

The Truth Will Set You Free: Ignatian Examen as Contemplative Practice in Boisterous Digital World

Paulus Bambang Irawan, SJ, STD
Faculty of Theology Sanata Dharma University
Yogyakarta, Indonesia

This paper seeks to argue the contribution of the traditional Ignatian examen of conscience as creating a reflective space for university students to make a right decision in a boisterous digital environment. Using a spiritual political theology approach, this paper argues that a modified traditional spirituality practice can be a powerful medium in making “interruption” to the vast-and-seemed-unchallenged spread of post-truth politics. This paper also want to show the unique contribution of spiritual political theology in addressing the problem of post-truth politics in pluralistic society not only by focusing to strengthen democratic institution by upholding the rule of law as proposed by political scientists but more importantly by forming a conscientious individual to deal with massive unfounded information in order to make right decision for the common good.

This paper takes the campaigns of Sanata Dharma University Campus Ministry in promoting Ignatian examen as reflective space during 2019 Indonesian Presidential elections as case study. During an intense and divisive Indonesian presidential election in 2019, Sanata Dharma University Campus Ministry creatively translated the classic Ignatian examen into various student programs which focused on providing “time and place” for students to asses and reflect various informations, to meet and discuss with many actors within civil society and to raise their concerns about the growing threats to plurality, especially as it happened in the city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia

From modern Indonesian political landscape, 2019 Indonesian presidential election was continuation of a long history of negotiations between legacy of previous authoritarian regime and forceful aspirations for “free society” in the popular movement. From global point of view, 2019 Indonesian election resembles the pattern of the rise of populist politicians in the post truth era as it happens in many parts of the world.

Digital media opens door for this brutal contestation to garner political support. In this relatively cheap and immense network of digital ecosystem, “facts” are “produced” and spread not to unveil the truth but to create hateful feelings toward others who are different. Several studies on characteristics of fake news in Indonesian society show that fakes news drag audiences toward a more exclusive mindset, propel a negative stance toward minority groups and immigrants in pluralistic society. The spread of fake news correlates with the emergence of the “buzzer” who are paid and hired by political groups in garnering support by exploiting angst and fear. Several cases of riots in Indonesia were closely related to massive spread of fake news on hot issues. In a more solid democratic society which has stronger system to check and balance through a more mature free press, the destructive effects of hoaxes and fake news are relatively easy to be contained. But in a society with a weaker democratic institution due to the long history of dictatorship like Indonesia, the enormous of fake news is proven to damage to the cohesion and social trust in civil society.

In related to that matter, political scientist have argued on the urgent need to strengthen *institutionalization* of democratic society through upholding the rule of law in taming the destructive effects of fake news. But apart from developing institutional capacity, there is a plenty of rooms for developing *personal capabilities* in identifying and responding fake news through creating a personal reflective space. This paper argues that a reflective space is crucial in post-authoritarian society to navigate the complexity of fake news. More importantly, reflective space will enhance the development of institutional democratic society itself because every democratic system will work if there are basic consensus within civil society. I argue that a renewed traditional spiritual practice will create a fertile ground of cross-cultural understanding beyond political or religious affiliations.

From spiritual theology point of view, providing reflective space through a modified spiritual practice will incarnate the traditional spirituality to the struggles of the people, especially to the youth. As envisioned by Pope Francis, the youth is longing for the rich spiritual heritage as their resources for personal flourishing. By highlighting the importance of time and place of human lives, a modernized spiritual practice will help the seekers to escape from the trap of privatizing their spiritual journeys and provide a powerful thrust to go public by responding to the hopes and struggles of their communities. In the context of Christian university, developing a contextualized spirituality is one vivid example of university's commitment to be part of Church's mission in human formation of students as agents of change in their society.