

Daniel in digital Babylon: A spirituality of resistance and the identity integrity of God's people in the ecosystem of surveillance capitalism through theological reading of Daniel 1 and 6

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Abstract: Church communities today inhabit a digital ecosystem governed by surveillance capitalism, in which human attention is harvested, and identity is algorithmically formed; a condition this article names "digital Babylon." This study constructs a spirituality of resistance and a theology of identity integrity for God's people in that ecosystem through a theological reading of Daniel 1 and 6. Employing qualitative library research that integrates narrative exegesis with constructive theology, the article reads Daniel's refusal of the royal diet and his disciplined practice of prayer before an open window as paradigms of boundary-keeping and counter-formation at the heart of empire. The findings propose a model of "Babylonian literacy without Babylonian identity": God's people may master the language, knowledge, and platforms of the digital empire while sustaining nonnegotiable disciplines of identity rooted in worship. The article contributes an Old Testament foundation for digital ecclesiology and offers churches, especially in Indonesia, a doctrinally grounded framework for resilient discipleship within, rather than withdrawal from, digital culture.

Keywords: Daniel, digital Babylon, identity integrity, spirituality of resistance, surveillance capitalism

Introduction

The life of God's people in the twenty-first century unfolds within an ecosystem they did not design and do not fully understand. The digital space that has become the daily habitat of congregations, where they work, socialize, worship, and form their opinions, operates according to an economic logic that Shoshana Zuboff calls surveillance capitalism: a unilateral claim upon human experience as free raw material, converted into behavioral data, processed into prediction products, and traded for the sake of commercial certainty.¹ Within such an

¹ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019), 8–10. The term "ecosystem of surveillance capitalism" in this article refers to the entire technological-economic environment—platforms, devices, interfaces, and the business models that sustain them, which operates by extracting users' behavioral data for processing into prediction products. What is stressed is not any particular corporation but the economic logic that structures the digital space in which congregations live their daily lives.

ecosystem, the human person is no longer merely a user; he or she is a field to be harvested. The question this raises for faith is not only ethical but existential: who in fact forms the identity of God's people today; the God they worship, or the digital architecture they inhabit?

Indonesian thinkers have registered the urgency of this condition. F. Budi Hardiman describes the digital revolution as a tempest that shakes the very manner of human being: relations become wholly mediated, the public sphere is distorted, and the human subject is swept into currents moving faster than its own capacity for reflection.² That upheaval unfolds upon the structure of the network society mapped by Castells, in which networks become the new social morphology and network logic permeates production, power, and culture.³ For the church, the two together mean that the terrain of discipleship has changed structurally: congregations are formed daily by the hidden liturgies of digital platforms,⁴ far more intensively than by one or two hours of weekly worship.

This formative pressure is compounded by the context of global polycrisis, the entanglement of economic, ecological, and geopolitical crises that mutually reinforce one another, which renders digital space at once a channel of information about crisis and an engine for amplifying anxiety.⁵ Indonesian congregations experience this paradox concretely: digital media enable them to work, to trade, and to minister, while at the same time flooding them with disinformation, a culture of comparison, and an exhausting demand for self-display. The question is not whether the church ought to be present in digital space; that presence is already a fact, but how the people of God are to preserve the integrity of their identity within a space designed to form them in the image of the market.

This condition is what the present article calls digital Babylon.⁶ The designation is not rhetorical hyperbole but structural analysis. Babylon in the book of Daniel is not merely a place of deportation but a system that conquers from within: through a language that must be learned, a curriculum that must be completed, names that are exchanged, and a rhythm of court life that gradually reshapes who a person is. The digital ecosystem operates by an equivalent pattern, though with different instruments—it supplies its own language (interfaces and online vocabulary), its own informal education (streams of content that shape ways of thinking), its own renaming (profiles, followers, and metrics that displace given names), and its own calendar and daily rhythm (notifications, posts, endless scrolling). In this

² F.X. Budi Hardiman, "Manusia dalam Prahara Revolusi Digital," *Diskursus: Jurnal Filsafat dan Teologi STF Driyarkara* 17, no. 2 (2018): 177–192.

³ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 500–502.

⁴ The term "platform" is used here in the technical sense employed in media studies: a digital infrastructure that mediates interaction among users while at the same time establishing the rules, the layout, and the ranking mechanisms of that interaction. A platform is therefore never neutral; it determines what is seen, what sinks from view, and which behaviors are rewarded.

⁵ Michael Lawrence et al., "Global Polycrisis: The Causal Mechanisms of Crisis Entanglement," *Global Sustainability* 7 (2024): e6, <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2024.1>.

⁶ "Digital Babylon" is an analytical term employed in this article to name the digital ecosystem insofar as it functions like the Babylonian empire in the book of Daniel: a system that accommodates and benefits its inhabitants while at the same time reshaping their identity through its own language, education, naming, and rhythms. The term is structural rather than moral; it points to the position of God's people within a system they do not control, not to a judgment that digital technology is evil.

sense, digital space deserves to be called a formative empire:⁷ its power works not primarily through visible coercion but through the formation of its inhabitants' habits and desires.

This analogy must be delimited at once so that it is not misunderstood. To call the digital ecosystem Babylon is not to equate technology corporations morally with Nebuchadnezzar, still less to construct a demonology of technology. What is being equated is the structural position of God's people in the two contexts: a community living within a system it does not control, enjoying a portion of that system's blessings, yet whose deepest identity stands under threat of being reshaped by it. It is at this structural position, and not in any moral verdict upon technology, that the question of identity integrity acquires its sharpness: which lines may be crossed, which lines must be guarded, and on what theological basis those lines are drawn.

The Old Testament holds extraordinary narrative resources for this question: the court tales of the book of Daniel. Since the classic study of W. Lee Humphreys, Daniel 1–6 has been read as a projection of a diaspora lifestyle that affirms the possibility of full participation in the life of a foreign nation while remaining faithful to the God of Israel.⁸ Daniel and his companions underwent a Babylonian education, mastered the language and literature of the Chaldeans, and even held high office in the empire, yet at certain points they drew lines they could not cross: the royal food in chapter 1 and the prohibition of prayer in chapter 6. This combination of participation and refusal is precisely what makes the Daniel narrative so pertinent to a people living in the digital Babylon just described.

More than a tale of moral exemplarity, the Daniel narrative is rooted in a theology of exile.⁹ Daniel Smith-Christopher has shown that deportation was no peripheral episode but a paradigm-forming one for biblical theology, as the people learned to live out their faith as a minority community without political sovereignty at the heart of a foreign empire.¹⁰ That exilic condition is structurally analogous to the church's position within the digital ecosystem: the church is not sovereign over the platforms, does not determine their algorithms, and cannot exit them without forfeiting access to the generation it serves. A theology of exile is therefore both more honest and more empowering than Christendom nostalgia as a frame for the digital church's existence.

The research gap this study addresses lies in three layers. First, studies of Daniel in Indonesia generally stop at moral-individual application—personal integrity, steadfastness of faith—without reading the narrative's political-economic dimension for the community. Second, digital religion studies has developed rapidly as a field with its own theoretical

⁷ "Formative empire" designates a system of power that operates primarily not through physical coercion but through the formation of its inhabitants' habits, desires, and ways of seeing. The word "formative" is used in the sense proper to the theology of formation: it concerns the shaping of character and desire through repeated practice, not merely the transmission of information.

⁸ W. Lee Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, no. 2 (1973): 211–223, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3262954>.

⁹ "Exile" here refers to the deportation of Judah to Babylon in the sixth century BCE, and "theology of exile" denotes the theological reflection that arises from and interprets that experience. The adjective "exilic" is used throughout this article for the condition of living as a minority community of faith without political sovereignty within an order controlled by others.

¹⁰ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 6–8.

frameworks,¹¹ yet it is seldom grounded in Old Testament exegesis; dialogue between Daniel scholarship and digital religion studies has scarcely occurred in Indonesian-language literature. Third, theological critique of surveillance capitalism remains very scarce in Southeast Asia, even though congregations in this region are among the world's most intensive users of social media. This article addresses all three gaps by making Daniel 1 and 6 the foundation for a digital spirituality of resistance.¹²

The aim of this article is to formulate a spirituality of resistance and a theology of identity integrity for God's people within the ecosystem of surveillance capitalism, on the basis of a theological reading of Daniel 1 and 6. What is meant by a spirituality of resistance must be stated from the outset: it is a set of formative disciplines enabling God's people to preserve the identity given to them by God within a system that has an interest in reshaping that identity. Resistance in this sense is not directed against technology as an enemy but against the digital ecosystem's total formative claim upon the life of the congregation. Its axes are two icons drawn from the Daniel narrative: the table, the domain of daily consumption in which identity is either stripped away or guarded little by little, and the window, the domain of orientation in which the direction of life is rhythmically recalibrated toward God. The method is qualitative library research in two movements: a narrative exegesis of the two chapters in dialogue with contemporary Daniel scholarship, and a theological construction that translates the exegetical findings into the digital context through dialogue with digital religion studies and the political-economic critique of technology. The formal object of the study is the identity integrity of God's people as a theological problem; its material object is the narrative of Daniel 1 and 6. The discussion is arranged in four parts: an analysis of digital Babylon as a formative empire; a reading of Daniel 1 and 6 in the perspective of exilic theology; the construction of a spirituality of resistance; and its application to church communities, particularly in Indonesia.

Digital Babylon: Surveillance capitalism as a formative empire

Calling the digital ecosystem "Babylon" is not rhetoric of demonization but an analysis of structure. Babylon in the Bible is an empire that conquers not only with armies but also with systems: its language, education, economy, and ritual calendar reshape subjugated peoples from within. Surveillance capitalism operates by a similar pattern, though more subtly: through the mechanism Zuboff calls behavioral surplus, human digital traces are extracted beyond what the service itself requires and are then used to predict and to modify behavior in the commercial interests of others.¹³ What is at stake is not merely privacy but formative sovereignty: who holds the right to shape human will and human habit.

This formative empire possesses an implicit theology of its own. Kathryn Tanner has shown that finance-dominated capitalism forms a total subjectivity, binding persons to past debt, disciplining present labor, and colonizing the imagination of the future, so that it

¹¹ Heidi A. Campbell, "Surveying Theoretical Approaches within Digital Religion Studies," *New Media & Society* 19, no. 1 (2017): 15–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816649912>.

¹² "Spirituality of resistance" is defined in this article as a set of formative disciplines enabling God's people to preserve the identity given them by God within a system that has an interest in reshaping that identity. The word "resistance" therefore does not denote hostility toward technology but the refusal of the digital ecosystem's total formative claim upon the life of the congregation. Its full elaboration is given in the third section below.

¹³ Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 93–95.

functions like a religion demanding faith, hope, and devotion.¹⁴ In its digital version, this empire offers a counter-soteriology: validation through metrics, instant community through platforms, and a counterfeit transcendence through virality. Precisely as Babylon replaced the names of Daniel and his companions with the names of Babylonian gods, the digital ecosystem labors to replace the identity given by God with a tradable profile identity.

Its anthropological dimension is underscored by Hardiman: in digital civilization, human beings are threatened with the loss of interiority—the inner space in which reflection, prayer, and freedom take root—because the whole of life is drawn outward into a display that is continuously evaluated.¹⁵ For a Christian tradition that understands the human being as a creature formed by what it worships, this diagnosis is critical: the culture of display is a liturgical machine that forms desire. If the church fails to recognize the liturgical character of the digital ecosystem, it will go on wondering why congregants who worship faithfully are nevertheless formed more deeply by the timeline than by the gospel.

Meanwhile, the church itself has migrated into this empire. The shift from the online church as broadcast to church-online as a mode of ecclesial existence, as mapped by Jung, means that the church now genuinely resides within the territory of digital Babylon, complete with its dependence upon platform infrastructure.¹⁶ This residence is ambivalent. On the one hand, it opens a missional reach previously unimaginable; on the other, it subjects the church's communication to an algorithmic logic that privileges emotional engagement over truth or depth. A church naive about this ambivalence will find its message slowly reshaped by the medium it rides.

Indonesian studies confirm this ambivalence from two directions. The cybertheology research of Sopacoly and Lattu shows that cyberspace has become a real space for living out faith—Indonesians genuinely encounter God, pray, and form community online—so theology may not disregard digital mediality as a locus for doing theology.¹⁷ An empirical study of HKBP congregations in Jakarta, however, shows the other side: most members perceive a profound gap between digital fellowship and bodily fellowship, along with a strong longing for physical togetherness that the screen does not satisfy.¹⁸ These two findings are not a contradiction but a pair of coordinates: the Indonesian church lives between them and needs a theological framework that can hold both without denying either.

The most vulnerable within this ecosystem are those born inside it. Subowo shows that Indonesia's Generation Z requires intentional formation in digital spirituality, since without spiritual depth they have no filter against the current of algorithmic formation that shapes

¹⁴ Kathryn Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 1–3.

¹⁵ Hardiman, "Manusia dalam Prahara Revolusi Digital," 179–181.

¹⁶ Daekyung Jung, "Church in the Digital Age: From Online Church to Church-Online," *Theology and Science* 21, no. 4 (2023): 781–805, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2023.2255956>.

¹⁷ Mick Mordekhai Sopacoly and Izak Y. M. Lattu, "Kekristenan dan Spiritualitas Online: Cybertheology sebagai Sumbangsih Berteologi di Indonesia," *Gema Teologika: Jurnal Teologi Kontekstual dan Filsafat Keilahian* 5, no. 2 (2020): 137–151.

¹⁸ Binsar J. Pakpahan, Puji H. Aritonang, and Agus Hendratmo, "Congregation Members' Response to Worship and Fellowship in the Digital Space during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2024): a9980, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9980>.

their self-concept, their relationships, and even their theology.¹⁹ This generation has never known a pre-digital world; for them Babylon is not a land of exile but a native country. It is for that very reason that the Daniel narrative, the story of young people fully educated in the Babylonian curriculum from an early age, speaks to them with a startling proximity, as the following section will trace.

The methodological affirmation already offered in the introduction requires sharpening here, before the discussion turns to the text. The digital Babylon analogy is not intended to equate technology corporations morally with Nebuchadnezzar, but to equate the structural position of God's people in the two contexts: a community living within a system it does not control, enjoying a portion of that system's blessings, yet whose deepest identity stands under threat of being reshaped by that system. The difference between the two must nevertheless be acknowledged honestly, for it is precisely there that the difficulty of the present age lies: Babylon demanded obedience through visible decrees that could be refused with full awareness, whereas the digital empire works through invisible design and relies on consent given without thought. This difference does not render Daniel's question obsolete but makes it more urgent: when the empire's demand arrives no longer as a decree but as a convenience, the line to be guarded becomes far harder to recognize. It is at this structural position, and not in any demonology of technology, that the question of identity integrity finds its sharpness: which lines may be crossed and which must be guarded with one's life, and on what theological basis those lines are drawn.

Daniel 1 and 6 in the perspective of exilic theology: Negotiating identity at the heart of empire

The court tales of Daniel 1–6 are set in the exile and, according to scholarly consensus, were shaped within a diaspora community genuinely wrestling with life under foreign rule; in their final form they speak to the crisis of persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes.²⁰ This double setting enriches the reading: the same narratives function as a manual for diaspora living in relatively peaceful times and as resistance literature in times of persecution. The book of Daniel has thus itself been tested in the two modes that the digital church likewise faces: the mode of everyday negotiation with the system, and the mode of confrontation when the system demands what belongs to God alone.

Daniel 1 opens with a deliberate paradox. Daniel and his companions accept almost the entire package of Babylonian assimilation: new names, the language and literature of the Chaldeans, three years of court education; yet they refuse the one thing that appears most trivial of all: the king's food and wine. Goldingay observes that the narrative locates the test of self-determination precisely in the matter of food, for the table is the domain of the everyday, where fidelity is either formed or stripped away little by little.²¹ That refusal is not asceticism; it is *boundary-marking*: a daily symbolic act that reminds the one who refuses, more than it impresses anyone else, that his identity is not owned by his imperial host.

¹⁹ Adhika Tri Subowo, "Membangun Spiritualitas Digital bagi Generasi Z," *DUNAMIS: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 5, no. 2 (2021): 379–395, <https://doi.org/10.30648/dun.v5i2.464>.

²⁰ John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 45–47.

²¹ John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary 30 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 17–19.

Humphreys captures the theological structure of these tales with precision: Daniel's success at court and his fidelity to God are not set in opposition but interwoven; the characters are able to participate fully in the life of the empire and to become witnesses to God precisely there, yet that participation has a clear stopping point whenever the empire's demand touches worship.²² This pattern of participation-with-a-stopping-point distinguishes the theology of Daniel from two simpler alternatives: a separatism that withdraws entirely from the system, and an assimilationism that dissolves into it without remainder. For the digital church, this pattern serves as a road map: neither exiting the platforms nor capitulating to them, but being present with firm boundaries.

Carol Newsom sharpens this reading by showing that the book of Daniel contains an internal debate in political theology: some of its narratives imagine that a foreign king may be educated into acknowledging the sovereignty of God, while its apocalyptic visions judge the empire as a beast that must be destroyed.²³ This tension is not inconsistency but canonical wisdom: the people's relation to empire cannot be reduced to a single posture, because empire itself is ambiguous, at times open to cooperation, at times monstrous. The digital church requires the same theological suppleness: the capacity to discern when a platform is a Nebuchadnezzar who can be taught and when it is the fourth beast.

Daniel 6 shows the moment when negotiation reaches its limit. The thirty-day prohibition of prayer is a legal device designed to render fidelity to God an administrative crime. Daniel's response is recorded with meaningful detail: he went up to his upper room, whose windows opened toward Jerusalem, and three times a day he knelt, praying and giving praise to his God, "as he had done previously" (Dan. 6:10). Seow underscores that the force of this verse rests in its closing phrase: what preserved Daniel's integrity was not a sudden courage but a habit formed long before the crisis arrived.²⁴ Resilience is the fruit of rhythm, not of improvisation.

Anathea Portier-Young situates such practices within a framework of resistance theology: for Jewish communities under empire, resistance took the form not primarily of armed revolt but of bodily practices and communal disciplines refusing the empire's totalizing claim upon reality: prayer, fasting, obedience to Torah, and the writing of counter-visions.²⁵ Resistance in this sense is epistemic and formative: it preserves the community's capacity to see the world otherwise than the imperial narrative permits. Daniel's window opened toward Jerusalem is a technology of epistemic resistance: three times a day, his life was recalibrated toward the city of God rather than the city of the king.

A theology of exile supplies the larger frame for all of this. Smith-Christopher argues that post-exilic communities developed creative mechanisms of social resilience—guarding identity boundaries, strengthening domestic practice, and sustaining narratives that preserve a minority community's self-respect—not as sectarian regression but as a theological strategy

²² Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora," 217–219.

²³ Carol A. Newsom, "Political Theology in the Book of Daniel: An Internal Debate," *Review and Expositor* 109, no. 4 (2012): 557–568.

²⁴ C. L. Seow, *Daniel*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 85–87.

²⁵ Anathea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 3–5.

of survival.²⁶ This reading rehabilitates the boundary-keeping practices that modernity so often suspects of exclusivism: for a minority at the heart of empire, a boundary is not a wall of hatred but a skin that keeps the body alive. The question for the digital church is not whether boundaries are needed, but what kind of boundaries and where.

This exegetical survey yields three findings. First, the Daniel narrative teaches critical participation: master the language and knowledge of the empire, ten times wiser than all the learned of Babylon, without surrendering worship. Second, integrity is preserved through small and repeated disciplines rather than through momentary heroism: the dinner table and the hour of prayer, not the podium. Third, Daniel's public courage in chapter 6 was made possible by theological clarity concerning what is nonnegotiable, a clarity that Newsom shows to be the fruit of the community's struggle in political theology rather than of individual decision alone.²⁷ These three findings furnish the raw material for constructing a spirituality of resistance in the section that follows.

A spirituality of resistance: From the king's table to the window opened toward Jerusalem

The working definition already offered in the introduction may now be elaborated in full. The spirituality of resistance constructed by this article is defined as a set of formative disciplines that enable God's people to preserve the identity God has given them within a system that seeks to reshape that identity. This definition locates resistance not in hostility toward technology but in refusing the digital ecosystem's total formative claim. Three of its features require emphasis if it is not to be misunderstood. First, it is positive before it is negative: what is undertaken is not primarily the rejection of something but the training of something else, until refusal becomes the natural consequence of a fidelity already formed. Second, it operates at the level of habit rather than major decisions; its measure is therefore repetition rather than intensity. Third, it is communal: a discipline unsupported by community will collapse under the social pressure of the very ecosystem it seeks to resist. Two icons from the Daniel narrative serve as its axes: the table (the domain of daily consumption in which identity is either stripped away or guarded little by little) and the window (the domain of orientation in which the direction of life is rhythmically recalibrated toward God).

The axis of the table concerns the discipline of consumption. Goldingay reminds us that Daniel's test lay in what appeared most natural to accept: food from the king's table was an honor, not a threat, and that it is precisely this appearance of naturalness that rendered it dangerous to identity.²⁸ The digital analogy is exact: what forms congregations is not the content that appears evil, but the daily algorithmic diet that appears entirely ordinary, endless scrolling, ever more personalized recommendations, ever more addictive micro-satisfactions. A spirituality of resistance begins by naming this diet as a theological problem and by establishing a digital "vegetables and water": a pattern of consumption chosen deliberately out of the commitment of faith rather than served up by a recommendation engine.

Its anthropological foundation comes from studies of formation. James K. A. Smith shows that human beings are fundamentally liturgical creatures formed by love-laden practices

²⁶ Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 189–191.

²⁷ Newsom, "Political Theology in the Book of Daniel," 560–562.

²⁸ Goldingay, *Daniel*, 21–23.

before they are formed by ideas; counter-formation therefore cannot be accomplished by correct information alone but requires a counter-liturgy that trains desire.²⁹ In this light, the failure of many ecclesial programs of digital literacy becomes explicable: cognitive literacy cannot withstand liturgical formation. What is needed is a rhythm of practices: worship, daily prayer, the family table without devices, the digital Sabbath, that forms congregants' desires more deeply than the platforms do.

Here, the Sabbath tradition acquires a fresh sharpness. Brueggemann reads the Sabbath as an act of resistance against the anxious culture of production and consumption: to cease rhythmically is to confess that life is sustained by God and not by ceaseless labor and consumption.³⁰ A digital Sabbath, a periodic and communal cessation of connectivity, is therefore not a lifestyle detox but a confession of faith: an embodied declaration that the attention of God's people is not a commodity available around the clock to an economy that harvests it.³¹ Like Daniel's refusal of the royal food, the digital Sabbath is a small act bearing a large freight of sovereignty: it draws a line of ownership over time and consciousness.

The axis of the window concerns the discipline of orientation. Prayer three times a day facing Jerusalem was no legalistic obligation but a technology of calibration: amid days spent administering Babylon, Daniel rhythmically turned his body toward another center. For digital congregations, the discipline of orientation means building a rhythm of prayer that structures the day, not prayer slipped in between notifications, but notifications silenced for the sake of prayer. When daily worship becomes the architecture of time, the timeline loses its power as the structurer of consciousness; congregants begin to read the world from Jerusalem rather than from the feed.

This spirituality of resistance is not merely defensive; it empowers ministry. Within a pneumatological framework, the gifts of the Spirit can be actualized through digital media to build up the body of Christ; the digital age opens new space for the ministry of the charisms rather than closing it.³² The difference between a congregation formed by algorithms and a congregation ministering through algorithms lies precisely in the disciplines of table and window: a community whose desires have been trained by the liturgy of the Kingdom can use the tools of Babylon for the work of Jerusalem. Without that training, the same tools will use them.

The communal dimension of resistance requires emphasis, for Daniel was not alone: he struggled together with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and his prayers were rooted in a community. The experience of Pentecostal churches during the pandemic demonstrates that crisis may in fact give birth to a theology of care that mobilizes communal resources for the vulnerable. Resilience is never an individual achievement but the fruit of a functioning network of love.³³ A digital spirituality of resistance must therefore be institutionalized within community: small groups that guard one another's rhythms, families that agree upon a

²⁹ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 39–41.

³⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 1–3.

³¹ Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 8–10.

³² Harls Evan R. Siahaan, "Aktualisasi Pelayanan Karunia di Era Digital," *EPIGRAPHE: Jurnal Teologi dan Pelayanan Kristiani* 1, no. 1 (2018): 23–38, <https://doi.org/10.33991/epigraphe.v1i1.7>.

³³ Mookgo S. Kgatle, "Megacostalism and the Pandemic: Developing a Megacostal Theology of Care beyond COVID-19," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45, no. 1 (2024): a3018, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.3018>.

domestic liturgy, and a leadership courageous enough to set the example, for leaders without roots will be swept away by disruption along with their congregations.³⁴

Finally, a spirituality of resistance demands honesty about the cost. Daniel 6 does not promise that integrity always ends outside the lions' den; it promises only that God is present within it. Portier-Young reminds us that Jewish resistance theology was born from communities some of whose members genuinely died as martyrs; authentic resistance always reckons with the possibility of loss.³⁵ For the digital church, that cost may take the form of lost reach, declining metrics, or a failure to keep pace with trends whenever integrity demands a path that is not viral. A community that has made its peace with that cost, one whose success is defined by fidelity rather than by visibility, is a community that can no longer be enslaved by the attention economy.

The integrity of God's people in the digital ecosystem: Babylonian literacy without Babylonian identity

This final section translates the exegetical and constructive findings into an ecclesiological framework that the church can put into operation: the model of "Babylonian literacy without Babylonian identity." The model stands upon two legs that must be kept together. The first leg, Babylonian literacy: like Daniel, who mastered the language and literature of the Chaldeans until he surpassed the Babylonian experts themselves, the church is called to master digital literacy with excellence, understanding how algorithms work, how the platform economy operates, and how digital culture functions, not as a compromise but as a missional competence. The second leg, not becoming Babylon: that mastery is accompanied by nonnegotiable disciplines of identity, which keep the church from replicating the logic of empire within its own common life.

A framework of theological negotiation for this model has already been supplied by digital religion studies. Campbell and Garner show that communities of faith always negotiate technology on the basis of their history, core values, and practices, a healthy process demanding reflective awareness rather than automatic adoption or automatic rejection.³⁶ What the Daniel narrative contributes to this framework is its criterion of negotiation: the guiding question is not "is this technology effective?" but "does this practice strip away our worship and our identity little by little?" The table and window thereby become instruments of audit: every ecclesial adoption of technology is tested for its effect on the congregation's patterns of consumption and its rhythm of orientation toward God.

At the level of systematic ecclesiology, this model completes initiatives already present within Indonesian theology. Afandi has affirmed the inevitability of the church's encounter with information technology and has called for a theologically formulated digital ecclesiology;³⁷ Dwiraharjo has constructed a biblical defense of the validity of online worship

³⁴ Daniel Ronda, "Kepemimpinan Kristen di Era Disrupsi Teknologi," *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat* 3, no. 1 (2019): 1–8.

³⁵ Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire*, 10–12.

³⁶ Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner, *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 21–23.

³⁷ Yahya Afandi, "Gereja dan Pengaruh Teknologi Informasi 'Digital Ecclesiology'," *FIDEI: Jurnal Teologi Sistematis dan Praktika* 1, no. 2 (2018): 270–283, <https://doi.org/10.34081/fidei.v1i2.12>.

in a time of crisis.³⁸ The Daniel narrative adds a dimension that neither has yet worked out: formative vigilance. A digital church that is ecclesialogically valid may nevertheless perish formatively if it borrows not only Babylon's platforms but also its liturgies, measures success by metrics, treats congregants as an audience, and shapes its communication according to algorithmic taste. Ecclesial integrity requires that the church borrow the tools without borrowing the soul.

In the domain of mission, the Daniel model both liberates and disciplines. The actualization of the Great Commission within a digital context, as urged by Hartono, finds in Daniel a missionary exemplar whose witness arose from integrity rather than from strategy: the kings of Babylon and Persia acknowledged Daniel's God because they had seen Daniel's life.³⁹ A digital mission modeled upon this pattern will shift its center of gravity from the production of content to the production of a community whose life is worth witnessing: financial transparency amid a manipulative economy, gentleness amid a culture of viral rage, and epistemic honesty amid a flood of disinformation. Content is only a window; what the world sees is the house behind it.

The model likewise orders the hybrid *onsite-online* relation with an exilic realism. The congregational longing for bodily fellowship, documented empirically⁴⁰, and the inevitability of digital presence mapped by church-online studies⁴¹ need not be set against each other. In the logic of diaspora, the people of God have always lived in more than one space: Daniel resided in Babylon and was oriented toward Jerusalem. A healthy hybrid church lives out the same double structure, residing in digital space with full competence, oriented toward bodily encounter as its sacramental center of gravity, without disparaging either space as less spiritual, and without permitting either to claim totality.

For the formation of the digital generation, the Daniel model offers an empowering framing narrative. Rather than teaching Generation Z that their digital world is evil, a message that produces only guilt or disregard, the church can frame them as a Daniel generation: young people fully educated in the Babylonian curriculum, called to be ten times more excellent within it, and whose honor lies in the lines they do not cross. Intentional formation in digital spirituality here finds its concrete shape: cross-generational mentoring that trains the disciplines of table and window, peer communities that guard one another's rhythms, and ecclesial celebration of those small acts of courage that refuse the current.⁴²

Finally, for the Indonesian context, this model resonates with the church's historical experience as a creative minority. The Indonesian church has never possessed the luxury of Christendom; it has always had to learn to participate fully in national life while guarding the identity of its faith, an exilic competence that now needs only to be extended into the digital domain. The experience of minority status that once appeared to be a weakness proves instead to be a form of capital: congregations accustomed to living alongside difference, to negotiating

³⁸ Susanto Dwiraharjo, "Konstruksi Teologis Gereja Digital: Sebuah Refleksi Biblis Ibadah Online di Masa Pandemi Covid-19," *EPIGRAPHE: Jurnal Teologi dan Pelayanan Kristiani* 4, no. 1 (2020): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.33991/epigraphe.v4i1.145>.

³⁹ Handreas Hartono, "Mengaktualisasikan Amanat Agung Matius 28:19-20 dalam Konteks Era Digital," *KURIOS: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 4, no. 2 (2018): 157–166, <https://doi.org/10.30995/kur.v4i2.87>.

⁴⁰ Pakpahan, Artonang, and Hendratmo, "Congregation Members' Response."

⁴¹ Jung, "Church in the Digital Age."

⁴² Subowo, "Membangun Spiritualitas Digital bagi Generasi Z."

identity within a plural public sphere, and to building communal resilience from below possess the very spiritual musculature required for a diaspora in digital Babylon. A theology of exile is, in the end, not a theology of alienation but a theology of fruitfulness in a foreign land, just as the community of the exile brought forth some of the richest material in the Old Testament canon.⁴³

Conclusion

The contextual analysis has shown that the digital ecosystem functions as a formative empire (digital Babylon) that shapes the identity of its inhabitants through the hidden liturgies of the attention economy, so the problem of the digital church is, at root, a problem of formation rather than merely of medium. The exegetical reading has shown in the Daniel narrative a distinctive pattern of critical participation: full mastery of the language and knowledge of the empire, interwoven with nonnegotiable disciplines of identity and preserved through small, repeated practices; the table that marks the boundary of consumption and the window that calibrates orientation toward God. The theological construction yields a spirituality of resistance resting upon the discipline of consumption, counter-liturgy, the digital Sabbath, the rhythm of prayer, the empowerment of the charisms, and communal institutionalization, with full honesty concerning the cost of fidelity. The resulting ecclesiological model of “Babylonian literacy without Babylonian identity” gives the church, particularly the Indonesian church, historical capital as a creative minority and a framework for inhabiting digital space with excellent missional competence without forfeiting its soul. Further study might extend this reading to Daniel 3 on the worship of the statue and the economy of spectacle, and might test it empirically against the practices of digital formation among congregations in Indonesia.

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Credit authorship contribution

Ayub Pangga Lewu and Jonsa Manullang discussed the original ideas, wrote the initial draft, and refined the manuscript altogether. They revised the manuscript. Both authors contributed equally, and they agreed on the order of authorship without coercion.

AI disclosure

The authors state that they used AI tools to refine existing drafts, identify relevant references, and generate suggestions for discussion points. AI assistance was restricted to testing and expanding upon ideas initially proposed by the authors. The final manuscript reflects the authors' collective deliberations and remains fully attributable to them.

Ethical considerations

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⁴³Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 27–29.

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