

Editorial Note

Reimagining Religion in the Contemporary World: Adaptation, Plurality, and Interdisciplinary Engagement

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Abstract: This editorial introduces Volume 8, Issue 2 (August 2024) of *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama dan Lintas Budaya*, featuring six original research articles by 17 authors from 12 institutions across seven countries. Together, these contributions offer critical insights into the evolving role of religion in an era marked by digital transformation, pluralistic tensions, and institutional shifts. The issue explores key themes such as interfaith relations, digital ethics, pilgrimage tourism, gender justice, and religious resilience amid global crises. The editorial reflects on the adaptability of religion as a living tradition, highlighting its ability to respond to challenges like secularisation, misinformation, and mental health. It also discusses the reimagination of the sacred across digital, legal, educational, and touristic domains. Furthermore, it emphasises the urgency of interdisciplinary religious studies, demonstrating how engagement with fields such as psychology, media studies, political science, gender theory, and law enriches both scholarship and practice. This editorial calls for a sustained, collaborative, and responsive approach to the study of religion in today's interconnected world.

Keywords: Digital ethics; digital religion; global faith; interdisciplinary studies; pilgrimage tourism; religious adaptation; religious pluralism; religious resilience; sacred space; secularisation.

Abstrak: Editorial ini memperkenalkan Volume 8, Edisi 2 (Agustus 2024) *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama dan Lintas Budaya*, yang menampilkan enam artikel penelitian asli dari 17 penulis dari 12 institusi di tujuh negara. Bersama-sama, kontribusi-kontribusi ini menawarkan wawasan kritis tentang peran agama yang terus berkembang di era yang ditandai dengan transformasi digital, ketegangan pluralistik, dan pergeseran kelembagaan. Edisi kali ini membahas tema-tema utama seperti hubungan antar agama, etika digital, wisata ziarah, keadilan gender, dan ketahanan agama di tengah krisis global. Editorial ini merefleksikan kemampuan agama untuk beradaptasi sebagai sebuah tradisi yang hidup, menyoroti kemampuannya dalam menjawab tantangan-tantangan seperti sekularisasi, informasi yang keliru, dan kesehatan mental. Editorial ini juga membahas reimaginasi yang sakral di ranah digital, hukum, pendidikan, dan wisata. Selain itu, editorial ini juga menekankan urgensi studi agama interdisipliner, yang menunjukkan bagaimana keterlibatan dengan bidang-bidang seperti psikologi, studi media, ilmu politik, teori gender, dan hukum dapat memperkaya keilmuan dan praktik. Editorial ini menyerukan pendekatan yang berkelanjutan, kolaboratif, dan responsif terhadap studi agama di dunia yang saling terhubung saat ini.

Kata Kunci: Etika digital; agama digital; iman global; studi interdisipliner; wisata ziarah; adaptasi agama; pluralisme agama; ketahanan agama; ruang suci; sekularisasi.

1. Introduction

We are delighted to present Volume 8, Issue 2 (August 2024) of *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama dan Lintas Budaya*. This issue comprises six original research articles that explore critical questions related to religious coexistence, digital ethics, spiritual resilience, and institutional adaptation. Thematically diverse and methodologically rich, the contributions in this issue affirm the relevance of religious scholarship in addressing global and local transformations.

This edition brings together the work of 17 authors from 12 institutions across 7 countries—Indonesia, Spain, Italy, Germany, Nigeria, Malaysia, and Australia. Their interdisciplinary approaches and cross-national perspectives illustrate the journal’s continuing commitment to building bridges between disciplines, cultures, and faith traditions.

The articles in this issue cover a wide range of pressing concerns. Hermawan and Valero Matas compare religious moderation policies in Indonesia and Malaysia, showing that government involvement plays a key role in shaping interfaith dynamics (Hermawan & Matas, 2024). Lewar et al. turn to theology to address online gender-based violence, offering the *Magnificat* as a scriptural lens to frame the Church’s response to digital injustice (Lewar, Kleden, Sihombing, & Rizzi, 2024). The piece by Satrya and colleagues draws attention to the role of religious pilgrimage sites—specifically Indonesia’s *Gua Maria*—as inclusive spaces that nurture peace, tolerance, and intercultural dialogue (Satrya, Wono, Kaihatu, & Minantyo, 2024).

Other articles address the disruptive impact of misinformation, secularisation, and mental health crises. Fathurrohman et al. expose how religious hoaxes are manufactured and amplified through digital media, causing deep social and theological divides (Fathurrohman, Anna, Sibawaihi, & Fahmi, 2024). Adeoye’s work in Nigeria reveals how churches creatively adapt to secularisation through digital innovation and contextual theology (Adeoye, 2024). Lastly, Ah Gang and Torres explore how religious belief strengthens emotional resilience and life effectiveness among Malaysian university students during the COVID-19 crisis (Gang & Torres, 2024).

Collectively, the articles in this issue illuminate the dynamic interplay between faith, culture, and contemporary social realities. They reveal how religious thought and practice continue to evolve in response to digital disruption, political tensions, and the quest for communal and personal resilience. We hope that this issue inspires further interdisciplinary research and serves as a valuable resource for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers committed to understanding the multifaceted role of religion in shaping a more inclusive and ethically grounded society.

2. Reflections from the Editor

Religion as a Living and Adaptive Tradition

Across the articles in this issue, a clear pattern emerges: religion demonstrates its capacity to adapt, evolve, and respond to the complexities of contemporary life. Rather than being a static set of doctrines, religion appears here as a living tradition—capable of guiding communities through challenges such as digital injustice, mental health crises, secularisation, and interfaith tensions. These studies collectively affirm that theology, ritual, and religious institutions are not frozen in time; instead, they continue to offer frameworks of meaning, solidarity, and ethical engagement in today’s diverse world.

Religion’s adaptive capacity is rooted in its nature as a complex, evolving system. Scholars such as Sosis (2020) describe religion as an adaptive system comprising cognitive, neurological, affective, behavioural, and developmental components that interact in a self-regulating manner. This systemic perspective reveals how religious traditions can respond fluidly to environmental and societal changes, maintaining relevance across historical and cultural shifts. Religion does not simply resist change; it integrates new traits and reinterprets old ones to remain responsive to evolving contexts.

This adaptability is evident in the way religious systems evolve in concert with their surrounding cultures. As García (2015) argues, religious transformations are closely tied to historical developments and the stable mechanisms of the human mind. From early Christianity to contemporary Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist movements, religious thought has consistently evolved through encounters with modernity, secularism, and globalisation (Fernandez & Ramirez, 2024). This interplay often gives rise to new paradigms—ranging from liberation theology to neo-traditionalist revivals—that reflect both continuity and innovation.

In the age of globalisation, new expressions of religiosity have emerged that reflect contemporary experiences and anxieties. Reuter (2012) identifies phenomena such as New Age spirituality, religious revitalisation, and even fundamentalism as examples of how faith traditions recalibrate in intercultural

and technologically advanced societies. Yet, as Zholdybaeva et al. (2024) note, mainstream religious institutions sometimes lag in adapting to digital realities, while newer movements often thrive by embracing online platforms and global networks to spread their messages and engage followers.

The social and cultural relevance of religion extends far beyond worship spaces. Religion continues to shape ideologies, political narratives, youth cultures, and even consumer practices (Redden, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). Faith is no longer only a private or institutional affair—it is also a cultural force mediated by media, education, and activism. This is especially visible in the ecological sphere, where religious communities increasingly mobilise in response to the climate crisis. According to Puglisi and Buitendag (2022), these faith-based responses offer a distinctive moral vision grounded in stewardship, interconnection, and planetary ethics.

From an evolutionary standpoint, religion's capacity to endure and adapt may itself be a reflection of its functionality. Some scholars argue that religion acts as an adaptive trait, promoting social cooperation, moral cohesion, and communal resilience (Richerson & Newson, 2011; Sosis, 2009). Others view it as a byproduct of broader cognitive processes, yet still acknowledge its ability to produce and select beliefs and rituals that resonate with changing environments (Wunn & Grojnowski, 2018). Either way, religion's survival over centuries testifies to its exceptional ability to navigate shifting cultural, political, and existential terrains.

These perspectives collectively affirm that religion is not static—it is dynamic, relational, and deeply entangled with the fabric of contemporary life. Its resilience lies not in resisting change but in reinterpreting tradition, reframing practice, and renewing its ethical and social commitments. In responding to the moral and structural complexities of our age, religion continues to evolve—quietly, sometimes radically, yet always meaningfully.

Reimagining the Sacred in Plural and Digital Realities

This issue also invites us to reflect on how the concept of the sacred is being reimagined. Faith is no longer confined to conventional spaces such as mosques, churches, or temples; it is now equally present in virtual platforms, legal frameworks, educational policies, and even pilgrimage tourism. As religious expressions enter new domains, we must ask: How do sacred traditions retain their authenticity while responding to the demands of pluralistic, media-saturated societies? These questions are crucial, especially in the face of increasing disinformation, moral fragmentation, and cultural anxiety. Scholars, leaders, and institutions must rethink their roles in shaping inclusive and resilient public faith.

As faith continues to transcend traditional religious spaces, one of the most prominent areas of redefinition lies in the digital realm. Spiritual accompaniment has been virtualised through social networks, allowing faith communities to engage in pastoral dialogue and spiritual reflection online. Velásquez Camelo (2021) describes this phenomenon as part of the "culture of real virtuality," where ecclesial practice becomes more participatory and accessible through digital connectivity. In addition, the rise of virtual churches has sparked debates on embodiment and authenticity, yet scholars increasingly recognise their legitimacy as spaces for genuine worship and community (Belorussova, 2021; Lytle, 2010). Emerging technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are now being explored to enhance religious experiences, offering immersive forms of engagement that blend spiritual meaning with digital innovation (Kay, 2016).

Legal frameworks have also become arenas where religious values and practices are being negotiated. The principle of *good faith*, rooted in civil law, has long served as a stabilising concept in contractual relations. It fosters trust, predictability, and ethical conduct in legal systems that engage with plural religious communities (Cordeiro, 2018; Shumilo, Babakin, Kovalenko, Yasynok, & Boiko, 2024; Vettori, 2022). Furthermore, the interface between secular law and religious doctrines is increasingly visible in religious arbitration tribunals, where disputes are resolved based on sacred texts and ecclesiastical norms (Helfand, 2013). These developments illustrate how faith is no longer separate from legal discourse but integrated into juridical interpretations of justice, morality, and obligation.

In the sphere of education, faith is influencing both policy and pedagogy. Faith-based schools are expanding globally, particularly in post-secular societies, where religious identity is being reframed not as exclusionary but as a means of fostering community and moral development (Reiss, Waghid, McNamara, & Chapman, 2014; Watson, 2013). In Britain, the role of faith schools continues to spark debate, especially regarding diversity, civic inclusion, and educational equity (King, 2010). Simultaneously, discussions on integrating spirituality into secular education systems are gaining traction in countries such as Australia. Scholars like Adams (2017) argue for a reflexive and inclusive approach to spirituality that supports children's emotional and ethical development within non-religious institutions.

Pilgrimage tourism represents another significant frontier in the reimagining of sacred spaces. The traditional notion of pilgrimage as a purely devotional act is giving way to a more experiential and event-driven model. Dowson (2020) introduces the concept of the "Eventisation of Faith," in which sacred sites incorporate communal gatherings, cultural performances, and ritual events that enrich the pilgrimage experience. Globalisation has further transformed pilgrimage tourism into a major industry, where religious travel facilitates not only devotion but also identity formation, intercultural exchange, and peacebuilding (Gupta, Aragon, Kumar, & Ramasamy, 2023; Isaac, 2015; Liutikas & Raj, 2024). These developments reflect how the sacred is now encountered in spaces designed to accommodate both religious significance and hospitality-driven engagement.

The sacred in contemporary society is increasingly expressed beyond fixed geographies and traditional rituals, manifesting through digital platforms, legal frameworks, educational systems, and spiritual tourism. These evolving expressions reflect how religion actively engages with the structures and sensibilities of modern life. Rather than diminishing its influence, this fluidity reinforces the enduring relevance of religion in addressing the moral, emotional, and communal complexities of an interconnected and pluralistic world.

The Urgency of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies

One of the strongest messages of this issue is the importance of crossing disciplinary boundaries. The challenges addressed by the authors—ranging from hoaxes and gender-based violence to secularisation and psychosocial resilience—demonstrate that religious studies cannot operate in isolation. Collaborations with fields such as law, media studies, psychology, political science, and gender theory are essential to deepen our understanding and produce solutions with real-world impact. As editors, we believe that the future of religious scholarship lies in its ability to remain both rooted in tradition and open to interdisciplinary innovation.

The relevance of religious studies today hinges on its willingness to engage with other disciplines. As human experiences become increasingly complex—mediated by technology, shaped by legal frameworks, and challenged by political and psychological shifts—religion too must be studied in its full social entanglement. The psychology of religion, for instance, provides vital insights into how belief systems affect cognition, behaviour, and emotional resilience. Scholars such as Engedal (2011) and Nelson (2012) argue that religious life cannot be fully understood without addressing the internal, communal, and cognitive dimensions that psychology helps uncover. Moon (2024) even refers to religion as a "natural laboratory" for exploring human behaviour, emphasising the growing value of community-oriented psychological approaches in religious studies.

In parallel, media studies have significantly advanced our understanding of how religion is performed, mediated, and experienced in the digital age. Scholars like Hoover (2012; 2009) and Blondheim & Rosenberg (2017) have demonstrated that digital platforms are not merely neutral tools but co-creators of religious meaning. They shape rituals, amplify voices, and influence theological interpretations. As religious discourse migrates to online spaces, media literacy and technological fluency become essential competencies for both scholars and faith communities. In contexts such as Southeast Asia and Africa, the growing convergence of religion and media—studied by Abusharif (2020)—calls for renewed frameworks to analyse how sacred narratives are produced and contested in digital environments.

Political science has long recognised the power of religion as a political force, but its contemporary significance is expanding. Religion influences political ideology, voter behaviour, policy debates, and international diplomacy. Potz (2019) and Zrinščak (2022) underline how religious actors function as political agents, negotiating power and shaping moral agendas in the public sphere. In an era where religion intersects with populism, securitisation, and global migration, political science perspectives are indispensable for understanding how faith traditions navigate and reshape political landscapes.

Gender theory has also transformed religious studies by confronting patriarchal structures within religious institutions and texts. Works by Riswold (2020) and Aune & Nyhagen (2016) highlight how feminist, queer, and intersectional lenses have expanded theological inquiry and deepened critiques of religious authority. These perspectives illuminate how religion and gender co-produce social identities and power relations, and how sacred texts and leadership roles are negotiated in light of contemporary gender justice movements.

Legal studies provide another critical dimension. Religion and law are deeply intertwined—both historically and in modern constitutional democracies. Legal scholars such as Ferrari (2015) and Radan et al. (2004) have shown how religious values influence legislative processes and how legal systems, in turn, regulate religious expression. The emerging field of law and religion, as articulated by Sandberg (2020) and Fantappiè (2020), calls for interdisciplinary collaboration between legal theorists, theologians, and sociologists to address challenges such as blasphemy laws, religious freedom, and interreligious conflict resolution.

It is increasingly evident that religious studies cannot thrive in disciplinary isolation. Engaging with psychology, media studies, political science, gender theory, and law provides essential tools and perspectives to deepen our understanding of how religion operates within real-world contexts. By embracing these interdisciplinary intersections, scholars are better equipped to produce research that is not only theoretically robust but also ethically grounded and socially responsive. As the articles in this issue illustrate, such integrative approaches are not merely advantageous—they are imperative for ensuring that religious scholarship remains relevant, reflective, and impactful in our interconnected and rapidly changing world.

3. Conclusion

This issue of *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama dan Lintas Budaya* offers a timely and compelling collection of insights that reaffirm the centrality of religion in navigating the complex challenges of contemporary life. From digital injustices to interfaith dialogue, from sacred tourism to educational reform, the articles herein demonstrate that religious thought and practice are not only enduring but also evolving—reaching into new domains with creativity, criticality, and care.

As editors, we are encouraged by the diversity of voices, methodologies, and geographic perspectives that this issue brings together. The featured research underscores the importance of viewing religion as a dynamic, adaptive, and integrative force—one that continues to shape moral discourse, social transformation, and cultural resilience in ways both familiar and novel.

We hope that the contributions in this volume serve as a catalyst for further interdisciplinary inquiry and global collaboration. More than ever, the study of religion must remain attuned to the changing realities of the world it seeks to understand. We are confident that scholars, practitioners, and readers alike will find in these pages not only rigorous academic analysis but also a profound sense of relevance—an invitation to engage, reflect, and act in the pursuit of more just, inclusive, and spiritually grounded futures.

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