

Curriculum as liturgy: Reorienting Christian education towards the formation of desire in the algorithmic age

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Abstract: This article offers a conceptual reconstruction of the Christian education curriculum as a liturgical practice of desire formation amid contemporary algorithmic counter-liturgies. Beginning from the diagnosis that learners of Christian Religious Education in Indonesia are intensively formed by algorithm-driven digital ecosystems before they ever enter the classroom or the church, while most Christian education curricula continue to operate within a cognitivist paradigm that treats human beings as mere thinking things, the study argues that the curriculum must be reconceptualized, theologically and pedagogically, as a counter-liturgy that forms the *ordo amoris*. Employing a qualitative-constructive approach grounded in library research, the article synthesizes James K. A. Smith's liturgical anthropology with the techno-cultural diagnostics of Byung-Chul Han, Shoshana Zuboff, and Nicholas Carr, and then formulates four reconstructive principles: embodiment, repetition, narration, and community. Building upon, while also distinguishing itself from, the existing Indonesian reception of Smith, the article's contribution lies in its academic triangulation of liturgical anthropology with techno-cultural critique and in the translation of that triangulation into the regulatory architecture of Indonesian Christian Religious Education, examined through the documented liturgical traditions of the HKBP and the GKI.

Keywords: algorithmic age, Christian religious education, desire formation, liturgical curriculum, *ordo amoris*

Introduction

Learners of Christian Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Kristen*, hereafter CRE) in Indonesia today live within a formative ecosystem that shapes them far earlier and far more intensively than either the classroom or the church. The *Digital 2024: Indonesia* report records that the average Indonesian internet user spends more than seven and a half hours online every day, most of it on algorithm-driven platforms designed to maximise exposure.¹ The critical question for Christian education today is therefore no longer simply “how long do children spend on their devices?” but a far deeper one: what formative practices are shaping them there? Behind the duration of exposure lies an architecture of desire formation that operates ceaselessly through daily rhythms, visual rituals, and an automatically curated logic of recommendation. What is being formed is not primarily what learners think about the

¹ We Are Social and Meltwater, “Digital 2024: Indonesia,” *DataReportal*, 21 February 2024, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-indonesia>.

world, but what they love, what they long for, and what they regard as good and worth pursuing. In other words, the contemporary algorithmic ecosystem constitutes a potent pedagogical practice that is forming our learners' *ordo amoris*.

Meanwhile, most CRE literature and practice in Indonesia still operates within what James K. A. Smith calls a cognitivist anthropology—a model of the human being as a *thinking thing*, a creature formed primarily through information, doctrine, and beliefs that are cognitively processed.² CRE curricula, both at the secondary-school level and within CRE study programmes at theological colleges (*Sekolah Tinggi Teologi*, STT) and State Institutes of Christian Studies (*Institut Agama Kristen Negeri*, IAKN), remain dominated by the transmission of faith content—doctrine, biblical narrative, Christian ethics, and church history—which is assumed to be capable of forming learners' faith through adequate propositional understanding. Influential Indonesian CRE textbooks, from the work of Daniel Nuhamara to more recent CRE literature, while attentive to spiritual and contextual dimensions, still tend to treat cognition as the principal gateway to faith formation.³ This paradigm is not merely incomplete; it becomes fatal when confronted with contemporary algorithmic counter-liturgy, which operates not at the level of cognition but at the level of affect, imagination, and bodily habit. If desire forms incessantly outside the classroom, while the classroom offers nothing more than information transfer, then the prospect of the CRE curriculum substantively forming learners' faith becomes very slim indeed.

Internationally, a significant theological-pedagogical movement has emerged that seeks to reformulate faith formation in liturgical and affective terms. James K. A. Smith's *Cultural Liturgies* trilogy—comprising *Desiring the Kingdom* (2009), *Imagining the Kingdom* (2013), and *Awaiting the King* (2017)—advances the foundational thesis that the human being is a *liturgical animal*, a creature formed more primordially by desire-shaping repetitive practices than by ideas or cognitive beliefs. This thesis is rooted in a long tradition of liturgical theology stretching from Augustine, through Don Saliers's *Worship as Theology* (1994), which presents worship as the principal *locus* of theological formation,⁴ to the pedagogical contribution of David I. Smith's *On Christian Teaching* (2018), which translates this liturgical framework into the practice of the Christian classroom.⁵ In recent years, Andrew Root has extended this discourse by bringing Charles Taylor's analysis of secular modernity into conversation with contemporary practical theology, thereby opening a critical horizon on the *secular mysticisms* that shape learners in the digital age.⁶ At the outset, applying Smith's framework to digital formation is nothing new in English-language Christian discourse: in *Digital Liturgies* (2023), Samuel D. James has already drawn on Smith's concept of cultural liturgies to map five formative patterns of the internet and propose counter-habits for Christian readers.⁷ Nevertheless, this discourse has yet to be substantively absorbed into Indonesian CRE, whether at the conceptual level or at the level of curricular operationalisation.

² James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 39–40.

³ Daniel Nuhamara, *Pembimbing Pendidikan Agama Kristen* (Bandung: Jurnal Info Media, 2007), 23–24.

⁴ Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 15–16.

⁵ David I. Smith, *On Christian Teaching: Practicing Faith in the Classroom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 1–3.

⁶ Andrew Root, *The Church in an Age of Secular Mysticisms: Why Spiritualities without God Fail to Transform Us* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), 4–6.

⁷ Samuel D. James, *Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom in an Online Age* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023).

Indonesian CRE, for its part, has begun—albeit still sporadically—to address the dimensions of spirituality, character formation, and the challenges of digital culture. Emanuel Gerrit Singgih's contribution to contextual theology,⁸ Joas Adiprasetya's thought on theological imagination and religious participation,⁹ Robert Borrong's work on environmental ethics with its pedagogical dimension,¹⁰ and numerous articles in journals such as KURIOS, DUNAMIS, Polyglot, and Gema Teologika have enriched CRE discourse in Indonesia. Closest to the theme of this article is Hendra Yohanes's study (2024) in DUNAMIS, which compares the concept of the *imago Dei* within a cosmic-temple framework with Smith's *homo liturgicus* model and concludes that Christian education does not end with the communication of Christian teaching material, but consists in the formation of persons whose desires are directed towards the Kingdom of God.¹¹ That study precedes the present article in introducing Smith's liturgical anthropology into Indonesian-language Christian education discourse and even employs the same key term, "desire" (*hasrat*). Accordingly, the research gap addressed here cannot be framed as a lack of reception of Smith in Indonesia.

This article differs from Yohanes's study in three respects that warrant explicit statement. First, Yohanes employs the *homo liturgicus* model as a point of comparison for a biblical-theological construction of the *imago Dei*, whereas this article adopts liturgical anthropology as its working premise and moves from there in a curricular direction. Second, Yohanes directs his critique at rationalism as a general tendency within Christian education, whereas this article names a specific and structured formative rival—the algorithmic ecosystem—through triangulation with Han, Zuboff, and Carr. Third, Yohanes stops at the *telos* of Christian education, whereas this article translates that *telos* into four reconstructive principles operationalised within Indonesia's regulatory framework, namely the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) at the secondary level, the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI), and the National Standards for Higher Education (SN-Dikti) in CRE study programmes. The research gap that this article seeks to bridge, therefore, is neither the absence of any reception of Smith in Indonesia nor the novelty of combining Smith with digital formation at the global level, but rather the absence of an academic triangulation of liturgical anthropology, the Han–Zuboff–Carr techno-cultural diagnostics, and their translation into the regulated curricular architecture of Indonesian CRE.¹²

The central thesis of this article is that the Christian education curriculum needs to be reconceptualised, theologically and pedagogically, as a liturgical practice that forms learners' *ordo amoris*, that is, as a counter-liturgy set against the algorithmic liturgies that have already shaped their desires. This study aims to formulate theological-pedagogical principles for

⁸ Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, *Berteologi dalam Konteks: Pemikiran-pemikiran mengenai Kontekstualisasi Teologi di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2000), 27–28.

⁹ Joas Adiprasetya, *An Imaginative Glimpse: The Trinity and Multiple Religious Participations*, vol. 198 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 35–36.

¹⁰ Robert P. Borrong, *Etika Bumi Baru: Akar Permasalahan dan Pendekatan Kristiani terhadap Ekologi* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2003), 187–188.

¹¹ Hendra Yohanes, "Manusia sebagai Citra Allah di Bait Semesta: Tinjauan terhadap *Imago Dei*, *Homo Liturgicus*, dan Implikasi terhadap Pendidikan Kristen," *DUNAMIS: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 9, no. 1 (2024): 247–266.

¹² James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 25–27, 40–41; cf. Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019), 8–11.

reconstructing the CRE curriculum as a liturgical practice of desire formation in the face of the contemporary algorithmic age, with particular reference to secondary education and theological higher education in Indonesia. The article's contribution is set out in three deliberately modest claims: first, a conceptual triangulation between Smith's liturgical anthropology and the Han-Zuboff-Carr techno-cultural diagnostics, which, as far as the author's survey extends, has not yet been undertaken systematically in academic scholarship and has so far largely remained at the level of essays and popular books; second, the formulation of four reconstructive curricular principles—embodiment, repetition, narration, and community—as an operational framework for curriculum developers; and third, the translation of these principles into Indonesia's educational regulatory framework, drawing upon the liturgical traditions of Indonesian churches as a pedagogical resource.

The study adopts a qualitative-constructive approach through library research, comprising two complementary hermeneutical moves. The first is *theological retrieval*—a critical-constructive reading of primary sources in liturgical theology (Smith, Saliers, Augustine) in order to build an adequate anthropological and pedagogical framework. The second is *cultural diagnostic*—a critical reading of contemporary philosophical diagnostics (Han, Zuboff, Carr) in order to map algorithmic counter-liturgy as a contemporary formative condition. A dialectical synthesis of the two yields a constructive proposal in the form of principles for curricular reconstruction. This approach stands within the tradition of practical theology as articulated by Richard R. Osmer in *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (2008), which sets out four tasks of practical theology: the descriptive-empirical (what is going on?), the interpretive (why is this going on?), the normative (what ought to be going on?), and the pragmatic (how might we respond?).¹³ This article focuses on the interpretive, normative, and pragmatic tasks, with empirical data drawn from techno-cultural literature and digital-sector reports providing descriptive context.

The discussion is organised under four complementary headings. The first, "Liturgical Anthropology: Human Beings as Worshipping and Loving Creatures," establishes the anthropological foundation that faith formation takes place at the level of the *ordo amoris* through repeated practice, rather than primarily at the cognitive level. The second, "Algorithmic Counter-Liturgy: The Formation of Desire in the Attention Economy," offers a *cultural diagnostic* of how algorithm-driven digital platforms form learners' desires liturgically, albeit anonymously. The third, "Curriculum as Counter-Liturgy: Four Reconstructive Principles," formulates four principles as a framework for curricular reconstruction. The fourth, "Towards a Liturgical Christian Religious Education in Indonesia: Practical Implications," contextualises these principles for CRE in senior secondary schools (*Sekolah Menengah Atas*, SMA) and in CRE study programmes at STT and IAKN, examining the liturgical traditions of the HKBP (*Huria Kristen Batak Protestan*, Batak Christian Protestant Church) and the GKI (*Gereja Kristen Indonesia*, Indonesian Christian Church) as two documented cases. The article concludes by summarising its contribution and suggesting directions for further research.

¹³ Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 4–5.

Liturgical anthropology: Human beings as worshipping and loving creatures

James K. A. Smith opens the Cultural Liturgies trilogy with a sharp critique of what he calls bobblehead anthropology—an anthropological model that pictures the human being as an oversized head perched atop a small and almost inconsequential body. Within this paradigm, the human person is identified chiefly as a thinking thing, a Cartesian creature formed and defined by ideas, beliefs, and cognitively processed information. Smith argues that this paradigm, which dominates modern Christian education, is theologically flawed and pedagogically inadequate.¹⁴ As an alternative, Smith proposes an anthropology that is more primordial and more consonant with the classical Christian tradition: the human being is a *liturgical animal*, a creature formed more fundamentally by what it loves than by what it thinks. Faith formation, accordingly, is not primarily a matter of filling the mind with correct information but of directing desire towards God as its ultimate *telos*.

The roots of this liturgical anthropology lie in the long Augustinian tradition. From the opening lines of the *Confessions*, Augustine portrays the human being as a creature in search of love: "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."¹⁵ This reflection is deepened in Book X, where Augustine asks what, in truth, he loves when he loves his God.¹⁶ At the heart of Augustinian anthropology lies the concept of the *ordo amoris*—the ordering of love—which determines how a person lives, chooses, and orients himself or herself in the world. Human beings are not formed first and foremost by what they know, but by what they love most deeply. When this love is oriented toward God, the person finds integrity; when it is oriented toward creatures or toward the self as the ultimate *telos*, the person suffers spiritual disintegration. What matters for Christian education is that this *ordo amoris* is not formed primarily through argument or cognitive instruction, but through repeated practices that form the habits of the heart—an insight that flows from Augustine's own struggle with a love he came to discover only belatedly.¹⁷

Smith operationalises this Augustinian insight through the key concept of liturgy, understood in a broad anthropological sense. For Smith, liturgy denotes not only formal ecclesial worship but any set of repeated practices that shapes human desire towards a particular *telos* or vision of "the good life." A weekend visit to the shopping centre is a liturgy; watching a football match at a stadium is a liturgy; even the daily routine of checking social media is a liturgy. Every liturgy has its particular narrative (a story about what the good life is), its particular rituals (repeated bodily practices), its particular symbols (artefacts that stimulate the imagination) and its particular community (people who participate in the same liturgy).¹⁸ Because human beings are formed by what they love, and because what they love is formed by the liturgies in which they participate, the most critical question for Christian education is not "what do learners think?" but "which liturgies are shaping their desires?"

This liturgical dimension operates chiefly through the imagination rather than through reason. In *Imagining the Kingdom*, Smith deepens his analysis by drawing on the

¹⁴ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 41–43.

¹⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), I.1.1.

¹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, X.6.8–X.7.11.

¹⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, X.27.38.

¹⁸ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*.

philosophical insights of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu concerning *habitus* and bodily knowledge to show that desire formation occurs at a pre-reflective, imaginative level.¹⁹ Imagination here is not mere fantasy or daydreaming, but the basic capacity through which human beings make sense of the world prior to discursive reflection. Liturgies form this imagination by presenting a vision of “the good life” in forms that can be felt, seen, heard, and touched. This is why a Christian education that operates solely at the cognitive-propositional level will invariably be outmatched by cultural liturgies that work at the imaginative-affective level. Smith puts it succinctly: we are what we love, and we love what we imagine.²⁰ Faith formation, therefore, is always the formation of the imagination.

Don E. Saliers, in *Worship as Theology*, deepens this dimension by showing that Christian worship has, from the outset, functioned as a theological practice that forms—rather than merely expresses—the faithful’s beliefs and desires. Saliers articulates the key thesis of *lex orandi, lex credendi*—the law of prayer is the law of belief—as an anthropological-pedagogical principle: the way the faithful pray shapes what they believe.²¹ The implications for Christian education are profound. Worship—with its annual rhythm (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost), its sacramental rites (Baptism, the Lord’s Supper), its bodily practices (praying, singing, listening, kneeling), and its repetition of texts (the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Psalms)—constitutes the most primordial curriculum of faith formation in the Christian tradition. Whenever Christian education abandons this liturgical dimension for the sake of efficient cognitive transfer, it loses its deepest formative roots.

In the Indonesian context, this anthropological insight is not entirely foreign. Indonesian contextual theology, through voices such as Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, has long emphasised the communal and practical dimensions of faith formation, recognising that Christian faith cannot be separated from its concrete ecclesial-practical context.²² Joas Adiprasetya, in his doctoral work *An Imaginative Glimpse*, articulates a Trinitarian theology that highlights the imaginative-participatory dimension of Christian faith, a contribution that resonates with Smith’s insight into the imagination as the *locus* of formation.²³ Moreover, Indonesian churches possess documented and well-ordered liturgical resources—the Agenda together with the Buku Ende hymnal in the HKBP, and the synodal liturgical order of the GKI, to mention the two examples examined in the fourth section—which constitute a pedagogical asset that CRE curricular discourse has hitherto neglected. Indonesian Christian education stands upon an orderly liturgical tradition, yet frequently fails to recognise it or to draw upon it as a curricular resource.

The anthropological implications for CRE curriculum development in Indonesia are far-reaching. First, curriculum developers need to shift from the question “what must learners know?” to a more primordial one: “What kind of learners do we wish to form—what ought they to love, long for and pursue?” The second question does not replace the first but prioritises and frames it. Second, the success of CRE learning can no longer be measured solely in terms of cognitive ability (memorising verses, explaining doctrines, analysing texts), but

¹⁹ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 13–15.

²⁰ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), 22–24.

²¹ Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 22–23.

²² Singgih, *Berteologi dalam Konteks*, 80–82.

²³ Adiprasetya, *An Imaginative Glimpse*, 35–36.

must also attend to signs of the formation of the *ordo amoris*, which are harder to measure yet far more substantive: orientation of life, moral sensitivity, and capacity for worship and participation in the community of faith. Third, teaching methods need to be broadened from discursive explanation to liturgical practice: daily rituals, annual rhythms, symbols and artefacts, and immersion in the grand narrative of God.

Yet this articulation of liturgical anthropology cannot stand on its own. It must reckon with the concrete reality that Indonesian CRE learners today live within a potent and relentless counter-liturgy—an algorithmic liturgy that has already shaped their desires. As Smith reminds us, the principal problem of contemporary Christian education is not an absence of formation but the presence of a rival formation that works far more effectively than formal Christian education.²⁴ The following section therefore maps this counter-liturgy critically as a prerequisite for the curricular reconstruction proposed thereafter.

Algorithmic counter-liturgy: The formation of desire in the attention economy

The notion of “counter-liturgy” here is not rhetorical hyperbole but a serious analytical category. If liturgy, in Smith’s anthropological definition, is a set of repeated practices that shapes human desire toward a particular *telos*, then algorithm-driven digital ecosystems—platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and the like—meet every criterion of liturgy. There are daily rituals (checking one’s *feed* in the morning, scrolling before sleep); there is a narrative of the good life on offer (consumption, self-presentation, social validation, instant gratification); there are symbols that stimulate the imagination (images, videos, reels); and there is a community that shares the same liturgy (networks of followers, trending topics, digital subcultures). Moreover, this algorithmic liturgy operates far more intensively than either ecclesial liturgy or CRE instruction: learners take part in it for hours every day, all year round, whereas ecclesial liturgy and formal CRE instruction are granted only a few hours each week.

Byung-Chul Han, the German-Korean philosopher, has offered an incisive diagnosis of the formative dimension of contemporary digital technology. In *The Burnout Society*, Han argues that the contemporary subject is an achievement subject, compelled to produce, connect, and perform without end, to the point of radical exhaustion and weariness of soul. What makes this dangerous, Han contends, is that the achievement subject is not coerced from without but coerces itself; it is at once the perpetrator and the victim of its own exploitation.²⁵ This diagnosis is sharpened further in *Psychopolitics*, where Han shows that contemporary neoliberal power no longer operates by repressing the individual but by mobilising the individual’s own desires.²⁶ Digital platforms thus become the most effective of psychopolitical instruments: they shape desire through engagement, reward particular behaviours and thereby cultivate dispositions that serve the platform economy.

²⁴ James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 53–55.

²⁵ Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 18–20.

²⁶ Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*, trans. Erik Butler (London: Verso, 2017), 11–13.

In a more recent work, *Non-Things: Upheaval in the Lifeworld* (2022), Han deepens this analysis by showing that the digital age has eroded the materiality, durability, and depth of human experience. Human beings, he argues, no longer dwell among things but among non-things: information, data, and content.²⁷ Unlike things and practices, information has no *Eigenzeit* (a time of its own); it appears and vanishes within seconds, leaves no lasting trace and demands no deep commitment. The implications for desire formation are profound: in an ecosystem saturated with non-things, the human capacity to dwell, to wait, to commit, and to explore something in sustained depth is steadily eroded. CRE learners formed within this ecosystem tend to lose the capacity for contemplative prayer, for slow and attentive reading of Scripture, and for commitment to a demanding community of faith. They become shallow consumers of religious experience rather than persevering disciples.

Shoshana Zuboff, in her monumental *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), adds a crucial political-economic dimension. Digital platforms, Zuboff argues, are not neutral media for communication or education; they are machines for extracting behavioural data that turn human experience into a tradeable commodity. In her account, surveillance capitalism unilaterally appropriates human experience as a free source of raw material, which it then converts into behavioural data.²⁸ The theological and pedagogical implications are stark: CRE learners who use these platforms are not acting as active and free subjects but are becoming objects of data extraction whose behaviour is predicted, modified, and sold. The economic logic of the platform has an interest in prolonging their exposure, not in deepening their dialogical, contemplative or formative capacities. Every minute a learner spends on a platform generates data and advertising revenue; those minutes are not free, even when no money changes hands.

At the neurocognitive level, Nicholas Carr, in *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (2010), has mapped how intensive internet use alters the structure and function of the human brain. Reading on screens crowded with hyperlinks, notifications, and visual stimuli, Carr argues, trains the brain for rapid, superficial scanning while weakening its capacity for focused attention, deep reading, and sustained reflective thought.²⁹ The implications for Christian education are critical: the very capacities weakened by the digital ecosystem—focused attention, deep reading, and slow reflection—are precisely those most needed for substantive faith formation. Contemplative reading of Scripture, attentive listening to preaching, deep reflection on doctrine, and the practice of demanding spiritual disciplines all require capacities that digital formation is steadily eroding. Carr's diagnosis thus complements those of Han and Zuboff with a concrete neurocognitive dimension.

When these three diagnoses are synthesised—Han on the psychopolitical dimension, Zuboff on the political-economic, and Carr on the neurocognitive—the character of contemporary algorithmic counter-liturgy can be described fairly comprehensively. First, it forms learners as achievement subjects who drive themselves ceaselessly towards production, connection, and self-presentation. Second, it erodes the capacity for focused attention, deep reading, and long-term commitment. Third, it shapes desire towards instant gratification,

²⁷ Byung-Chul Han, *Non-Things: Upheaval in the Lifeworld*, trans. Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), 1–3.

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 5–7.

continuous consumption, and quantified social validation. Fourth, it alienates learners from communal experience rooted in bodily presence and concrete place, replacing it with fluid and shallow virtual connection. Fifth, it turns learners into objects of data extraction whose behaviour is systematically modified for commercial ends. If this is the concrete and inescapable formative ecosystem, then the challenge facing the CRE curriculum becomes clear: it must not merely add information about the faith but actively form rival desires.

In the Indonesian context, these dynamics are all the more acute given the country's very high level of digital penetration. The DataReportal 2024 survey records more than 185 million internet users in Indonesia, with average daily exposure exceeding seven and a half hours, and with algorithm-driven platforms dominating patterns of use. These figures continue to climb: surveys by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) record national internet penetration of 79.50 percent in 2024 and 80.66 percent in 2025, or approximately 229.4 million out of a population of 284.4 million, with the highest penetration among Millennials (89.12 percent) and Generation Z (87.80 percent)—precisely the age groups to which SMA CRE learners and students in CRE study programmes belong.³⁰ They are *digital natives* in a more radical sense than previous generations: not merely familiar with technology, but possessing a *habitus* formed by it from the very beginning. The implication is clear: an Indonesian CRE curriculum that continues to operate as though learners entered the classroom as neutral subjects waiting to be filled with information about the faith fundamentally misreads the contemporary formative context. Learners arrive in the classroom as subjects already formed by a potent counter-liturgy, and the task of the CRE curriculum is to convene a bold counter-liturgy of its own.

This diagnosis, it must be stressed, is neither technophobia nor a rejection of digital technology as such. Digital technology is an inescapable reality, and it holds significant positive potential for education. The target of the critique is the specific algorithmic architecture of the contemporary attention economy, which is designed not for human formation but for data extraction and the prolongation of exposure. Nor is this critique a moralistic lament; it is a structural analysis that seeks to understand how the contemporary formative ecosystem operates so that Christian education may respond to it constructively. As Smith writes in *Awaiting the King*, the task of Christian education in this age is to form a dual citizenship—learners who live in the contemporary world, yet whose *ordo amoris* is shaped by God's grand narrative.³¹ The next section formulates this task in operational terms through four reconstructive curricular principles.

Curriculum as counter-liturgy: Four reconstructive principles

If Indonesian CRE learners are being intensively formed by algorithmic counter-liturgy, then the fundamental curricular task is no longer merely to refine the transmission of faith content but to convene a counter-liturgy that forms an alternative *ordo amoris*. Following the framework of Smith's liturgical anthropology and synthesising it with David I. Smith's pedagogical operationalisation,³² the author proposes four reconstructive principles that may

³⁰ We Are Social and Meltwater, "Digital 2024: Indonesia"; APJII, *Survei Penetrasi Internet Indonesia 2024* (Jakarta: Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia, 2024); and APJII, *Profil Internet Indonesia 2025* (Jakarta: Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia, 2025).

³¹ Smith, *Awaiting the King*.

³² Smith, *On Christian Teaching*, 8–10.

serve as a framework for CRE curriculum developers: the principle of *embodiment* (bodily enactment), the principle of *repetition* (rhythmic reiteration), the principle of *narration* (the grand narrative) and the principle of *community* (ecclesial communality). These four principles are not isolated methodological techniques but complementary dimensions of a curriculum understood as formative liturgical practice.

The first principle, *embodiment*, holds that the CRE curriculum must engage learners' bodies substantively, not merely their minds. As Smith demonstrates, desire formation takes place at a pre-reflective level through bodily practices—posture, movement, voice, touch, food, space—rather than primarily through the transfer of cognitive information.³³ Implementing this principle means that the CRE curriculum must seriously integrate bodily practices of a liturgical character: kneeling in prayer, singing together, lighting Advent candles, partaking in the Lord's Supper, making pilgrimages, planting trees as a symbol of ecological covenant, and serving others with one's own hands. For Christian education in Indonesia, this principle resonates strongly with the liturgical-communal tradition of our churches, whose elements have long been mapped in Indonesian liturgical scholarship: congregational singing, common prayer, the confession of faith, and the sacraments as repeated bodily practices.³⁴ What is needed is not wholly new innovation, but the reflective awareness that these bodily practices are curriculum, not ornament.

A critical implication of this principle is that a CRE curriculum that fails to engage the body—one that operates solely at the cognitive-propositional level or that is delivered virtually without bodily presence in a concrete space—is, in essence, theologically and anthropologically deficient. During the COVID-19 pandemic, much of Indonesian Christian education moved entirely online, and in the post-pandemic period this tendency has often been retained for efficiency. From the perspective of a liturgical curriculum, however, fully online CRE instruction forfeits its most primordial formative dimension. Maria Harris, in *Fashion Me a People*, long ago emphasised that the curriculum of the church is the entire course of its communal life, not merely an instructional programme;³⁵ and that entire course of life is always embodied, spatial and temporal. The contemporary CRE curriculum, whether in SMA or at STT/IAKN, needs to attend seriously to these spatial and embodied dimensions.

The second principle, *repetition*, holds that desire forms through rhythmic repetition rather than spectacular, isolated events. Smith, following Bourdieu, shows that *habitus* is formed through the internalisation of repeated practices that become bodily habits and imaginative frameworks.³⁶ For the CRE curriculum, this implies that formative power lies not in "exceptional lesson material" or "extraordinary retreat activities," but in the daily, weekly, and annual rhythms that learners inhabit. An opening prayer offered in earnest at every lesson, the rhythm of the liturgical year integrated into the teaching calendar (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost), the weekly practice of congregational worship and daily devotional routines—these are the most formative "lesson material" of all. John H. Westerhoff III, in his classic *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, long ago stressed that faith is not

³³ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 75–77.

³⁴ J. L. Ch. Abineno, *Unsur-Unsur Liturgia yang Dipakai Gereja-gereja di Indonesia* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2012) 44–54; cf. Rasid Rachman, *Pembimbing ke dalam Sejarah Liturgi* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2010), 160–163.

³⁵ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 63–65.

³⁶ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 32–34.

taught primarily through a good Sunday school curriculum but through children's participation in the rhythms of life of the community of faith.³⁷ A CRE curriculum that takes the principle of *repetition* seriously will attend to rhythm, not merely to content.

The third principle, *narration*, holds that faith formation is first and foremost the immersion of learners in God's grand narrative—the story of creation, covenant, incarnation, cross, resurrection, and eschatological consummation—rather than an accumulation of doctrinal propositions detached from that narrative. Smith reminds us that narrative is the fundamental form through which the imagination is shaped, whereas propositions become meaningful only when embedded within a wider narrative.³⁸ For the CRE curriculum, this implies a shift from a systematic-doctrinal approach, in which doctrines are taught as discrete blocks of information, towards a narrative-imaginative approach, in which learners are immersed in God's story and invited to find themselves within it. The *shared Christian praxis* approach developed by Thomas H. Groome—though still situated within a more cognitive paradigm than Smith's—has paved the way in this direction by placing story and vision among the key components of religious education.³⁹ In the Indonesian context, this principle also means placing God's story in dialogue with the grand narratives of the nation—stories of struggle, *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), and diversity—so learners can discover a narrative integration between their faith and their national context.

The fourth principle, *community*, holds that desire formation is always communal and ecclesial rather than individual and private. In *A Community of Character*, Stanley Hauerwas advances a fundamental thesis: Christian character cannot be formed outside a community that lives out the Christian narrative and its practices together.⁴⁰ For the CRE curriculum, this implies that the CRE classroom—whether in SMA or at STT/IAKN—cannot be confined to a space of individual transaction between teacher and learner. The CRE classroom must be understood as a micro-community of faith that engages in liturgical practice together, and CRE learning must be organically connected with the life of the local congregation. A CRE classroom isolated from the wider community of faith will lose its most primordial formative dimension. A curriculum that takes the principle of community seriously will design learning experiences that bridge classroom and congregation: congregational visits, participation in congregational worship, communal service, intergenerational mentoring, and involvement in the congregation's diaconal ministry.

These four principles do not stand in isolation but intersect in an organic integration. Learners' bodies engaged (embodiment) in recurring rhythms (repetition), immersed in the grand narrative of God (narration), and within a real community of faith (community)—this is the shape of a curriculum conceived as a counter-liturgy that answers its algorithmic rival. Each principle responds to a specific dimension of the counter-liturgy currently forming learners. The principle of embodiment responds to the disembodied character of the digital ecosystem. The principle of repetition responds to temporal fragmentation and the inability to

³⁷ John H. Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2012), 28–30.

³⁸ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*.

³⁹ Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 135–137.

⁴⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 9–11.

commit long term. The principle of narration responds to the dominance of consumerist and self-presentational narratives on digital platforms. The principle of community responds to social atomisation and shallow virtual connection. Together, therefore, the four principles constitute a curricular architecture that is structurally responsive to the formative challenges of the present.

The formulation of these four principles, it must be emphasised, is not a technical recipe to be applied mechanically in every setting. It is a heuristic framework that must be carefully contextualised to concrete circumstances. How these principles are to be translated into the SMA CRE curriculum under the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, and how they are to be implemented in CRE study programmes at STT/IAKN within the KKNi and SN-Dikti frameworks, will be discussed in the next section. The four principles are theological before they are methodological; they flow from a liturgical anthropology rooted in the Christian tradition and cannot therefore be exchanged for any contemporary pedagogical technique that happens to be in vogue.

Towards a liturgical Christian religious education in Indonesia: practical implications

Contextualizing the four principles for Indonesian SMA CRE means confronting one specific regulatory reality: the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and the Pancasila Student Profile (*Profil Pelajar Pancasila*), which serve as the national points of reference. Within this framework, SMA CRE is allocated limited time—generally two lesson periods per week—and serves learners from highly diverse ecclesial backgrounds. Within these constraints, a liturgical curricular framework has strategic practical implications. First, the annual liturgical rhythm (Advent, Lent, Easter, Pentecost) should explicitly frame the teaching calendar so that learners experience a Christian *Eigenzeit* distinct from the commercial-consumerist calendar. Second, every CRE lesson should have a minimal liturgical structure: an opening with prayer or song, a contemplative reading of a biblical text, teaching, and a closing commissioning.⁴¹ This structure is not ornamental but a repeated formative practice. Third, integration with the local congregation should be designed systematically through congregational visits, participation in worship, and diaconal service. The limited time available to SMA CRE can thus be compensated for through partnership with the congregational community.

Liturgical practice in SMA CRE may also take more concrete and experiential forms. A CRE class might, for example, practice *lectio divina* as a slow and contemplative method of reading Scripture—a direct counter-practice to rapid digital scanning. It might hold a ritual of lighting the Advent candle at every lesson during Advent, as a practice that forms a sense of waiting and eschatological hope amid a culture that demands instant satisfaction. It might invite elderly members of the congregation as witnesses of faith to share their testimonies as a practice of intergenerational connection that resists digital atomization. It might organize service visits to orphanages and care homes, correctional institutions, or marginalized communities, as a practice that forms concrete love. What matters is that these practices are not treated as supplementary activities but understood as the curriculum's core, because they form learners liturgically.

⁴¹ Nuhamara, *Pembimbing Pendidikan Agama Kristen*, 47–49.

At the level of CRE study programs at STT and IAKN, contextualizing the four principles becomes more complex because two curricular dimensions must be integrated. The first is formative-personal: CRE students are prospective church leaders and educators whose own faith needs to be formed liturgically. The second is professional-multiplicative: CRE students must be equipped with the capacity to design and lead liturgical formation for others in the future. Charles R. Foster and colleagues, in *Educating Clergy*, identify four pedagogies of formation in theological education—interpretation, formation, contextualization, and performance—all of which resonate strongly with the four principles proposed here.⁴² For CRE study programs at STT/IAKN, the implication is the need for a curricular reconstruction that places the communal liturgical practice of the campus—daily or weekly chapel, annual retreats, the liturgical rhythm of campus life—as an integral part of the curriculum, rather than as an extracurricular activity external to it.

Within the KKNi and SN-Dikti frameworks, these liturgical principles must be translated into administratively valid formulations of Graduate Learning Outcomes (*Capaian Pembelajaran Lulusan*, CPL) and Course Learning Outcomes (*Capaian Pembelajaran Mata Kuliah*, CPMK). For instance, the CPL of a CRE study programme should encompass not only cognitive competences (understanding doctrine, interpreting Scripture, designing learning) and skill competences (teaching, leading worship, pastoral care), but also deeper formative competences: spiritual capacity, communal sensitivity, and liturgical integrity. Courses such as “Spirituality and Liturgical Practice,” “Communal Faith Formation,” “Theology of the Christian Curriculum” and “Practicum in Liturgical Leadership” could form the curricular backbone that operationalises the framework of liturgical anthropology. Core courses such as Systematic Theology, Christian Religious Education, and CRE Teaching Practice would, in turn, also need to be restructured so that they not only convey content but also model liturgical-formative practice itself.

One specific contribution of this article is its contention that Indonesian Christian education stands upon an ordered and documented liturgical tradition—a wealth that often goes unrecognised and is seldom drawn upon as a curricular resource. So that this examination does not stop at a broad but superficial roll-call of names, the following discussion confines itself to two traditions whose liturgical documents are open to scrutiny, namely the HKBP and the GKI, treating them as case studies rather than as samples representative of the entire Indonesian ecclesial landscape.

The HKBP orders its worship through the Agenda, a book of liturgical order modelled on the *Agende* of the Prussian churches, which functions alongside the Buku Ende as its hymnal and the almanac as a guide to the readings of the church year, beginning on the first Sunday of Advent. From the standpoint of a liturgical curriculum, this apparatus is precisely what the principle of *repetition* seeks: a recurring formative calendar with particular texts and hymns for each season. Binsar J. Pakpahan, however, shows that the HKBP’s ecclesial documents—the Agenda, the Panindangion Haporsean (confession of faith), the Ruhut Parmahanion dohot Paminsangon (church order and discipline) and the Buku Ende—were written at different times and in different contexts and have never been harmonised, with the result that there are theological inconsistencies among them, particularly in their formulations of Holy

⁴² Charles R. Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Golemon, and Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 22–24.

Communion.⁴³ This finding is in fact important for the argument of this article: liturgical richness does not automatically translate into pedagogical strength. It becomes curriculum only when its theological coherence is examined and made explicit, and it is here that theological education faces a task that has yet to be undertaken.

The GKI offers a different and complementary example. The GKI's current liturgical order is the outcome of the 2005 GKI Synod Assembly and was brought into simultaneous use by all congregations on the first Sunday of Advent 2006; it follows the pattern of the *ordo* set out in the Lima Document and uses the *Revised Common Lectionary* for Sunday worship and the principal feasts of the church year.⁴⁴ This means that all GKI congregations follow the same sequence of readings in a three-year cycle—a structure that, read through the framework of this article, constitutes a synod-wide narrative curriculum that is already in operation without ever having been called a curriculum. In this context, the principle of *narration* need not be invented; it needs to be recognised and then deliberately connected with CRE lesson planning, both in schools and in congregations, so that the readings learners hear on Sunday are not disconnected from what they study on Monday.

These two examples have been deliberately limited, since both possess official liturgical documents that are open to scrutiny and have become objects of scholarly study. Other traditions—the GMIM and GPM with their blending of local elements, the GBKP, GKPS, and GKE with their ethnic distinctives, the GPIB and GKJW in the Reformed line, and Pentecostal and charismatic churches with their embodied and affective worship—likewise hold considerable pedagogical potential, but mapping them requires dedicated liturgical research beyond the scope of this article. The author proposes this as an important agenda for further research, and the existing body of Indonesian liturgical scholarship provides an initial foundation for such work.⁴⁵ Robert P. Borrong, in his reflection on ecological ethics, has emphasised the importance of drawing on Indonesia's traditional wisdom as a theological resource;⁴⁶ the same principle applies to curricular discourse, subject to one condition that must be stated clearly: such appropriation must be grounded in a reading of the available documents and scholarship, not in a general invocation of the names of traditions.

Joas Adiprasetya's thought on theological imagination and religious participation also opens an important horizon for this contextualisation. In Indonesia's plural context, the formation of a Christian *ordo amoris* does not occur in a vacuum, but in constant dialogue with other religious traditions and with the reality of a diverse nation.⁴⁷ A liturgical CRE curriculum that is genuinely contextual will form learners who possess deep Christian integrity together with authentic dialogical capacity—learners who dwell within the grand narrative of God, yet who, from that dwelling place, are able to encounter others with openness and love. This is the final practical implication of note: an Indonesian liturgical curriculum must not become isolationist or defensive towards Indonesia's plural context; rather, precisely because of its deep liturgical roots, it becomes a curriculum capable of contributing constructively to a plural Indonesian nationhood.

⁴³ Binsar J. Pakpahan, "Analisis Kritis Liturgi Perjamuan Kudus Huria Kristen Batak Protestan" *Indonesian Journal of Theology* 2, no. 1 (2014): 42–64.

⁴⁴ BPMS GKI, *Liturgi Gereja Kristen Indonesia* (Jakarta: Badan Pekerja Majelis Sinode GKI, 2006).

⁴⁵ Abineno, *Unsur-Unsur Liturgia*; Rachman, *Pembimbing ke dalam Sejarah Liturgi*.

⁴⁶ Borrong, *Etika Bumi Baru*, 187–188.

⁴⁷ Adiprasetya, *An Imaginative Glimpse*, 119–120.

Implementing this liturgical curricular framework, however, faces several significant structural challenges. First, the regulatory frameworks of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and KKNI/SN-Dikti still predominantly treat cognitive competences and technical skills as evaluation parameters, making liturgical-formative competences difficult to formulate administratively. Second, much of Indonesian theological education remains oriented towards a cognitivist Western academic model, so that curricular reconstruction in a liturgical direction will meet with institutional resistance. Third, the quality of liturgy in Indonesian churches themselves varies, and, as the HKBP case shows, even traditions with comprehensive documents may harbour internal theological inconsistencies; not every congregation practises its liturgy with the depth required to become a pedagogical partner for CRE. Fourth, the generation of CRE educators—SMA teachers and STT/IAKN lecturers—must themselves be liturgically re-formed before they can lead liturgical formation for learners. These challenges are not reasons to refrain from reconstruction, but an invitation to design that reconstruction strategically, incrementally and collaboratively.

By way of a final note, the limitations of this article must also be acknowledged. As a conceptual-constructive study, it does not yet include empirical data on how the proposed framework would operate in concrete Indonesian CRE settings. Further research is needed to test these principles through participatory action research with SMA CRE teachers and lecturers in CRE study programmes at STT/IAKN, through the evaluation of existing curricula using the framework of liturgical anthropology, and through case analyses of implementation in specific ecclesial and educational contexts. The liturgical examination in this article is also confined to two traditions, the HKBP and the GKI, so that a broader mapping of other Indonesian liturgical traditions remains an open task. Moreover, the article engages chiefly with the Reformed-Augustinian theological tradition through Smith and with Western techno-cultural critique through Han, Zuboff and Carr; a broader dialogue with other Christian theological traditions in Indonesia—Pentecostal, Catholic, Charismatic and Orthodox—would enrich the framework considerably. Nonetheless, it is hoped that this contribution will provide a sufficiently firm conceptual foundation for Indonesian CRE curriculum developers to embark upon a reconstruction that is genuinely theological and contextual.

Conclusion

This article has offered a conceptual reconstruction of the Christian education curriculum as a liturgical practice of desire formation in the face of contemporary algorithmic counter-liturgy. Beginning from the diagnosis that CRE learners in Indonesia are intensively formed by algorithm-driven digital ecosystems before they enter the classroom or the church, while most CRE curricula continue to operate within a cognitivist paradigm, the study has argued that the curriculum needs to be reconceptualised, theologically and pedagogically, as a counter-liturgy that forms the *ordo amoris*. By triangulating Smith's liturgical anthropology with the techno-cultural diagnostics of Han, Zuboff, and Carr, the article has formulated four reconstructive principles—*embodiment*, *repetition*, *narration*, and *community*—as an operational framework for CRE curriculum developers. These principles have been contextualised for SMA CRE and for CRE study programmes at STT/IAKN through an examination of two documented liturgical traditions, the HKBP and the GKI, which show that the liturgical

framework sought by the principles of *repetition* and *narration* is in fact already available within Indonesian churches, yet has never been read as curriculum. The article's contribution is conceptual and calls for follow-up in the form of participatory action research, empirical curricular evaluation, broader liturgical mapping and inter-traditional dialogue. What is ultimately at stake is not merely curricular reformulation, but whether Indonesian Christian education will continue to be outmatched by algorithmic counter-liturgy, or will dare to convene a counter-liturgy that forms learners to love God and neighbour with the integrity of their whole bodies, rhythms, narratives and communities.

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Credit authorship contribution

The authors confirm that they contributed equally to the development and completion of the manuscript. Afi contributed to the initial ideas and conceptual framework, while Leobisa provided critical feedback, strengthened the discussion, and helped refine the manuscript into its final form before submission.

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