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THEOLOGY IN A TIME OF POLYCRISIS: Rethinking Public and Communal Engagement in Indonesia

TEOLOGI DI MASA POLIKRISIS: Menimbang Ulang Keterlibatan Publik dan Komunal di Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the role of theology in public and communal life in the context of the contemporary *polycrisis* confronting Indonesian society—encompassing crises of national identity, ecological sustainability, familial structures, educational integrity, and the disruptive advance of artificial intelligence. The author contends that theology, properly understood, is inherently public, grounded in the relational nature of the triune God and manifest in the ecclesial community's engagement with the world. Through a combined methodological approach that integrates theoretical analysis with auto-ethnographic reflection, the study delineates six distinct

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models of public theology: theology as intrinsically public, theology in public, theology for the public, theology that constitutes a new public, universal theology applied to public issues, and theology contributing to public life. The article engages critically with political, liberationist, and intercultural theological paradigms, as well as with relevant philosophical interlocutors including Kant, Rawls, and Habermas. It argues for a public theology that is both theologically rigorous and contextually responsive, capable of addressing complex societal challenges without capitulating to reductionist or instrumentalist tendencies. The study concludes by underscoring the necessity of terminological precision and methodological clarity in the articulation and application of public theology, particularly within pluralistic and crisis-laden global contexts.

Keywords: Public theology; Polycrisis; Intercultural theology; Contextual theology

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengkaji secara kritis peran teologi dalam kehidupan publik dan komunal dalam konteks *polycrisis* yang dihadapi masyarakat Indonesia dewasa ini—meliputi krisis identitas kebangsaan, keberlanjutan ekologi, struktur keluarga, integritas pendidikan, serta disrupsi yang ditimbulkan oleh kemajuan kecerdasan buatan. Penulis berargumen bahwa teologi, dalam pengertian yang tepat, bersifat publik secara inheren; berakar pada relasionalitas Allah Tritunggal dan diwujudkan dalam keterlibatan komunitas gerejawi dengan dunia. Melalui pendekatan metodologis yang memadukan analisis teoritis dan refleksi auto-etnografis, studi ini mengidentifikasi enam model teologi publik: teologi sebagai entitas publik, teologi dalam ruang publik, teologi untuk publik, teologi yang membentuk publik baru, teologi universal yang diterapkan pada isu publik, dan teologi yang berkontribusi pada kehidupan publik. Artikel ini secara kritis mengeksplorasi paradigma teologi politik, teologi pembebasan, dan teologi interkultural, serta berinteraksi dengan pemikiran filosofis seperti Kant, Rawls, dan Habermas. Studi ini menegaskan pentingnya suatu teologi publik yang teologis secara ketat dan kontekstual secara responsif, yang mampu menjawab tantangan masyarakat secara kompleks tanpa terjebak dalam pendekatan reduksionis atau instrumentalistik. Kesimpulannya, artikel ini menekankan urgensi kejelasan terminologis dan konsistensi metodologis dalam formulasi dan penerapan teologi publik, khususnya di tengah konteks global yang pluralistik dan sarat krisis.

Kata-kata Kunci: Teologi publik; polikrisis; teologi interkultural, teologi kontekstual

INTRODUCTION

Theological Basis

In 2025, *the Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia* (PGI) or the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, commemorates its seventy-fifth anniversary. The chosen theme for this significant milestone, "Kesatuan Tubuh Kristus yang Tangguh dan Relevan" or "The Unity of the Body of Christ that is Resilient and Relevant". This theme reflects not only an aspiration for ecclesial unity, but also a deep concern for the Church's relevance and resilience in the face of profound national and global challenges. At its 2024 General Assembly in Toraja, PGI named these intersecting issues a "polycrisis", a term that captured the convergence of spiritual, social, political, and ecological

turmoil now pressing in on the Church in Indonesia. Among the crises identified were the breakdown of unity (keesaan), threats to national identity (kebangsaan), ecological degradation (ekologi), the unraveling of family life (keluarga), the decline of educational integrity (pendidikan), and the growing ethical challenges posed by artificial intelligence. While each of these crises could be examined in its own right, together they demand a deeper, more foundational response. For Christians, that response begins with theology.

But what kind of theology? And from where do we begin? To answer these questions, we must resist the temptation to turn theology into a tool of ideology. This moment doesn't call for using religious language to score political points or baptize our preferences. Instead, it calls for something much harder and much more honest: listening. Listening, first of all, for the voice of God, not on our terms, but on God's. And second, listening to the lived experiences, wounds, hopes, and struggles of our communities. The practice of theology, especially in public, begins in humility. It begins in the awareness that God speaks into a world not of our own making — and sometimes, through voices we are not accustomed to hearing.

Theologically, this starting point takes us back to the heart of the Christian tradition. The God revealed in Jesus Christ does not stand at a distance from the world's suffering. God draws near. In Jesus, God enters into human alienation, not to dominate it or explain it away, but to bear it and redeem it. That is the mystery at the heart of the Church: we are not a self-generated community. We are a people called into being by the grace of Christ, drawn together through God's solidarity with those who are estranged, even from themselves.

The Church, then, does not exist for its own survival. It exists as a visible, earthly body through which the risen Christ continues to love and reconcile the world. Its mission flows from this calling. If we say that the Church is grounded in grace, then its presence in the public sphere must reflect that grace, in tone, in posture, and in substance. This brings us to the role of public theology.

Public theology is not a unified field. It is, in fact, a term used in multiple ways depending on context, region, and theological orientation. At its broadest, it refers to the Church's effort to reflect theologically on matters of public concern, matters that touch the lives of communities beyond the Church's own internal interests. But this broad definition conceals deep differences. In some settings, public theology simply means theology that is visible, theology that shows up in the public square, in policy debates, in civic discourse. For others, like John de Gruchy[2], public theology carries a critical and liberative edge, a way of bringing theological reflection into conversation with issues of justice, peace, and human dignity. Thinkers like Max Stackhouse have emphasized the need for theological voices in shaping moral vision in a pluralistic society, while others, especially in the Global South, have insisted that theology must be contextually rooted and responsive to local struggles.

In Indonesia, these tensions take on a unique shape. The religious diversity of the nation, combined with the history of interfaith conflict and cooperation, means that public theology cannot rely on cultural hegemony or assumed Christian norms. It must be dialogical, contextual, and aware of its positionality. It must also be historically alert: to the ways churches have both

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2 J. W. de Gruchy, 'From Political to Public Theologies: The Role of Theology in Public Life in South Africa', in W. F. Storrar and A. R. Morton, Public Theology for the 21st. Century: Essays in honour of Duncan B. Forrester. London: T &T Clark, 2004, 45 - 62.

resisted and colluded with state power. In other words, theology in public must be both humble and courageous, prepared to speak, but also prepared to repent.

This paper takes up public theology not as a fixed category, but as a space for theological discernment, shaped by experience, tradition, and the demands of our present moment. The methodology here combines two complementary strands. First, the paper draws on established theological frameworks that have shaped public theology over the past decades. These include the political theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz, the contextual theologies of liberationist thinkers in Latin America and Asia, and the more dialogical approaches seen in theologians like Stackhouse, de Gruchy, and David Tracy. These frameworks help us understand what's at stake when theology moves into public spaces and what it risks when it does not. Second, this reflection is grounded in autoethnographic experience.

Over the past five decades, I have taught in Indonesia, including at Islamic institutions and have participated in interreligious dialogue across Southeast Asia. These experiences have not only shaped my theology; they have tested it. Most notably, my involvement in the reconciliation process in the Moluccas after Christian-Muslim conflict in the early 2000s provided a concrete glimpse of what theology can mean in public: not a set of abstract claims, but a lived commitment to repair and peace. These stories like the mutual gifting of a tifa and a church bell between Muslim and Christian communities, are not just illustrations. They are theology in motion.

By weaving theological reflection with lived narrative, this paper aims to offer a contribution that is both analytical and embodied. Theology, after all, is never just about what we think. It's about how we live, and how we respond to God's call in the thick of real life.

DISCUSSION

Historical Antecedents of Public Theology

The diversity of public theology today reflects its complex and layered history. This is not a discipline that emerged in isolation, but one shaped by prior theological and political discourses. In many ways, it can be seen as a response and at times, a correction to the limitations of earlier forms of Christian engagement with public life. In the early twentieth century, "political theology" often served as a theology of statecraft. It was used to legitimize governance, to bless the bond between altar and throne. But by midcentury, that framework was being fundamentally challenged. In the wake of global conflict and the failures of both church and state, political theology began to take on a more critical edge most notably in the work of Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz.

Moltmann reimagined Christian hope as inherently political not in a partisan sense, but in its insistence that the resurrection of Christ demands realworld transformation. Metz deepened this by emphasizing the Church's obligation to remember suffering not as a sentimental act, but as a theological imperative. His call for a "new political theology" was an effort to reframe theology itself: not as a private discourse of salvation, but as a public witness to reconciliation, justice, and peace.

These ideas influenced more than just academic theology. They reverberated globally, particularly in Latin America, where liberation theologians took up Metz's critique and applied it in concrete struggles against oppression. Drawing from both Scripture and critical theory including

Marx, Gramsci, Ernst Bloch[3], and later Deleuze and Negri these theologians crafted a political theology grounded in the lived realities of the marginalized. Their focus was clear: theology had to stand with the poor, against the machinery of capitalism, neoliberalism, and imperialism.

Other theological voices joined this critical turn. René Girard's work on scapegoating and mimetic desire offered a powerful lens for interpreting violence and sacrifice in society.[4] Meanwhile, a younger generation of liberation theologians expanded the scope to include questions of gender, ecology, and cultural identity. Theologians like Dorothy Sölle, Stanley Hauerwas, and in Indonesia, Julianus Mojau, developed critical prophetic discourses that challenged not only structures of power but also the Church's own complicity in injustice. On another front, Radical Orthodox theologians approached public theology through a different route one that rejected modernity itself. Their project drew heavily on Augustine, the Church Fathers, Catholic integralism, and Christian socialism, alongside Russian thinkers like Bulgakov. John Milbank, Graham Ward, and William Cavanaugh became leading voices in this stream. Their concern was that theology had been reduced to secular categories and that reclaiming theological imagination meant rejecting Enlightenment assumptions altogether. Their version of public theology is less about engaging liberal norms and more about reasserting an alternative — and unapologetically theological vision of public life.

The language of public theology itself, however, first entered English discourse in the American context. Martin Marty coined the term as an effort to interpret public life in light of transcendent meaning, drawing inspiration from Benjamin Franklin's civic vision.[5] Robert Bellah extended the idea to include the civic religion of the American republic a kind of theological grammar embedded in public rituals, language, and institutions.[6] In these early uses, "public theology" didn't necessarily mean Christian theology in public, but rather, the religious foundations implicit in national identity often more deist than explicitly Christian.

Later American theologians influenced by liberal political philosophy took up the term in a different way. Drawing on Immanuel Kant's ethics, John Rawls's theory of justice, John Courtney Murray's Catholic political thought, and Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, they sought to position theology within public discourse as a rational moral voice. Kant's ideal of "publicity", the principle that actions must be justifiable in the light of reason and transparency provided one of the conceptual backbones for this approach. But this American liberal public theology wasn't without flaws. Many of its advocates, particularly those working from within AngloAmerican contexts, operated with an unclear grasp of the roots of these concepts in German legal and political theory. As a result, their understanding of "the public" could become muddled collapsing civil society, the public sphere, and theological engagement into one undifferentiated space. This led, at times, to overly simplistic accounts of the *basileia*, the reign or kingdom of God reframed in vaguely theistic or civic terms.[7]

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3 For the standard study of Bloch, see W. Hudson, The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch. London: Macmillan, 1982.

4 See H.Assman and F. Hinkelammert, Idolatria do Mercado. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1989, and the Korean Bolivian theologian, Jiong Mo Sung, Desire, Market and Religion. London: SCM, 2007.

5 M.E. Marty, The Public Church. New York: Crossroad, 1981, 16. Cf. M.E. Marty, 'Reinhold Niebuhr: Public Theology and the American Experience', in Journal of Religion 54: 4 (1974), 332-359.

6 R. Bellah, 'Civil Religion in America', in Daedalus 96 (1967), 1 - 21.

7 On contemporary New Testament studies in this area, see L. W. Hurtado, God in New Testament Theology. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010.

Still, this new form of public theology had its strengths. It was more attuned than the political theology of Metz and Moltmann to the need to engage the Enlightenment seriously. It recognized the practical realities of democracy, public institutions, and pluralism. Influenced by the historically grounded sociology of the Scottish Enlightenment and the pragmatic sensibilities of the Reformed tradition, it called theology to "go public" in ways that were communicative and socially constructive. Terms like "public square," "public life," and "civil society" became touchstones for this model even if they weren't always carefully distinguished.

Max Stackhouse's work exemplifies this stream. He explicitly distinguished political theology from public theology by emphasizing their different postures toward the state.[8] Where political theology challenged systems of power, public theology (in his terms) sought to inform the moral convictions that undergird civil society. Stackhouse argued that theology could address the prepolitical commitments that shape a people's life together not just laws or policies, but the cultural foundations of meaning itself. In doing so, he echoed older American notions of public religion, even as he tried to recast them for modern democratic contexts.

Yet as the world shifts, new forms of public theology continue to emerge. Will Storrar, for example, has argued that public theology must now think globally.[9] In his view, it should not only engage issues in local or national arenas, but participate in shaping a global public sphere one in which discourse, advocacy, and solidarity can cross borders. For Storrar, theology must learn to speak in global languages, contributing to the reconstruction of public life in light of shared human crises.

But if public theology is to flourish in this broader context, it needs some internal coherence. Without clear principles or frameworks, public theology risks becoming a loose collection of political opinions with a theological gloss. To avoid this, it must become more reflective not only about the issues it addresses, but about the form of theology it deploys and the assumptions it carries into public debate. This brings us to one final and increasingly vital insight: theology is never done in a vacuum. It is always intercultural. Since the first articulations of *theologiae in loco* in the 1950s, a growing body of literature has emphasized that all theology is contextual, and that any claim to universality must pass through the realities of particular cultures, histories, and languages. Indigenous Asian theology has a long and often overlooked legacy. Samuel Moffett outlined its early history[10], and later scholars like Gillman and Klimkeit built on that foundation.[11] The central insight here is that the Gospel is not bound to any one culture. The authentic gospel or the *Christ-Event-for-us*[12] is not a fixed doctrinal package, but a living event one that must be heard, received, and embodied anew in every context.

The Church, therefore, is always wrestling between accepting Christ in the culture where it finds itself and discerning what in that culture must be challenged. It is both *indigenous* and *reformata sed semper reformanda* always being reformed. Paul's use of the term *hē akoē* (the hearing) captures this beautifully: faith is not mechanical reception but active listening a dynamic response

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8 M. Stackhouse, 'Civil Religion, Political Theology and Public Theology: What's the Difference?' in Political Theology 5: 3 (2004), 275-293, reprinted in L. Hansen, ed., Christian in Public: Aims, Methodologies and Issues in Public Theology (Beyers Naudé Centre Series on Public Theology). Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2007, 79 - 95.

9 W. F. Storrar, 'The Naming of Parts: Doing Public Theology in a Global Era', in *International Journal of Public Theology* 5: 1 (2011), 23 - 43.

10 S. H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, Vol 1. San Francisco: Harper, 1992.

11 I. Gillman and H. J. Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia before 1500*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002.

12 I use the term "gospel" here in a sense not simply dependent on the Bultmannian use of the term.

to grace within culture.[13] Since Ernst Käsemann's work on theological diversity in the New Testament, this insight has deepened. The Church is not monolithic.[14] It is ecumenical interconfessional, intercultural, and intergenerational.[15] For theology to be faithful, it must reflect this. It must resist the temptation to treat contextual theologies as appendices as if they are optional footnotes to the "real" theology of dogmatics or systematics. Instead, they belong at the center. As in the early Church, the theological task today must be plural, local, embodied and yet profoundly connected to the universal story of Christ.

Forms of Communal and Public Theology

Against the backdrop of these historical antecedents and developments and with full awareness of theology's intercultural context worldwide the author now seeks to clarify several distinct ways in which public theology has been pursued within the relatively narrow discursive field curreinntly claiming the title. Each of these approaches represents a critical idealisation intended to sharpen how public theologians describe and situate their work. In practice, actual public theologies align only partially with these conceptual forms, and some are more visible in contemporary discourse than others. The aim here is not to caricature or de-legitimise existing approaches, but to articulate a set of overlapping forms. Individual theologians often draw on multiple forms or shift between them in different contexts, as illustrated earlier in the auto-ethnographic example. While these forms lack fully defined theoretical foundations and seldom clarify precisely what is meant by 'theology' or 'public', they nevertheless offer valuable insights and contribute to the emergence of a nuanced, flexible matrix for public theology.

First: Public theology as theology as such

In this first form, public theology is simply theology itself. All theology is inherently 'public': the Latin term 'privatio' implies a lack or defect (cf. English 'privation'), suggesting that religion and public life are fundamentally interwoven (as noted by Walter Brueggemann). Public theology, in this view, is not an addendum to 'theology proper' it is theology. This understanding is sometimes seen in Karl Barth's insistence on public witness to Christ, and in the public scope of Jürgen Moltmann's writings.[16] Theology in this mode aspires to address 'the public' as a whole, or even 'humanity' broadly conceived. However, it is crucial to distinguish between theology defined by its audience (the public) and theology defined by its issues (public concerns).[17] In some cases, addressing 'humanity as a whole' proves utopian and lacks a determinate object. Additionally, this form can unconsciously employ Kantian universalism, promoting culturally specific values in the

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13 See, for example, Romans 10:16-17; Galatians 3:2.

14 See E. Käsemann, "Begrundet det neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche?", in *Evangelische Theologie*, München, Vol. XI, 1951/52, 13–21 (subsequently published in E. Käsemann,*Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, Erster Band, 2nd Edition. Göttingen: Vandenhoech und Ruprecht, 1960); E. Käsemann, "Zum Thema der Nichtobjektivierbarkeit", in *Evangelische Theologie*, München, Vol. XII, 1952/53, 455–366. (subsequently published in E. Käsemann, 1960)

15 See, especially, R. H. S. Boyd, *India and the Latin Captivity of the Church: The Cultural Context of the Gospel* (Monograph Supplement to the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, No. 3). London: Cambridge University Press, 1974; J. M. Kitagawa, *The Christian Tradition beyond the European Captivity*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992. See, too, J. Haire, *The Character and Theological Struggle of the Church in Halmahera, Indonesia, 1941 – 1979* (*Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums*, Band 26). Frankfurt am Main und Bern: Lang, 1981.

16 J. Moltmann, tr. M. Kohl, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999, 1.

17 For a sustained argument for theology of public life as opposed to public theology, see C. A. Mathewes, *Theology of Public Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

language of universality. David Tracy's notion of 'three publics' church, academy, and society is increasingly inadequate in a complex, pluralist global order.[18]

Second: Public theology as theology in public

This second form understands public theology as theology in public or in the public realm. It marks a shift away from privatised religion and clericalised Christianity toward active engagement with public affairs. It is heavily indebted to John Rawls' argument that in pluralist societies, consensus on the good life is impossible, requiring religious citizens to speak using 'public reasons'.[19] David Tracy's 'common secular faith' reflects similar assumptions.[20] This model generally accepts the American liberal premise that rational discourse in the public square should be stripped of religious particularity. However, this blurs the distinction between 'rationality' and 'reason-giving' and undervalues theological resources like symbol, liturgy, and mysticism.[21] While it assumes idealised democratic frameworks, it often fails to engage metaphysical issues or the natural sciences, defaulting instead to Anglo-American political philosophy and watered-down readings of Jürgen Habermas.[22]

Third: Public theology as theology for the public

This model views theology as being done for the public, outside the institutional church. John de Gruchy and others have proposed this as an alternative to privatised Christianity.[23] It opens theology to new audiences and interdisciplinary dialogue but may lack the capacity to fully integrate or critique these other fields. Public theology of this kind is motivated by concern for relevance and social utility but may fall into utilitarian logic or soft postmodernism without rational grounding. It often assumes compatibility with social science methods, or aims to work with secular institutions to achieve 'common goals'. Public theology of this type may even be a mutation

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18 See D. Tracy, 'Defending the Public Character of Theology', in *Christian Century* (1981), 350 - 356.

19 Rawls' position shifted substantially over time to allow more religious presence in the public square and to count various significations as reasons, but the underlying account of the problem remained. For critical reflections, see Kang Phee Seng, 'Religöser Diskurs auf dem öffentlichen Forum', in *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 49 (2007), 499 – 513; 'Keeping Religion out of the Public Square: Reflections on Public Reason and Public Religion', in *Religious Values and the Public Square*: *Public Religion, An East-West Dialogue*, edited by Kang Phee Seng, Yeung See Yin and Liang Yuanyuan. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2008, 158 – 179; and 'Religious Dialogue, Pertinacity and Mutual Respect in the Public Arena: Christian Perspectives', in *Confucian-Christian Dialogue in China: Where are the Problems?*, edited by Xie Wenyu and Lo Ping-cheung. Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2010, 385 - 401 (latter two in Chinese).

20 See D. Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Liberalism*. London: SCM Press, 1981.

21 See L. Hansen, 'A "Private Side" to Public Theology? Mysticism Revisited', in L. Hansen, ed., *Christian in Public: Aims, Methodologies and Issues in Public Theology* (Beyers Naudé Centre Series on Public Theology). Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2007, 97 - 125.

22 See D. S. Browning and F. Fiorenza, *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology*. New York: Crossroads, 1992. Habermas, however, has modified his own earlier views, partly in response to his theological critics, to allow for the role of religious symbols and language which cannot yet be translated into discursive rational form. See J. Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008.

23 John de Gruchy follows the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in exploring the possibility of a non-religious theology which deals with the whole of life, and not only the personal issues of private individuals. See J. de Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, and *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Witness to Jesus Christ*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988.

of Reinhold Niebuhr's correlational theology without its anthropological depths.[24] At worst, this model risks reducing theology to a kind of civic virtue signaling or uncritical social value assertion.

Fourth: Public theology as theology to constitute a new public

This form of public theology is rooted not in modern liberalism but in Scripture and theological tradition. It critiques secularism, liberalism, and Enlightenment rationalism, refusing to translate theology into these frames. Instead, it draws from specific confessional identities Lutheran, Reformed, Catholic, Anglo-Catholic, Orthodox and may even defend hierarchy and heteronomy. Public theology of this kind is often deeply Trinitarian and places Chalcedonian and Nicene formulations over Enlightenment constructs. However, it tends to be Eurocentric and pre-modern in epistemology, and lacks adequate contextual engagement, particularly outside of Europe. It also lacks the tools to engage technical social, economic, or political problems.

Fifth: Public theology as universal theology

Here, public theology is universal theology applied to public matters. Paul Tillich and Robert Neville exemplify this model through inquiries into ultimacy.[25] Andrew Shanks argues that theology must attend not only to Scripture and tradition, but to God's presence throughout all of history and in the living public.[26] This model emphasises spiritual depth but struggles to offer concrete responses to technical policy or structural injustice. Still, it has inspired constructive approaches to ecological and gender concerns.

Sixth: Public theology as theology contributing to public life

This final form sees theology contributing to public life by addressing practical societal issues. It sometimes takes an instrumentalist view, serving the goals of the state a tradition historically visible in the Erastian church-state model. This is the model of theology used to justify apartheid, condemned in the Belhar Confession.[27] It assumes Christian tradition contains public meanings translatable to plural audiences, including non-Christians and secular people. But the assumption that churches can fulfil social roles consistently is questionable. History including the Church of England's support for imperialism, German Lutheranism in WWI, and Catholic collaboration with fascism undermines this claim.

CONCLUSION

This article has set out to explore what form of theology is necessary in a context marked by converging crises: social, ecological, cultural, and technological. Drawing from the specific Indonesian ecclesial context and the PGI's 75th anniversary theme "The Unity of the Body of Christ that is Resilient and Relevant" we began with a pressing theological question: What kind of theology can speak meaningfully and faithfully into the reality of a polycrisis? In responding to this

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24 Reinhold Niebuhr is widely described as a public theologian for his explorations of the presence of evil in human social existence, although it is not clear that his anthropological correlational theology was public, even though it addressed public matters. Niebuhr placed an Augustinian emphasis on the human tendency to corrupt the good and relentlessly attacked utopian and idealistic approaches to political and international affairs. See R. W. Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

25 See R. Neville, *On the Scope and Truth of Theology Theology as Symbolic Engagement*. New York: T &T Clark, 2006.

26 See A. Shanks, *God and Modernity A New and Better Way to do Theology*. London: Routledge, 1999, 10.

27 See P. Naude, *Neither Calendar Nor Clock: Perspectives on the Belhar Confession*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

question, we have considered the role and current expressions of public theology, a field increasingly recognised but not yet fully consolidated as a formal academic discipline.

One of the central conclusions of this study is that public theology cannot be approached as a monolithic field. Rather, it is best understood as a constellation of overlapping discourses, methodologies, and normative commitments. As demonstrated through the typological analysis of various forms of public theology, the field comprises multiple trajectories, ranging from theology as such, theology in public, theology for the public, theology to constitute a new public, theology as universal theology, and theology contributing to public life. Each form presents distinct epistemological assumptions, rhetorical strategies, and theological orientations, which in turn shape the kinds of publics addressed and the modes of engagement employed.

This pluralism is not simply a matter of scholarly variation; it reflects deep theological commitments and contextual differences that shape how theologians understand the church's relationship to the world. The diversity of forms points to both the vitality and the ambiguity of public theology as an emerging field. On the one hand, this flexibility allows theologians to respond contextually, drawing from different traditions and intellectual frameworks. On the other hand, the absence of shared theoretical foundations and agreed-upon definitions of terms such as "public" and "theology" raises questions about coherence, disciplinary identity, and academic legitimacy.

Given this complexity, one of the most important requirements for doing public theology responsibly is clarity—both conceptual and methodological. Specifically, scholars must be transparent about which form of public theology they are adopting, and equally self-reflective about the theological assumptions underpinning their own evaluative frameworks. This "double hermeneutic" involves recognising not only the theological model being examined but also the normative lens through which such analysis is conducted. Without this awareness, critiques of public theology risk becoming either anachronistic or internally inconsistent. Theological analysis, particularly within public discourse, is never neutral. It is always shaped by underlying commitments, doctrinal traditions, and ethical priorities. Naming these elements explicitly is a matter of both academic integrity and theological responsibility.

The Indonesian context discussed in the introduction provides a compelling case for the necessity of such methodological and theological clarity. The crises facing the Church fragmentation, nationalism, ecological collapse, educational breakdown, and the ethical dilemmas of technological advancement cannot be addressed adequately by theology that is reactive, ideological, or narrowly doctrinaire. They demand a theology that is both rooted in the deep wells of Christian tradition and responsive to the particularities of the present moment. Public theology, as we have argued, offers a framework for such engagement but only if its forms and methods are carefully articulated and critically examined.

This need for clarity does not mean that public theology must aim at uniformity or disciplinary closure. On the contrary, one of the field's great strengths is its capacity to foster dialogue across disciplines, confessions, and cultural contexts. However, dialogue without clarity devolves into confusion. Thus, public theologians must learn to navigate the tension between contextual responsiveness and methodological rigour. They must be multilingual in the theological sense able to speak credibly to the academy, the church, and the broader public, while maintaining coherence and integrity within each domain.

Furthermore, the Church's vocation, as articulated in the introduction, is not self-preservation but participation in the reconciling mission of Christ. Theological engagement in

public life must be consistent with this vocation. It must reflect not only intellectual seriousness but also spiritual humility, ethical responsibility, and ecclesial faithfulness. Public theology, when rightly practised, becomes a form of witness: it testifies to a God who draws near in crisis, who speaks through unexpected voices, and who calls the Church to embody grace in a fragmented world.

In this sense, public theology is not a separate domain of theological inquiry but a posture that informs all theological reflection. It begins not with strategies or solutions but with listening with attentiveness to both divine and human voices. This posture is essential for a theology that seeks to be resilient and relevant, as the PGI's anniversary theme demands. Resilience in this case is not about institutional strength or cultural dominance; it is about fidelity to the gospel in the midst of vulnerability. Relevance is not measured by popularity or media presence, but by the capacity of theology to speak meaningfully into the lives and struggles of real communities.

In conclusion, this article argues that any attempt to practise or evaluate public theology must begin with a clear articulation of how public theology itself is being understood. The diversity of its forms must not be ignored, nor should the complexity of its engagements be reduced to simplistic models. The field demands a rigorous and reflective approach one that honours both the theological depth and the contextual demands of the task. If public theology is to serve the Church and the world in a time of crisis, it must be marked by clarity, humility, and courage. Only then can it fulfill its promise as a theological mode that speaks not only about the public but to and with it rooted in grace, aimed at reconciliation, and driven by hope.

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