shalom (welfare) is needed as a condition.

If believers want safety, happiness, peace, and justice, they should act ethically and carry out the rules wisely. An evil rule is a stupidity that digs a hole for itself. Otherwise, a good action or attitude can be interpreted as shalom (welfare). Siahaan said that peace (shalom) is also closely related to health and economic conditions, materials such as water, abundant harvests, safety from the threat of wild animals, and safety from enemies.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, Cairns stated that in the general sense of the Hebrew language, shalom (welfare) is defined as a good relationship between man and God. This means that the LORD who has reconciled himself with humans and those who have made peace with GOD have received shalom. In other words, shalom does not come solely from human efforts but from God himself (Lev. 26:6; Num. 6:26).<sup>25</sup>

Shalom (welfare) is holistic, covering both physical and spiritual well-being as God has given us in the present, and its fullness will still be experienced in the future. Shalom does not only mean peace because there is no war; in a positive sense, it means harmony. According to Westermann, Shalom describes a condition in a group that refers to health or the whole in the community context.<sup>26</sup> Shalom shows a harmonious relationship, namely as a group welfare in a social sense refers to a relationship. Shalom is only possible with obedience to Yahweh's law. Therefore, loyalty to law and truth cannot be separated from peace.<sup>27</sup>

In the general sense of Hebrew, shalom is defined as a good relationship between man and God. God is the only source of shalom, which implies that someone who receives shalom has made peace with God. Shalom is God's gift to those who live according to His will; in other words, shalom does not come solely from human effort but comes from God Himself (Lev. 26:6; Num. 6:26).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Shalom in The Old Testament: In Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 402-403

<sup>24</sup> SM Siahaan, *Peace (Shalom) in the Old Testament* (BPK Gunung Mulia: Jakarta, 1984), 13

<sup>25</sup> IJ Cairns, *The Role of the Old Testament in a Developing World* (Yogyakarta: Duta Wacana, 1980), 56

<sup>26</sup> Yoder Perry B., *The Meaning of Peace: Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster, 1992), 7. This condition includes all aspects of goodness in community life. It is a state of order in harmony or order expressed as a pleasurable whole, a feeling of harmony, shalom does not refer to an ideal life but an order that can be experienced in everyday life.

<sup>27</sup> Ulrich Mauser, *The Gospel of Peace: A Scriptural Message for Today's World* (Louisville: Westminster, 1992), 19.

<sup>28</sup> I.J. Cairns, *The Role of the Old Testament in a Developing World* (Yogyakarta: Duta Wacana, 1980), 56

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of moving towards inclusive togetherness in the context of Jeremiah 29:7 is to practice religious moderation and hospitality. This verse states, "Seek prosperity for the city where I raised you from captivity and pray for it to the LORD, for if that city is prosperous, you will also prosper. Religious moderation means balancing religious practices and attitudes toward different beliefs. This means respecting and acknowledging the diversity of religions and beliefs without discrimination or oppression of certain religious groups. Religious moderation promotes dialogue for mutual understanding and cooperation among religious believers to create societal harmony and peace. Apart from that, hospitality is also essential in creating inclusive togetherness. Hospitality means welcoming and receiving people from different backgrounds with compassion and friendliness. Jeremiah 29:7 means opening doors to people from outside, including those of a different religion, culture, or ethnicity, and providing them with a safe place and adequate services. Practicing religious moderation and hospitality can create an inclusive environment where everyone feels welcome, respected, and acknowledged. This enables us to work together to achieve shared prosperity and enrich our diverse society.

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