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# **Contextual Pneumatology: Pneumatology in the Challenges of Post-Truth and Digital Media**

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## **Introduction**

The subject of the study is Contextual Pneumatology, as a critical and systematic reflection on the Holy Spirit for the present context. By starting from the biblical foundation of the Old Testament (Genesis 1: 2), we realize that the Holy Spirit is an inseparable part of God's creation process. There is a belief that God's ongoing creation process has never been separated from the role of the Holy Spirit. Also, based on the biblical foundation of the New Testament (Acts 2: 1-12), we know that the Spirit of God empowered the disciples so that those from 'every nation under heaven' could hear, be reached and feel 'the great works done by God'. Still in the New Testament foundation (John 3: 8), it says that the Spirit of God continues to work to recreate and renew the

world, in a process that is not always identifiable, like the wind that 'blows where it pleases'. The Spirit has made God's saving work known to all corners of the world and felt by many.

The question is "How is the Spirit at work today?" In the context of today's media technology, social media - such as *Youtube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter* - is one of the signs of the times. How does the Spirit move throughout the world, in the midst of human relationships in pluralistic societies in the age of media technology, in such a way that many hear, are reached and feel the great deeds done by God? Could social media be one of the means used in the work of God through His Spirit who wants to renew the world? This paper will analyze the phenomenon of using social media (@hitsomk, Damai Kasih Channel, Paul Zhang, Jay Smith, and Ustad Somad) in the perspective of pneumatology in the midst of the post-truth era and inter-religious dialogue.

### **Context: Digital Media Frenzy and Post-Truth**

This era is characterized by the development of digital-social media technology and the internet. The generation of this era is also characterized by its technological "literacy", even making them "digital natives". They are very proficient in using digital devices. They have become a phenomenon of a society that has a *hybrid* life that brings together the real and virtual worlds. Youtube, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, and others are examples of social media that are widely used by people today. The internet has become a necessity and part of human life as Antonio Spadaro stated,

The internet is a reality that is part of the everyday lives of many people... Today, the internet is a place that we frequent in order to stay in contact with friends who live far away, to read the news, to buy a book, to book a vacation, or to share interests and ideas.

The internet has brought a new culture today. That culture, according to Sheery Turkle, is an "*always-on*" culture. With the internet, humans can always connect with others as they wish. The internet has brought about a change in the pattern of interaction that has been fixated on time and space with certain people towards computer-mediated interaction with anyone who is desired. This situation has resulted in the boundaries between reality and the virtual world in the internet bits melting. Access to the internet and social media is now easier with the presence of smartphones. These smartphones are like "magic wands" that can bring pizza, taxis or goods from online stores within minutes.

This digital technology revolution that spreads a lot of information and convenience has actually created a condition called *post-truth*. Lee McIntyre said that post-truth became popular when the term was used in Oxford Dictionaries. The Oxford dictionary defines "post-truth" as a state in which objective facts are not so influential in

the process of forming public opinion but only appeal to emotions and personal beliefs. McIntyre mentions that post-truth was born out of the concerns of people who are attentive to the concept of truth and feel that truth is under attack or harassment. In other words, in this post-truth era, emotions dominate over objective facts so that objective truth is put on the back burner. People are reluctant to fact-check information that appears on the internet.

In the context of social media, post-truth can appear in various forms such as filter bubbles, opinion as fact, and social media manipulation, as well as the spread of hoaxes. Social media is equipped with an 'algorithm system' that will capture the actions of each user after liking, clicking, or sharing. He or she will then be placed in a category with other users or groups with similar views or interests. Meanwhile, other groups that are not in one understanding are then kept away. In everyday life, when watching YouTube for example, we are often shown videos that are the same or related to the videos we have seen. This happens because the data is stored in big data and entered into the Youtube algorithm. This is a form of filter bubble where media algorithms reduce the user's desire to see points of view that are different from their own.

Opinions appear as facts where social media users can talk about their views with great confidence and conviction even if their views are not based on facts. Social media manipulation occurs when there are parties who have certain interests to create public opinion in their favor. The posts may even be edited in such a way that they appear to present the actual facts. Hoaxes and fake news are rampant because social media allows people to share information without first checking the veracity of the source. This is the context of today.

### **Perspective: The Holy Spirit in the Challenges of Post-truth and Digital Technology**

The perspective in this paper is contextual pneumatology, how the Holy Spirit works in the context of this age characterized by technological advancement, the internet, and digital media and the post-truth climate. In the process of creating the universe, the Spirit of God was already present and animated the entire work of creation (cf. Gen 1:2; 2:7). The Spirit of God is not only present in the creation story, but He also animates the creation. At the same time, the Spirit of God nourishes, grows and nurtures each of His creatures. Like the creation story when God breathed the breath of life into Adam, the first man (cf. Gen 2:7), Jesus did the same thing to His disciples by saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit..." (cf. Jn 20:22). This Spirit also animated and motivated the disciples to witness to many people.

Later, Luke, the evangelist, pointed out one of the important roles of the Holy Spirit which is to teach people to speak, "For then the Holy Spirit will teach you what to say"

(Lk 12:12). What should they say? The truth. The Holy Spirit will teach people the truth, so that they can bear true witness. Jesus himself called the Spirit who would be with the disciples the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17; 16:13). He is the one who will teach and remind the disciples of everything that Jesus said (cf. Jn 14:26).

However, the movement and role of the Holy Spirit is challenged in the era of digital technology revolution and post-truth when truth is difficult to recognize or truth is considered relative. In the previous section, we have explained the characteristics of today's era characterized by social media and the birth of post-truth and the impacts that may arise. In such a situation, the exploitation of emotions and sentimentality takes precedence over straightening, educating, and awakening the reasoning of citizens. In such a climate, we can see how the peculiarities of other religions can be mocked, insulted, made into jokes and defamed. The treatment of discriminatory content also appears in various abusive expressions, assuming that everything depends on each person's perspective. The act of insulting through social media may be considered normal or okay as long as it is entertaining. The deficit of critical and humanist reasoning ultimately perpetuates and institutionalizes the spread of cheap content.

In such a situation, how can the role of the Holy Spirit in teaching the truth to many be accomplished? The Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus, appeared in the situation of the world's hostility towards Jesus. Herman Ridderbos places John 15:18-16:15 in a storyline with the title "The hostility of the world and the testimony of the comforter". Jesus states that just as the world hates and persecutes Him, so do the disciples (cf. Jn 15:22-25). Jesus also invited the disciples to persevere in this situation (Jn 16:1-4). It was the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus who helped and led the disciples in facing the hostile world situation. Thus, the Holy Spirit continues to work in the midst of difficult situations today.

### **Research Points: Pneumatological Analysis**

A number of phenomena show that living together in a pluralistic society in Indonesia shows two trends: a friendly face full of respect in a fluid atmosphere and a hard face in a climate of extremism. A friendly face certainly does not invite problems; people are just invited to continue to maintain and develop it. Challenges clearly arise in relation to the opposite face. A hard face is inseparable from a closed and rigid attitude in response to something. There is a tendency to simply swallow, memorize and accept what one believes, so much so that others are often seen as enemies to be fought against. This section contains various channels from @hitsomk, Damai Kasih Channel, Ustad Somad, Jay Smith, and Paul Zhang.

a) Account @hitsomk

This hitsomk account is one of the Catholic Instagram accounts. The number of posts currently totals 3,770 posts. In addition, the number of followers of the @hitsomk account is 209,000 followers. This account posts various themes such as catechesis of the Catholic Faith, quotes from Saints, short biographies of Saints, and social activities such as donations for orphanages and nursing homes. Social actions are called *Charity Hits*. Then, the posts of this account are attractively packaged and easily understood by young people. The presence of this account is indeed to provide 'inward catechesis' for young Catholics (OMK) to know the teachings of the Catholic faith both in legal norms or teachings (dogma).

Some of the posts that can be found on the account are: "After the sacrament of Penance, do you sin again, is it in vain?" which contains an explanation that sometimes Catholics doubt the grace given in the Sacrament of Penance. The Sacrament of Penance is a means to receive forgiveness of sins but due to human free will, it does not rule out the possibility of humans falling into sin. Of course, after receiving forgiveness of sins, it is hoped that one will not fall into sin again. Then, "Is it unclean to eat pork in Catholicism?" which contains the account admin's answer about whether something is unclean or not. He explained biblically and said that the Gospel given to the Church is not to be interpreted according to personal understanding. The comments on the posts were varied. Some expressed their gratitude. Some were helped by the posts. But there are also those who still question the posts, for example from @republic.enjoy: "but why do 2 religions born in the holy city of Jerusalem agree to forbid pigs, Jews and Muslims and even other Christians also forbid .." From some of these posts, it appears that this account does have the purpose of providing catechesis to young Catholics about the teachings of the Church.

b) Damai Kasih Channel

Damai Kasih Channel (DKC) is a Catholic account that has been active in online evangelization since February 2021. DKC presents videos with certain themes, such as videos about the history of the apostles, the history of the councils, interfaith discussions or dialogues, responses to other channels, and about Church teachings. The following is quite a lot, namely 13,800 people and the videos have been watched by around 1,610,871 people. DKC consists of Catholic laypersons who are accompanied by around 11 priests spread across a number of places in Indonesia and abroad. Damai Kasih Channel always live streams on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 19.00 WIB. There are 483 videos that have been uploaded by this account.

DKC is quite consistent in teaching the Catholic faith and responding to erroneous views from other YouTube accounts in accordance with its motto, "Always preach the real truth and not justification". Some of the uploaded videos try to respond the erroneous views of other accounts on the teachings of the Catholic Church, for example the video entitled, "Responding to Rev. Gilbert Lumoindong (Is it True that Our Lady is not the Mother of God and Our Lady is Sinful...???)". This video contains DKC's response to one of the statements in Rev. Gilbert Lumoindong who does not believe that Mary is the Mother of God. Rev. Gilbert said that Elizabeth's statement, "Who am I so that the mother of God comes to visit me?" did not affirm Mary's position as the mother of God was eternal, but answered Mary's doubts about the baby she was carrying. Then, Mary became holy only when the Holy Spirit overshadowed her in the purpose of conceiving the baby Christ and her holiness ended after Christ was born. To this statement, DKC responded with the teaching of the *theotokos* while showing the history of the formulation of the teaching. The audience gave a good response to this video. This can be seen in the comment @ringOsolution: "Salute the dkc team. Thank you for providing answers to the video of the lumondong priest, so that Catholic lay people like me increase their faith and logical thinking to weak humans."

Another example is a video titled, "Steven Indra Wibowo, is it true that you are the former Romo...???". The video is a response to Steven Indra Wibowo, a convert, who claims to be a former of Pengkotbah and Jesuit priest. It turns out that after investigation in the Society of Jesus there is no data showing that he is a former Jesuit priest. Furthermore, one of the participants quoted Steven Indra's statement that "*In the Misdinar it helps to be at the altar all kinds of things, up to deacon, prodiakon, finally I decided to take the sacrament of priesthood*". It turns out that Steven does not understand the terms that appear in the Catholic Church. Then, the DKC admin showed the stages of becoming a diocesan priest to clarify the stages that a person goes through to become a priest in the Catholic Church. This video received a positive response from netizens, as expressed by @AKINDO Channel Vidio: "I like the Catholic Channel ... they never argue to find fault with people or other religions but rather prioritize straightening out what is deflected or poorly understood by adherents of other religions about Catholicism."

### c) Offensive preaching of Ustadz Somad.

Abdul Somad Batubara is a cleric born in Silo Lama, Asahan, North Sumatra, on May 18, 1977. He is a scholar who is often called UAS (Ustadz Abdul Somad). In addition to the title obtained through education, namely Ustadz H. Abdul Somad, Lc., D.E.S.A., Ph.D, he also has a traditional title, namely 'Datuk Seri Ulama Setia Negara.' He has a YouTube channel called Ustadz Abdul Somad Official with 3.45 million followers. In addition, his teaching videos are also spread on various channels on YouTube.

UAS's preaching went viral when he talked about the infidel jin (jin kafir) on the cross. In a video titled, "*Abdul Somad: di salib ada jin kafir! Dasar gob####!*", UAS gave an answer to a worshipper's question who stated that his heart often shivered when he saw the cross. Answering the question, UAS said that there are infidel jinn in the cross. UAS also explained how the infidel jin entered the statue on the cross. The infidel jin on the cross invites Muslims to become infidels (UAS practiced how the infidel jin called Muslims and sang "alleluyaa..."), the infidel jin tried to disbelieve the person during the person's lifetime, if he was unable to even before death, then he was delivered using an ambulance that had an infidel symbol (cross).

His offensive preaching about the "infidel jin in the cross" caused controversy in 2019. Other offensive preachings include "Jesus did not die on the cross, there are other people who are likened to Jesus, the Council of Nicea in 324 was a meeting of priests who managed to agree that Jesus was God, even though this was never mentioned in the Gospels, the symbol of the cross on ambulances and on the flags of European countries was made with the aim of disbelieving people, Jesus is not God". These preachings certainly attack the beliefs and teachings of the Christian faith even though they are not directly delivered to Christians. This kind of preaching can make people to insult, ostracize, and even lead to intolerant actions.

#### d) Offensive apologetics of Jay Smith.

In the previous section, there was offensive preaching and attacking Christianity. In this section, Jay Smith's negative apologetics of faith videos are shown. In Jay Smith's videos, the tone is one of conflict and debate. There is an element where Jay Smith is trying to assert Christian truth, but he is challenging, demonizing and inflaming the opponents he is debating.

Jay Smith is a Christian Apologist who was born in India. He was a member of the missionaries at Woodstock School in India. His grandparents were also missionaries. He reached a BA from Messiah College and then a Master of Divinity from Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in apologetics. He also reached an MA in Islam from Fuller Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D in apologetics from Melbourne School of Theology. He belongs to the Brethren in Christ Church, a denomination of the Anabaptist Church (Menonite rite). Jay Smith began to actively voice apologetics and appear in public since 2010. However, in existing YouTube accounts, Jay Smith's videos began to be uploaded and watched by many people around 2018-2022. Even when the pandemic came, Jay Smith also appeared several times on YouTube.

Jay Smith's video debate with David Wood entitled, "Debate: Did Muhammad of Islam really exist? David Wood vs Jay Smith" uploaded by the Praedicator Veritatis

account shows the efforts of both of them in defending Christianity with an element of bringing down the other party, specifically Muslims. In the video of their debate, it appears that the video is set up as if they are debating. However, in reality, Jay Smith and David Wood are working together to bring down Muslims. Jay Smith's way of bringing down Muslims is by arguing that Muhammad's arrival is unclear, while David Wood himself argues that Muhammad existed, but came as a sinful and immoral person (through bad stories about Muhammad).

e) Paul Zhang.

Jozeph Paul Zhang or Shindy Paul Soerjomoelyono (his real name from the Chinese clan) was born on August 31, 1974 in Banjarnegara, Banjarnegara District, Central Java. He was ordained as a pastor in 1999 at Betani Church Salatiga. Jozeph Paul Zhang is known as an apologet of the Bethany Protestant Church who is active in social media (YouTube) preaching. Paul Zhang's videos can be watched on his YouTube account Jozeph Paul Zhang. In addition, his videos can also be found on the Dapur Sukacita YouTube channel. His uploaded videos are displayed in the form of live Zoom.

The videos uploaded by Paul Zhang are anti-Islamic. In the video "Ketika Dunia Melawan Islam", Paul Zhang expressed his views on Islam as the world's greatest enemy. For him, since the crusades, Islam has been very hostile to Christianity and the cruelty of Islam exceeds that of atheists. His view is complemented by some factual data about Muslim violence in the world. According to him, Hitler admired Islam and his alliance was always with Muslims so that the Church and priests who opposed him were severely tortured. Furthermore, according to him, Muslims claim that all prophets and religions prophesied Islam which is *rahmatan lil alamin*. Later, in the video "Mohammad Sang Penghujat Roh Kudus", Zhang presents his view of Mohammad as a blasphemer of the Holy Spirit. He states that Mohammad attacks and distorts the facts in the Bible. Mohammad does not recognize and denies the death of Jesus. Not recognizing Jesus on the cross means blaspheming the Holy Spirit. He based this on the gospel of Matthew 12:31, "All sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven".

Zhang also responded the news of Steven Indra Wibowo's death in a video titled, "Today Koh Steven gets 72 angels". The video contains a scathing satire against Steven Indra Wibowo who left the Christian faith, that everyone who converts to Islam will suffer. At the beginning of this video, Zhang showed a video that he sang himself, which contained expressions of 'hatred' for the Ustad. Those videos show anti-Islamic content.

## Theological Reflection: Contextual Pneumatology

### a) The Holy Spirit in Diverse Realities

The role and mission of the Holy Spirit was truly evident in the event of Pentecost. The believers gathered in one place were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other languages (Acts 2:1-13). Those who witnessed the event were astonished. The Pentecost event showed the role of the Holy Spirit in building brotherly dialog and unity in diversity. The Holy Spirit enabled them to accept the differences that appeared in different languages. Then, while they were praying, the place where they were gathered was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they proclaimed the word of God boldly (Acts 4:31). By the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were not afraid to preach the word of God. The obvious effect of the preaching was that "they increased to about three thousand people" (Acts 2:41). The following will also explain the views of John Zizioulas, Karl Rahner, Michael Welker, and Clark Pinnock on the role of the Holy Spirit.

John Zizioulas, an Eastern Orthodox theologian offers a pneumatology of communion or *koinonia*. Communion is a central idea in his theology and perspective on the church. According to him, the most important character of God is communion. In contrast to relationships whose meaning is still vague or the impression is not yet solid, fellowship or communion contains a more solid impression. There is commitment within it.

Karl Rahner, one of the great Catholic theologians, introduced the concept of transcendental pneumatology. He called human beings as *Geist in Welt* or Spirit in the World. Karl Rahner states that humans have openness to God's revelation (*potentia oboedientialis*) because of the Spirit within them. Furthermore, he says, "Thus man encounters himself when he finds himself in the world and when he asks about God; and when he asks about his essence, he always finds himself already in the world and on the way to God."

Michael Welker offers a realistic and pluralistic pneumatology. For him, the Spirit not only plays a role in creating unity, but also fights for diversity or plurality. He points to the Pentecost event as an example. "Through the outpouring of the Spirit, God affected the whole world, the various languages, the testimony of many people about God himself". The Spirit allowed all people to hear the apostles' message in "their own mother tongue" (Acts 2:8). The story of Pentecost is a reversal of the misunderstanding, alienation and hostility towards linguistic and cultural diversity in the world. Pentecost acts as a model of unity in the context of diversity.

Later, Clark Pinnock talks about pneumatology in his book *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*. He offers what he calls a pneumatology of religion. In his

concept of mission, the question of whether there is salvation or at least an element of salvation outside the Church becomes important. He emphasizes inclusivism in relation to other religions. The realization that there is salvation outside the Church affirms the presence and role of the Holy Spirit.

b) The Movement of the Holy Spirit on @hitsomk, Damai Kasih Channel, Ustad Somad, Jay Smith, and Paul Zhang

In the Christian tradition, the process of revelation is initiated by God who communicates the secrets of His will to human beings (cf. Dei Verbum 2). Humans are able to grasp and respond to this revelation thanks to the guidance of the Holy Spirit (DV 5). The Holy Spirit works in man and always invites, encourages and leads man to the truth of Christ (cf. John 14:26). If a person is imbued with the Spirit of God, he will certainly reach and direct himself to God the Father (cf. Rom 8:15) and the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1Cor 12:3).

The Holy Spirit acts as a force that encourages and guides people to the truth. Jesus promised the disciples the Holy Spirit. He is the one who will teach the disciples about everything that Jesus said and did. The Apostle Paul pointed out the fruits of the Spirit, namely love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5: 22-23). Thus, the criteria for the presence of the Holy Spirit is not when there are divisions, quarrels, conflicts, hatred and hostility

The Holy Spirit teaches about the truth, namely Jesus Himself, who is the way, the truth, and the life (cf. Jn 14:6). Through the Holy Spirit, the disciples will understand the teachings of Jesus where the role of the Holy Spirit is to show the person of Jesus, His mission, and the consequences of Jesus' teaching and mission. This Spirit will also enable the disciples to be witnesses of Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

In pneumatological analysis, hitsomk and Damai Kasih Channel accounts open up space for the Holy Spirit to move who teaches the truth and encourages witnessing the truth. The narrative built by both accounts is "Always preach the truth and not justification". DKC, for example, does not intend to preach Church teachings or apologize. Political and national themes are the concern of the admin. However, in a reflection, Pak Erik as the DKC admin felt called to evangelize and apologize in social media. The impulse that arises in the reflection, if connected to the Spirit that is in everyone, shows the role of the Holy Spirit who calls and encourages efforts to teach the truth. Therefore, the movement of the Holy Spirit appears in both accounts in proclaiming the truth.

Unlike the previous two accounts, Jay Smith and Paul Zhang deliver an anti-Islamic narrative. The video of the debate between Jay Smith and David Wood about Muhammad has been set so that it appears as if one of them is *pro* and the other is *contra*. However, in reality, both have agreed to demonize and attack Islam, for example with 'bad stories' about Muhammad. The offensive attitude towards Islam is also evident in Paul Zhang's videos, such as "When the world hates Islam" and "Muhammad blasphemed the Holy Spirit". In the former, Zhang shapes public opinion that Islam has historically been the enemy of the world, while in the latter, he shows that Muhammad, whom they revere, blasphemed the Holy Spirit. Jay Smith and Paul Zhang's offensive attitude toward Islam has closed the door to the Spirit's unifying, connecting, and championing of diversity as envisioned by Zizioulas and Welker. The fruits of the Spirit such as love, peace, kindness and self-control (cf. Gal 5:21-23) are nowhere to be seen. What is present is a narrative of hostility and hatred. These are not the criteria for the presence of the Spirit. Therefore, the Spirit does not blow in them because their fruit is not love and peace, but hatred and enmity.

Ustadz Abdul Somad builds public opinion with anti-Christian narratives. His offensive attitude towards Christianity is very apparent in his preaching about the infidel jin on the cross. Not only that, he also revealed that the cross symbol on the flags of European countries and on ambulances is an attempt to disbelieve. If a Muslim cannot be disbelieved during his lifetime, then he will be disbelieved before his death by being taken by ambulance. This idea can certainly build a public opinion that leads to hatred of Christians. His exclusive attitude closes the space for the Spirit that unites, fights for diversity, creates love and peace. What emerges is hatred and hostility.

## Conclusion

One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to teach man the truth, so that he can bear true witness. In the midst of the massive development of technology and digital media and post-truth, truth cannot be easily identified. Truth becomes relative because it depends on everyone's perception. Emotions are more dominant in building public opinion. This is the challenge for the Spirit Movement today.

The digital world that gave birth post-truth has become a field for the preaching of many figures, both those who present a friendly face and those who present an offensive attitude towards certain beliefs. Hitsomk and Damai Kasih Channel are examples of the face of good, friendly preaching that does not attack other religions. Jay Smith, Paul Zhang, and Ustadz Somad are examples of offensive preaching towards other religions.

Both Scripture and theologians indicate that the Holy Spirit has a role to play in uniting, championing diversity, and engendering openness to other religions (inclusiveness). The fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, joy, peace, faithfulness, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. Thus, it can be concluded that hitsomk and Damai Kasih Channel open the space for the Spirit to move while Jay Smith, Paul Zhang, and Ustadz Somad close the door to the Spirit's movement.

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