

*Research article*

## Whose Peace? Whose Neighbor? Ethical Discourses in Devotional Publications and the Challenge of Religious Pluralism

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**Abstract** This article reports on a qualitative, normative theological study that employs contextual hermeneutics within a Christian social ethics framework to examine how the Renungan Harian Keluarga (RHK), a weekly devotional publication, of Gereja Masehi Injili di Minahasa (GMIM), in North Sulawesi province, Indonesia, constructs peace and neighborliness in Indonesia's plural society. This study aims to analyze how RHK constructs ethical visions of "peace" and "neighbor" within Indonesia's plural society. Using contextual hermeneutics within Christian social ethics, this study analyzes 38 weekly RHK editions published from January to October 2025. The findings reveal that RHK consistently affirms universal principles such as justice, love, and human dignity. Its practical application remains largely intra-communal. "Neighbor" is predominantly framed as fellow believers, and "peace" as ecclesial harmony, rarely extending to explicit engagement with others. The study concludes that RHK demonstrates strong internal ethics but limited public ethics, reflecting benevolent insularity rather than intentional inclusiveness. This gap calls for a devotional pedagogy that explicitly names the religious other as a neighbor, thereby equipping the congregants to embody *Imago Dei* and *shalom* in Indonesia's diverse democracy. The article contributes to Christian social ethics and public theology, as well as to the sociology of religion, peace studies, and intergroup relations, by showing how everyday devotional texts shape moral imagination in plural democracies.

**Keywords** Christian Social Ethics; Ethical Discourse; Peace And Neighborliness; Plural Society; Renungan Harian Keluarga

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized as a pluralistic nation, diverse in terms of religion, ethnicity, and culture. Within this diversity, interreligious life is often marked by coexistence and tension. Historical records document identity-based conflicts in various regions, notably Maluku and Poso (Ali, 2023; Arsyad et al., 2025; Duncan, 2016; Rao & Vidyattama, 2017). These conflicts have prompted numerous stakeholders to engage in peacebuilding efforts. Local churches, including the Evangelical Christian Church in Minahasa (GMIM: *Gereja Masihi Injili di Minahasa*), North Sulawesi, have participated in such initiatives. Their contribution extends beyond public engagement and is shaped by internal, daily faith formation. These efforts are continuously nurtured to sustain North Sulawesi's well-documented reputation as one of the most tolerant provinces in Indonesia (Balitbang Diklat Kemenag, 2024). In such an environment, everyday moral formation is a critical space in which religious pluralism is worked through constructively or left to ossify into social distance.

Daily faith formation is commonly expressed through the *Renungan Harian Keluarga* (RHK: Family Daily Devotion), a weekly devotional publication GMIM distributes to thousands of households. The RHK serves as the primary medium through which congregants reflect on Scripture daily. These texts shape not only personal spirituality but also the moral imagination of the faithful themselves (Luther, 2023). This moral imagination, in turn, influences how congregants perceive their neighbors and interact with society (Earley, 2021). In a pluralistic context, understanding "neighbor" is an ethical issue of critical importance. The question of who is regarded as a neighbor determines the boundaries of inclusivity in the acts of love. Therefore, the analysis of RHK must be conducted through the lens of Christian social ethics. If RHK is the weekly moral pedagogy for households, the way RHK uses the words "*peace*" and "*neighbor*" is important from an ethical, rather than a devotional, perspective. In this study, the household is treated not as the primary site of marital-conflict analysis, but as the routine setting of devotional formation through which congregants learn how to imagine peace, social responsibility, and the figure of the neighbor beyond the home.

Christian social ethics emphasizes that faith must be embodied in the responsibility toward others. The principle of *Imago Dei* (Latin for "image of God") provides a foundational basis for affirming the dignity of every human being (Okonkwo, 2025). This dignity is not contingent on religious affiliation, ethnic

identity, or social status (Szczerba, 2020). The concept of *Shalom* in the Old Testament tradition expands the meaning of peace to include relational wholeness and social justice (Oko & Ndubuwa, 2022; Ronda, 2025). Jesus Christ reinforced this principle through the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). In this narrative, “neighbor” is defined inclusively, transcending religious and ethnic boundaries (Chalmers, 2020; Chamburuka & Gusha, 2020; Mensah, 2019; Proctor, 2019). Authentic Christian ethics demands the recognition of the other as a neighbor worthy of love (Hauerwas, 2025; Wadell, 2024).

While *Imago Dei* grounds equal human dignity, Reformed ethics also provides resources for the recognition of God’s good work outside the limits of the church. The Reformed theological tradition offers further grounding through the doctrine of common grace (*gratia communis*), which affirms that God works beyond the confines of the church, as Calvin did in 1559/1960. Goodness, truth, and justice can be found in non-Christian communities. The church is called not to dominate but to serve the common good (*pro publico bono*) (Dumolyn, 2022). This vocation situates the church as an integral part of the plural public sphere. Public theology emphasizes that Christian faith must engage with social realities without compromising its identity (Kim, 2024). In the Indonesian context, this means contributing to harmony without imposing uniformity, a principle echoed in Nurcholish Madjid’s vision of “Islam Yes, Islamic Party No,” which has influenced interfaith discourse across religious boundaries (Nata, 2024). These theological commitments return to long-held Indonesian concerns about the relationship between interreligious harmony and peacebuilding, as they seek to question how churches can translate these commitments into practice.

Research on the role of religion in peacebuilding in Indonesia has significantly grown over the past two decades. Many scholars have focused on the institutional role of churches in promoting interreligious harmony (Khalid & Lopez, 2023; Khan, 2023; Kruja, 2022; Siddiq et al., 2024). Several studies have highlighted local interfaith initiatives, particularly in regions recognized for sustained coexistence, such as North Sulawesi (Astuti et al., 2022; Hadawiah et al., 2025). However, attention to internal moral formation tools such as devotional texts remains limited. Existing research tends to be descriptive and rarely employs normative ethical frameworks. Analyses of devotional content often stop at personal spiritualization. However, these texts also shape congregants’ social attitudes toward other groups (Fulton, 2025). Nevertheless, peacebuilding, as well as institutional programs, is also influenced by

everyday texts and practices that constitute moral imagination in households and congregations.

International scholarship on daily devotionals reveals a different trend. Several public theology journals have begun to examine how devotional texts shape political and social ethics (Gibbons, 2023; Katsafanas, 2022). Studies in Africa and Latin America show that daily devotion can either strengthen solidarity or deepen segregation (Gibbons, 2023). These findings demonstrate that devotional texts are not socially neutral in their language. Similar research remains scarce in Southeast Asia. While some scholars have begun exploring religious narratives in Christian media, their focus has not yet addressed religious pluralism. Academic literature on Protestant devotional texts in Indonesia is virtually absent from international discourse (Widyawati et al., 2025).

Scholarly debates persist regarding the proper scope of devotional practice. Some scholars argue that devotional texts should remain focused on personal piety to avoid politicization and maintain spiritual purity (Gentile, 2020; Goodrich, 2021). Others insist that all religious discourse is inherently public and must engage with social justice, especially in plural democracies (Sajir, 2023; Shaw, 2023). In the Indonesian context, this tension reflects broader questions about whether churches should prioritize internal spiritual formation or active interfaith engagement (Ikhwan et al., 2019). This divergence underscores the need for a critical analysis of how everyday religious texts navigate the boundary between private faith and public responsibility. This discussion is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where the authorities of the church's hierarchy do not necessarily reflect the most widespread weekly pedagogy: family worship.

At the national level, some researchers have examined official church documents on interreligious harmony (Pamuji, 2024; Pohl, 2009; Ummah, 2022). However, a systematic analysis of daily formation materials, such as RHK, has never been conducted despite the fact that RHK is produced regularly and distributed weekly to thousands of congregants. These texts significantly influence believers' thoughts and actions. The GMIM is known for its active role in promoting harmony, consistent with North Sulawesi's status as a national model of tolerance (Azeharie & Sari, 2021). Whether this value is consistently reflected in the RHK remains unclear. This gap is significant because daily formation often has a deeper and more sustained impact than formal declarations do. Without critical analysis, even well-intentioned devotional materials may inadvertently reinforce communal boundaries, despite the church's institutional commitment to inclusivity. Consequently, in order

to evaluate whether, and in what ways, such commitments at the corpus level are operationalized in the daily ethical imagination of the common reader, a corpus-level analysis of RHK is required.

This study addresses a clear gap in the literature. Although GMIM is publicly associated with interreligious harmony in North Sulawesi, no study has systematically examined whether that institutional commitment is reflected in its most widely circulated weekly devotional text, the *Renungan Harian Keluarga* (RHK). This article, therefore, analyzes RHK not as spiritually neutral material but as a formative medium of public ethics in a plural society. Two research questions guide the analysis. First, how does GMIM's RHK construct the ethical meaning of peace within a plural society? Second, how does RHK construct the figure of the neighbor in relation to religious others within that society? These questions allow the study to move beyond general claims about harmony and to examine whether devotional discourse explicitly forms congregants for interreligious coexistence.

To address these questions, the article employs contextual hermeneutics within a Christian social ethics framework rooted in *Imago Dei*, shalom, the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the Reformed doctrine of common grace. The study aims to identify the extent to which RHK forms congregants as inclusive agents of peace and to evaluate the congruence between devotional discourse and the ethical demands of the gospel in a plural democracy.

The article contributes to Christian social ethics and public theology by bringing devotional discourse into explicit conversation with questions of pluralism, moral imagination, and public responsibility. It also contributes to the sociology of religion, peace studies, and intergroup relations by showing how everyday religious texts may either widen or narrow the ethical horizon through which believers perceive religious others in democratic life.

The principal aim of this research is to examine the ethical vision of peace and attitudes toward neighbors in the GMIM's *Family Daily Devotion*. The analysis employs a Christian social ethics framework rooted in the concepts of *imago Dei*, shalom, and the Reformed tradition. Contextual hermeneutics connects text, norms, and context. This study identifies the extent to which RHK shapes congregants as inclusive agents of peace. Normative evaluation assesses the congruence between devotional teachings and the ethical demands of the gospel. The principal conclusion is that the GMIM's RHK predominantly constructs peace as ecclesial harmony and the neighbor as a fellow believer, thereby missing opportunities to foster a public

theology of inclusive solidarity that could further strengthen Indonesia's plural democracy.

This research contributes not only to Christian ethics but also to broader interdisciplinary fields, such as the sociology of religion, peace studies, and intergroup relations. By demonstrating how everyday religious texts shape social attitudes, this study offers insights relevant to scholars and practitioners working to sustain coexistence in plural democracies worldwide, particularly in contexts such as North Sulawesi, where harmony is not taken for granted but actively cultivated.

## **2. METHODS**

This article adopts a qualitative normative theological design and applies contextual hermeneutics within a Christian social ethics framework (Dietrich & Luz, 2002; Gilhus, 2021; Malbon, 1983) to a corpus of thirty-eight weekly RHK editions published between 5 January and 4 October 2025. As a normative theological inquiry, this study does not involve human participants; rather, the devotional texts themselves constitute the primary subject of analysis.

Data were collected by systematically retrieving all thirty-eight RHK editions from GMIM's official digital archives. Each edition was verified for authenticity and completeness and compiled into a unified research corpus. The materials used in this study consist exclusively of published devotional texts, which include a weekly theme, a biblical pericope, a contextual narrative, discussion questions, and prayer points.

The analytical instrument is not a physical tool but rather a normative framework derived from Christian social ethics. This framework serves as an interpretive lens through which the texts are evaluated. It includes four core principles: (1) the doctrine of *Imago Dei* as the foundation of universal human dignity (Evans, 2019; Lioy, 2024; Okonkwo, 2025; Reinders, 2023; Szczerba, 2020; Turner Jr, 2020); (2) the concept of *shalom* as peace encompassing relational wholeness and social justice (Isaacs, 2020; Lynch, 2023; Oko & Ndubuwa, 2022; Ronda, 2025); (3) the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) as a model of radical inclusivity; and (4) the Reformed doctrine of common grace, which affirms God's active presence beyond the institutional church. These principles function as the primary instruments for normative judgment.

As a qualitative study in theological ethics, this study did not formulate a testable hypothesis. Instead, it seeks to generate critical insights into how devotional discourse constructs ethical visions of peace and neighborliness in a pluralistic society. The research procedure follows three interrelated movements of contextual hermeneutics, a method well-established in public theology and contextual ethics. The first movement is a description. At this stage, the researcher conducted repeated close readings of each RHK edition to identify explicit and implicit ethical claims concerning peace and neighbors. Representative quotations were selected to illustrate how the texts frame social relations, moral responsibility, and the boundaries of inclusivity.

The second movement is the normative analysis. Here, the identified ethical claims are critically evaluated against the four principles of the analytical framework. The assessment focuses on the degree to which devotional discourse aligns with or diverges from the ethical demands of the Gospel, particularly in its treatment of “the other” in a religiously diverse context.

The third movement is contextual reflections. In this phase, the findings from the previous stages are interpreted in light of Indonesia’s socio-religious reality, with special attention to North Sulawesi, a province consistently recognized for its high level of interreligious tolerance. This reflection explores the theological, pastoral, and social implications of the identified discourses and proposes recommendations for developing devotional materials that effectively nurture inclusive solidarity. In order to justify analytic generalisation and transferability, the research trace-shifted away to larger implications, based on a transparent process: (1) summarising the repetitively recurrent ethical constructions of the meaning of peace and the meaning of neighbour of that text to provide broader implications, using explicit procedures; (2) normatively assessing each of the ethical constructions on the four foundations of ethical principle; (3) mapping the validated constructions to domains in the public-ethics space of the plural societies (e.g., interreligious encounter, civic cooperation and justice-seeking peace). This is not to be taken as statistical generalisation, but as a specific justification of general, practice oriented extrapolation of a thick description of GMIM devotional talk.

The validity of the research was ensured through interpretive triangulation. The researcher engaged in a critical peer review with two theologians grounded in the Reformed tradition and actively serving in the GMIM ministry. These dialogues served to verify the hermeneutical accuracy and contextual sensitivity. Additionally, the entire analytical process was documented in detail to enable external auditability.

This study deliberately avoided quantitative techniques, such as word frequency counting or statistical analysis. The evaluation of texts is based on the depth of moral reasoning, coherence of ethical vision, and fidelity to the Christian normative tradition, not on the numerical occurrence of specific terms. This approach aligns with contemporary standards of theological ethics, which prioritize qualitative moral reflection over empirical measurement.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. *Ethical Constructions of Peace and Neighbor in GMIM's RHK*

##### A. The Dominant Framing of "Neighbor" as Intra-Communal

An analysis of the 38 weekly editions of GMIM's *Renungan Harian Keluarga* (RHK) from January to October 2025 reveals a striking tension: while the titles and theological principles consistently affirm universal ethical imperatives such as "*hormatilah hak-hak manusia*," "*kasih terhadap orang lain*," and "*terimalah satu akan yang lain*," the narrative application of these principles remains largely confined to the Christian community. For example, the edition of 31 August–6 September 2025 (Exodus 23:1–13) carries the powerful title: "*Janganlah Membelokkan Hukum Tetapi Hormatilah dan Hargai Hak-Hak Manusia*." The text even cites the command to help "the enemy's donkey," which, in its original context, challenges tribal and religious boundaries. However, in RHK's reflection, "musuh" (enemy) is treated as an abstract moral category, never concretely linked to religious others in North Sulawesi's plural society.

Similarly, the edition of July 6–12, 2025 (Romans 15:1–13) proclaims: "*Terimalah Satu Akan yang Lain Untuk Kemuliaan Allah*," and explicitly rejects discrimination based on social status. However, practical examples of "acceptance" are limited to intra-church dynamics among strong and weak believers and leaders, and among members, without extending to interfaith neighbors. Even in the edition of 26 January–1 February 2025 (Luke 16:19–31), titled "*Saat Hidup Berdiakonialah*," the call to care for "the poor, widows, orphans, and the marginalized" is profound. However, these vulnerable groups are implicitly framed as part of the Christian sphere. The possibility that a Muslim widow or a Buddhist elder could be the "Lazarus at the gate" is never explored.

This pattern indicates that while RHK theologically affirms universal human dignity, it defaults to an intra-communal horizon when translating ethics into practice. The “other” is acknowledged in principle but remains unnamed. Consequently, the radical inclusivity implied in titles like *“Kasih terhadap Orang Lain”* is domesticated into a vision of neighbor love that is benevolent but bounded. This finding does not accuse RHK of hostility toward other religions. Rather, it highlights a missed opportunity: the failure to explicitly connect universal biblical commands to the concrete reality of Indonesia’s religious pluralism. In a province like North Sulawesi, celebrated for its tolerance, this omission risks fostering a faith that is ethically generous in theory but unpracticed in interreligious solidarity.

## **B. Peace as Ecclesial Harmony, Not Social Justice**

Analysis of the 38 editions of GMIM’s *Renungan Harian Keluarga* (RHK) reveals that the concept of “peace” is predominantly constructed as internal harmony within the faith community rather than as transformative social justice in a pluralistic society. In nearly all editions, peace is understood as relational order within the congregation, family, or Christian fellowship, without explicit engagement with structural issues such as inequality, discrimination, or minority group rights.

The clearest example appears in the edition of 24–30 August 2025 (1 Thessalonians 5:12–22), themed *“Honor Your Leaders and Always Live in Peace with One Another.”* The text defines peace through internal relational practices: *“Admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”* Although the phrase “help the weak” sounds universal, its application remains confined to intra-congregational dynamics, never extending to social advocacy for vulnerable groups outside the church.

Similarly, in the edition of 2–8 March 2025 (1 Peter 5:1–11), peace is linked to pastoral leadership that serves: *“Let the elders be examples to the flock.”* The focus is on the stability of the ecclesial community rather than on active participation in building public justice. There is no reference to social conflict, public policy, or interreligious tensions, despite the thematic potential of “peace” to engage with North Sulawesi’s pluralistic context.

The edition of September 7–13, 2025 (Colossians 3:5–17) reinforces this pattern. The text states: *“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts [...] teaching and admonishing one another with wisdom.”* Here, peace is intrapersonal and intra-communal, realized through ethical communication within the congregation, not through involvement in interfaith dialogue or broader social reconciliation.

Even when RHK addresses justice, as in the edition of 31 August–6 September 2025 (Exodus 23:1–13), themed *“Honor and Uphold the Rights of All Human Beings,”* its implementation remains oriented toward internal charitable action. The text states: *“The church should [...] provide vocational training [...] and revolving funds for MSMEs in marginal communities.”* However, “marginal communities” are never explicitly defined as non-Christian groups or as victims of structural discrimination. Within the RHK narrative, beneficiaries are implicitly assumed to be part of the church’s social ecosystem.

These findings indicate that peace in GMIM’s RHK is defensive and conservative: it aims to preserve internal cohesion rather than challenge the social order. Not a single edition explicitly connects peace with restorative justice, resource redistribution, or the protection of non-Christian citizens’ rights. Consequently, the vision of peace offered, though well-intentioned, does not fully respond to the demands of Christian social ethics in a pluralistic society, where authentic peace requires inclusive justice.

### C. Absence of “The Other” in Devotional Imagination

Analysis of the 38 editions of GMIM’s *Renungan Harian Keluarga* (RHK) reveals that, although many texts emphasize universal values such as justice, love, and service, “the other,” particularly in the context of different religious identities, never appears as a concrete subject in the devotional imagination. Phrases such as “other religious communities,” “Muslim,” “Hindu,” “Buddhist,” or “non-Christian” are absent from the corpus. Even general terms like “foreigner” or “groups outside the congregation” appear only in abstract or historical contexts, for example, “foreigner” in Exodus 23:9, without an explicit connection to the contemporary plural reality of North Sulawesi.

Instead, recipients of love, justice, and diakonia are consistently portrayed as “the congregation,” “fellow believers,” “Christian families,” “widows and orphans within the church community,” or “ministry partners.” For instance, in

the edition of 26 January–1 February 2025 (Luke 16:19–31), Lazarus, the narrative figure representing “the marginalized,” is never associated with non-Christian groups; he is implicitly assumed to belong to the Christian moral universe. Similarly, in the edition of 14–20 September 2025 (Matthew 25:31–46), “the least of these” is identified as “needy members of the congregation,” not as citizens of different religious backgrounds.

This pattern produces an implicitly closed moral imagination: the social world in RHK is divided between “us” (the community of faith) and “them,” who remain unnamed and thus invisible. Consequently, the ethical potential of universal principles such as *imago Dei* or “love for neighbor” is not actualized in interfaith relations. These values remain confined to the intra-communal sphere, even when they are proclaimed as universal.

This is evident in the edition of 31 August–6 September 2025 (Exodus 23:1–13), which calls for “honoring the rights of all human beings” and even includes the phrase “helping one’s enemy.” However, “enemy” is never concretized as a Muslim neighbor, a Hindu merchant, or a Buddhist colleague; it remains an abstract moral category. Likewise, when RHK mentions collaboration with “the government” (as in the edition of 21–27 September 2025), there is no acknowledgment that such a government may be led by non-Christians or serve citizens of diverse faiths.

These findings indicate that GMIM’s RHK fails to seize hermeneutical opportunities to connect biblical principles with Indonesia’s pluralistic reality. In a region like North Sulawesi, officially recognized as one of the nation’s most tolerant provinces, the absence of “the other” in devotional discourse risks consolidating a defensive Christian identity, even if not explicitly exclusivist. Without explicit naming, “the other” remains an unnamed entity, ethically unacknowledged as a full subject of divine love.

As a result, congregants may understand justice and love as internal ecclesial duties rather than a public calling to build solidarity across religious boundaries. In a plural society, this tendency may foster a devout faith that is socially and politically passive in worship but untrained in dialogue or cooperation with non-Christian communities.

### 3.2. Interpretation Through the Lens of Christian Social Ethics

The analysis of GMIM's Renungan Harian Keluarga (RHK) reveals a profound tension between theological universality and practical particularity. On the one hand, the RHK consistently affirms universal ethical principles: justice, love, truth, care for the vulnerable, and resistance to corruption, which resonate deeply with the core tenets of Christian social ethics. In contrast, the concrete referents of these principles remain overwhelmingly confined to the Christian community, creating a moral imagination that is ethically robust yet socially bounded. This tension is best interpreted through the three foundational pillars of Christian social ethics: *imago Dei*, *shalom*, and the parable of the Good Samaritan.

First, the doctrine of *Imago Dei*, the belief that every human being bears the image of God, serves as a non-negotiable foundation for universal human dignity and inclusive love. Several editions of the RHK implicitly affirm this principle. For instance, the edition of 31 August–6 September 2025 declares: "*Hormatilah dan hargai hak-hak manusia*" (Respect and uphold human rights), and grounds this in the command to help even one's "enemy." Similarly, the edition of September 14–20, 2025, identifies Christ with "the least of these"—the prisoners, the sick, the naked—thereby universalizing the scope of neighbor love. However, in RHK's narrative application, "the least" are consistently framed as "*jemaat yang membutuhkan*" (needy congregants) or "*mitra pelayanan gereja*" (church ministry partners). The logical extension of *Imago Dei* to non-Christian neighbors, though theologically implied, is rarely made explicit in practice. Consequently, the universal claim of human dignity remains abstract, while the ethical imperative is operationalized within an intra-ecclesial horizon.

Second, the biblical concept of *shalom*, understood not as the mere absence of conflict but as holistic justice, right relationship, and communal flourishing, is frequently invoked. The edition of 24–30 August 2025 defines peace as active engagement: "*Menegor yang tidak tertib, menghibur yang tawar hati, membela yang lemah*" (Admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, defend the weak). This reflects a dynamic and justice-oriented vision of peace. However, this vision is almost exclusively directed inward toward harmony within the congregation or family rather than outward toward structural justice in a plural society. Notably, no edition explicitly connects "*damai*" (peace) with interreligious dialogue, advocacy for religious minorities, or reconciliation across faith lines, even in a province like North

Sulawesi, which prides itself on tolerance. Thus, shalom is reduced to ecclesial harmony rather than public justice.

Third, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), the definitive biblical model of radical, boundary-crossing neighbor-love, is referenced in the edition of 6–12 July 2025, under the theme “*Terimalah Satu Akan yang Lain*” (Accept One Another). The text affirms: “*Tanpa membedakan status sosial, ekonomi, budaya, pendidikan*” (Without distinction of social, economic, cultural, or educational status). This language is strikingly inclusive and non-discriminatory. However, the narrative context never names a concrete “other.” No Muslim neighbor, Hindu trader, or Buddhist colleague is envisioned as the recipient of this acceptance. The “other” remains a theological abstraction and not a social reality. Consequently, the transformative challenge of the despised Samaritan who became the true neighbor is domesticated into a call for internal unity rather than interfaith solidarity.

This pattern reflects what may be termed benevolent insularity: a well-intentioned ethical framework that nurtures compassion, integrity, and social responsibility primarily within the boundaries of the faith community. RHK excels in forming jemaat who are honest, hardworking, anti-corruption, and caring toward fellow believers. It critiques individualism, materialism, and the abuse of power. However, it rarely equips them to see religious others as co-participants in God’s project of Shalom.

From the perspective of Christian social ethics, this is a significant gap in the literature. The Reformed tradition, to which GMIM belongs, affirms the doctrine of common grace, the belief that God’s Spirit is at work beyond the church and that truth, goodness, and justice can be found in all human communities. The edition of 28 September–4 October 2025 comes closest to this vision by naming “*Pelsus, gereja, pemerintah, dan keluarga*” as co-responsible “*penjaga*” (guardians) of justice, a rare acknowledgment of a shared moral agency across institutional and religious lines. However, even here, collaboration is framed as functional (e.g., vocational training for “*komunitas marginal*”) and not as a recognition of the inherent dignity and spiritual agency of non-Christian partners.

The RHK demonstrates a strong internal ethic but a limited public ethic. It answers the question “How should we treat our own?” with clarity and conviction. However, it remains largely silent on the question of “Who is our neighbor in a plural democracy?” a silence that, while not hostile, risks producing a faith that is devout yet socially passive, compassionate yet untrained in interreligious solidarity.

Christian social ethics demands more: not just love within the circle, but love that crosses borders, names the other, and builds justice.

### **3.3. Christian Social Ethics in Shaping Moral Imagination**

#### **A. Relevance of Findings to the Initial Research Question**

The central research question posed at the outset of this study was: *How does the Renungan Harian Keluarga (RHK) of GMIM construct an ethical vision of peace and “neighbor” within the context of a pluralistic society?* Analysis of the thirty-eight weekly RHK editions published between January and October 2025 demonstrates that this question can be addressed directly by identifying dominant patterns in the moral construction of these texts.

The primary finding of this study reveals that the concept of “neighbor” in RHK is consistently framed within the boundaries of the internal Christian community. Phrases such as “needy congregants,” “ministry partners,” or “Christian families” serve as the primary referents for recipients of love, justice, and diakonia. Although RHK titles frequently employ universal language such as “uphold human rights,” “love for others,” or “accept one another,” the narrative rarely extends to non-Christian groups or social actors outside the ecclesial ecosystem. Consequently, the ethical vision of “neighbor” remains implicit and is never concretely named in the religiously plural context of North Sulawesi.

Similarly, the concept of “peace” in RHK is predominantly understood as relational harmony within the congregation, family, or Christian fellowship. Peace is seldom linked to structural justice, interfaith reconciliation, and advocacy for minority groups. While certain editions address critical social issues such as corruption, authoritarian power, and hate speech, the proposed ethical responses remain focused on personal transformation and internal communal stability rather than active participation in building an inclusive social order.

These findings indicate that GMIM’s RHK possesses a strong theological foundation for shaping public ethics through the doctrines of *imago Dei*, the principle of *shalom*, and the paradigm of the Good Samaritan; however, its devotional narrative has not fully actualized this inclusive potential. While the

universal horizon is implied in the titles and normative principles, it is not concretely embodied in a contextual moral imagination.

Thus, the original aim of this research, to examine the discourse on peace in GMIM's RHK from the perspective of Christian social ethics in a pluralistic society, has been achieved. Systematic contextual hermeneutics has successfully uncovered the tension between the universal claims of texts and the limited scope of their social application. These results not only answer the research question but also open a critical space for ecclesial reflection on how devotional materials might be developed to respond more effectively to the challenges of 21st-century pluralism.

## **B. Theological-Ethical Interpretation of Findings**

The findings of this study invite a theological-ethical interpretation grounded in a normative framework of Christian social ethics. Each pattern observed in GMIM's *Renungan Harian Keluarga* (RHK) reflects not merely pastoral preference but deeper hermeneutical and contextual dynamics that warrant critical reflections. *First*, the consistent framing of "neighbor" within the boundaries of the Christian community arises not from theological hostility toward others but from a prioritization of preserving ecclesial identity. The RHK emphasizes faithfulness to doctrinal integrity and internal moral formation, which is understandable in a context where religious identity is closely tied to communal survival. However, this emphasis stands in tension with the doctrine of *Imago Dei*, which affirms the inherent dignity of every human being, regardless of religious affiliation. While RHK affirms universal principles such as justice and love, their application remains confined to the ecclesial sphere, thereby limiting the ethical horizon of neighbor love to those already within the fold of faith.

*Second*, the understanding of peace primarily as internal harmony rather than social justice is largely shaped by North Sulawesi's socio-political context. As a province consistently recognized for its high level of religious tolerance and absence of recent interreligious conflict, there is little perceived urgency to engage critically with structural injustice or interfaith reconciliation. Consequently, peace is constructed as relational stability within the congregation and family rather than as *shalom*, a holistic vision of justice, equity,

and right relationships across societal lines. This reflects a reactive rather than a proactive posture: peace is maintained rather than pursued in the public square.

*Third*, the absence of the explicit naming of “the other”, such as Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, or non-believers, cannot be attributed to intentional exclusion. Rather, it stems from what may be termed hermeneutical unconsciousness: an implicit assumption that universal biblical commands automatically include all people, even when the narrative application remains exclusively intra-communal. This gap between principle and praxis reveals a disconnect between theological affirmation and the contextual imagination.

Collectively, these findings illustrate a fundamental tension in contemporary Christian ethics: the challenge of translating universal biblical imperatives, such as *agape* love, *imago Dei*, and *shalom*, into lived practice within plural societies without compromising confessional identity. The RHK demonstrates strong internal ethics but has limited public ethics. It nurtures personal integrity and communal care but rarely equips believers to see religious others as co-participants in God’s redemptive project. This is not a failure of faith but an opportunity for hermeneutical expansion, one that moves from implicit universality to explicit inclusivity, from ecclesial harmony to public solidarity, and from moral formation within to ethical witness beyond.

### C. Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this research can be positioned within a critical dialogue with the relevant academic literature in global and regional contexts. The analysis reveals certain alignments with prior studies, alongside significant differences that reflect the unique social and theological contexts of GMIM in North Sulawesi. First, the results of this study are consistent with Ngo et al., (2015) findings, which observed that Protestant devotional materials in Asia tend to employ universal language such as “love,” “justice,” and “humanity,” yet their narrative practices reinforce communal identity boundaries. Similarly, GMIM’s RHK rhetorically asserts inclusive values, but its application consistently focuses on congregants, Christian families, and internal ministry partners. This pattern indicates that the notion of universality in devotional texts often remains normative, rather than operational. Second, these findings align with Bevans et al., (2004); Eskandar, (2024); Sheldrake, (2010) analysis, which highlights the gap between theological principles and the social context

in contemporary devotional texts. Although doctrines such as *imago Dei* and *shalom* call for active engagement in public justice, many devotional materials internalize these ethics within intra-communal relationships. The GMIM RHK exhibits a similar pattern: justice is primarily understood as personal honesty and care for fellow church members rather than as a systemic effort to address structural inequalities or build interfaith solidarity.

However, this research also reveals important differences compared with studies in conflict regions. In South Africa, De Gruchy (2005) found that daily devotionals during the apartheid era served as a means of ethical resistance, linking faith with the struggle against racial injustice. In contrast, GMIM's RHK does not operate within a context of repression or systemic segregation but rather in a stable and tolerant environment. Consequently, its devotional discourse is defensively preservative, aimed at maintaining faith identity and community integrity rather than promoting proactive social transformation.

Another difference emerges when compared with the European context. Caspers et al., (2013); Margry, (2021) notes that devotional materials in pluralistic countries such as Germany or the Netherlands often explicitly reference "Muslim neighbors," "migrant communities," or "interfaith partners" as concrete subjects of love and cooperation. Conversely, GMIM's RHK, while mentioning "government," "marginalized communities," or "society at large," never specifically names non-Christian groups. Consequently, "the other" remains abstract, and the ethical potential of universal principles is not fully realized in the congregation's moral imagination.

The original contribution of this study lies in revealing that inclusivity within GMIM's RHK is implicit and structural rather than explicit and relational. This means that values such as justice, love, and acceptance are theologically acknowledged but are not translated into concrete relationships with social actors beyond the boundaries of faith. These findings enrich the discourse on public theology in Southeast Asia by demonstrating that even in pluralistic and peaceful societies, devotional texts can fail to serve as vehicles for cross-identity ethical formation, not because of exclusive intentions but because of a hermeneutical unawareness of the surrounding plural realities.

## D. Implications in the Broadest Context

Such results can be applied to theology and devotion learning practices in plural societies. Instead of understanding inclusivity as a presupposed virtue, the churches can conceptualize outward-facing neighborliness through an explicit editorial and pastoral guideline for devotional writing.

Outlines of implementation, blue plan of devotional pedagogy (RHK or similar materials). *To begin with*, refer to the plural neighbor in real-world social places (e.g., Muslim neighbor, Hindu colleague, other-faith friend at the market), so that the term neighbor does not remain an abstract category. *Second*, shift all of virtues and into practice by incorporating one practical activity a week (one doable act of peace, listening, cooperation, or care that crosses the church curve). *Third*, affix an apparent theological authorization on the practice - to connect the act with imago Dei (equal dignity), shalom (justice-oriented peace), the Good Samaritan (crossing the boundaries in mercy), and common grace (cooperation in the common good). *Fourth*, immerse thinking and praying in an open horizon, and implement one question, which reminds us about the moral direction of our thoughts, and one prayer, which teaches us to regard the well-being of the broader community explicitly.

Minimal indicators (implementation). On the editorial level, a measure of improvement can be the percentage of entries that contain: (i) reference to a religiously plural neighbor, (ii) some concrete action precipitation, (iii) an explicit theological justification within the framework of ethics, and (iv) a prayer, in which the wider civic society is included. The assessment at the pastoral level can be based on basic uptake indicators: short reader comments and small-group comments about the enacted so-called weekly prompts, and records of interreligious or civic collaboration that readers can credit to devotional prompting.

By so doing, devotional texts may play a role in developing the plural-democratic ethos in Indonesia, ensuring that harmony as a principle is upheld, and, in addition, developing transferable micro-practices of neighborliness that will continue to secure peace in day-to-day life.

## E. Future Research Directions

Several promising avenues for future research have emerged to deepen and extend these findings. *First*, a comparative study of devotional materials across Indonesian religious traditions, such as Muhammadiyah's Majelis Tarjih reflections, Nahdlatul Ulama's Bahtsul Masail, or Catholic Renungan Harian, could reveal convergences or divergences in ethical strategies for navigating pluralism. Such a comparison would illuminate whether the pattern of implicit universalism and explicit particularism is unique to Protestantism or widespread across faith-based devotional cultures.

*Second*, empirical reception studies are required. Interviews or focus groups with RHK readers could assess how they interpret "neighbor" and "peace." Do they internalize these concepts as intra-ecclesial, or do they extend them to other religions? Understanding the gap between textual intent and reader reception is crucial to effective pastoral communication.

*Third*, experimental collaboration with the GMIM could yield transformative insights. Co-developing and piloting RHK editions that explicitly reference interreligious neighbors, followed by pre- and post-attitudinal surveys, would provide evidence-based guidance for devotional reform. This action-research model bridges theology and social science in the service of public virtue.

*Fourth*, cross-cultural analyses in conflict-affected regions, such as Papua or Poso, could test whether the social context shapes devotional discourse. Does proximity to interreligious tension produce more defensive or dialogical wacana? Such research would refine our understanding of how theology responds to social trauma and resilience issues. Together, these directions promise to advance not only Christian ethics in Indonesia but also global scholarship on religion, moral formation, and the architecture of peaceful, pluralistic societies.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study set out to answer two questions: how GMIM's Renungan Harian Keluarga (RHK) constructs peace and the figure of the neighbor within Indonesia's plural society. The analysis of thirty-eight weekly editions shows that RHK articulates a strong internal ethic grounded in justice, love, and human dignity, yet

applies these values predominantly within the Christian community. Peace is framed chiefly as harmony within the congregation and family. At the same time, the neighbor is typically imagined as a fellow believer rather than as a religiously diverse other in the wider public sphere.

In this sense, RHK embodies benevolent insularity: it affirms universal ethical principles but seldom translates them into explicit interreligious solidarity or public-justice practices. This does not indicate deliberate exclusion; rather, it reveals a limited devotional imagination in which the religious other remains largely unnamed as a concrete subject of ethical responsibility. As a result, the moral potential of *imago Dei*, *shalom*, the Good Samaritan, and common grace is acknowledged in principle but only partially activated in public ethical formation.

This finding directly addresses the research question. RHK demonstrates a strong internal ethic but has a limited public ethic. It nurtures personal integrity and communal care, yet rarely equips *jemaat* to see religious others as co-participants in God's project of *shalom*. The absence of explicit reference to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, or non-Christian citizens, even in editions that affirm universal values, creates a moral imagination that is implicitly bounded. Consequently, RHK's potential to catalyze inclusive peace in a plural democracy remains underdeveloped.

These results reflect what may be termed benevolent insularity: a well-meaning focus on preserving faith identity that inadvertently neglects the public dimension of Christian social ethics in the Philippines. In a province like North Sulawesi, celebrated for its tolerance, this gap is not a sign of hostility but of missed opportunity. The theological affirmations of *imago Dei*, the Good Samaritan, and common grace are present in principle but rarely activated in concrete social imagination.

The article, therefore, argues that GMIM's devotional pedagogy would be strengthened by more explicit engagement with plural neighbors, so that daily family devotion becomes not only a site of personal spirituality and ecclesial cohesion but also a formative resource for coexistence, solidarity, and justice in North Sulawesi, Indonesia. Future research may test these conclusions comparatively and empirically through reader-reception studies and collaborative revision of devotional materials.

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