The Impact of Post-Modernism and of Post-Truth on Indonesian Society and the Christian Mission: A Philosophical-Theological Perspective

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Abstract

This article explores the meanings and societal impacts of post-modernism and post-truth in Indonesia from a philosophical-theological perspective, and reflects on the Christian mission in this context. Using a combination of empirical observation and philosophical-theological reflection, the study analyzes how post-modern thought, characterized by the deification of rationality and the rise of digital societies, and the post-truth condition, in which truth is often shaped by perception and media manipulation, have affected Indonesian society. The findings show that these cultural shifts have contributed to moral disorientation, religious politicization, and a weakening grasp on objective truth in public discourse. In response, the article proposes a narrative theological approach that interprets God's saving action within the lived experience of Indonesian people today, reaffirming the role of faith and theology in resisting the erosion of truth and justice.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi makna dan dampak sosial dari post-modernisme dan post-truth di Indonesia dari perspektif filosofis-teologis, dan merefleksikan misi Kristen dalam konteks ini.

Dengan menggunakan kombinasi pengamatan empiris dan refleksi filosofis-teologis, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana pemikiran post-modern, yang ditandai dengan pendewaan rasionalitas dan kebangkitan masyarakat digital, serta kondisi post-truth, di mana kebenaran sering kali dibentuk oleh persepsi dan manipulasi media, telah memengaruhi masyarakat Indonesia. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pergeseran budaya ini telah berkontribusi pada disorientasi moral, politisasi agama, dan melemahnya pemahaman tentang kebenaran objektif dalam wacana publik. Sebagai tanggapan, artikel ini mengusulkan sebuah pendekatan teologis naratif yang menafsirkan tindakan penyelamatan Tuhan dalam pengalaman hidup masyarakat Indonesia saat ini, menegaskan kembali peran iman dan teologi dalam melawan erosi kebenaran dan keadilan.

1. Introduction

The theme the author has elaborated is grounded by a topic presented during the symposium of ASPAMIR[1] in Widya Mandira Catholic University, Kupang, NTT, Indonesia, under the title *"The impact of post-modernism and of post-truth on Indonesian society and the Christian Mission"*. The elaboration of this topic has been supported by the literature published in the last decade concerning the revolution of Industry 4.0, the era of digital devices, etc.[2] A philosophical-theological approach serves as the primary framework for exploring the meanings of the terms post-modernism and post-truth. These concepts—along with modernism and truth—are philosophical in nature, yet they have not been sufficiently emphasized in the relevant literature. Therefore, they will be examined individually in the following discussion. Although these terms originated in a Western context, their impact on Indonesian society is both significant and undeniable.

The central problems addressed in this topic revolve around two main questions: What is the meaning of post-modernism and post-truth, and how do they impact Indonesian society? And how can we speak of God's work within the Indonesian context shaped by these influences today? These issues are explored by first establishing the philosophical concepts of post-modernism and post-truth, which help explain the current situation and condition of Indonesian society. In response, the article proposes a narrative theological approach that, in the digital era, reveals God's

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[1] ASPAMIR stands for Asia-Pacific Association of Mission Researchers, a network of missiologists and scholars affiliated with the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), focusing on missionary research and theological reflection within the Asia-Pacific region. Established in 1991, ASPAMIR convenes every four years to address contemporary issues in missiology, theology, and intercultural mission. This time ASPAMIR was held at Widya Mandira Catholic University in Kupang, Indonesia**,** from 22nd to 25th November 2022**.**

[2] Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow.* London: Penguin Random House UK, 2017, Pp.327-462.

Savitri, Astrid, *Revolusi Industri 4.0. Mengubah Tantangan Menjadi Peluang di Era Disrupsi 4.0.* Yogyakarta: Penerbit Genesis, 2019.

Donatus Sermada Kelen, SVD, *Revolusi Industri 4.0: Kapitalisme Neo-Liberal, Homo Deus dan Wacana Solusi (Suatu Tinjauan Filsafat Sosial)*, In *Siapakah Manusia; Siapakah Allah. Menyingkap Tabir Manusia dalam Revolusi Industri 4.0.* Valentinus, CP Cs. Seri Filsafat Teologi Widya Sasana. Vol. 29 No. Seri 28, 2019, Pp. 77-100.

creative and redemptive power within the Indonesian context. The investigation leads to the insight that there has been no essential shift in the paradigm of thinking from the modern era to the post-modern era. From a theological perspective, to speak about God in this context is to narrate His saving and redemptive activity in the life of the Indonesian people today.

2.   Method

The method of investigation is based on the historical perspective of philosophy concerning paradigms of thought. This perspective adopts the method of philosophical reflection to examine whether there is an essential change in the transition from the modern to the post-modern era. The author draws on the thinking of several philosophers who describe key characteristics of the modern and post-modern eras based on socio-historical facts, viewed from this historical-philosophical approach. Within this framework, the author affirms Lyotard's view that the post-modern era is a continuation of the Enlightenment, emphasizing unlimited freedom and the deification of rationality. In the realm of ethics, the author aligns with Taylor's analysis, which identifies three sources of morality that post-modern individuals rely on. These philosophical views are then applied to the Indonesian context in the present time. Global concepts such as industrialization, digitalization, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and human intelligence have also been taken into consideration in the Indonesian context of the post-modern era.

The investigation into the meaning of truth and post-truth follows the same methodological approach used in examining modernism and post-modernism. The author engages with the views of key philosophers—Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Immanuel Kant—whose perspectives provide the conceptual basis for identifying the ideological roots of post-truth, particularly within a philosophical and mathematical framework. Using this same method, the author seeks to define post-truth while analyzing its contemporary impact on Indonesian society. From the philosophical point of view concerning post-modernism and post-truth, the author moves on reflecting the Christian mission in the midst of the present Indonesian situation and condition under the theological perspective. The author suggests that doing theology in the era of post-modern and of post-truth in accordance with the present Indonesian society is narrating the saving power and the redemptive activities of God involving in Indonesian history, and the author shows up the reasons why doing theology is only relevant and fitting for the monotheistic religions, while the followers of non-monotheistic religions have their contributions by doing philosophy concerning the problems of ethics practicing the religion and the state in Indonesia.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. The Impact of Post-modernism on Indonesian Society

3.1.1. Modernism and Post Modernism

Concerning the idea of Lyortard about the post-modernism, Taylor said:*"Post-Modernism is according to Lyortard a proof of an exaggerating praise on the first profile of the spirit for the sake of unlimited freedom"*(Taylor, 1996:848).[3] Post-modernism does not represent a completely new paradigm in the history of philosophy; rather, it is a continuation of the modern paradigm, which emphasizes rationality as the supreme authority for addressing the problems of humanity and the world. The modern era is often identified with the Age of Enlightenment, during which religion and belief in God were no longer considered essential to human life. Faith was gradually replaced by trust in the power of human reason to master and transform the world. According to Taylor's interpretation of Lyotard, post-modernism furthers this trajectory by deifying rationality, driven by unlimited human freedom to create and advance science and technology. As a result, the authentic identity of the human person, whether in the modern or post-modern era, becomes increasingly enslaved by the very products of human reason and creation. Both modern and post-modern societies remain bound by the outcomes of human intelligence, as seen in the rapid and relentless development of science and especially digital technology.

The historical boundary between modernism and post-modernism is not central to the elaboration of this theme. It is briefly noted that post-modernism emerged in different fields at different times—in art during the 1930s, in history around 1947, and in philosophy by 1984 (Sugiharto, 1996: 23–28). However, the focus of this discussion lies in identifying the moral sources that form the background of modern and post-modern ethics. According to Charles Taylor (1996: 849–854), the ethics of modern individuals—extending into post-modern thought—are rooted in three primary sources of moral judgment: (1) the theistic foundation articulated by Augustine; (2) the naturalistic foundation grounded in instrumental rationality, as proposed by Descartes and John Locke; and (3) the expressive-romantic foundation theorized by Rousseau.

The grounds of the theistic view articulated by Augustine were inspired by Platon's philosophy concerning the highest principle which belongs to the world of ideas. The highest principle is immaterial, immortal, constant, one (*unum*), good (*bonum*), truth (*verum*), and beauty (*pulchrum*). Augustine explained that the highest principle attributed to the said qualities is God (Taylor, 1996:235-261). He is the supreme substance on whom all things and creatures, including human beings, are dependent. In God, all human beings are finding their genuine identity. By the power of human rationality, man can relate himself with God who exceeds the power of human rationality, and by the power of human will, man is longing for God who is dwelling in the deepest

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[3] *"Die Postmoderne im Sinne Lyotards erweist sich als ueberkomplizierte Anpreisung des ersten geistigen Profils im Namen der uneingeschraenkten Freiheit"*. Charles Taylor, *Qullen des Selbst. Die Enstehung der neuzeitlichen Identitaet*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996.

layer of the human heart. Human moral deeds are rooted in God's self who is the Goodness and the Light, but because of Adam's sin, all human beings exist in a sinful condition, and just due to God's grace, the human being is able to see the Light and to do morally. The greatest contribution Augustine has offered to build up the modern human identity is the cultivation and penetration of religious values into the lives of modern societies, although religious values have been kicked out from the public sphere due to the secular power of modern men. The religious institutions, religions, and beliefs, even monarchial or theocratic states, are still proving the presence of the power owned by the *"metaphysic"* or transcendental world (divine power) to which the moral deeds of modern men are referring. The traces of "*the Holy One*" can be found yet in the midst of the noisy world that modern men have (Wuchterl, 1982:30-37.164-171).

The second moral foundation, the naturalistic view, is rooted in the instrumental rationality proposed by Descartes and John Locke. Although Descartes did not formulate a formal ethical system, his philosophical emphasis on rationality as the supreme authority for evaluating all things introduced a new direction in moral reasoning. Moral judgment was no longer anchored in God dwelling in the depths of the human heart, but rather in human rationality as the highest measure of truth and action. In this framework, moral decisions are evaluated by rational reflection, and reason itself is seen as distinct from matter. For Descartes, matter (res extensa) functions mechanically, while consciousness (res cogitans) exercises judgment. Rationality serves as an instrument to determine whether things are useful or beneficial for human beings. Social relationships, in turn, are constructed on the basis of freedom, guided by reason and sustained by values such as self-respect, human dignity, individual autonomy, free will, and generosity (Taylor, 1996: 267–287). Consequently, the institutions of modern society are not necessarily religious in character. In contrast, John Locke rejected the notion of independent rationality, viewing it as passive, shaped by sensory experience. Knowledge, in Locke's view, arises from perceptions formed by sense impressions. The world is understood through external experiences, and morality is not seen as innate but rather shaped by external laws—such as divine law, constitutional rules, or legal instructions. These sources serve as tools of moral regulation, though they are not considered part of a natural law to be universally obeyed. For Locke, ethics are grounded in natural law, which requires treating human nature and the world as objects to be observed and mastered for the sake of knowledge and practical skill. State institutions, then, are born of a social contract, established to preserve peace and guarantee freedom. In this framework, morality is individual, dependent on human free will, and universal values need not be rooted in religion.

The third moral foundation in modern thought is found in the expressive-romantic view, as theorized by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This stream of philosophy emphasizes emotion and inner experience, standing in opposition to the rationalist tendency to measure all aspects of life under the dominion of reason. Rousseau argued that human beings must return to the power of nature, which has been distorted by rational systems and imposed belief structures. For him, the source of morality lies in human nature itself. A person should not act against this inner nature, but instead

seek to discover and cultivate it. These natural inclinations are often concealed, and the task of the individual is not to analyze them scientifically, but to express them freely—especially through art. Artistic expression becomes the privileged medium for revealing the beauty and truth of human instincts. Within this framework, freedom of expression is considered the highest value, one that often clashes with institutionalized norms, whether religious or political. As a result, institutions—both state and religious—are frequently viewed as threats to the authenticity and autonomy of the individual. It is therefore unsurprising that many adherents of this view harbor deep skepticism toward all forms of institutional authority.

The three sources of moral judgment identified by Taylor have served as reference points for the moral actions of modern individuals. This indicates that modern human identity is no longer shaped by a single moral foundation. Instead, the presence of multiple moral sources has impacted modern ethics by creating a sense of disorientation in life-values, as the basis for moral judgment is no longer universal. Modern individuals face a heterogeneity of moral values, which leads to the erosion of absolute moral standards. In such a context, God is no longer viewed as the ultimate moral value or the highest Good amid competing value systems. Pluralistic societies embrace this diversity of values, which often results in social conflict and unrest due to the clash of differing life-values. These unresolved tensions continue into the post-modern era and have been examined by post-modern thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault. According to Taylor, these developments raise several critical questions related to the earlier-mentioned moral sources: What is the genuine source of moral judgment in the post-modern era? What concept of rationality can replace instrumental rationality? And what is the understanding of morality in relation to the ideas of the good, the true, and the just in the post-modern context?

Post-modernism has shaped contemporary society into what is now referred to as a digital society, characterized by the use of digital language and technology. According to Klaus Schwab, this transformation has emerged through the processes of industrialization during the Third and Fourth Industrial Revolutions (Savitri, 2019: 63–105). The Third Industrial Revolution began with the invention of computers and the widespread use of the Internet from the late 20th century to the present. A key breakthrough during this era was the replacement of typewriters with computers, enabling users to send messages via email that reached recipients instantly with a single click. Long-distance communication no longer depended on landline telephones but instead shifted to mobile phones wherever signal access was available. The Fourth Industrial Revolution builds upon the digital developments of the third, beginning in the 1980s. What distinguishes this era is that human interactions with digital devices are now increasingly managed automatically by the devices themselves, rather than being directly controlled by users. This marks a shift from manual operation to autonomous digital systems in shaping everyday interactions and processes.

In the digital era that characterizes post-modern societies, all nations are being impacted by the process of digitalization in social life—that is, the widespread adoption and use of digital tools for both individual and communal purposes. Throughout this transformation, the traditional

distinctions between rich and poor countries, or between the so-called first, second, and third worlds, appear increasingly irrelevant, as virtual realities now dominate the concrete experiences of societies worldwide. Even in remote areas, people are familiar with mobile phones, the Internet, Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms. Financial transactions, including those in money markets, are now carried out using electronic systems.

In this context, post-modern individuals are increasingly governed by artificial intelligence rather than human intelligence, prompting profound philosophical questions. What is the place of human beings in this digital age? Can a digital society that generates virtual communities be considered a genuine society? Just as the transition from the medieval to the modern era required a new paradigm of thought, today's digital society demands fresh philosophical reflection. Habermas addresses this concern by arguing that human rationality, once exalted for its role in advancing science and digital technology, has become overly instrumentalized. This situation calls for a renewed inquiry into the very substance of rationality—why has it become so mechanistic, and what are the implications for our understanding of humanity and society?

The process of digitalization in human life during the post-modern era has been driven by the spirit of economic profit-seeking, characteristic of capitalism. This process has generated new social divisions, where capital—particularly financial capital—has become the dominant force in managing social interactions within state life (Habermas, Vol. 2, 1989: 166; Band 2, 1987: 248). In order to produce advanced digital tools, high-tech firms must accumulate significant capital, both in their headquarters and in their global branches. This concentration of wealth is consistent with the logic of capitalism, as wealthy investors seek to expand their influence and profit through global investment. Yet, this system inevitably produces competition, tension, and conflict among capital owners, which are intrinsic to the capitalist spirit. According to Habermas, these social divisions occur not only in physical societies but also within virtual societies, which consist of digital tool developers, producers, users, and mass consumers. Although these groups are not sharply divided in appearance, they all utilize digital tools in ways that reflect instrumental rationality, aimed at gaining economic profit. The groups most affected by this structure are those without access to modern digital technology—those who cannot afford devices, lack the skills to operate them, or have no entry into the digital system at all. To participate in this society, individuals must possess purchasing power, digital competence, and the mathematical rationality that increasingly functions like a machine. In such a world, the human being is transformed into a giant machine, and the dominant belief system becomes what Yuval Noah Harari calls the "data religion" in his book *Homo Deus* (Harari, 2017: 327–462).

3.1.2. The Impact of Post-modernism on Indonesian Society Nowadays

The impact of post-modernism on Indonesian society could be revealed through the process of digitalization on Indonesian society. The human power for working and producing something

has been replaced slowly by the power of electronic machines, and in the era of industry-revolution 4.0, digital tools are slowly ruling over the lives of Indonesian people. The simple experience prevailing in the big Javanese cities could be seen with ordering a grab to bring someone from one place to another. The intended place is the new one unknown by the driver of the grab. When the driver of Grab tunes up the digital tools, the voice coming out from the digital instrument guides the driver to follow the road map shown up automatically by the digital vehicles. So, the power of digital vehicles is greater than the power of human rationality. This phenomenon is an indication that artificial intelligence (AI) is cleverer than human intelligence.

Indonesia remains an agricultural nation and is not yet classified as an industrial one. Discussing post-modern society in the digitalization era may seem less urgent in Indonesian society, as it does not align with the reality of an agricultural nation. In villages across Indonesia, most women still rely on manual labor with traditional methods for washing clothes. Electric lights have not yet been universally introduced to Indonesian villages, and even electrical outages occur frequently in major cities, as evidenced by the dimming of lights in Jakarta and Bekasi in August 2019. The ability of rural populations to purchase digital technology, such as computers and mobile devices, is quite limited. Those who own mobile phones can only use them in areas with signal coverage. Rice fields continue to be cultivated traditionally; people still plant and harvest rice using manual labor. Most Indonesians remain in a pre-industrial phase and have not yet experienced the industrial revolution 1.0 that European societies underwent in the 18th and 19th centuries, marked by the invention of weaving devices and the onset of large-scale production. Of Indonesia's approximately 260 million people, 10% are the wealthiest, controlling 74,08% of the nation's assets, while the top 1% own 45,04% of national properties. Only a small fraction of these groups can easily participate in the digitalization process in this era of post-modernism, as their access is primarily driven by financial capital. In contrast, the majority of Indonesians must engage in digitalization forcefully due to the currents of globalization.

The foundation of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945 and its subsequent development cannot be separated from the global processes of industrialization and digitalization, particularly as they unfolded in the industrialized nations of Europe and the United States. The industrialization process—which strongly influenced the emergence of two opposing ideologies in global economics and politics—also weighed heavily on the founding fathers of Indonesia. During both the Old Order under President Sukarno and the New Order under President Suharto, the Indonesian state found itself caught between two powerful ideological forces: democratic liberal capitalism, represented by the United States, and socialist communism, led by the Soviet Union. These ideological tensions deeply influenced Indonesia's political direction and socio-economic strategies during the formative decades of its national identity.

What Taylor proposed regarding the three moral sources that have shaped modern and post-modern ethics in industrial nations also significantly influenced the founding fathers of Indonesia during the early formation of the state. Although Indonesia's national identity was not built upon

commonalities of race, ethnicity, language, or religion, it was grounded in a political agreement that gave rise to a brilliant new ideology: Pancasila, as enshrined in the 1945 Constitution (UUD '45) and symbolized by the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* ("Unity in Diversity"). By establishing "Ketuhanan" (belief in God) as the first principle of Pancasila, the Indonesian state positioned religion as a foundational moral reference, rooted in a theistic worldview for both public ethics and religious life. Importantly, the Indonesian state formally adopted neither liberal-democratic capitalism nor socialist communism. This means that Indonesia is neither a religious state that enforces one religion's laws as supreme, nor a secular state that relegates religion entirely to the private sphere. This balanced understanding forms the core of the Pancasila ideology, allowing Indonesia to describe itself as a Pancasila-state with a unique form of Pancasila-democracy.

However, despite its formal and legal success, the ideology of Pancasila—designed to balance religious and secular powers within the tensions of opposing ideologies—has often remained an empty slogan, lacking strong influence on the ethical fabric of national and religious life. Its realization and practical application in daily societal and spiritual existence appear to be largely unsuccessful. At the root of this problem lies Indonesia's ongoing struggle to define and manage the relationship between religion and the state. What model should Indonesia pursue to unify religious and secular authority? Should it follow the clear separation of church and state as in Western secular democracies, or adopt a model with no separation, as seen in the theocratic state of Iran? The process of digitalization in Indonesian society has not succeeded in resolving this dilemma; in fact, it has often intensified the divide, giving rise to both radical religious movements on one side and liberal ideological movements on the other.

The processes of industrialization and digitalization have largely disregarded religion and its spiritual values as a foundational element of societal life. In post-modern Indonesia, digitalization has reinforced secular authority, rooted in rationality, as the primary means of solving global and human problems. The medieval worldview, which centered thought on faith in God, is now considered outdated or incidental—religion is seen as incapable of addressing concrete societal and human challenges. This mindset promotes a strict separation between religion and the state, suggesting that each should operate independently and follow fundamentally different paths.

However, empirical realities in Indonesian society reveal that religion continues to be regarded as a supreme value in the life of the nation, society, and religious communities. This is evident from political developments, particularly the long-standing tension between secular-nationalist parties and Islamic religious parties since the country's founding. A pivotal moment came with the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs on January 3, 1946 (Sermada, 2017: 110–116). This act marked the beginning of religion's movement from the private to the public sphere, placing it under state authority and political influence. As a result, religion has become politicized, manifesting in state-controlled religious institutions such as religious education centers, faith-based community organizations, Sharia-compliant banks (e.g., Muamalat Bank), and others.

Indonesian law further reflects this politicization—for example, the national university system divides authority between the Ministry of Religion, which governs religious education, and the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education (Kemenristekdikti), which oversees public education. Moreover, the Blasphemy Law, issued on January 27, 1965, was legislated under the political regime of that time—not primarily to deepen spiritual life, but to serve political interests and maintain state power (Sermada, 2017: 115–116).

In the daily newspaper, Kompas, on Monday February 3rd, 2020, under the title *"Ketimpangan Relasi Kuasa Picu Intelorensi"*, it was written as follows *"Fenomena perusakan tempat ibadah dan ancaman terhadap kebebasan beribadah dan berkeyakinan di tanah air beberapa tahun terakhir merepresentasikan ketimpangan relasi kuasa yang didasari sentimen agama"*.[4] This sentence of the article was related to the report about the intolerant religious life among the people: the destruction of Mushollah Al-Hidayah in the district of northern Minahasa, the province of northern Sulawesi on January 29th, 2020; the refusal of a formal permit to build the catholic church of Saint Joseph's parish in Karimun-district, Riau-islands; the difficulty of getting formal permits to build the worship-house of GKI Yasmin Bogor and HKBP Filadelfia Bekasi. The intolerance acted by the people was in fact triggered by the implementation of instructions regulated officially by the minister of religious department together with the minister of home affairs in 2006. It was the form of politicization of the religion that has had a negative impact on the religious intolerant life rooted within the destructive SARA issue hitting the Indonesian public life until now. The most obvious example of the politicization of religion for the sake of political interest was the success attained by Anies Baswedan, a Moslem, during the governor-election for DKI Jakarta in 2017. He won the election (58%) against his rival Ahok, a Christian, due to the appeal for the metropolitan inhabitants to choose the person who has the same faith as the majority's faith of the electors.

When religion is the highest value in performing the state life and religious life in Indonesia, so in the same time the side of sensitivity among the Indonesian people is forged and formed in the scale of putting the religion, that is sensitivity, higher than the rationality. The freedom of thought, the freedom of speech, the freedom of art-expression when it comes to touching religious things, can be interpreted as the spot and blasphemy on religion. The followers of the religion whose faith is disturbed because of those expressions can easily become angry and express their attitude in committing violence against the so-called actor of blasphemy. The people, therefore, act as bigots who condemn very easily actors of blasphemy. The law of blasphemy on religion and its impact on Indonesian society has forged and strengthened the sensitivity instead of promoting rationality in Indonesian state life. In the post-modern era it seems that the sensitivity of Indonesian people is dominating the public life, while the spiritual values attached to religion are weakening

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[4] The article was titled *"Imbalance in Power Relations Triggered Intolerance"*. It reported that *"The phenomenon of worship-place destruction and threats to the freedom of worship and religious expression in recent years reflects an imbalance in power relations rooted in religious sentiments across various regions"*.

slowly. It is a real fact that the sensitivity is irrational, but the power of irrationality is instrumentalizing the rationality to win the political interest.

3.2. The Impact of Post-Truth on Indonesian Society

3.2.1. Truth and Post-Truth: The Meaning

Truth and post-truth are philosophical terminologies elaborated in the field of epistemology or philosophy of knowledge. The truth and true knowledge are reflected in epistemology. When people speak about truth and post-truth, it is language that has to become media for expressing the truth and communicating it to others. The digital language is one form of modern communication that ought to refer to the truth like all other forms of communication before the existence of the computer. In order to find out the relationship between the language of communication and truth, the first step should be taken which is to acknowledge and understand what is the meaning of truth. The philosophers have tried to formulate the meaning of truth from ancient times up to now.

The known concept of truth is based on the classical understanding that is still valid up to now. The classical understanding is taken from Aristotle's concept and formulated by Thomas Aquinas in a different way (Juessen, 1994:226-231). Aristotle depicted truth as a quality coming out from a statement. The understanding of the adjective word *"true"* was formulated by Aristotle as follows: "*Saying, that something whether it exists, does not exist, or something whether it does not exist, really exists, is wrong; whereas saying, that something whether it exists, really exists, or something whether it does not exist, really does not exist, is true" (Juessen:*1994:227).[5] The quality of a statement is called true statement or false statement. Therefore, truth should be related to the truth of a statement, and to verify whether the statement is true or false, man should make what he has thought and stated in accordance with the reality outside. The truth, therefore, is the correspondence or the adequation of what is thought and stated with the real things outside. In Latin language, Thomas Aquinas formulated *"Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus"*. God is Truth in theological reflection, that is, correspondence of what God has stated in His rationality with His Reality as a rational essence. By following the pattern of Aristotle's thought stating that God exists, this statement is true.

In the context of understanding the truth as formulated by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, the task of language is to reveal the true reality and to communicate this true reality to others. The way of revealing and communicating the true reality needs to adopt a technique of using the language being able to lead the people to see and to understand the true reality. But the problem is that the true reality is never known and recognized completely through the language. Language functioning to reveal the true reality is always connected with the subject or the person who is speaking about the true reality. Therefore, when it is said that truth is the adequation of what is thought and stated with the real things outside, the concept of the truth is no longer neutral; this concept is always

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[5] *"Zu sagen, dass das, was ist, nicht ist, oder das, was nicht ist, ist, ist falsch; hingegen (zu sagen), dass das, was ist, ist, oder das, was nicht ist, nicht ist, ist wahr".*

touching with the subjective perspective determining the subject's language (Possenti, 2001:4-12). The true reality is never a pure object in itself.

Kant's tradition that represents the era of modernism contains the logical criteria of truth. Kant has used the word of his mother's tongue *"Uebereinstimmung"* (correspondence) which he understood as the correspondence of the cognition with the general-formal law of rational power. Kant said: *"So, the only logical criterion of the truth, that is the correspondence of the cognition with the general and formal laws of the understanding and of the rationality, is really the absolute condition, so it is the negative condition of all truths"*(Kant, 1990:101).[6] The cognition that is always depending on the subject (knowing subject) may not oppose to formal law of rationality and to its power; when it is opposed with the said law, it is wrong. It means that the truth should be logical and rational according to Kant. The question is how to examine the respective correspondence. Kant suggests that the examination of the correspondence should be sought and found in the series of propositions. If one proposition is in accordance with the other propositions, it is the truth (Soekadijo, 1985:4-5). Vittorio Possenti has proposed his comments on Kant's concept of truth: *"Truth is the agreement of one proposition with the system of the other propositions; that is to say, the agreement or conformity of proposition among themselves rather than with reality"* (Possenti, 2001:10).

Kant's concept of truth, as previously mentioned, also contains a significant limitation. In his view, truth takes on a highly subjective character, since propositions that arise through agreement or correspondence are ultimately formulated from the perspective of the subject—even when they are organized and systematized according to rational and logical principles. As a result, the possibility of objective truth in itself becomes diminished or even eliminated. This modernist understanding of truth, as represented by Kant, has been deconstructed in the post-modern era, where the concept of truth is increasingly shaped by the logic and operations of digital tools. In this context, truth becomes post-truth. The term *post-truth* is a philosophical category that can be examined through the operational logic of digital technologies, which function within digital languages across platforms such as the Internet, Google, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and others.

The production of digital tools is rooted in the philosophical base of mathematical language (Audi, 1996:143-147). The adjective word "digital" derives from the Latin substantive word *"digitus"* which means *"finger"*. Human fingers consist of ten fingers, and it is put in a number, namely 10. These fingers are used to touch the electronic tools in order to produce messages mechanically and automatically. The number 10 which refers to teen fingers is formed from two numbers, that is number *"one"* (1) and number *"zero"* (0), expressing one quality. Number 10 is a binary system that consists of two elements that should prevail and form a pair with the

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[6] *"Also ist das bloss logische Kriterium der Wahrheit, naemlich die Uebereinstimmung einer Erkenntnis mit der allgemeinen und formalen Gesetzen des Verstandes und der Vernunft zwar die conditio sine qua non, mithin die negative Bedingung aller Wahrheit"*, sagte Kant.

mathematical symbols, namely, *"1"* (one) and *"0"* (zero). The way of operating the digital tools adopts this binary system, and on a simple investigation it works clearly by clicking *"on"* (switch on) and *"off"* (switch off). When it is clicked at *"on"*, the next consequence should be followed mechanically and automatically to take a step forward, and it is the same with clicking *"off"*. It means that to present an object, two poles (on and off) have been designed and programmed so, that man moves only between these two poles, between *"on"* and *"off"*, to produce the intended object, but the intended object has been of its own self submissive to the programmed and designed line between *"on"* and *"off"*. The truth is the certainty found between poles *"on"* and *"off"*, that is object that prevails automatically and mechanically in the programmed and designed space. This is called post-truth. Post-truth is then the truth that is identical to the certainty, and the result is that there is no distinction anymore between the certainty and the true reality.

One written fact is taken from the newspaper Surya issued on Saturday, August 21ˢᵗ, 2010. The front page of the newspaper contained the photo of Barack Obama the president of the USA. He was wearing a white head-cloth and a sarong like a Muslim, when he met Ulama Somalia, Sheikh Mahmed Hassan, in Wajir, Kenya 2006 at the time Obama was still a senator. This newspaper gave notice yet that Obama got very often the nickname "Imam Obama". It had been supported by the result of a survey performed by an independent institute, Pew Research, on August the 13ᵗʰ 2010. One in five American citizens responded that Obama was a Muslim (18%) when they were asked about Obama's religion. Despite the majority of the people responding to the survey who admitted that Obama was a Christian (34%), the picture, news in social media, the internet, and surveys-outcome showed the other figure of Obama, namely a genuine Muslim. Such electronic data showed that what man had pictured and uploaded on social media was the presentation of the fact only as a certain and sure object, but the truth of the fact and the presentation of the fact in electronic media could not be distinguished clearly.

The digital tools work out mechanically and automatically, so the intention or the purpose someone would like to express through digital tools is anonymous, hidden, and fixed on the pictural or verbal language. This anonymity of the purpose just makes it difficult to acknowledge the distinction between the true and genuine reality and the subject's intentions being fixed on the pictural and verbal language as the outcoming work of digital tools. Digital language is a form of fixation regulated mechanically and automatically. The propositions expressed in the form of sentences or in the form of pictures have been tuned up and functioned automatically. When the propositions are regulated in a deceptive way or systematized intentionally for the other purpose the subject knows for himself, so the reality the digital language is showing up differs precisely from the true reality. This is the era of post-truth, where the truth expressed in the digital language (virtual truth) and the true-genuine reality lost their distinction.

3.2.2. The Impact of Post-Truth on Indonesian Society Nowadays

Indonesian society that is being hit by the power of working-method digital tools, is not free also from the impact of the ideology of post-truth. The real and genuine truth that is being held fast and grasped firmly by the ideology of post-truth as found in the lives of society, state, and religion, has been reduced to what has been declared and received as the true reality in various social-digital media. But when the news contents about the same theme are in contrast with one another in the social-digital media, the ideology of post-truth just produces inconvenience, suspicion, upset, and doubt among the people in the society to recognize the true reality. Some facts can be mentioned as follows.

Some Indonesian words are similar to the Melayu language. When the Indonesian word "hukum" is typed or ticked and spelled out on the computer, the word *"hukum"* changes precisely into the Melayu word *"hokum"* automatically. It is the same also with the Indonesian word *"sesama"*; it will change automatically into the Melayu word *"sesame"*. The Indonesian word *"hampir"* would become *"hamper"*. The change of the spelling after those words have been ticked in the computer is for sure in accordance with the language designed in the computer. The foreigners who are reading the words like *"sesame, hokum, hamper"* come to the conviction that those words have the true spelling of the Indonesian language. The truth is the same as what has been shown on the computer.

A more complex example of post-truth dynamics in Indonesian society can be seen in the fields of health and religion. In the health sector, a report from Metro TV—later uploaded to YouTube on February 10, 2020, under the title *"Asing Heran Indonesia Bebas Corona"* ("Foreigners Surprised That Indonesia is Free from Corona")—highlighted doubts from foreign observers regarding Indonesia's ability to detect COVID-19 cases. These doubts stemmed from the fact that neighboring ASEAN countries had already reported and managed COVID-19 infections, while Indonesian authorities continued to claim zero infections. Observers found this implausible, especially given the frequent flights between China and Indonesia, including from Wuhan, the epicenter of the outbreak, where many Indonesian students were studying. When the Indonesian government ordered the evacuation of these students from Wuhan, they were quarantined for 14 days on Natuna Island. On February 15, 2020, they were released and returned to their families, each holding a certificate declaring them virus-free. Following this, the Indonesian government officially declared that no Indonesian citizens had been infected at that time. According to information from KOMINFO,[7] there were 34 hoax-related contents circulating about the spread of the coronavirus in Indonesia. This wave of misinformation caused fear and uncertainty among the Indonesian public, leading many to question the actual extent of the virus's spread. The return of students from Wuhan, China, and their subsequent quarantine on Natuna

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[7] KOMINFO is the abbreviation for *Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika Republik Indonesia*, or *the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology of the Republic of Indonesia*, which is responsible for regulating and overseeing information technology, telecommunications, and media policies in Indonesia.

Island triggered protests from local residents who opposed their arrival. These events, along with the widespread circulation of unverified news, demonstrate how the ideology of post-truth—channeled through social media and digital platforms—affected many Indonesians' ability to distinguish between hoaxes and factual reality.

The other fact concerning the field of religion was uploaded on YouTube on December 17th, 2017 under the title *"Kisah Ustadz Bangun Samudra, Mantan Pastor yang pintar menjadi Ustadz"*. It was reported that Ustadz Bangun Samudra showed his identity as a renegade priest who had gone through the catholic formation since kindergarten in catholic school Surabaya up to doctoral graduation earned in Vatikan, Rome. As a renegade priest he, then, embraced Islam and became a famous preacher among the Islam communities. There were a lot of reactions expressed by the netizens to the claim of Ustadz Bangun Samudra. Many people who were not experts dealing with the news reported in social media believed that what Ustadz Bangun Samudra had claimed about himself would have been true. In "suara.com Cek Fakta" issued on Tuesday, February 25th, 2020, under the title "Trending Topik, Warganet Bongkar Kebohongan Spanduk Eks Pastor Jadi Ustadz", Reza Gunada/Rifan Aditya wrote about the lie of Ustadz Bangun Samudra. In the respective digital media, Romo Josef Koko had commented: *"Kenapa umat beragama di sini mudah sekali dibohongi? Contoh jelas: Dia pernah di Seminari Garum-Blitar (SMA) & hanya 1 tahun artinya tidak lulus! Setelah mualaf, tahu-tahu muncul sebagai Ustad & mengaku mantan pastor (Pastor Genius lulusan S3 Vatikan). Anehnya ribuan orang langsung percaya begitu saja"* (tulis@Romo JostKokoh).[8] The ideology of post-truth that mirrors the incapability of post-modern society to distinguish the hoax and the true reality has played a strong role in the area of political SARA-issue exposed by Ustadz Bangun Samudra in order to discredit the Christianity, especially the catholic church. In spite of the lie of Ustadz Bangun Samudra, as expressed by many netizens, many people who did not know about the working method of digital media really believed in what Ustadz Bangun Samudra had said as a truth.

The digital era marks the rise of post-truth in Indonesian state and society. Before the prevalence of computers, the truth of an event was based on direct experience, and a statement about that event was accepted as true if it corresponded with what people had actually witnessed. That was understood as truth. However, with the use of digital tools, data and news stored in computers are now automatically selected and shaped according to the intentions and designs programmed by their creators. For instance, a burglar who successfully steals money from an ATM may exploit artificial intelligence (AI) to disrupt the machine's automated digital systems. Similarly, when a new and unfamiliar email appears in someone's inbox, it may indicate a hacker's ability to implant their agenda through that email into another account. In such cases, the email is

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[8] Romo Josef Koko had commented: *"Why are the religious people here very easily deceived? The clear proof: He was ever in Seminari Garum-Blitar (SMA) & only one year means no passing the examination! After Mualaf he seemed immediate to be Ustad & to acknowledge himself as a renegade priest (genius priest completing S3 Vatikan). It is funny and ridiculous, thousand people believe and feel convinced immediately"*.

shaped by the hacker's interests and ideology. While data across digital platforms such as the internet, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Google, Twitter, and TikTok undeniably exists and is easily accessible, it is increasingly difficult to verify whether the data presented is actually true. The post-truth ideology affecting Indonesian society reflects a growing inability to distinguish between virtual truths constructed through digital data and the genuine truth of lived reality. As such, the process of digitalization in Indonesia often functions as a form of sophisticated engineering that obscures and blurs true reality.

3.3. Christian Mission in Indonesian Context Under the Impact of Post-Modernism and of Post-Truth

The Christian mission is understood as the task of the Christians not only to proclaim the Good News of the gospel for the people, but also to bear witness to faith in Jesus Christ. In the digital era having a strong impact on Indonesian society, the Christian mission is focusing on the effort of answering the question of how to proclaim the good news of the gospel and how to bear witness of faith in Jesus Christ nowadays in the Indonesian context.

The task of the Christians adjusting to the Indonesian context nowadays should be formulated in line with the Christian effort of theologizing and philosophizing the Indonesian context. The article *"Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity: a Report on Knowledge (of God)"* offers a proposal for theologizing the human context in the era of postmodernism (Vanhoozer, 2003:3-23). The era of postmodernism mirrors the position of theology not as a modern science but as a drama "that situates the human within the narrative of God's creative and redemptive activity" (Vanhoozer, 2003:21). The Indonesian state in which the Christians are working and living is a drama of human life absorbed by God's activities that are creative and redemptive. God continues working unceasingly to redeem the sins and to recover the wounds the Indonesian people have committed in performing the life of society and of the state. The theologians have to try to narrate such a drama that is going on on Indonesian soil from two perspectives: on one side from the perspective of God's saving power in Indonesia and on the other side from the perspective of the responses to the Indonesian people react to the saving power of God.

From the perspective of God's saving power in Indonesia, the Christian faith—especially the Catholic faith in Jesus Christ embraced by many Indonesians—plays a significant role. The number of Christians in Indonesia, particularly Catholics, has grown steadily year by year.[9] Although it is difficult to measure God's saving power with precision, the Christian faith in God's grace has been qualitatively experienced by the Indonesian people throughout the nation's history and continues to be lived out today. Signs of this divine presence can be seen in various societal

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[9] The catholic population in Indonesia were 8,6 million people (3,06%) 2023 from the total population of Indonesia 280.73 million. In February 2024, the catholic population increase to 8.596.545 million (3,1%) from the total population of Indonesia 280.7 million. The report is taken from Google.

phenomena. During the Reformasi era, from 1998 to the present, there have been numerous incidents of violence and riots targeting Christians; churches were bombed, and efforts to construct new churches were often obstructed, particularly in areas where Christians are a minority. Despite these challenges, Indonesian Christians have remained steadfast in their faith, and many individuals in Indonesia have even converted to Christianity.

A significant role played by the catholic church, especially by the Bishop's Conference of Indonesia (KWI), was formulated in Nota Pastoral 2004 and 2017. The contents of Nota Pastoral issued by KWI in 2004 and 2017 have been always connected with the social diseases Indonesian people are suffering from. It is called KKN (Korupsi, Kolusi, Nepotisme). The simple meanings of these three terms are as follows. Corruption is understood as the abuse of public money for the profit and interest of the rulers and their cronies; collusion is a profitable relationship among the rulers and their cronies backing up their power to guide the people; nepotism is a system of power to rule the people based on the genealogical descendants and dynasty. These three terms are being exercised in unpleased and wrong ways the formal Indonesian authorities, namely the legislative, the executive, and the judicative power, have performed. It is not a secret anymore, when Indonesian people mock the rulers and their cronies exercising these powers by calling them *"thieves"*: The legislatives become the legisla**thieves**; the executives become execu**thieves**; the judicative power becomes judica**thieves**. Under the light of the Christian faith, these Nota Pastoral were really inspired by God's saving power that had influenced the consciousness of Indonesian people, especially the Indonesian Catholics and their spiritual leaders, to reveal these diseases as the steps to go forward removing the respective diseases slowly.

Christian missions implemented in the midst of the Indonesian context of post-truth and post-modernism should be undertaken with the academic effort of theologizing and philosophizing the Indonesian struggle to solve the main problems the Indonesian state and society are facing. The social diseases as mentioned above (KKN) are still prevailing in the present digital era, and the true reality of the Indonesian state standing on Pancasila and UUD'45 has become vague and remains empty in the practical lives of Indonesian people.

Doing theology in the midst of the Indonesian context during this digital era is valid for the followers of monotheistic religions. The point of view in doing theology is faith and experiences of faith within the spiritual life of own religions that should be formulated by the theologians who are able to narrate the saving power of God speaking for Indonesian people concerning the national problems of ethics in realizing Pancasila ideology and the own spiritual life of religion into praxis. Islamic theology as well as Christian theology should focus on the efforts of taking care of the own faith in God's image found in the spiritual life of the own religion. The fifth principle of Pancasila *"Keadilan Sosial bagi Seluruh Rakyat Indonesia"* (The social justice for all Indonesian people) can be approached and elaborated by the Islamic and Christian theology that is based on the economic principle contained in the fifth principle of Pancasila. The system of the Indonesian economy is rooted in the principle *"kekeluargaan"* (family principle) and is put into practice under

the local wisdom *"gotong-royong"* (solidarity). Therefore, the system of the Indonesian economy is neither capitalistic nor socialistic-communistic. The faith in God reflected and narrated through theology should be directed to understanding and believing in embracing and loving the power of God to all people without exception. The embracing and loving power of God confirms and affirms really the Indonesian state (NKRI) as a home of togetherness in which all Indonesian people under one nation and state (NKRI) live and consider themselves as "brothers and sisters".[10] Corruptions, economic greediness, money politics, and politicization of religion unhealthily are only the signs of scratching and degrading the embracing and loving power of God to all people without exception. The negative impacts of post-modernism and post-truth on Indonesian society in the digital era should be eliminated through theology that should promote the real and genuine truth about the embracing and loving power of God to all people instead of hoaxes.

Doing philosophy is a task of every Indonesian citizen who is able to understand the meaning of doing philosophy with the effort of seeking the wisdom of how to solve the Indonesian national problems mentioned above. The followers of whatever religion can do philosophizing as far as using only rationality to speak about the national problems and their way out to solve them. Doing philosophy belongs to all people who have the capacity to think all kinds of things freely. Doing philosophy in the context of Pancasila state should focus on the problems of practicing the religion instead of thinking about the substance of religion, because the meaning of the word *"Ketuhanan"* (Godliness) formulated in the first principle of Pancasila is very inclusive; all religions and believes are included in the word *"Ketuhanan"*. However, the problem of practicing the religion that should be reflected in the frame of philosophical discourse is the relationship between the religious ethics and politics exercised within the Indonesian state. The empirical facts found in the practical lives of Indonesian people have shown that the politicization of religion has reduced the substantial meaning of religion into an ethical meaning. Religion is identified with ethics. Doing philosophy coping with the problems of practicing religion should lead the enlightenment into the true understanding of substantial position about religion as well as about politics. The substantial position of religion is lying on religious values made alive in the spiritual life of the followers. Religion is a matter of spiritual life, whereas politics is the strategy of how to get the power to attain the common welfare (*Bonum Communae*). Politics is a matter of ethics. Indonesian people should practice the spiritual religion instead of exercising the political religion.

4. Conclusion

The meaning of post-modernism and post-truth has been explored through a separate but interconnected analysis of modernism and post-modernism, followed by an elaboration on the concepts of truth and post-truth. Post-modernism reflects a shift in dominant thinking after the

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[10] NKRI stands for *Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia*, which translates to *The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia*. It refers to the official constitutional form of Indonesia as a sovereign, unified nation-state.

modern era, characterized by an emphasis on unlimited freedom of thought and action, along with the continued deification of rationality. Building on this framework, post-truth is understood as the blurring of boundaries between truth and falsehood, largely driven by the automated and algorithmic functions of digital technologies in the post-modern age. In light of these developments, this article has sought to respond to the question of how to speak about God's redemptive power in such a context. The answer offered here is theological and narrative in nature: God's creative and saving interventions in Indonesia's history are best conveyed through concrete stories and lived experiences, rather than abstract philosophical reasoning. The key insight of this reflection is that there has been no essential change in the paradigm of thought between modern and post-modern eras—only a shift in expression. In the digital age, truth itself becomes post-truth, shaped and filtered through technological systems. Therefore, from a theological standpoint, bearing witness to God's presence in Indonesia today requires telling the story of salvation in ways that engage the complexity of the digital, pluralistic, and often fragmented realities of Indonesian society.

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