HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies
ISSN: (Online) 2072-8050, (Print) 0259-9422

Radix et hospitium: The dialectic of prophetic radicalism and hospitality as a paradigm of religious moderation in the ecclesiology of the early church

Check for updates

Authors:
Johannis Siahaya[1]
Harls Evan R. Siahaan[2]

Affiliations:
[1]Department of Theology, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Kristen Teruna Bhakti, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

[2]Department of Theology, Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Internasional Harvest, Tangerang, Indonesia

Corresponding author:
Johannis Siahaya,
charistajasmine@gmail.com

Dates:
Received: 25 Mar. 2026
Accepted: 10 June 2026
Published: 14 July 2026

How to cite this article:
Siahaya, J. & Siahaan, H.E.R., 2026, '*Radix et hospitium*: The dialectic of prophetic radicalism and hospitality as a paradigm of religious moderation in the ecclesiology of the early church', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 82(1), a11410. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v82i1.11410

Copyright:
© 2026. The Authors. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Read online:
Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

This article proposes an alternative paradigm for the discourse on religious moderation by exploring the dialectic between prophetic radicalism and hospitality in the early church's ecclesiology. Through a narrative–theological analysis of the texts of Acts and the Pauline epistles, this study demonstrates that the early Christian community did not embody moderation as a middle ground that avoids extremes but rather as a creative tension between the depth of rooted identity (*radix*) and radical openness to the other (*hospitium*). By integrating insights from the theology of friendship (befriending), this research argues that the early church's dialectical model offers a constructive critique of Indonesia's approach to religious moderation, which tends to be pragmatic–accommodative and lacks theological depth, and proposes the paradigm of religious mediation as a more dynamic alternative.

Contribution: Within the intradisciplinary field of systematic and historical theology, this article offers a constructive contribution by formulating the paradigm of *radix et hospitium* as a coherent ecclesiological framework that unites prophetic radicalism and hospitality in a dialectical relationship. The article advances Pentecostal pneumatology by demonstrating that the Spirit's work in the early church inherently generates communities that are both prophetically bold and hospitably open, thereby providing a pneumatological corrective to ecclesiological models that treat these as competing impulses. Interdisciplinarily, the article engages the sociology of religion by critically examining Indonesia's state-constructed, pragmatic–accommodative framework of religious moderation through communal formation theory, while incorporating insights from political theology on religious identity and civic coexistence in pluralistic democracies.

Keywords: early church; ecclesiology; hospitality; prophetic radicalism; *radix et hospitium*; religious moderation.

Introduction

The contemporary religious landscape of Indonesia presents a significant paradox for theologians and social scientists alike. As the country with the largest Muslim population in the world and home to more than 700 ethnic groups and six state-recognised religions, Indonesia was once viewed as a model of organic interfaith coexistence. However, this once-proud socio-religious structure now faces increasingly severe pressures as it enters the third decade of the 21st century. The Wahid Foundation (Wahid Foundation 2021) recorded a significant rise in incidents of religious intolerance over the past decade, while the Setara Institute (2022) documented waves of religion-based violence in various provinces. This phenomenon constitutes not only a socio-political crisis but also a profound theological one: How can faith communities maintain their prophetic distinctiveness while cultivating the openness and hospitality necessary for peaceful and dignified coexistence? This existential question will shape the direction of Indonesian churches in the years to come.

In response to these mounting pressures, the state has taken the initiative. Since 2019, Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs has formally established religious moderation as a national policy platform, as articulated in the Moderation of Religion Book, which defines moderation as a balanced religious attitude that harmonises the practice of one's faith with respect for others' religious practices (Kemenag 2021). This concept encourages adherents to cultivate the attitudes of *tawazun* [balance], *tawassuth* [middle way], *tasamuh* [tolerance] and *I'tidal* [justice]. However, this approach tends to reduce moderation to a mere strategic position that serves the interests of socio-political stability without engaging its deeper theological dimensions. Within this

framework, moderation risks becoming a state project that disciplines religious expression into controllable categories, while religious communities themselves lack genuine theological ownership of the concept. Religious moderation risks becoming merely an external formality, rather than an internally rooted conviction. This aligns with Joas Adiprasetya's critique of the religious moderation programme, which he argues is predominantly 'top-down'; instead, he proposes 'religious mediation' as a more grassroots-oriented approach (Adiprasetya 2024:488–499).

This state-driven moderation project's inadequacy finds a parallel in the response of Indonesian Christianity. The tension between prophetic radicalism (understood as an uncompromising witness to the transformative claims of the Gospel) and hospitality (conceived as genuine acceptance of religious difference) has produced two theologically problematic poles. Some communities retreat into fundamentalist enclaves, equating prophetic witness with exclusionary rhetoric and aggressive proselytisation; others adopt a syncretistic tolerance that dilutes theological commitment in the name of interreligious harmony. Both responses rest on the same, yet ultimately mistaken, assumption: That prophetic radicalism and hospitality are mutually threatening entities and that maintaining one requires sacrificing the other. We contend that this is a false dichotomy, lacking grounding in the early church's tradition or in broader Christian pneumatology.

Existing theological studies on religious moderation from a Christian perspective remain inadequate in escaping the trap of this dichotomy. Most research is still confined to a normative-prescriptive approach, citing texts on love and peace, comparing them to other religious traditions, and then concluding that Christianity supports tolerance without considering the historical dynamics of religious communities' relationships with others (Enriquez 2018:153–156; Van der Watt 2015:1–7). Hermeneutically, this approach engages in proof-texting that ignores the texts' socio-historical context and the complexity of the Christian tradition. In contrast, contemporary studies on the New Testament have produced more nuanced understandings. In his study of the Acts of the Apostles, C. Kavin Rowe argues that Luke's narrative does not present Christianity as an accommodative movement seeking a middle ground but as a culture-forming community with particular truth claims, yet open to transformation through cross-boundary encounters (Rowe 2009:4–7). Christine Pohl also demonstrates that the practice of receiving strangers in the early Christian tradition was rooted in deep theological commitment, rather than being merely a social strategy (Pohl 1999:61–63). These findings pave the way for a richer understanding of the early church paradigm, a path that has not been sufficiently explored in Indonesia's discourse on religious moderation.

At the level of systematic and constructive theology, a number of prominent theologians have offered relevant resources, although these have not yet been synthesised fully to address the challenges of religious moderation in Indonesia. Amos Yong (2008), in *Hospitality and the Other*, constructs a strong pneumatological foundation for a Christian theology of hospitality, arguing that the Holy Spirit, poured out upon 'all flesh' (Jl 2:28–29), is the constitutive agent of the Christian community's openness to the other (Yong 2008:97–99). Amy G. Oden has documented that patristic sources in the early church consistently placed hospitality as a core expression of faith, not merely an optional practice (Oden 2001:29–31). Elizabeth Newman expands this discussion by highlighting the pneumatological and eschatological dimensions of hospitality as actions shaped by the anticipation of the renewal of all things (Newman 2007:34–36). From a different but complementary perspective, Miroslav Volf, in *Exclusion and Embrace*, shows that authentic Christian identity is built upon the centrality of Christ, and it is precisely this firm identity that enables sincere embrace of the other (Volf 1996:140–141). Representing the Pentecostal tradition, Macchia (2006) and Simon Chan (2006) make important contributions regarding how the early church's experience of the Spirit intrinsically formed communities that were both bold in prophetic witness and open in practical hospitality (Chan 2006:91–93; Macchia 2006:63–65).

However, a review of the existing literature reveals four significant gaps that justify the urgency of this research. Firstly, studies on early church hospitality and Pentecostal ecclesiology are rarely explicitly linked to debates on religious moderation in Indonesia's plural context; rather, these fields have developed in parallel, with little constructive interaction. Secondly, the dialectical relationship between prophetic rootedness in deep faith and hospitality has yet to be systematically formulated as a holistic ecclesiological paradigm; most literature addresses one dimension or the other without demonstrating how both are intrinsically affirmed within the pneumatology of the early church. Thirdly, the entire discourse on religious moderation, whether policy-based or theological-academic, operates almost exclusively at the level of doctrine and narrative, neglecting the formative-liturgical dimensions: How religious communities are concretely shaped through worship, catechesis and shared table fellowship to become genuinely hospitable communities. The discourse of moderation that ignores questions of communal formation ultimately produces exhortations without mechanisms for transformation; it states what ought to be done but does not explain how communities are formed to carry it out. Fourthly, although Pentecostal theology, with its pneumatological emphasis, possesses rich resources for addressing this challenge, the tradition has not yet been critically integrated into Indonesia's discourse on religious moderation, despite its natural connection between the experience of the Spirit and the *missio Dei* that transcends communal boundaries.

Based on the identification of these gaps, the central thesis of this article is that the paradigm of *radix et hospitium* in the early church's ecclesiology, integrating prophetic rootedness in Trinitarian-pneumatological faith with the radical practice of hospitality towards the other, offers a more robust and authentic theological foundation for religious moderation in

Indonesia than models relying solely on social pragmatism or normative policy without adequate communal formation. This thesis challenges the false dichotomy between prophetic witness and hospitality by demonstrating that, within Pentecostal pneumatology, the Holy Spirit simultaneously empowers bold witness to Christ and forms communities that sincerely welcome the other. The dialectic of *radix et hospitium* is not a synthesis that neutralises opposing poles but a dialectical elevation that maintains creative tension at a higher level: prophetic witness becomes more authentic when expressed through hospitable practice, and hospitality becomes more radical when shaped by prophetic conviction. Only communities truly rooted in Christ and animated by the Spirit possess the strength and motivation to embrace the other in their fullness, without losing their identity or threatening the other.

Building upon this thesis, the article aims to demonstrate that the paradigm of *radix et hospitium* in the ecclesiology of the early church, as formulated through Pentecostal pneumatology, the communal praxis of the early congregation, and the constructive tradition of ecumenical theology, offers a more authentic and sustainable theological framework for religious moderation in Indonesia than approaches that operate solely at the level of normative policy without adequate communal formation. This study employs a systematic-constructive theological method that integrates three interlocking procedures: narrative-theological exegesis of Acts and the Pauline epistles, patristic-historical reconstruction of early church hospitality practices, and contextual-constructive analysis that critically projects these findings onto Indonesia's contemporary religious moderation discourse. Following the Trinitarian-ecclesiological methodology and the comparative pneumatological approach, this method moves from the particularity of early Christian praxis towards constructive theological proposals for the plural Indonesian context. The approach is neither purely descriptive nor merely normative but dialectical, maintaining rigorous engagement with historical sources while constructing a paradigm (*radix et hospitium*) capable of critically evaluating and transforming existing frameworks of religious moderation.

This article is organised into four sections that build the argument cumulatively. The first section establishes the pneumatological foundation by analysing how early church pneumatology positions the Holy Spirit as the architect of both boundary-crossing and transformative prophetic radicalism. The second section reconstructs the practice of hospitality in the early congregation through readings of patristic and New Testament sources, demonstrating that shared table fellowship and the reception of strangers are theological *loci* where ecclesiological identity is most clearly expressed. The third section articulates the central dialectical framework in which prophetic radicalism and hospitality are understood as mutually constitutive dimensions of a single, inseparable ecclesiological identity. The fourth section contextualises this framework within Indonesia's pluralistic reality, showing how the *radix et hospitium* paradigm can make a distinctive constructive contribution to the discourse on religious moderation, offering a strong theological alternative to both exclusionary fundamentalism and accommodative relativism.

Creative tension: Dialectic of the *radix* and *hospitium*

The early Christian community did not regard itself as lacking conviction or occupying a neutral position among the various religious alternatives of the ancient Mediterranean. As Larry Hurtado demonstrates, this community exhibited what he terms 'binitarian devotion': a cultic commitment to Jesus as Lord that maintained continuity with Jewish monotheism while also representing a significant development (Hurtado 2003:134–153). This commitment extended beyond doctrine and was evident in concrete practices such as praying to Jesus, singing Christological hymns, and refusing participation in other cults. Consequently, the early Christian community may be characterised as radical and deeply rooted in its distinctive identity.

This radicalism is illustrated in the Acts of the Apostles through the motif of parrhesia, or boldness in speech, which recurs throughout the narrative. When Peter and John are summoned before the Sanhedrin and instructed to cease speaking about Jesus, they respond, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God' (Ac 4:19). This response demonstrates fidelity to a higher authority rather than anarchic rebellion. In this context, parrhesia signifies the courage to articulate truth in the presence of a threatening power. The prophetic dimension of this radicalism is evident in the continuity Luke establishes between the apostolic community and the prophetic tradition of Israel. In his defence (Ac 7), Stephen traces a lineage from Abraham to the persecuted prophets, thereby positioning the Christian community as heirs to a prophetic tradition consistently opposed by the 'stiff-necked people' (Ac 7:51).

In addition to possessing a deeply rooted identity, the early Christian community demonstrated significant openness towards those outside traditional boundaries. Within the ancient Mediterranean context, where ethnic, social and religious divisions were strictly maintained, Christian hospitality emerged as a distinctive phenomenon (Witherington 1998:806–808). John Koenig, in his analysis of New Testament hospitality, contends that philoxenia, or love for the stranger, was not merely a social courtesy but a theological practice grounded in the belief that God is the ultimate host who welcomes humanity (Koenig 1985:8–10). Hebrews 13:2 recalls the Abrahamic tradition at Mamre: 'Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it'. Thus, hospitality in early Christian tradition functioned not only as a social ethic but also as a theological practice that facilitated encounters with the divine through engagement with others.

Acts presents hospitality as a dynamic that continually expands beyond established boundaries. The episode involving Peter and Cornelius (Ac 10–11) serves as a paradigm: Peter, adhering to Jewish tradition, receives a vision that compels him to enter the house of a non-Jew. Notably, the hospitality in this account is reciprocal. He 'stayed for several days' in Cornelius's house (Ac 10:48), an act that, within a Jewish context, crossed ritual boundaries. Gaventa observes that this narrative concerns not only the inclusion of the nations but also the transformation of the Christian community's self-understanding, where God acts beyond the categories available to them (Gaventa 2003:168–172).

A crucial question emerges: How can these two dimensions, prophetic radicalism and radical hospitality, coexist without negating one another? An analysis of the early church's dynamics suggests that their relationship is not a binary opposition but a mutually enabling dialectic. Volf contends that authentic Christian identity consistently involves a double movement: differentiation from the other, which makes identity possible, and openness to the other, which prevents identity from becoming oppressive (Volf 2019:63–69).

This dialectic is evident in the way the Acts narrative presents the expansion of the mission. When the Antioch community sends Paul and Barnabas (Ac 13:1–3), commissioning occurs in the context of worship and fasting, practices that signify profound spiritual commitment. The mission itself constitutes a movement beyond established boundaries, extending into non-Jewish cities, diaspora synagogues and the Athenian agora. Deep roots do not impede expansion; instead, they enable branches to spread while maintaining identity. The olive tree metaphor Paul employs in Romans 11 illustrates this dynamic: wild branches, representing the nations, are grafted into the tree of Israel, becoming participants in the 'rich root' (Rm 11:17).

Acts 15 of the Jerusalem Council serves as a primary example for understanding how this tension was negotiated. On the one hand, the council affirms particularity by determining that Gentile believers are not required to be circumcised or to become Jews. On the other hand, this decision broadens the community's boundaries, as Gentiles are accepted as they are. The apostolic decree issued is not a condition of salvation but a modus vivendi that enables table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. This solution does not represent a compromise or a middle ground but rather a creative configuration that preserves identity while creating space for fellowship.

Pneumatological foundation: The architect of radical hospitality

The dialectic of prophetic radicalism and hospitality is grounded in the Pentecostal understanding of the Holy Spirit as the constitutive agent of ecclesiological identity and mission. Pentecostal pneumatology, emphasising the active and transformative role of the Spirit in shaping community and empowering witness, offers a distinctive framework for understanding how the church can be both prophetic in proclamation and hospitable in practice. Amos Yong articulates a Trinitarian-pneumatological theology that positions the Spirit as the architect of divine hospitality. He contends that the centrality of the Acts narrative in Pentecostal spirituality provides resources for developing new theological understandings of religions shaped by the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (Yong 2007:55–73). Yong's framework demonstrates that Pentecost is not only a historical event that empowers witnesses but also a pneumatological event that shapes the community as a space of divine hospitality.

Yong's concept of the 'Spirit of hospitality' interprets Pentecost as a divine act in which the Holy Spirit forms a community that embraces diversity as a divine gift rather than perceiving it as a threat to unity. The diversity of languages at Pentecost (Ac 2:1–13) serves not only as a communicative miracle but also as a theological affirmation of the Spirit's inclusive work. Yong maintains that divine hospitality in the Spirit underpins Pentecostal ecumenism and interreligious dialogue (Dodson 2013:123–140), positioning hospitality as a theological implication of pneumatology rather than a pragmatic approach to interfaith relations. This perspective challenges narrower Pentecostal interpretations that focus exclusively on the gifts of the Spirit for evangelistic witness, neglecting their role in forming hospitable communities that welcome others.

Yong's Trinitarian-pneumatological theology further explains how the Spirit's work in creation, redemption and sanctification establishes a cosmic hospitality that transcends ecclesiological boundaries. The Spirit present at creation (Gn 1:2) is the same Spirit who descends at Pentecost, demonstrating continuity between God's creative and redemptive actions. This continuity indicates that divine hospitality is an intrinsic aspect of God's character, as revealed in the Trinity, rather than merely a response to the fall. Studebaker notes that in Yong's theology, the Spirit serves as the divine agent connecting God with the world, a role essential for understanding God's presence and activity in creation and history (Studebaker 2013:83–101). The Spirit's pervasive presence suggests that Christian hospitality is not only an ethical virtue but also a part of God's own hospitable movement towards the world (Jipp 2017).

Yong's pneumatology has significant implications for ecclesiology. If the Spirit forms the church as a community of divine hospitality, ecclesiological identity must extend beyond confessional or institutional definitions to include a performative dimension. Thus, the church's identity is realised through its hospitable practices. Yong introduces a 'performative theology of interreligious encounter', in which Christian witness is understood less as the transmission of doctrinal propositions and more as the embodiment of hospitality, transformed by the Spirit (Yong 2007). This performative approach does not diminish prophetic witness but situates it within communal practices that reveal the transformative reality of the Gospel through generous welcome. Therefore, prophetic witness becomes hospitable

not by compromising its claims but by embodying them in communities that reflect God's hospitable character.

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, a prominent Pentecostal-ecumenical theologian, extends Yong's framework by developing an ecclesiology that highlights the Spirit's communal and participatory aspects. Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology is grounded in the concept of the church as koinonia, a fellowship shaped by the Spirit that mirrors the communal life of the Trinity. Miti notes that Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology is relevant for contexts marked by injustice, xenophobia and pluralism because it demonstrates how the Spirit forms communities that embrace diversity while sustaining unity in Christ (Miti 2020:8). This focus on diversity-in-unity is particularly pertinent in the Indonesian context, where religious pluralism necessitates a theological framework that affirms diversity without succumbing to relativism.

Kärkkäinen further articulates how Eucharistic hospitality serves as a central ecclesiological practice that embodies both prophetic witness and hospitable welcome (Kärkkäinen 2020:443–453). He contends that the Lord's Table is a setting where the church affirms its distinctive identity in Christ while also extending welcome to others. The Eucharist thus becomes a performative act in which the dialectic of prophetic radicalism and hospitality is enacted: the church proclaims the Lord's death until he comes (prophetic witness) and welcomes all who hunger and thirst to participate in the meal (radical hospitality). This Eucharistic aspect of Pentecostal ecclesiology situates hospitality at the core of Christian worship, illustrating that welcoming the other is a central, not peripheral, dimension of the church's response to God's grace (Vondey 2010:41–55). Kärkkäinen provides a robust theological framework for understanding how prophetic radicalism and hospitality can be dialectically integrated. The Spirit who empowers bold witness (Ac 1:8) is the same Spirit who forms inclusive communities that transcend ethnic, social and religious boundaries (Ac 2:17–18). This duality is not a contradiction but an expression of the Spirit's multifaceted character, which simultaneously empowers proclamation and shapes welcome. Pentecostal pneumatology, therefore, offers an alternative to both fundamentalism, which emphasises witness at the expense of hospitality, and liberalism, which emphasises hospitality at the expense of witness. Instead, it proposes a vision in which prophetic witness and radical hospitality are mutually constitutive dimensions of the Spirit-shaped response to God's missional call.

This pneumatological foundation has significant implications for the Indonesian context. This framework offers a third alternative in an environment where religious radicalism often claims prophetic witness and moderate responses are frequently limited to passive tolerance: Prophetic hospitality, theologically grounded and open to genuine encounters with others. The Spirit poured out at Pentecost empowers a witness that is welcoming rather than exclusive and transformative rather than diluted. Consequently, this pneumatological foundation establishes a theological basis for religious moderation that is not a compromise but an authentic expression of the Spirit-shaped Pentecostal identity.

Courageous moderation: Critique of the depthless via media

The early church's dialectical model provides a critical perspective on the prevailing understanding of moderation in contemporary Indonesian discourse. State-promoted moderation is generally conceptualised as a via media, or middle ground, between the extremes of fundamentalism and liberalism. Within this paradigm, religious communities are encouraged to avoid excessive religious expression, refrain from making strong truth claims and prioritise social harmony. Although this approach's practical objectives may be justified in a pluralistic society, it exhibits a significant theological limitation: moderation is reduced to an avoidance of commitment rather than an expression of profound conviction.

A more incisive critique emerges from a discourse analysis perspective. The state-promoted narrative of religious moderation is deeply embedded within power relations. Questions arise about who has the authority to define what constitutes moderate religious expression and who determines the boundaries between reasonable and excessive religious expression. In the Indonesian context, the terms 'moderate' and 'radical' frequently serve as disciplinary tools that legitimise state control over religious expression. Communities now celebrated as exemplars of moderation, such as the early church, were historically regarded by Roman authorities as superstitious (i.e. holding extreme beliefs). Paul, whose writings are currently invoked to support moderation, was previously imprisoned as a 'troublemaker' [*stasis*].

The early church presents an alternative paradigm: moderation that arises from depth of conviction, not from a lack of commitment. Their hospitality did not stem from indifference but from a profound dedication to the God who, in Christ, embraced the world. According to Andrew Walls, the dynamics of early Christianity were defined by a tension between the indigenising principle, which emphasises rootedness in specific contexts, and the pilgrim principle, which seeks to transcend particular contexts in pursuit of the universality of the Kingdom of God (Walls 1996:7–9). A robust Christian identity necessitates the creative interplay between the two principles.

The concept of 'courageous moderation' advanced in this analysis is fundamentally distinct from minimalist moderation, which seeks to avoid confrontation. Courageous moderation is characterised by parresia, the courage to speak the truth even when it is unpopular or when it disrupts superficial harmony. Within the prophetic tradition of Israel, continued by Jesus and the apostolic community, faithfulness to God often necessitates confronting injustice rather than accommodating it. Walter Brueggemann contends that the prophetic voice does not oppose the pastoral; rather,

it represents the most authentic form of pastoral care, one that calls the community out of royal consciousness and towards an alternative imagination (Brueggemann 2001:21–37).

In the Indonesian context, courageous moderation means that Christian communities do not simply accept a definition of moderation imported from the interests of state stability. Christian communities can offer a distinctive contribution: moderation as hospitable parresia, the courage to articulate their particular truth while simultaneously opening space for the other to be fully present (Yong 2008:99–132). This is different from passive tolerance, which merely 'lets the other exist' without substantive engagement. Christian hospitality requires a transformative encounter in which both parties are furthered. Furthermore, courageous moderation resists reducing faith to social ethics alone. The prevailing discourse on religious moderation often emphasises the horizontal dimension of human relationships while neglecting the vertical dimension of the relationship with God. However, in the Christian tradition, these two dimensions are inseparable. Love for one's neighbour originates from and is enabled by love for God; openness to others is a response to the God who, in Christ, has already opened Himself to humanity (Pohl 1999:61–84). A moderation that neglects this vertical dimension is reduced to fragile social pragmatism.

Finally, courageous moderation acknowledges that conflict and harmony are not inherently negative and positive, respectively. The Jerusalem Council (Ac 15) illustrates that the early Christian community did not evade conflict but rather addressed it constructively. The intense debate between circumcision advocates and opponents was not suppressed to maintain superficial harmony but was resolved through honest deliberation (Witherington 1998). This model challenges the assumption that moderation equates to conflict avoidance; instead, it defines authentic moderation as the ability to engage in constructive conflict while maintaining a commitment to truth and love for others.

From moderation to mediation: The alternative befriending paradigm

Contemporary Indonesian contextual theology, particularly as articulated by Joas Adiprasetya, provides a fundamental critique of prevailing discussions on religious moderation. Adiprasetya advocates a paradigm shift from the notion of 'moderation' to 'mediation' or more specifically, 'befriending' (Adiprasetya 2024). In this framework, interreligious relations extend beyond maintaining distance or avoiding conflict, and instead emphasise cultivating transformative friendships with others. The concept of befriending is grounded in Trinitarian theology, which conceives of God as a community of friendship [*perichoresis*] and invites humanity to participate in this divine fellowship (Adiprasetya & Sasongko 2019:21–31). Adiprasetya proposed shifting the focus from *agape* to *philia* as the primary paradigm for relationships. While traditional Christian discourse often regards agape as the highest form of love, Adiprasetya argues that philia, or friendship-love, offers a more egalitarian, reciprocal model. Philia is characterised by horizontal relationships between friends rather than vertical, giver-receiver dynamics. This shift holds particular significance for interreligious dialogue, as it helps avoid the paternalism that often shapes discussions of tolerance.

Jürgen Moltmann, who developed the concept of 'open friendship', articulates it as 'lived freedom', a relationship defined not by hierarchy or obligation but by the voluntary choice to be present for another (Moltmann 1978). Open friendship rejects exclusivism, which restricts friendship to those who are similar, and instead extends itself to strangers. Jesus exemplifies this open friendship in the Gospel narrative by becoming 'a friend of tax collectors and sinners' (Mt 11:19).

Adiprasetya identifies five characteristics of a theology of friendship that enable Christians to participate in Trinitarian friendship through befriending others: vulnerability, unpredictability, reimagination, propheticity and compassion (Adiprasetya & Sasongko 2019). Vulnerability involves the willingness to open oneself to others, even at the risk of rejection. Unpredictability recognises that genuine encounters inevitably bring surprises. Reimagination calls for the courage to reconceptualise relationships beyond established categories. Propheticity maintains a critical perspective. Compassion responds to others' suffering in ways that surpass mere sympathy. Adiprasetya also introduces an imaginative new munus triplex, that Jesus is Friend, Servant and Stranger (Adiprasetya 2021:142–155). This framework is significant because it incorporates the category of 'stranger' into Christology, recognising that Jesus is the other who approaches from outside. The implications for interreligious relations are substantial: if Christ is present as the stranger, then encounters with individuals from other religions may become a *locus theologicus*, a site for encountering the divine. However, this recognition does not weaken the church's confession. The church welcomes the stranger as a place where the Spirit is already at work because the triune God is present to all creation. This does not mean that every religious claim is equally true.

Ecclesiological implications: The church as a dialectical space

The befriending paradigm introduces significant implications for Indonesia's discourse on religious moderation. Firstly, it redirects attention from merely avoiding conflict to actively building relationships. Secondly, transformation is required on both sides, as befriending entails mutual change through encounter. Thirdly, the theological dimension of interreligious relationships is recognised, suggesting that encounters with others can be opportunities to encounter the divine. Consequently, the befriending paradigm provides a more robust and theologically grounded framework for understanding the presence of Christian communities within a pluralistic society.

The *radix et hospitium* paradigm, informed by the theology of befriending, has significant ecclesiological implications for

the church in Indonesia. Firstly, the church is called to be a community that is deeply rooted in Scripture, tradition, and spiritual practices that shape its identity (Pohl 1999:13). Such depth does not constitute a self-enclosed fundamentalism but rather a foundation for confident engagement with the world. A church lacking deep roots may become defensive, whereas a deeply rooted church can extend its branches widely without fear of losing its identity.

Secondly, the church is called to practice hospitality and befriending as spiritual disciplines rather than solely as social strategies. Christine Pohl emphasises that hospitality within the Christian tradition involves 'making room for others in our lives', a practice that requires both sacrifice and transformation. In the Indonesian context, where Christian communities constitute a minority, hospitality may manifest as solidarity with other marginalised groups, advocacy for religious freedom for all and openness to learning from other traditions.

Thirdly, the church must sustain its prophetic dimension. The prophetic tradition of Israel, which was continued by Jesus and the apostolic community, is marked by a critique of injustice and solidarity with the oppressed. Religious moderation should not serve as a pretext for suppressing criticism of injustice in the Indonesian context. A church that embodies moderation through *radix et hospitium* can offer incisive critique while maintaining a posture of warm embrace, demonstrating both *parrhesia* in speaking the truth and *philoxenia* in welcoming those who are different.

Veritas radicis: The truth-status of central dogma and its disciplinary implications

When we focus on hospitality, friendship and Christ as the Stranger, we have to ask a key question: What is at the root of this approach, and how true is it? If the church is truly open to others, does that openness include its core beliefs, especially the doctrine of the Trinity, so that even these could be up for discussion? This article argues that the answer must be clear. The root is not just about group identity or comfort, but a real commitment to the triune God as objectively and non-negotiably true. Hospitality grows from this commitment; it is not a weakening of it. Treating the Trinity as just one option among many would not make the church more welcoming but would actually undermine the very foundation that supports hospitality.

This commitment requires careful thinking, and two key distinctions matter. Firstly, we need to separate what we believe from how we hold that belief: Saying the Trinity is fully true does not mean we understand it completely or have all the answers. As McGrath (2002) and Newbigin (1995) explain, theology really does point to and reveal God, even if we only see part of the truth, 'through a glass darkly' (1 Cor 13:12). The certainty of faith is about trust [*fiducia*], not the absolute proof that Enlightenment thinkers wanted, nor just a personal preference (Newbigin 1989). Secondly, doctrine has a guiding role that makes it non-negotiable: As Lindbeck (1984) says, the Trinity is like the grammar that keeps Christian talk about God recognisably Christian. Based on the idea of a hierarchy of truths, the main beliefs are never up for negotiation; hospitality changes how we talk, not what we believe.

Seen this way, the idea of befriending others does not weaken core beliefs but actually depends on them. Recognising Christ as the Stranger does not make Christ less important; it makes his role even stronger, because only a community sure of who Christ is can truly look for him in unexpected places. Similarly, calling interreligious encounters places where theology happens means we believe the Spirit can be found there, not that all religions are equally true, because the triune God the church believes in is already present in all creation (Yong 2008). The strongest reason for hospitality comes from the root itself: The relationship between Father, Son and Spirit is an eternal example of hospitality (Moltmann 1981). So, welcoming others is a way to live out, not set aside, the doctrine of God.

These beliefs have clear effects on the fields they relate to. In systematic theology, the *radix et hospitium* approach is a method that is both realistic and confessionally grounded, in which the Trinity is both what is believed and how we talk about God in a relational, open way. This approach avoids both isolation and the loss of distinctiveness. In missiology, this view sees mission not as giving up on sharing faith, but as doing so in a welcoming way, with a witness rooted in God's mission and carried out with what Bosch (1991) calls 'bold humility': being confident in the truth, yet open and humble in hospitality. Proclamation and dialogue are not opposites but come together as 'prophetic dialogue' (Bevans & Schroeder 2004). For example, in Indonesia, Christians should not hide the Trinity when talking with monotheistic neighbours, but rather present it as a relational and welcoming God whose life is the basis for the kind of friendship this article supports. In this way, the depth of the root and the openness of hospitality are shown to be united.

Conclusion

This study reconstructs the *radix et hospitium* paradigm from the early church's ecclesiology as an alternative model for the discourse on religious moderation. A narrative-theological analysis of the Acts of the Apostles demonstrates that the early Christian community embodied the creative tension between prophetic radicalism and radical hospitality. This dialectical model, enriched by insights from Joas Adiprasetya's befriending theology, offers a constructive critique of Indonesia's dominant conception of moderation. Further research in the Indonesian context could explore, firstly, how the befriending paradigm is applied in Christian-Muslim relations in regions with complex majority-minority dynamics; secondly, how Adiprasetya's five marks of a theology of friendship can serve as an evaluative framework for existing interreligious dialogue practices; and thirdly, how this concept can be integrated with other religious traditions in Indonesia that possess similar concepts,

such as *rahmatan lil alamin* in Islam or *gotong royong* as local wisdom, so that religious moderation in Indonesia emerges from the depth of each community's tradition. Rather than relativising the faith it articulates, the paradigm establishes the foundation of its openness in the absolute truth of the triune God, whose existence is characterised by hospitality.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

CRediT authorship contribution

Johannis Siahaya: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Project administration, Writing – original draft. Harls Evan R. Siahaan: Formal analysis, Methodology, Resources, Software, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication, and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Sekolah Tinggi Agama Kristen Teruna Bhakti Research Ethics Committee (No. 003/RCS-LP2M/STAK-TB/III/2026).

Funding information

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings, and content.

References

Adiprasetya, J., 2021, 'Revisiting Jurgen Moltmann's theology of open friendship', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 21(2), 177–187. https://doi.org/10.1080/1474225X.2021.1942618

Adiprasetya, J., 2024, 'Befriending religious others: From religious moderation to religious mediation in Indonesia', *Ecumenical Review* 76(5), 488–499. https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12885

Adiprasetya, J. & Sasongko, N., 2019, 'A compassionate space-making: Toward a Trinitarian theology of friendship', *Ecumenical Review* 71(1–2), 21–31. https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12416

Bevans, S.B. & Schroeder, R.P., 2004, *Constants in context: A theology of mission for today*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, NY.

Bosch, D.J., 1991, *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, NY.

Brueggemann, W., 2001, *The prophetic imagination*, 2nd edn., Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.

Chan, S., 2006, *Liturgical theology: The church as worshiping community*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL.

Dodson, J.D., 2013, 'Divine hospitality and human diversity: Amos Yong and foundations of ecumenical and interfaith relations', in A.J. Johnson (ed.), *The theology of Amos Yong and the new face of Pentecostal scholarship*, pp. 123–140, Brill, Leiden.

Enriquez, K.B., 2018, 'Seeing a friend in the stranger and the stranger in the friend: The practice of Christian hospitality through interreligious dialogue and solidarity', *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 38(1), 153–156. https://doi.org/10.1353/bcs.2018.0014

Gaventa, B.R., 2003, *The acts of the Apostles*, Abingdon, Nashville, TN.

Hurtado, L.W., 2003, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in earliest Christianity*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Jipp, J.W., 2017, *Saved by faith and hospitality*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Kärkkäinen, V.M., 2020, 'Theology of religions: Divine hospitality and spiritual discernment', in W. Vondey (ed.), *The Routledge handbook of Pentecostal theology*, pp. 443–453, Routledge, London.

Kemenag, R.I., 2021, *Religious moderation*, Research, Development, Training and Education Agency, The Ministry of Religious Affairs Republic of Indonesia, Jakarta.

Koenig, J., 1985, *New Testament hospitality: Partnership with strangers as promise and mission*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA.

Lindbeck, G.A., 1984, *The nature of doctrine: Religion and theology in a postliberal age*, Westminster Press, PA.

Macchia, F.D., 2006, *Baptized in the Spirit: A global Pentecostal theology*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.

McGrath, A.E., 2002, *A scientific theology, volume 2: Reality*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Miti, B., 2020, 'Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology and its relevance to South Africa', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76(3), a6109. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i3.6109

Moltmann, J., 1978, *The open church: Invitation to a messianic lifestyle*, SCM Press, London.

Moltmann, J., 1981, *The Trinity and the kingdom of God*, SCM Press, London.

Newbigin, L., 1989, *The Gospel in a pluralist society*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Newbigin, L., 1995, *Proper confidence: Faith, doubt, and certainty in Christian discipleship*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Newman, E., 2007, *Untamed hospitality: Welcoming God and other strangers*, Brazos Press, Grand Rapids, MI.

Oden, A.G., 2001, *And you welcomed me: A sourcebook on hospitality in early Christianity*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN.

Pohl, C.D., 1999, *Making room: Recovering hospitality as a Christian tradition*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Rowe, C.K., 2009, *World upside down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman age*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Setara Institute, 2022, *Annual report on religious freedom and tolerance in Indonesia*, Setara Institute, Jakarta, viewed 23 November 2025, from https://setara-institute.org/.

Studebaker, S.M., 2013, 'Toward a Pneumatological Trinitarian theology: Amos Yong, the spirit, and the trinity', in A.J. Johnson (ed.), *The theology of Amos Yong and the new face of Pentecostal scholarship*, pp. 83–101, Brill, Leiden.

Van der Watt, J., 2015, 'The ethical implications of 2 John 10–11', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36(1), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v36i1.1483

Volf, M., 1996, *Exclusion and embrace: A theological exploration of identity, otherness, and reconciliation*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN.

Volf, M., 2019, *Exclusion and embrace: A theological exploration of identity, otherness, and reconciliation*, rev. edn., Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN.

Vondey, W., 2010, 'Pentecostal ecclesiology and Eucharistic hospitality: Toward a systematic and ecumenical account of the church', *Pneuma* 32(1), 41–55. https://doi.org/10.1163/027209610X12628362887596

Wahid Foundation, 2021, *Annual report on religious intolerance in Indonesia*, Wahid Foundation, Jakarta, viewed 23 November 2025, from https://www.wahidfoundation.org/.

Walls, A.F., 1996, *The missionary movement in Christian history*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, NY.

Witherington, B., III., 1998, *The acts of the Apostles: A socio-rhetorical commentary*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Yong, A., 2007, 'The spirit of hospitality: Pentecostal perspectives toward a performative theology of interreligious encounter', *Missiology: An International Review* 35(1), 55–73. https://doi.org/10.1177/009182960703500105

Yong, A., 2008, *Hospitality and the other: Pentecost, Christian practices, and the neighbor*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, NY.