



## **RELIGION IN SOCIAL LIFE AND SOCIAL CHANGE: FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL GLUE, SOURCES OF VALUES, AND MORAL MOVEMENTS**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the role of religion in social life and social change through a qualitative literature review approach. The analysis focuses on two main questions: how religious institutions function as social glue and sources of values in modern society, and how they act as agents of social change and moral movements. The findings reveal that religious institutions serve as social glue by creating a sense of togetherness through collective rituals and building cross-class solidarity through internal redistribution mechanisms. As sources of values, they provide ethical frameworks for navigating moral choices amid pluralism and transmit values across generations through active negotiation between tradition and change. In their role as agents of social change, religious institutions possess exceptional mobilizational capacity and moral resources, demonstrated in transformative movements such as civil rights and anti-apartheid struggles. However, the direction of religious engagement is shaped by theological interpretations, internal authority structures, relationships with political power, and socio-political contexts. The effectiveness of religious institutions in fulfilling their functions depends on their ability to manage tensions between universality and particularity, commitment to truth and openness to dialogue, and political engagement and moral authority preservation. Theoretical contributions shift the focus from secularization narratives toward understanding religion as a dynamic force that adapts to and shapes modernity. Practical implications point to the need for policy frameworks that recognize the unique capacities of religious institutions while maintaining state neutrality in religious affairs.

**Keywords:** religion, social glue, sources of values, social change, moral movements, modern society, religious institutions.

## Introduction

Religion has been an inseparable part of human social life throughout the history of civilization. In its various forms and manifestations, religion provides a framework of meaning that helps individuals and communities understand their position in the universe, answering existential questions about origins, the purpose of life, and what happens after death. More than just a system of personal belief, religion functions as a social institution that regulates interpersonal relationships, establishes norms of behavior deemed right or wrong, and provides mechanisms of cohesion that unite society. Through collective rituals, religious ceremonies, and shared practices of worship, individuals experience a sense of connection with something that transcends themselves while simultaneously connecting with others who share the same convictions. In daily life, religion is present not only in places of worship but also permeates the way people work, educate children, build families, and interact with neighbors. The all-encompassing presence of religion makes it one of the most significant forces shaping social order, both in relatively homogeneous traditional societies and in modern societies characterized by increasing diversity and complexity (Spektrov, 2022).

As modern society evolves marked by rationalization, secularization, and individualization various predictions have emerged suggesting that religion would increasingly lose its relevance in social life (Cizreli & Özyurt, 2022). Early modern thinkers forecasted that as science and technology advanced, humans would increasingly abandon religious explanations and turn to scientific rationality to understand the world. Religious institutions were predicted to lose their authority, to be replaced by the state, the market, and other secular institutions. However, the trajectory of modernity shows that these predictions have not fully materialized. Religion has not disappeared; rather, a transformation has occurred in how religion exists and functions within society. In various parts of the world, the resurgence of religion in its many forms became a defining characteristic from the late twentieth to the early twenty-first century. Religion is no longer confined to the private sphere but has returned to the public space in various expressions, ranging from moral movements championing specific values to political mobilization based on religious identity. This transformation demonstrates that religion possesses an extraordinary capacity for

adaptation, capable of responding to the changing times by finding new forms relevant to the needs of contemporary society.

The function of religion as social glue has become even more significant in societies experiencing fragmentation and dislocation due to rapid social change (Kucukcan, 2010). As traditional bonds like kinship and local community weaken, religion often remains one of the few institutions capable of providing a sense of belonging and collective solidarity. Religious communities offer spaces for individuals to feel connected with others sharing the same values and commitments, amidst an urban life that is often anonymous and impersonal. Through social networks built by religious institutions whether in formal organizations like churches, mosques, or temples, or in smaller groups like study circles or prayer fellowships individuals obtain the social support urgently needed to face life's uncertainties. Furthermore, religion provides a shared moral language that allows members of society to communicate about what is good and bad, just and unjust, amidst the plurality of values that increasingly characterizes modern society. Without a shared moral framework, social cohesion becomes difficult to maintain because there is no common foundation to serve as a reference for resolving conflicts and competing interests. These dynamics are increasingly critical in urban peripheries, where informal economies and complex social networks dictate survival (Sulistyo, 2024), and where the characteristics of urban living directly influence the social determinants of population health (Warin, 2022).

As a source of values, religion possesses a unique capacity to shape the moral orientation of individuals and society. Religious values function not only as personal behavioral guidelines but also as the foundation for the formation of social institutions, legal systems, and public policy. Teachings on justice, compassion, equality, and responsibility toward others often inspire social movements fighting for a more just society. In many contexts, religious values provide strong motivation for individuals to engage in philanthropy, social service, and advocacy for marginalized groups. This moral resource is vital when society faces new ethical challenges that secular frameworks alone cannot adequately address. Issues such as economic disparity, environmental degradation, and technological advancements that redefine the boundaries of humanity require deep ethical consideration, and in many cases, religious traditions provide the

intellectual and spiritual resources relevant to responding to these challenges. This approach resonates with the broader need to realize sustainability in public policy by building a balance between economic, social, and environmental interests (Mardikaningsih & Hariani, 2021). Thus, religion functions not only as a guardian of traditional morality but also as a source of ethical innovation capable of responding to new problems arising with changing times.

The position of religion as an actor in social change and moral movements shows that religious institutions do not merely react to surrounding changes but actively help shape the direction of those changes. Throughout history, religious movements have been the driving force behind fundamental social transformations, from abolitionist movements against slavery to civil rights movements and anti-apartheid struggles. In a more contemporary context, religion is present in various moral movements championing issues such as economic justice, environmental preservation, peace, and minority rights. The success of these movements often rests on religion's capacity to mobilize vast moral and material resources, build solidarity networks across geographic and cultural boundaries, and provide moral legitimacy for the causes they champion. However, religion's involvement in social change also has a more complex side. In some cases, religion acts as a source of resistance against changes deemed to threaten traditional values or serves as a basis for mobilizing violence and horizontal conflict. Managing these conflicts requires strategic work on harmony within work teams, where causal factors and management strategies directly impact organizational effectiveness (Al-Hakim & Irfan, 2024). This dual role of religion shows that its influence on social change is determined by how teachings and traditions are interpreted and actualized in specific socio-political contexts, making the study of religion and social change a field rich in complexity and nuance.

In modern society characterized by rationalization, secularization, and value pluralization, a fundamental problem arises regarding how religious institutions can maintain their function as social glue and a source of values when their traditional authority is increasingly eroded. On one hand, religion is still needed to provide a shared moral framework as a basis for social cohesion amid value fragmentation. On the other hand, the claims of universality often attached to religious teachings clash with the reality of

pluralism, which demands recognition of differences and individual freedom to make moral choices. This tension creates a dilemma for religious institutions: if they rigidly maintain claims of absolute truth, they risk losing relevance to younger generations who value freedom of choice; yet if they are too flexible in interpreting teachings, they risk losing the identity and coherence that form their strength. This issue is exacerbated by the tendency of identity politics to strengthen globally, where religion is often mobilized to differentiate between "us" and "them," which weakens religion's function as a social glue across differences. In such a situation, religious institutions face the challenge of finding a balance between maintaining commitment to their beliefs and developing an inclusive attitude that allows for dialogue and cooperation with others of different faiths. Addressing these complexities requires effective, service-oriented governance that can lead diverse communities toward shared goals (Rojak, 2021).

Another equally complex problem relates to the position of religion as an actor in social change when society faces various crises requiring collective responses. Religion has enormous potential to be a moral force for positive change, as evidenced by various social movements rooted in religious values. However, this potential is not always realized in practice. In many cases, religious institutions become part of the problem, either by legitimizing unjust status quos or by becoming sources of conflict and violence in the name of faith. Questions arise regarding the factors that determine whether religion will become a transformative force driving change toward justice and peace, or conversely, a force that maintains injustice and divides society. These answers are not simple because they involve complex interactions between diversely interpreted sacred texts, varying structures of religious authority, and the socio-political contexts in which religious communities reside. When modern society faces major challenges such as climate change, widening economic gaps, and technological disruptions the role of religion as an actor for social change becomes increasingly important, yet equally problematic due to internal fragmentation within religious communities regarding the direction of change to be pursued. Addressing such crises requires an adaptive approach, particularly in managing the economic uncertainty prevalent within organizations (Arifin & Darmawan, 2022).

The study of religion's role in social life and social change is highly relevant amidst the resurgence of religion in public spaces worldwide. After decades of secularization narratives dominating thoughts on modernity, we are witnessing the return of religion as a significant force in shaping the political, economic, and cultural life of society. This phenomenon is not limited to one religious tradition but occurs in various forms globally from the rise of Islamist movements in the Middle East and Southeast Asia to the growth of evangelicalism in Latin America and Africa, and the strengthening of Hindu nationalism in South Asia. The return of religion to the public sphere challenges basic assumptions about the relationship between modernity and secularism, forcing us to rethink the role of religious institutions in contemporary society. Without an adequate understanding of these dynamics, it will be difficult to explain the social-political developments occurring around us or to design appropriate responses to the challenges arising from this religious resurgence. Therefore, a systematic study of the function of religion in modern society is not merely an academic interest but has broad practical implications for efforts to build social cohesion and manage diversity. This includes understanding the dynamics of urbanization, the patterns of poverty, and the implications for urban prevention strategies (Rojak et al., 2012), as well as tackling spatial patterns of poverty and social segregation in metropolitan areas (Fauzi, 2021) and the marginalization of low-income communities through urban renewal (Fauzi, 2022).

The importance of this study is also driven by the need to understand how religious institutions can contribute to overcoming various crises facing humanity today. Climate change, extreme economic disparity, protracted conflicts, and social disintegration are problems that cannot be solved solely through technical approaches or policies. These issues have deep moral dimensions, requiring the mobilization of immense moral resources to change collective behavior and the social structures causing these crises. Religion, with its capacity to shape moral motivation, build cross-border solidarity, and provide meaning to sacrifices made for the common good, has enormous potential to be part of the solution. However, this potential will not materialize automatically; a better understanding of the mechanisms enabling religion to function constructively in responding to crises is needed, as is

an understanding of the factors that inhibit or even reverse this potential into a destructive force. This is underscored by the importance of citizen engagement in ecological issue management through participatory practices and community-based social supports (Zulkarnain et al., 2021), as well as the role of internal locus of control and environmental awareness in fostering pro-environmental behavior (Nuraini et al., 2022). Furthermore, these efforts must be grounded in a juridical foundation for sustainable public policy, as reflected in social welfare theory (Rizky & Udjari, 2021). By conducting a systematic review of existing literature, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding of how religion can be directed to become a positive force in overcoming the major challenges facing contemporary society.

the function of religious institutions in modern social life, focusing on two main dimensions: the role of religion as a social glue and source of values amidst plurality, and the position of religion as an actor in social change and moral movements. The theoretical contribution of this research is to formulate a conceptual framework that maps how religious institutions navigate the tension between claims of universality and the demands of pluralism in carrying out their functions, as well as to identify the factors that determine whether religious involvement in social change is transformative or conservative. Practically, the results of this research are expected to provide a better understanding for stakeholders, including religious leaders, policymakers, and development practitioners, regarding how the positive potential of religion can be maximized and its negative risks minimized in efforts to build a cohesive and just society amidst the challenges of modernity.

## Method

This research employs a library research design with a qualitative approach aimed at exploring and synthesizing various theoretical perspectives and empirical findings regarding the role of religion in social life and societal change. The choice of this method is based on the characteristics of the topic, which requires an in-depth exploration of concepts that have evolved within the sociology of religion, anthropology, and social change studies. As explained by Hart (2005), library research in the social sciences functions to map the development of thought in a particular field, identify ongoing

debates, and find gaps that require further study. In this research, the primary data sources are academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and dissertations discussing religious institutions, social cohesion, social change, and moral movements. The data collection process was conducted through systematic searches of academic databases using combinations of relevant keywords. Each identified source was then evaluated for credibility through an assessment of the publisher's reputation, the methodology used, and the consistency of the argumentation with findings from other reputable sources. Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2008) emphasize that good library research requires the ability to read critically and place each source within a broader map of debate.

Data analysis in this research uses the thematic analysis approach outlined by Boyatzis (1998), which allows the researcher to identify recurring patterns in the literature and organize them into meaningful themes. The analysis process begins with open coding of all collected library materials, followed by grouping codes with similar meanings into more abstract categories, and concludes with the formulation of main themes that answer the research questions. This approach enables the researcher to do more than just summarize what other authors have written, but also to perform a critical synthesis that generates new understanding regarding the dynamics of religion's role in modern society. To maintain the validity of the findings, this research applies a source triangulation strategy by comparing findings from literature with diverse disciplinary backgrounds, theoretical traditions, and geographical contexts, thereby obtaining a more complete and unbiased understanding. Furthermore, the researcher conducts searches for literature with different or conflicting perspectives to ensure that the resulting conclusions are not biased due to an overly narrow selection of sources. Fink (2010) emphasizes that credible library research must be able to demonstrate that the researcher has considered various existing perspectives, rather than only selecting sources that support the researcher's views. The entire analysis process is systematically documented so that every step can be traced back by other researchers wishing to conduct verification or replication.

## Result and Discussion

### The Function of Religious Institutions as Social Bond and Source of Values in Modern Society

The function of religious institutions as social bonds rests on their ability to create a sense of community that transcends primordial bonds such as family, ethnicity, or social class. In modern society characterized by high mobility and structural fragmentation, individuals often lose their grasp on their place within the broader social order. Religion appears providing a framework of meaning that enables someone to understand themselves as part of a community transcending local and temporal boundaries. Through collective rituals performed routinely, individuals experience shared experiences that strengthen the sense of connection with fellow community members. This experience is not purely intellectual, but involves all dimensions of humanity: emotions, aesthetics, and spirituality. When thousands gather in communal worship, or when families and neighbors celebrate holy days with traditions inherited across generations, social bond strengthening occurs that is not easily replaced by secular association forms. This bonding power becomes increasingly significant amidst urban life tending toward anonymity, where religion often becomes the only institution capable of providing space for individuals to feel community warmth and acknowledgment of their existence. This becomes highly relevant in reviewing dynamics of urban fringe areas, where urban expansion (urban sprawl) and daily mobility demand strong community cohesion (Wisnujati & Mardikaningsih, 2021).

In executing their function as social bonds, religious institutions also play roles in building solidarity across groups differing socioeconomically (Sarhini et al., 2018). Religious networks often connect individuals from various class, profession, and education backgrounds within one relatively equal container. A wealthy businessman can sit beside a factory worker in the same place of worship, feeling that before God they hold equal positions. This symbolic equality experience, although not erasing structural inequalities in daily life, provides foundation for building solidarity transcending class partitions. In many communities, religious institutions also develop internal redistribution mechanisms in the form of zakat, infak, tithing, or other philanthropic forms that regularly channel resources from those with excess to those lacking (Imami & Fadila, 2024). These practices

are not merely charitable, but also build collective awareness that community members' welfare is shared responsibility. Religion's social bonding function is not only symbolic, but also realized in material practices directly affecting community members' lives. The existence of such solidarity mechanisms becomes very important in modern society where state social safety nets are often inadequate or do not reach all needing groups. The need for these mechanisms becomes increasingly urgent given food vulnerability in poor households and informal worker employment uncertainty in city governance (Mahmudah, 2021; Mahmudah, 2022).

As a source of values, religious institutions provide ethical frameworks helping individuals and society navigate complexity of moral choices in modern life (Afrilsah & Afrilsah, 2024). Amid growing value plurality coloring contemporary society, individuals face various offers about what is good, what is right, and what should be fought for. Without clear reference frameworks, such broad choice freedom can become crippling burden. Religion offers structured value systems with clear priority hierarchies, and provides legitimacy transcending mere personal preferences or temporary social agreements. As explained by Durkheim, religion does not merely provide a set of beliefs, but also functions as collective solidarity source binding society members through sacred values transcending individual interests, thus providing strong moral legitimacy for social action (Spektrov, 2022). Teachings about honesty, justice, compassion, and responsibility are not presented as opinions that can be accepted or rejected at whim, but as truths originating from transcendental authority. Such authority provides solid foundation for individuals to maintain moral commitments amidst social pressure possibly directing them toward contradictory choices. In this context, religion functions as resistance source against moral relativism that can erode ethical foundations of shared life. However, values provided by religion must also be able to dialogue with modern thought developments bringing new awareness about human rights, gender equality, and individual freedom, so not falling into positions anti to progress. As proposed by Berger (1990), religion faces distinctive challenges in the modern era because secularization processes have transformed religion from undeniable reality into one choice among various other meaning possibilities, so religion's ability to maintain moral authority heavily depends on its capacity to critically dialogue with modernity without losing integrity of transcendental

values becoming its hallmark. In this connection, efforts accommodating social change in sustainability policies become important solutions for realizing just and relevant societies (Halizah & Mardikaningsih, 2022).

Religion's capacity as a source of values is also visible in its ability to transmit values across generations (Allana et al., 2017). In rapidly changing society, value gaps between older and younger generations often become significant conflict sources. Religious institutions, through formal and informal education, serve as bridges enabling fundamental values to be inherited to succeeding generations without losing relevance with new era challenges. Religious schools, youth groups, and youth development programs become means where traditional values are reinterpreted in languages understandable by generations growing in very different environments. This transmission process is not passive indoctrination, but involves active negotiation between older generations trying to maintain teaching essences and younger generations demanding relevance with realities they face. This dynamics results in gradual evolution of religious values, allowing traditions to remain alive without becoming burdens hindering adaptation to change. Thus, religion's function as a source of values does not mean rigidly maintaining status quo, but rather providing foundations enabling change to occur within meaningful continuity frameworks. This shift aligns with family institution changes in contemporary societies regarding norms, authority, and obligations (Rejeki, 2024).

In plural society, religious institutions' function as value sources face challenges finding common points with values originating from other religious traditions or secular sources (Ives & Kidwell, 2019). It cannot be avoided that truth claims inherent in every religious tradition potentially create friction when different groups live side-by-side in the same public space. However, experiences in various societies show that religious institutions can develop capacities to build shared public ethics without having to sacrifice fundamental beliefs. This process becomes possible when religious communities distinguish between what constitutes internal obligations for their adherents and what can become bases for interfaith cooperation. Values such as justice, peace, respect for human dignity, and concern for fellow weak ones often become common points enabling cooperation despite differences in theological foundations. Religious institutions capable of developing capacities to dialogue and cooperate with

other groups, without losing identity, actually demonstrate maturity in executing functions as value sources amidst plural societies. This ability becomes increasingly crucial in eras when religious identity-based conflicts threaten social cohesion in various world parts. This process is strengthened through citizen political participation in dynamic electoral democracies and inclusive civil society movements (Rojak, Khayru, & Darmawan, 2021).

Challenges to religion's functions as social bonds and value sources also emerge from within religious communities themselves. Internal fragmentation in religious institutions, manifested in sectarian divisions, interpretation differences, and inter-group competition, can weaken religion's ability to become unifier (Fannani, 2018). When internal conflicts in religious communities become more prominent than uniting solidarity, then religion's function as social bonds actually reverses into division sources. This phenomenon is often exacerbated by religion's involvement in identity politics, where religious interpretation differences are mobilized for power interests. In such situations, religious institutions lose capacities to provide neutral spaces where society members from various backgrounds can meet and feel community. Recovering social bonding functions requires religious leadership capable of placing broader community interests above group or personal interests, and commitment to prioritizing inclusive values becoming cores of religion itself. Without such leadership, religious institutions risk becoming part of problems, not solutions, in building social cohesion amidst fragmented modern societies. Impacts from these divisions can worsen poverty spatial patterns and social segregation in metropolitan areas, and marginalize low-income communities due to uneven urban renewal (Fauzi, 2021; Fauzi, 2022), also worsened by social stigma toward issues like mental health (Aisyah & Issalillah, 2022).

Digital technology developments also bring significant implications toward how religious institutions execute their functions as social bonds and value sources (Herriot, 2018). Digital spaces open possibilities for forming virtual religious communities transcending geographical boundaries, enabling individuals separated by thousands of kilometers to feel connection within same faith bonds. This phenomenon expands religion's social bonding reach, but also changes formed bond qualities. Virtual communities tend to be more fluid, with commitment levels lower than communities based on sustaining face-to-face interactions. Ease of

entering and exiting digital communities also means pressure to internalize group values becomes weaker. On the other hand, digital platforms also become spaces where religious teachings are disseminated, yet also become arenas for spreading harsh and exclusive interpretations. Religious institutions wanting to remain relevant must be able to utilize digital technology to expand mission reach, without losing essence of bonding and value formation functions requiring relational depth and continuing development processes. Balancing between utilizing technology-offered opportunities and maintaining commitment depth becoming characteristics of healthy religious communities becomes new challenges to face. Strengthening social networks through shared interest communities in urban areas shows how digital and physical synergy can facilitate this integration (Rejeki, 2021).

Religious institutions' functions as social bonds and value sources in modern society cannot be understood without examining dynamics between universality and particularity (Taylor, 2006). On one side, religion claims universal truth, applicable for all humans regardless of backgrounds. On the other side, religion is always experienced in specific cultural, historical, and social contexts, giving color and form to religious expressions. This universality-particularity tension becomes sources of creativity and conflict. Religious institutions successfully executing functions are those capable of maintaining universal visions of taught values, while providing spaces for particular expressions suitable with local contexts. They also able to bridge value universality with needs for building cross-boundary solidarity, without neglecting responsibilities toward local communities where they exist. Ability to manage this tension well becomes key factors distinguishing religious institutions remaining relevant and capable contributing to social cohesion amidst modernity, with those trapped in exclusivisms actually strengthening fragmentation. This process requires visionary leadership, continuing dialogues between religious leaders and community members, and willingness to continuously learn and adapt without losing teaching foundations becoming their identities. This aligns with community behavior changes, for example in using environmentally friendly shopping bags as single-use plastic replacements, showing how noble values can guide pro-environmental actions in public spaces (Hariani & Al Hakim, 2022).

## The Role of Religious Institutions as Actors of Social Change and Moral Movements

Religious institutions' involvement in social change cannot be understood as uniform phenomena, because direction and intensity of such involvement are heavily determined by how religious communities interpret their religious mandates in responding to faced social conditions (Parashchevin, 2023). In different religious traditions, there are spectrums of views about religion-world relationships, ranging from those strictly separating spiritual matters from worldly matters to those viewing social transformation as inseparable parts of religious missions. These theological views form basic frameworks influencing whether religious institutions will actively involve in driving social change, or instead choose focusing on internal spiritual development without interfering in socio-political affairs. However, these theological frameworks are not static; they can change along with internal community dynamics and external environmental pressures. In many cases, deep social crises such as extreme poverty, structural injustice, or systematic human rights violations become catalysts pushing religious institutions out of comfort zones and taking more active positions in fighting for change. This process is often accompanied by fierce internal debates between groups considering social involvement as betrayal against spiritual missions, with groups viewing it as execution of most authentic religious teachings. This context aligns with the need for multicultural conflict management in public policies for facing complex religious challenges (Hariani & Halizah, 2024).

As social change actors, religious institutions possess comparative advantages not possessed by other actors. The first advantage is extraordinary mobilization capacity, because religion has organizational networks spreading to lowest community levels, with leadership respected and considered having moral authority. These networks enable religious institutions to reach groups often not accessible by states or non-government organizations, including people in remote areas, urban poor groups, and marginalized communities. The second advantage is possessed moral resources, in the form of legitimacy originating from transcendental authority. When religious institutions speak about injustice, such voices carry different weight from secular organization voices because considered representing higher truths than merely political or ideological interests.

This moral legitimacy is very important in mobilizing public support for social change movements, especially when movements face resistance from ruling powers (Mhuireach, 2022). The third advantage is capacity to provide meaning for sufferings and sacrifices necessary in social change struggles. Religion provides languages and narratives enabling individuals to understand their struggles as parts of sacred missions transcending personal interests, thus strengthening long-term resilience and commitment (Smelser, 2011; Smith, 1996). This role becomes significant in balancing individual freedom and collective responsibilities in individualism eras (Saputra & Darmawan, 2021), and supporting employee welfare in public service organizations oriented toward communities (Gautama et al., 2021).

In various historical contexts, religious institutions have shown highly significant roles in social movements bringing fundamental changes. Civil rights movements in the United States in the mid-twentieth century, led by figures like Martin Luther King Jr., are classic examples showing how religious institutions became backbone struggles against racial discrimination (Devine et al., 2015). Black church networks provided safe organizational spaces for mass mobilization, while religious languages about human dignity as God's creations provided strong moral foundations for equality demands. Similarly, anti-apartheid movements in South Africa cannot be separated from South African Council of Churches roles and figures like Desmond Tutu, who used religious moral authority to garner international support and provide legitimacy for struggles against discriminatory regimes. In both cases, religion involvement was not marginal, but became movement strategy cores. Successes of these movements show that when religious institutions choose siding with justice, they possess capacities to become very powerful transformative forces. However, it is important to note that in both cases, positions taken were not automatically supported by entire religious communities; intense internal debates occurred before religious institutions officially took stands.

The role of religious institutions in social change is also visible in moral movements advocating contemporary ethical issues (Kuitert, 2022). In environmental issues, for example, various religious traditions begin developing ecological theology emphasizing human responsibility as

nature stewards. Pope Francis with his *Laudato Si* encyclical about caring for our common home becomes an example showing how global religious leadership can influence discourses about climate crises and mobilize believers to take actions. In economic justice issues, religious institutions often become advocates for policies favoring poor groups, using teachings about social justice and preferential option for the poor as bases for criticizing economic policies considered unfair. In peace and conflict resolution issues, religious institutions serve as mediators respected by conflicting parties, utilizing trust given by society to religious leaders for building dialogue bridges. Involvement in these contemporary moral issues shows that religion's roles as social change actors are not limited to issues directly concerning religious community interests, but also encompass universal humanitarian issues. Religion's capacity connecting contemporary issues with deep moral values becomes distinguishing strength from secular advocacy possibly being more technical-pragmatic. This is supported by importance of environmental management and law enforcement in maintaining resource sustainability (Nuraini et al., 2021), and efforts driving sustainable behavior changes through education and public awareness (Gautama & Mardikaningsih, 2022).

However, religious institutions' roles as social change actors are not always progressive, because in many situations religion actually functions as conservative forces maintaining existing orders through literal interpretations of teachings, including in social hierarchies, gender relations, and political authority legitimization; this condition makes religious institutions often become sources of resistance against rapid social change, either through mass mobilization or alliances with certain political powers, while tensions between progressive and conservative groups within same traditions trigger internal polarization strengthening along with social media developments tending to clarify viewpoint differences (Berger, 1990; Appleby, 2000). These tensions often reflect gender and ethnic diversity dynamics in contemporary organizations (Rojak & Darmawan, 2012) and changing human relationship patterns in increasingly complex urban societies (Irfan & Al Hakim, 2022).

Factors determining whether religious institutions will become transformative or conservative forces are very complex and interconnected (Huck, 2022). The first factor is internal authority structures within those

religious institutions. Institutions with centralized and hierarchical authority structures, like the Catholic Church, possess capacities for taking relatively consistent positions and mobilizing resources effectively to support those positions. However, centralized structures can also become obstacles when leadership takes positions not supported by most members. Conversely, institutions with more decentralized authority structures, like many Protestant churches or traditional Islamic organizations, allow emerging diverse positions reflecting grassroots view diversity, yet also make taking joint positions representing entire institutions difficult. The second factor is religious institutions' relationships with political power. Institutions having closeness with rulers tend to take positions supporting status quo, either because of interests maintaining enjoyed privileges or because of pressures not criticizing government policies. Conversely, institutions in marginal positions or experiencing oppression from political power often become most vocal critics against injustice and significant social change drivers. Relationships with power are dynamic, and government political position shifts can dramatically change religious institutions' attitudes toward social change.

The third factor is characteristics of teachings and intellectual traditions within each religious tradition. Religious traditions possessing rich social theology corpora, with thoughts about justice, human rights, and collective responsibilities, are more likely developing systematic responses to social change issues compared with traditions more focusing on ritual aspects and individual spirituality (Middeldorf, 2022). Availability of these intellectual resources is very important for providing solid theological foundations for involvement in social change, so not merely emotional responses to temporary conditions but integrated actions with deep religious understandings. The fourth factor is socio-political contexts where religious institutions exist. In societies experiencing deep crises such as civil wars, state collapses, or prolonged economic crises, religious institutions are often forced taking positions, either as protectors of innocent people, conflict mediators, or even as forces taking over functions of collapsed states. These extreme contexts can accelerate religious institutions' attitude changes from previously tending apolitical to very involved in socio-political affairs. Conversely, in stable societies with functioning governments well, religious institutions may feel

no need taking overly active roles in social change because those functions are already executed by other institutions. In this context, social inequality and urbanization challenges demand new approaches for building cohesion in urban environments (Mardikaningsih, 2021), including deep evaluations of cultural claims and persisting urban poverty (Rojak, 2024).

Moral movements originating from religion have characteristics distinguishing them from secular movements, especially regarding motivations, languages, and strategies. Motivations originating from religious beliefs tend to be stronger and more resistant to pressure compared with motivations originating from material or ideological interests alone (Blackford, 2023). Individuals involved in movements because believing they are executing God's commands tend to have deeper commitments and greater sacrifice willingness. Religious moral movement languages also have unique persuasive power because using symbols and narratives already embedded in collective societal consciousness. Using religious metaphors like liberation, redemption, and resurrection can frame social issues in ways evoking deep emotional resonances. Religious moral movement strategies often combine conventional tactics like policy advocacy and mass mobilization with spiritual practices like collective prayers, fasting, and rituals strengthening internal solidarity. This combination gives movements greater resilience because strength sources not only come from external factors like mass numbers or political support, but also from spiritual experiences strengthening each individual's internal commitments. This is relevant with the need for private legal protection against mental illness stigma in families, which is one crucial moral issue in contemporary societies (Zahid et al., 2022).

In contemporary societies characterized by strengthening individualism, religious moral movements face new challenges mobilizing support and maintaining internal cohesion (Meintel, 2021). Younger generations growing in more individualistic environments tend to have more fluid relationships with religious institutions, not feeling bound to traditional religious authorities, and preferring flexible involvement forms requiring no long-term commitments. Responses to these challenges vary. Some religious institutions try adapting by adopting styles and languages more suitable with younger generation sensitivities, including using social

media and digital platforms for reaching wider audiences. Others instead tighten positions, considering that root problems are weak commitments to correct religious teachings, so what is needed is strengthening doctrines and stricter religious discipline. Both strategies have respective risks: adaptation strategies can lead to identity dilution and losing cohesion becoming movement strength sources; doctrine strengthening strategies can make movements increasingly exclusive and lose relevance with era changes. Long-term success of religious moral movements may lie in abilities finding middle paths, namely maintaining teaching essences becoming movement identities while developing relevant new ways for delivering those messages to continuously changing generations.

Religious institutions' roles as social change actors are also inseparable from criticisms and challenges emerging from within and outside religious communities (Parashchevin, 2023). Internal criticisms often originate from groups considering that involvement in socio-political affairs has diverted focus from spiritual missions becoming religions' main tasks. According to this view, religion should focus on individual transformation through spiritual development, and social change will occur organically as results of individual changes, not through direct involvement in policy advocacy or mass mobilization. External criticisms, especially from secular circles, often highlight that religion involvement in social change tends to bring non-transparent hidden agendas, especially when religious moral movements try imposing certain religious values into public policies regulating all citizens regardless of their beliefs. These criticisms become increasingly relevant when religious moral movements support policies limiting minority religious groups' freedoms, restricting women's rights, or criminalizing different sexual orientations. Responses to these criticisms significantly determine religious institutions' credibility as social change actors. Religious institutions showing that their involvement in social change is based on universal values like justice and human dignity, not on efforts imposing certain group interests, tend to gain wider legitimacy from societies. This reflects complexities in maintaining traditions amidst modernity, especially for indigenous community social lives in urban areas (Amri & Khayru, 2022).

At certain points, religious institutions involved in social change must face questions about maintaining moral legitimacy when having to

cooperate with political powers not fully aligned with fought values (Wood et al., 2023). In practice, social change movements rarely succeed without political involvement, either in policy advocacy forms, supporting certain candidates, or even direct participation in governments. However, when religious institutions enter political realms, they risk losing moral authority becoming their main strength sources. Supporting certain candidates can make religious institutions politically polarized and lose abilities becoming neutral mediators. Government involvement can make religious institutions become parts of status quo they previously criticized. Managing tensions between political involvement and maintaining moral authority is never-easy challenges. Some religious institutions choose staying outside practical politics, focusing on policy advocacy and moral consciousness development without officially supporting certain candidates or parties. This choice enables them remaining critical against all political powers, but also can limit their effectiveness in directly influencing policies. Other choices involve more directly in politics with risks losing moral legitimacy in some societies' eyes. No risk-free choices exist, and decisions taken are heavily influenced by specific contexts and each institution's strategic considerations. In economic crisis situations in organizations, adaptive approaches become crucial so institutions can manage uncertainties without losing strategic integrity (Arifin & Darmawan, 2022).

Religious institutions' roles as social change actors must be understood in broader frameworks about modern society transformations themselves. Secularization occurring in many world parts does not mean religion disappearing, but changing how religion exists in public spaces (Hunt, 2002). Religion no longer has automatically accepted automatic authority, but must fight relevance in competitive public arenas. In these situations, religious institutions wanting to become effective social change actors must develop capacities arguing in languages acceptable by plural publics, not merely relying on traditional authorities or absolute truth claims. They also must be able cooperating with other actors having similar goals despite different beliefs, building interfaith and cross-sector alliances strengthening social change movements. Capacities collaborating without losing identities, being critical without becoming destructive, and maintaining long-term commitments without falling into short-term

pragmatism become characteristics of religious institutions capable constructively executing roles as social change agents. In complex modern societies, religion's roles as social change actors can no longer be played relying on nostalgia for past periods, but must be rediscovered through continuous learning processes and openness for dialogues with various other social forces. Needs for psychological perspectives in era 5.0 societies become relevant in understanding how social actors adapt to these fundamental changes (Darmawan et al., 2021).

Religious institutions' roles as social change actors are very diverse, determined by theological interpretations about religion-world relationships, mobilization capacities and possessed moral resources, and contextual factors like internal authority structures, relationships with political power, available intellectual traditions, and faced socio-political conditions. In various historical contexts, religious institutions have shown extraordinary capacities as transformative forces in civil rights movements, anti-apartheid movements, and contemporary moral movements, yet can also become conservative forces maintaining status quo or becoming resistance sources against change. Factors distinguishing between transformative and conservative roles include internal authority structures, closeness with political power, availability of intellectual resources, and socio-political context dynamics. Religious moral movements have unique characteristics in motivations, languages, and strategies distinguishing them from secular movements, yet face new challenges in increasingly individualistic societies. Criticisms from within and outside religious communities regarding legitimacy of involvement in social change demand religious institutions managing tensions between political involvement and maintaining moral authority. Ultimately, religion's roles as social change actors in modern societies must be rediscovered through developing capacities arguing in plural public languages, building cross-sector alliances, and maintaining long-term commitments without falling into short-term pragmatism. This needs considering connections between colonialism and vulnerability in political ecology studies regarding structural inequalities impacting global climate change (Gani, 2022).

## Conclusion

This research shows that religious institutions in modern society perform a complex dual function: as a social glue and source of values on one hand, and as actors of social change and moral movements on the other. The function of religion as a social glue relies on its ability to create a sense of belonging through collective rituals and build cross-class solidarity through internal redistribution mechanisms, which become crucial amidst the structural fragmentation of contemporary society. As a source of values, religion provides an ethical framework that helps individuals navigate the complexity of moral choices amidst plurality, as well as transmitting values across generations through a process of active negotiation between tradition and change. In its role as an actor of social change, religious institutions possess extraordinary mobilization capacity and unique moral resources, which in various historical contexts have been manifested in transformative movements such as the civil rights and anti-apartheid struggles. However, this role is not deterministic; the direction of religious involvement in social change is heavily determined by the interaction between theological interpretation, internal authority structures, relations with political power, and the surrounding socio-political context. The success of religious institutions in performing their functions depends greatly on the ability to manage tensions between universality and particularity, between commitment to believed truths and openness to dialogue with difference, and between political involvement and the maintenance of moral authority.

Theoretically, the findings of this research enrich the understanding of the relationship between religion and modernity by showing that secularization does not mean the disappearance of religion's role, but rather a transformation in the way religion is present and functions in the public sphere. This implication shifts the analytical focus from an approach that views religion as a remnant of the pre-modern era that will erode alongside modern development, toward an approach that understands religion as a dynamic force that continues to adapt to and shape modernity itself. Practically, these findings provide direction for the development of policies and programs that involve religious institutions in community development. Governments and development organizations need to recognize the unique capacity possessed by religious institutions to

reach grassroots communities and mobilize moral resources, as well as design partnerships that respect the autonomy of religious institutions without co-opting them into specific political agendas. For religious leaders, these findings underscore the importance of developing the capacity to interpret traditional teachings in a way that is relevant to contemporary challenges, as well as building interfaith dialogues that strengthen social cohesion. For the broader society, an understanding of the dynamics of religion's role is essential for developing a balanced attitude: neither rejecting religion as an irrational force that hinders progress, nor naively accepting religious authority claims without a critical evaluation of their social impact.

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