

## Christomatic Mission: A Pastoral-Theological Model for Christian Witness in Pluralistic Societies

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**Abstract:** This study explores how African Christians in Germany navigate the tension between maintaining their confessional identity and engaging in increasingly pluralistic and secular societies. Recognising the pastoral and theological challenges posed by epistemological relativism and interreligious equality, the research introduces the *Christomatic Model* as a relational framework for Christian missions. Employing a qualitative methodology with a reflective-hermeneutic approach, data were collected through informal conversations, participant observation, and written reflections within the African Catholic Community in Mannheim. Thematic analysis revealed that believers frequently moderate their expressions of faith—avoiding exclusivist language, concealing religious symbols, and adopting neutral terminology—due to fear of rejection or social stigmatisation. These findings underscore Christians' internal and external pressures in pluralistic settings and highlight the need for alternative pastoral strategies. The Christomatic Model responds by reframing Christian witness as relational accompaniment rather than doctrinal confrontation, offering a theologically grounded and contextually sensitive approach that upholds faith integrity while fostering interfaith respect. This study contributes original insights into contextual missiology by shifting the mission's focus from conversion to presence and by providing a concrete theological response to the lived experiences of believers in pluralistic societies. Its originality lies in articulating a mediatory paradigm that integrates doctrinal fidelity with relational openness, filling a significant gap in current theological and pastoral discourse.

**Keywords:** Christian identity; Christomatic model; interfaith dialogue; pastoral theology; pluralism.

**Abstract:** Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana orang Kristen Afrika di Jerman menghadapi ketegangan antara mempertahankan identitas konfesional mereka dan terlibat dalam masyarakat yang semakin majemuk dan sekuler. Menyadari tantangan pastoral dan teologis yang ditimbulkan oleh relativisme epistemologis dan kesetaraan antaragama, penelitian ini memperkenalkan Model *Christomatic* sebagai kerangka kerja relasional untuk misi Kristen. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan reflektif-hermeneutik. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, percakapan informal, dan refleksi tertulis dari anggota Komunitas Katolik Afrika di Mannheim. Hasil analisis tematik menunjukkan bahwa para responden cenderung memoderasi ekspresi iman mereka—menghindari bahasa eksklusif, menyembunyikan simbol keagamaan, dan menggunakan istilah yang lebih netral—karena kekhawatiran akan stigma sosial atau penolakan dalam ruang publik. Temuan ini menunjukkan adanya tekanan internal dan eksternal yang mendorong terjadinya penyesuaian teologis dan pastoral. Model *Christomatic* merespons tantangan ini dengan merumuskan kembali kesaksian Kristiani sebagai bentuk pendampingan relasional, bukan konfrontasi doktrinal, sehingga memungkinkan ekspresi iman yang setia dan sekaligus inklusif. Implikasi penelitian ini mencakup pengembangan paradigma misiologis baru yang kontekstual dan dialogis, serta menawarkan strategi pastoral yang relevan di tengah masyarakat majemuk. Nilai orisinal penelitian ini terletak pada perumusan model konseptual baru yang belum banyak dibahas dalam literatur teologi kontekstual dan pastoral, serta kontribusinya dalam membangun jembatan antara pengakuan iman dan keterbukaan relasional dalam kehidupan beragama di era pluralisme.

**Keywords:** Identitas Kristen; Christomatrix model; dialog antar agama; teologi pastoral; pluralisme.

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, the global society has witnessed a profound shift in the way truth is understood, particularly in the realm of religion. This transformation aligns with the rise of what is commonly referred to as *epistemological relativism*—the view that truth claims are inherently relative and largely shaped by individual or socio-cultural perspectives (Hautamäki, 2020; Raven, 2015). Within the era of globalisation and digitalisation, diverse streams of information and ideologies are now widely accessible, creating a landscape in which no single truth dominates. Religion is increasingly perceived not as the sole bearer of absolute truth, but as one among many valid belief systems within a pluralistic value framework (García-Carpintero, 2010). Consequently, religious identity has become fluid, negotiable, and even exchangeable. In this context, Christianity faces a critical challenge—especially when its exclusive claims, such as the uniqueness of Christ as the only path to salvation, confront the rising demand for inter-religious equality in the public sphere. This tension reflects a broader socio-theological transformation that warrants deeper academic reflection and analysis.

This phenomenon has encouraged societies to become more open and accepting of diverse belief systems, fostering an inclusive attitude towards religious pluralism. However, it simultaneously presents significant challenges to particularistic religious identities, such as that of Christianity. In pluralistic contexts, where multiple religions coexist, and claims to truth are seen as culturally relative, Christian exclusivism—the belief that salvation is found only through Christ—is often perceived as intolerant or divisive (Bano, Hassan, & Urooj, 2021; Trinitapoli, 2007). In many multicultural public spheres, doctrinal assertions like the uniqueness of Christ are increasingly regarded as problematic, as they appear to contradict the ethos of interreligious equality and social harmony (Domazet, 2020; Monteiro, 2020). Consequently, expressions of faith that once formed the foundation of Christian identity are frequently moderated or concealed to avoid being seen as offensive. This dilemma compels Christians to navigate the tension between fidelity to their theological convictions and the sociocultural expectation to embrace religious diversity—often modifying their witness to align with the norms of inclusivity (Brecht, 2012; Samuel, 2019). These challenges underscore the urgent need for new frameworks allowing authentic faith expression without undermining pluralistic coexistence.

The impact of this situation is not only sociological but also deeply theological and pastoral. Many Christians today experience confusion, alienation, and even fear when it comes to expressing their faith openly amidst the prevailing currents of secularism and religious pluralism. According to recent data from the Pew Research Center, younger generations in Western societies are increasingly distancing themselves from traditional religious affiliations. In the United States, only 45% of those aged 18–29 now identify as Christian, while 44% declare no religious affiliation—marking a dramatic increase from 16% in 2007 to 29% in 2024 (Pew Research Center, 2024). A similar trend can be observed in the United Kingdom, where 38% of individuals raised as Christians no longer associate with any religion, and 46% of the population now identify as non-religious, surpassing the remaining 43% who still identify as Christian (Burgess, 2025). These shifts signal a profound reconfiguration of religious identity, especially among younger generations who increasingly prefer fluid, open-ended spiritual self-understandings over exclusive religious commitments. In Indonesia, while discourses on tolerance and religious pluralism have gained traction, they are not yet sufficiently supported by theological narratives that reconcile firm faith affirmation with an open disposition towards diversity. Consequently, this phenomenon requires further exploration—not only to understand the complex dynamics between religious identity and pluralism but also to formulate theological approaches that can bridge the gap between confessional fidelity and social openness. Such inquiry is academically vital, as part of contextual and socio-religious theology, and practically, in crafting pastoral and missiological strategies that remain relevant in today's pluralistic world.

Previous research on Christianity and religious pluralism has generated a substantial body of theological and interreligious discourse, particularly in response to socio-cultural transformations brought about by globalisation and epistemological relativism. Broadly, the literature may be grouped

into three major approaches. Firstly, classical soteriological models—exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism—remain the dominant frameworks in theological discourse on salvation. Exclusivism asserts that salvation is found only through Christ, inclusivism allows for partial truth in other religions while maintaining Christ's central role, and pluralism, developed notably by John Hick and later by Bano et al. (2021), affirms the equal salvific validity of all religions. While these models offer conceptual clarity, they tend to operate at a theoretical level and do not sufficiently engage with the lived realities and identity tensions faced by Christians in pluralistic societies (D'Costa, 1990; H. Netland, 1999; Strauss, 2006).

Secondly, dialogical approaches advocate for interfaith engagement rooted in mutual respect and theological integrity. These include efforts to affirm one's Christian faith while participating in constructive and empathetic dialogue with other religions (Restrepo-Jaramillo, 2015; Triebel, 2012). Scholars like Mong (2017) and Nah (2012) have attempted to reconcile Christian identity with openness. However, this approach still struggles with internal tensions, especially among conservative communities, where doctrinal claims may be perceived as compromised in the pursuit of dialogue (R. K. Brown & Brown, 2011).

Thirdly, practical and pastoral studies explore how Christians respond to pluralistic contexts in everyday life. These include examples of faith communities adapting to diversity while sustaining their theological commitments, such as Lutheran initiatives described by Grafton (2017) and broader studies by Saiya & Manchanda (2022). Nevertheless, what is missing across these three categories is a unified, relational model that integrates doctrinal fidelity with interpersonal openness. This study addresses that gap by proposing the Christomatrix Model, a pastoral-theological framework that bridges the exclusivist claims of Christian faith with the relational demands of a pluralistic society.

This study aims to address the identified gap in current theological and interreligious discourse by proposing the Christomatrix Model—a pastoral-theological approach that seeks to mediate the tension between Christianity's exclusive identity claims and the dynamic realities of pluralistic society. The model aspires to create a creative mediatory space where Christians can remain faithful to their confession of Christ without falling into rigid exclusivism, while simultaneously engaging religious diversity through respectful and dialogical means. Emphasising personal interfaith relationships, honest and equal dialogue, and the affirmation of difference as a legitimate mode of Christian witness, Christomatrix offers a relational and process-oriented framework for contextual mission. Accordingly, the primary objective of this research is to formulate the theological and pastoral foundations of the Christomatrix Model and to critically evaluate its potential as a mediatory strategy for Christian engagement within today's multicultural and multifaith environments.

The central argument of this study is that the presence of Christians in pluralistic societies should not be viewed as a threat to the integrity of faith, but rather as an opportunity to deepen the meaning of Christian witness through a dialogical and contextual approach. Within the Christomatrix framework, religious diversity is not opposed to truth but is instead regarded as a relational field that enriches theological understanding and inspires believers to incarnate the Gospel amid real-world complexity. This perspective aligns with Triebel's (2012) pastoral-theological position, which underscores the importance of recognising truth in other religions without relinquishing core Christian convictions. Similarly, Grafton (2017) illustrates that interreligious engagement can be pursued with theological integrity, provided it is undertaken with humility and respect. Thus, the Christomatrix model is not an attempt to homogenise faith or dilute doctrinal exclusivity, but rather a mediatory approach rooted in relational spirituality and shared human solidarity. Faith in Christ, therefore, need not be articulated through domination, but through loving relationships and culturally grounded dialogue (Restrepo-Jaramillo, 2015; Saiya & Manchanda, 2022). In this way, the model aims to offer a constructive contribution to contemporary contextual theology and missiology, while addressing the pastoral challenges faced by Christians living within religiously diverse environments.

## 2. Method

This study explores the experiences of African Christians living in Germany who face challenges in expressing their religious identity in a pluralistic and secular context. The unit of analysis in this research is individual members of African diaspora church communities, particularly those engaged in pastoral roles or active in public-facing environments such as workplaces, educational institutions, or interfaith forums. The study focuses on how these individuals express their Christian faith, negotiate social pressures, and respond theologically and pastorally to pluralistic norms in everyday life.

A qualitative research design was employed, using a descriptive and reflective-hermeneutic approach. This design was chosen to allow for in-depth exploration of subjective spiritual experiences and contextual theological reflections. The qualitative method is particularly appropriate for this study, as it aims not to measure variables but to interpret meaning—especially regarding identity, faith expression, and pastoral response within a specific socio-religious setting. The reflective-hermeneutic perspective further enabled the integration of empirical experience with theological analysis, aligning with the study's concern for contextual theology and relational missiology.

Data sources consisted of both primary and secondary materials. Primary data were derived from members of the African Catholic Community in Mannheim, Germany, collected through informal conversations, written reflections, and participant observation during pastoral activities and communal worship. These firsthand experiences provided insight into the emotional and spiritual tensions faced by individuals in navigating faith in pluralistic settings. Secondary data were drawn from theological literature, pastoral writings, and interreligious discourse relevant to missiology, Christian identity, and pluralism—supporting the formulation of the Christomatrix model.

Data collection was carried out through informal engagement rather than structured interviews, in order to preserve the authenticity and spontaneity of participant responses. The researcher took detailed field notes during liturgical events, Bible studies, and casual conversations within the church setting. These interactions occurred over an extended period of observation within the community, allowing for a deep understanding of recurring themes without disrupting the pastoral dynamic or introducing formal research instruments that might influence behaviour.

The data analysis followed a thematic-reflective procedure. First, the data were reviewed and reduced to identify recurring expressions, patterns of behaviour, and emotional responses to faith expression in public settings. Next, themes such as relational evangelism, theological caution, and identity negotiation were categorised. These themes were then interpreted through a theological lens using key concepts from missiology and public theology. The outcome of this analytical process was the formulation of the Christomatrix model—a pastoral-theological framework that proposes relational accompaniment as a missiological strategy in pluralistic societies.

## 3. Results

### *The Tension between Christian Identity and the Demands of Pluralism*

One of the key findings of this study is the emergence of existential and theological tensions experienced by Christians in expressing their faith identity within increasingly pluralistic societies. This tension is both individual and structural, reflecting a dilemma between personal conviction and collective social norms. In multicultural and secular societies—particularly in Western Europe and North America—Christians often find that overt expressions of faith are at risk of being perceived as offensive or lacking inclusivity. While the social imperative to respect diversity is intended to foster tolerance, in practice, it frequently results in public spaces inhospitable to particularistic or exclusivist religious expressions.

A pastor from a diaspora community in Germany shared,

In this country, when I say 'Jesus is the only way to salvation', I feel like I must immediately add a clarification so as not to be misunderstood. I feel like I have to defend not just my faith, but my right to believe it (P. H., Personal Communication, February 04, 2024).

Meanwhile, a Christian student at a multicultural university in Germany remarked, *“I really want to talk about my faith, but I often feel I have to avoid mentioning Jesus directly. It feels like my faith is only acceptable if I present it in a ‘neutral’ way”* (M. R., Personal Communication, 18 January 2024).

These testimonies underscore a profound interpretative insight: that Christian individuals in pluralistic societies are not merely navigating theological beliefs, but are negotiating their very right to public religious identity. The perceived need to sanitise or neutralise expressions of Christian faith indicates an internalised social pressure, where public religiosity—particularly that which affirms exclusive truth claims—is subtly marginalised. Such dynamics reveal that pluralism, while ostensibly promoting inclusivity, can function as a soft form of exclusion when dominant cultural narratives privilege relativism over conviction. For many Christians, this results in a form of cognitive and spiritual dissonance—where affirming faith in Christ requires careful modulation to avoid social backlash. These findings suggest that the tension between religious identity and pluralist norms is not a mere theoretical abstraction but a lived, daily reality, calling for the development of theological models—such as Christomatrix—that prioritise relational integrity without sacrificing confessional authenticity.

This tension is further intensified by broader social transformations, particularly those associated with epistemological relativism. In this context, all belief systems are expected to be positioned equally—not only at the social level but also epistemologically and soteriologically. In other words, no truth claim—including Christianity’s assertion of salvation through Christ—is permitted to hold a privileged status above others (Junker-Kenny, 2021). This expectation places unique pressure on Christians who remain committed to the uniqueness of Christ as the sole path to salvation. As one church leader expressed during an interview, *“We often feel the need to soften our theological statements—not because we doubt them, but because we know that saying ‘Christ is the only way’ can close doors in interfaith conversations. It’s not about compromise; it’s about being heard at all”* (A. S., Personal Communication, February 10, 2024). Another echoed this sentiment, stating, *“In secular forums, a bold truth claim sounds like a provocation. We adapt—not to dilute our faith, but to keep the dialogue going”* (D. K., Personal Communication, February 11, 2024).

Through informal interactions and field conversations with church members and pastoral workers, a range of narratives emerged, revealing concerns about the shrinking space for authentic faith expression. For instance, within a Christian diaspora community in Germany, a pastor shared that each time he proclaimed an exclusivist doctrine—such as *“Jesus is the only way to salvation”*—he felt the need to immediately clarify his intention to avoid being misunderstood. *“I don’t just have to explain what I believe,”* he noted in an interview on 4 February 2024, *“but I also have to convince people that I’m not attacking their beliefs. It’s exhausting”* (P. H., Personal Communication, February 04, 2024).

Similarly, a Christian student attending a multicultural university admitted that she frequently avoids mentioning the name *“Jesus”* in public discussions due to fear of being perceived as intolerant. *“I always look for more neutral terms, like ‘spirituality’ or ‘my beliefs’, because mentioning ‘Jesus’ often makes people uncomfortable,”* she explained during an interview conducted on 18 January 2024 (M. R., Personal Communication, January 18, 2024).

These testimonies indicate that the pressure to conform to pluralistic norms affects how Christians communicate their beliefs and the internalisation and lived experience of their faith. What once constituted firm expressions of religious identity are increasingly moderated or concealed to remain acceptable in public discourse.

In addition to verbal expressions of faith, the use of Christian symbols—such as cross necklaces, Bible verse stickers, or other visible markers of religious identity—also becomes a contested practice in pluralistic contexts. During informal fieldwork, several participants expressed hesitancy to wear or display such symbols in professional or academic settings, fearing they might be seen as overly religious or proselytising. A young Christian nurse in the Netherlands commented, *“I used to wear a cross necklace every day, but after a colleague jokingly asked if I was on a mission, I stopped wearing it at work. It felt like my quiet expression of faith had become something to explain or justify.”* (L. K., Personal

Communication, January 28, 2024). This illustrates how even silent, non-verbal expressions of Christian identity are often moderated to fit within pluralist social expectations.

Another sensitive area highlighted during interviews was the reluctance among Christians to engage critically with the doctrinal claims of other religions. Many respondents described how interfaith discussions—whether in academic, social, or workplace contexts—discouraged theological critique, even when it was done respectfully. A theology student in the UK explained, *“In a class debate about salvation, I raised concerns about universalist interpretations, and a lecturer warned me to avoid comments that could be perceived as intolerant. Since then, I’ve avoided making theological comparisons altogether.”* (S. M., Personal Communication, February 14, 2024). Such experiences point to a growing internalised restraint among Christians, rooted in the fear of being labelled as bigoted or religiously supremacist. As a result, critical engagement with contrasting beliefs is often avoided, leading to a form of theological silence in interfaith spaces.

These narratives, gathered through diverse interviews and informal conversations, reveal consistent behavioural patterns among Christians navigating pluralistic environments. The findings suggest that faith expression is shaped not only by personal conviction but also by social pressures to conform to norms of inclusivity and non-offensiveness. Christians often feel compelled to censor, moderate, or altogether suppress aspects of their religious identity in order to avoid misunderstanding or marginalisation. To better illustrate these recurring responses, the following table 1 summarises common social situations and the typical ways in which Christian respondents reported managing their faith expression.

**Table 1. Christian Responses to Diverse Social Situations**

<b>Social Situation</b>	<b>Typical Christian Response</b>
<b>Stating exclusive doctrine (e.g., “Jesus is the only way”)</b>	Adds clarification or softens language to avoid being seen as intolerant
<b>Wearing religious symbols (e.g., cross necklace)</b>	Conceals symbols in professional/academic spaces to avoid appearing overly religious
<b>Initiating conversations about faith</b>	Replaces explicit Christian terms with neutral language (e.g., “spirituality”)
<b>Criticising other religious doctrines</b>	Avoids theological critique to prevent being accused of intolerance or religious supremacy
<b>Participating in interfaith dialogue</b>	Adapts theological statements to keep dialogue open and avoid shutting down conversations
<b>Sharing personal testimony publicly</b>	Feels hesitant or embarrassed; fears social rejection or being labelled as fanatical

In simpler terms, the data show that many Christians today feel a need to adjust how they express their faith in public settings. They often tone down or carefully reword statements about their beliefs—especially those seen as exclusive—to avoid sounding offensive. Even simple acts, like wearing a cross necklace or talking about Jesus, can make them feel uncomfortable or misunderstood in professional or academic spaces. Some also avoid open discussions about differences between religions out of fear of being labelled as intolerant. Overall, these behaviours reflect a pattern of quiet self-censorship. While these Christians are not necessarily ashamed of their faith, they feel social pressure to present it in a way that feels acceptable to everyone around them.

From the data collected, several patterns clearly emerge in how Christians navigate religious pluralism challenges. First, there is a strong inclination to modify the way faith is expressed, with many believers substituting explicitly Christian terms—like “Jesus” or “salvation”—with more general, neutral phrases such as “spirituality” or “personal belief.” This shift in language reflects an effort to avoid conflict and to remain socially acceptable in diverse settings. Second, this adaptation is both linguistic and internal, creating deep theological tension. Christians often struggle with how to fulfil their mission of proclaiming the Gospel while adhering to cultural norms that discourage exclusivist

truth claims. Third, the fear of being socially stigmatised—labelled as intolerant or fundamentalist—leads many to self-censor, choosing silence over public religious expression. This fear is especially pronounced when it comes to critiquing the beliefs of others or visibly displaying religious symbols. Lastly, these combined pressures appear to weaken the motivation for evangelism. The cultural emphasis on religious equality raises doubts about whether proclaiming Christ remains appropriate, leading to a more passive and cautious approach to witness. These patterns suggest that while promoting tolerance in theory, these patterns suggest that pluralism often marginalises traditional religious expressions in practice, creating a subtle but pervasive pressure to dilute or conceal confessional identities.

The implications of these findings are both theologically and pastorally significant. They reveal that the challenges faced by Christians in pluralistic societies are not limited to interpersonal sensitivity but rather reflect a profound transformation in the socio-religious landscape. In secular contexts, assertive truth claims—particularly those concerning salvation—are increasingly seen as exclusionary or provocative (Joblin, 2008; Siegwalt, 2014). This creates a climate where Christian identity must be negotiated carefully in public life, often resulting in self-censorship or the adoption of “neutral” religious language (Hennig & Hidalgo, 2021). The findings indicate that what is at stake is not merely theological nuance, but the right to articulate faith convictions in environments that privilege relativism over confession (Cameron, 2016; Vincett, Olson, Hopkins, & Pain, 2012). Such conditions highlight the urgency for a missiological approach that balances confessional integrity with relational engagement. The Christomatrix model responds to this need by proposing a framework of witness that is faithful to the uniqueness of Christ yet attuned to the sensitivities of interfaith settings—encouraging presence over persuasion, dialogue over domination (Robinson, 2019; White, 2023). By integrating theological conviction with empathetic communication, this model offers a constructive and contextually sensitive path forward for Christian witness in pluralistic and secular societies.

#### *Christomatrix as a Theological Model for Mission in the Context of Pluralism*

Field observations within the African Catholic Community in Mannheim, Germany, revealed that many pastoral workers experience significant tension when proclaiming the Gospel in a secular and religiously plural environment. Several leaders expressed that making exclusive claims such as “Jesus is the only way” often triggers discomfort or suspicion from wider society. One pastoral assistant noted, “Whenever I say ‘Jesus is the only way,’ I feel the need to quickly clarify—not because I doubt, but to avoid being labelled intolerant.” (Field Interview, February 2024). This anxiety is not merely doctrinal but deeply emotional, as ministers attempt to remain faithful while not being dismissed as offensive in interfaith contexts.

In response, many members of the community have shifted towards a more relational and non-confrontational style of mission. Rather than aiming for immediate conversion, they emphasise being present, building trust, and allowing space for personal encounter with Christ through authentic relationships. As one senior pastoral worker shared, “This model of just being with people, walking with them, letting them encounter Christ through relationship, gives us peace.” (Field Note, February 2024). These practices laid the groundwork for the development of the Christomatrix model, reflecting a pastoral-theological response that values presence over persuasion and relationship over rhetoric in the context of pluralism.

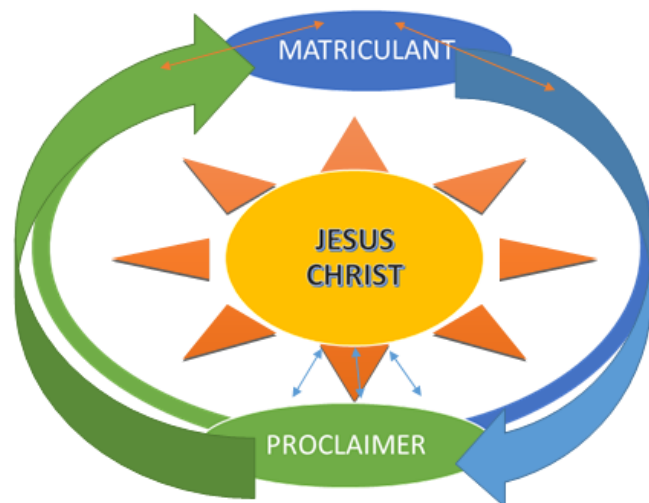
Building on these pastoral insights, the Christomatrix model was developed as a theological articulation of this relational approach to mission. The term *Christomatrix* combines *Christo*—from the Latin dative of *Christus*, meaning “to Christ”—and *matrix*, derived from *matriculation*, referring to a process of admission or voluntary entry. This etymology reflects the core principle of the model: that coming to Christ is not imposed, but entered into freely through relationship. The Christomatrix framework prioritises *relational entry into faith*, where the proclaimer does not confront the other with rigid doctrinal assertions, but rather accompanies them in a journey marked by trust, presence, and shared humanity. Instead of defining mission as a moment of proclamation, the model envisions it as

an unfolding process of accompaniment—one that honours both the uniqueness of Christ and the spiritual agency of the other.

The development of the Christomatrix model is grounded in key theological insights that reframe the Christian mission not as confrontation, but as relational presence. Foundational to this approach is the recognition, as Erickson (2013) articulates, that “in postmodern mission, relationship is not a method, but the message itself.” This perspective echoes the missiological vision of David Bosch, who argued that mission in a pluralistic age must transcend a triumphalist or solely propositional approach, and instead embody the incarnational pattern of Christ—marked by humility, dialogue, and contextual engagement (Bosch, 1991). In line with this, Lesslie Newbigin underscores that the proclamation of the Gospel must be situated within a lived reality of community, in which witness is expressed not merely in words but through the integrity of relationship (Newbigin, 1989).

This theological framework challenges the binary between evangelism and interfaith dialogue. Rather than presenting kerygma (the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord) as an exclusive claim that negates other faith traditions, the Christomatrix model proposes a form of relational evangelism, where the core message of Christ is communicated through presence, accompaniment, and mutual respect. It affirms Christ's uniqueness while resisting coercive or argumentative methods of proclamation. In this paradigm, relational openness does not imply theological relativism but reflects a posture of hospitality—one that is faithful to the Gospel yet sensitive to the spiritual dignity of others (H. A. Netland, 2001). Such theological insights affirm that an authentic mission must be dialogical, incarnational, and deeply human in contexts shaped by diversity and pluralism.

The Christomatrix model is structurally represented by a triadic relational diagram involving Christ, the proclaimer, and the matriculant. In this framework, Christ is the central axis who simultaneously relates to both the proclaimer and the matriculant. The proclaimer, in turn, maintains an active relationship with Christ and the matriculant—who is defined as the person being accompanied in their spiritual journey. Notably, the matriculant is not immediately connected to Christ, but rather encounters Him relationally through the presence and witness of the proclaimer. This conceptualisation shifts the dynamics of Christian mission from confrontation to accompaniment, where the emphasis lies not in direct persuasion, but in cultivating space for authentic spiritual encounter through lived relationship. As illustrated in *Figure 1*, this model positions mission as a journeying-with process, rooted in presence rather than pressure.



**Figure 1. Christ relates to both the proclaimer and the matriculant; the proclaimer relates to Christ and to the matriculant; the matriculant relates only to the proclaimer.**

To operationalise this framework, the Christomatrix model proposes a three-phase structure: Awareness, Engagement, and Consistency. The *Awareness* phase calls the proclaimer to be intentionally open to the possibility of relationship, not with an agenda of conversion, but with a spirit of humble



presence. *Engagement* is the active nurturing of interpersonal connection—marked by empathy, respect, and mutual discernment—without theological coercion. Finally, *Consistency* reflects the long-term commitment to walk alongside the matriculant, enabling space for reflection, questioning, and, potentially, transformation. These phases are not linear but cyclical and adaptable, affirming the gradual and organic nature of spiritual growth. Terms such as *matriculant* are used deliberately to suggest voluntary participation rather than forced conversion, while *relational entry* and *mission by accompaniment* underscore the theological premise that mission must be incarnational, dialogical, and contextually sensitive.

To restate the findings more clearly: the Christomatrix model emerged from the lived experiences of pastoral workers in a pluralistic setting, particularly within the African Catholic Community in Mannheim, Germany. These ministers found that direct, exclusive proclamations of faith were often misunderstood or met with resistance. As a result, they shifted towards a more relational approach—choosing to walk alongside others in friendship and trust, rather than seeking immediate conversion. This practical shift inspired a theological model that reframes mission as a relationship-centred process. Rather than trying to convince people through debate, the model encourages Christians to witness to Christ by being present, consistent, and open-hearted. With Christ at the centre, the model involves three key roles—Christ, the proclaimer, and the matriculant—and three phases: becoming aware, building a relationship, and remaining faithfully present. This framework allows Christians to share their faith with integrity while honouring the freedom and dignity of others.

The implications of these findings underscore a theological and missiological reorientation in Christian witness, especially within pluralistic and secular contexts. Rather than abandoning the core proclamation of Christ, the Christomatrix model embodies what Bargár (2021) calls a relational anthropology—an approach to mission grounded in mutuality, presence, and shared humanity. The data show that mission is increasingly being understood not as confrontation, but as incarnational presence, echoing Erickson's (2013) assertion that "relationship is not a method, but the message itself." In this light, the model aligns with the trinitarian and pneumatological vision of mission, where the church participates in the life of the Triune God through humble engagement with others (Kim, 2010; Yong, 2011). The model also affirms the call for respectful and contextual witness in pluralistic societies, where dialogue and hospitality are vital to avoid coercion while still affirming Christian distinctiveness (H. A. Netland, 2001; White, 2023). Thus, the Christomatrix model offers a theologically grounded and contextually sensitive paradigm that integrates presence, relational witness, and interfaith respect—a model that not only addresses contemporary challenges in mission but also contributes to the ongoing development of a relational theology of mission (Niemandt, 2012; Woods, 2016).

#### *Reconciling Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism through Christomatrix Disposition*

In the course of theological exploration and pastoral observation, a profound tension emerged between two groups: proponents of religious pluralism, who argue that all religions hold equal value, and Christian identitists, who uphold the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the missionary mandate (kerygma) as essential to Christian identity. This conflict arises because pluralists often view conversion efforts as offensive or invalid (Adeney, 2011), whereas, for Christians, proclaiming the Gospel is a spiritual duty incumbent upon every baptised believer (Pope Francis, 2013). The struggle is further highlighted in ecclesial reflections, as noted by Pedraza (2020), who speaks of the Vatican II tension between preserving Christian identity and remaining relevant in a changing world. Swamy (2016), drawing on Samartha, warns that traditional "missionary conquest" approaches may actually hinder deeper interfaith understanding. Thus, the opening section of this sub-chapter demonstrates that the divide between pluralism and Christian mission is not merely theological, but also relational, rooted in questions of identity and the broader public perception of religious engagement.

The Christomatrix model emerges as a relevant and contextually responsive approach to reconciling Christian identity with the demands of religious pluralism by prioritising relational accompaniment over doctrinal confrontation. In response to the tension between pluralists—who view all religions as essentially equal—and Christian identitists—who uphold the uniqueness of Christ and

the mandate to proclaim Him (Adeney, 2011)—this model offers an alternative that shifts the focus from conversion to relationship. Instead of engaging in ideological contests, the Christomatrix approach centres mission on human connection as the foundation for spiritual transformation, aligning with the insight of Jones (2010) that authentic witness arises through presence rather than persuasion. By reframing evangelisation as accompaniment, the model resists both theological relativism and triumphalist exclusivism, creating space for dialogue grounded in respect and shared humanity. This posture is increasingly vital in societies where overt proselytisation is met with scepticism, yet relational integrity still holds transformative power.

The tension between religious pluralism and Christian identity does not necessarily call for theological unification, but rather for a relational framework that enables safe and respectful dialogue. The Christomatrix model addresses this need by offering a pathway that preserves doctrinal conviction while avoiding confrontational engagement. It recognises that the claim to religious equality by pluralists, often misunderstood as theological sameness, directly conflicts with the Christian proclamation of Christ's uniqueness (Adeney, 2011; Pope Francis, 2013). However, this tension need not result in polarisation or theological hostility. Instead of attempting to homogenise belief systems, Christomatrix fosters what Gushee and Stassen (2016) call the recovery of relational dynamics, encouraging space for mutual learning. Through a reframing of conversion as a third-order outcome rather than a first-order agenda (Mong, 2017), this model proposes that mission is most faithful when rooted in accompaniment, not argument. In this way, Christomatrix does not dilute Christian truth claims but repositions them within a posture of humility and relational openness—allowing mission to function as communion rather than conquest.

A common misstep in pluralist thought is the tendency to conflate equality with sameness—an assumption that all religions must be treated as identical in essence to be equally respected. This interpretation, however, risks erasing the rich distinctiveness that characterises each tradition and undermines the possibility of genuine interfaith dialogue. The Christomatrix model offers a critical correction to this by promoting *difference-over-uniformity*, affirming that recognising and respecting theological and cultural distinctiveness is not a barrier but a bridge to deeper understanding. Within this framework, equality is not found in eliminating differences, but in engaging those differences with humility and openness. W. Brown (2020) supports this view by asserting that alternatives are better understood and appreciated when presented within the context of *difference*, rather than through enforced equivalence. Thus, Christomatrix challenges the flattening effects of pluralist sameness by upholding the dignity of particularity—encouraging interreligious encounters that are both honest and enriching.

In pluralistic contexts, a direct approach to conversion often generates resistance, as it may be perceived as an imposition of one truth over another. This has led to growing criticism of mission strategies that prioritise outcomes—specifically, the act of conversion—over the relational processes that precede it. The Christomatrix model offers a critical reorientation by repositioning conversion as a third-order mandate: a possible fruit of authentic relationship, rather than an initial or non-negotiable objective. Drawing on the structure of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, the model underscores the sequence of “going” and “teaching” before “baptising”—suggesting that presence and dialogue must precede doctrinal response. Mong (2017) supports this reinterpretation, proposing that relational presence opens space for spiritual transformation without coercion. Through this lens, mission is not a conquest but a companionship, in which faith is shared through witness, not force. This shift away from result-oriented evangelism toward process-oriented accompaniment reflects a theologically grounded response to the complexities of modern religious engagement.

Taken together, the three discursive insights—namely the dangers of ideological polarisation, the misinterpretation of religious equality as sameness, and the rigid prioritisation of conversion—highlight the urgent need for a renewed missiological framework that can faithfully navigate pluralistic realities. The Christomatrix model addresses this need by offering a relational approach that does not dismiss theological convictions but situates them within a context of mutual respect and shared human dignity. Rather than diluting the Gospel or retreating into triumphalist assertions, Christomatrix

challenges the rigidity of both pluralist and identitist extremes by fostering theological humility and authentic presence. It represents a corrective to dogmatic postures and proposes a relational paradigm that affirms difference without hostility. In doing so, it reclaims mission as a space of encounter rather than imposition. Ultimately, a Christomatrix approach opens up the possibility for Christian witness to flourish—not through confrontation or compromise, but through relationships marked by peace, patience, and genuine openness in an increasingly diverse world.

The implications of these findings extend beyond abstract theological debate and speak directly to the lived pastoral realities of Christian communities in pluralistic societies. The Christomatrix model, deeply rooted in the relational theology of mission, offers not merely a conceptual tool, but a transformative posture—one that affirms the possibility of maintaining theological integrity while embracing relational openness and mutual dignity. By demonstrating that mission can be grounded in presence, patience, and shared humanity, the model echoes Niemandt's (2012) and Kim's (2010) affirmation of *missio Dei* as participation in the Trinity's relational work in the world. It disrupts the long-standing dichotomy between evangelistic exclusivism and relativistic pluralism by proposing a third path—relational hospitality—where faithfulness and dialogue co-exist (Bargár, 2021; Yong, 2011). This is not only theologically sound but pastorally vital. In contexts where overt proselytisation is often met with suspicion or resistance, the Christomatrix framework aligns with practices of radical hospitality (Afaradi, 2024) and curious pastoral engagement (Blaine-Wallace, 2011), fostering authentic witness through accompaniment rather than argument. It affirms that Christian mission must be contextual and dialogical (Dames, 2010; van Beek, 2010), built upon the recognition of the *imago Dei* in the other, and expressed through acts of care, presence, and ethical discernment (Arrington, 2017). Ultimately, Christomatrix expands the theological imagination by reframing mission as a space of encounter—where spiritual transformation occurs not through dominance, but through relational fidelity, humility, and shared pilgrimage in a diverse world.

#### 4. Discussion

This study examines the tension experienced by Christians in expressing their faith identity within increasingly pluralistic societies that demand inclusivity and interreligious equality. The findings indicate that, in such social contexts, many Christians respond to environmental pressures by moderating their expressions of faith—for instance, by avoiding exclusive theological terminology, concealing religious symbols, and adjusting their language and behaviour to maintain social harmony. This tension is not only external but also internal, creating a profound sense of spiritual and identity dissonance among individuals. From the field, consistent patterns of adaptation emerged, in which expressions of belief are often restrained due to fear of stigmatisation and rejection. Within this context, the Christomatrix model is presented as an alternative theological proposal that redefines Christian mission—not as doctrinal domination, but as relational accompaniment that preserves the integrity of faith while respecting religious plurality.

The findings of this study emerged as a natural consequence of the interplay between religious identity, social pressure, and the pastoral need for contextual relevance. The tendency among Christians to moderate their expressions of faith in pluralistic environments is best understood not as a sign of theological weakness, but as a response to the shifting dynamics of public religiosity. This behaviour is shaped by the perceived tension between maintaining confessional integrity and avoiding social alienation in contexts where overt religious exclusivism is often viewed with suspicion. Such relational and cultural negotiation reflects the underlying rationale of the Christomatrix model, which posits that faith expression in pluralistic settings must be reimagined as a relational and dialogical witness. As argued at the outset of this study, the presence of Christians in diverse societies offers not a threat, but an opportunity to embody the Gospel in new and contextually sensitive ways. The observed relationship between social constraints and theological adaptation thus reinforces the model's core claim: that religious plurality is not opposed to truth, but constitutes a relational space where Christian witness can be deepened through humility, dialogue, and mutual respect. This approach echoes Triebel's (2012) assertion that acknowledging truth in other faiths does not entail abandoning

one's own, and supports Grafton's (2017) view that interreligious engagement can uphold theological integrity when approached with pastoral sensitivity.

In comparison with previous research, this study affirms and advances theological discourse on Christian identity and religious pluralism by addressing a critical gap left unfilled by dominant frameworks. Traditional theological models—exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism—have shaped much of the scholarly conversation (D'Costa, 1990; H. Netland, 1999; Strauss, 2006). However, while these soteriological paradigms offer conceptual clarity, they tend to remain abstract and fail to capture the lived experiences of Christians navigating pluralistic realities. Similarly, dialogical approaches—such as those by Triebel (2012), Nah (2012), and Restrepo-Jaramillo (2015)—have contributed significantly to interreligious understanding, yet often struggle to reconcile theological conviction with relational openness, particularly within more conservative Christian communities. Practical studies by Grafton (2017), Saiya & Manchanda (2022), and Nweke (2020) have begun to document how Christians adapt to pluralist pressures in public life, but these remain largely descriptive and lack a cohesive theological model that offers both doctrinal fidelity and relational praxis.

This study contributes novelty by introducing the Christomatrix model—a pastoral-theological framework that responds directly to these shortcomings. Rather than choosing between the extremes of theological triumphalism or relativist pluralism, the Christomatrix approach offers a mediatory path grounded in relational theology and contextual sensitivity. It extends Mong's (2017) call for relational engagement by proposing mission as accompaniment, not argument—where the Gospel is shared through presence, consistency, and mutual discernment. Moreover, this model reinterprets the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) to foreground “going” and “teaching” before “baptising,” shifting conversion from a primary goal to a potential outcome of authentic relationship. In contrast to the sameness implied in some pluralist theories (cf. Hick, Bano et al., 2021), this study builds on W. Brown's (2020) argument for equality-as-difference, positioning theological distinction as a source of enrichment rather than exclusion. Finally, the Christomatrix model uniquely addresses the sociocultural pressures documented by Lichterman (2012) and Mayhew et al. (2022), providing a concrete pastoral response for Christians who feel the need to silence or sanitise their faith in public life. In doing so, this research moves the conversation beyond conceptual debate and offers a grounded, practical theology for mission in today's pluralistic world.

The results of this study carry significant interpretative weight in both theological and sociological terms. They demonstrate that the negotiation of Christian identity in pluralistic societies is not simply a matter of doctrinal debate, but a lived, affective, and relational experience marked by vulnerability, discernment, and adaptive agency. Theologically, this highlights a crucial shift: that faithfulness to Christ in a pluralist context must increasingly be expressed not through public assertiveness but through relational fidelity and moral presence. The Christomatrix model, in this sense, reframes Christian witness as an act of ethical hospitality—embodying the Gospel through compassionate accompaniment rather than combative proclamation. This reimagining of mission as a relational vocation contributes to the broader field of contextual theology by integrating insights from pastoral theology, interfaith dialogue, and public theology. Moreover, it affirms the capacity of believers to remain theologically committed while engaging in social spaces marked by complexity and difference. The model thus challenges prevailing assumptions that public faith must be either assertively dogmatic or entirely privatised, and instead offers a nuanced, incarnational approach to living out Christian identity in diverse societies.

The implications of this study invite both affirmation and critical reflection regarding the evolving nature of Christian witness in pluralistic contexts. On the one hand, the Christomatrix model offers a positive and empowering framework that enables Christians to navigate public spaces with integrity and humility, avoiding the pitfalls of either silence or aggression. By reframing mission as relational accompaniment, it provides a viable alternative to combative evangelism, fostering deeper interfaith understanding and reducing the likelihood of social backlash. However, the model is not without its potential dysfunctions. One significant risk lies in the possibility of over-conforming to cultural expectations in the name of harmony, which can lead to a dilution of theological clarity or an avoidance

of articulating the core tenets of the Christian faith (Grit, 2019; Song, Ma, Wu, & Li, 2012). Such conformity—whether rational or irrational—has been shown to result in cognitive dissonance and epistemological confusion, particularly in interfaith contexts (Grainger, 2011). Moreover, the emphasis on interpersonal relationships, while valuable, may unintentionally render expressions of faith vague or ambiguous, making it difficult to communicate the essence of the gospel clearly and consistently (Grethlein, 2013; White, 2023). This challenge is intensified by the emotional demands placed on pastoral leaders tasked with sustaining long-term relational ministry. Studies have shown that such relational approaches require high levels of pastoral maturity, empathy, and emotional resilience, which can lead to exhaustion and burnout if not supported by appropriate spiritual and communal resources (Chandler, 2009; Smith, Francis, McKenna, & Village, 2025). Therefore, while the Christomatrix model offers a necessary corrective to coercive mission paradigms, it must be applied with theological discernment and supported by robust ministerial formation to avoid the twin dangers of theological vagueness and emotional depletion.

Based on the findings of this study, several strategic actions and policy recommendations are warranted to support the sustainable implementation of the Christomatrix model in pluralistic contexts. First, theological institutions and seminaries should revise their curricula to include modules on relational mission, interfaith competence, and contextual theology—equipping future ministers not only with doctrinal knowledge but also with pastoral skills needed for accompaniment-based ministry. Second, churches and Christian organisations must invest in structured formation programmes that foster emotional resilience, reflective practice, and spiritual maturity among their leaders, helping them navigate the psychological demands of relational engagement without compromising theological clarity. Third, ecclesial bodies should develop clear guidelines and support frameworks for public faith expression, ensuring that believers feel empowered to articulate their convictions with both boldness and sensitivity in pluralistic environments. Additionally, ecumenical and interfaith platforms should be expanded to encourage mutual learning and theological hospitality, allowing Christians to witness faithfully while engaging constructively across religious boundaries. Finally, it is essential that pastoral care systems within congregations are strengthened to provide ongoing support for ministers and lay members involved in relational mission—thus preventing burnout and fostering a culture of resilience, clarity, and compassionate presence. These policy initiatives would enable the Christomatrix paradigm to flourish not merely as a theoretical model but as a lived, sustainable, and theologically robust practice in diverse societies.

## 5. Conclusion

The central finding of this study is that Christian witness in pluralistic societies must evolve from confrontational proclamation to relational accompaniment in order to remain both theologically faithful and socially relevant. Through the lived experiences of believers navigating interreligious environments—where exclusivist expressions of faith are often moderated due to fear of rejection or misrepresentation—it becomes clear that traditional mission paradigms are increasingly insufficient. The Christomatrix model, developed as a response to this challenge, offers a theologically grounded and contextually responsive approach that reframes mission not as doctrinal domination, but as a dialogical and pastoral journey rooted in presence, empathy, and mutual respect. This model affirms that relational integrity can coexist with theological conviction, and that authentic Christian identity need not be diluted to engage meaningfully with diversity. As such, the Christomatrix framework provides a timely and constructive contribution to contextual theology and missiology, enabling a more humane, incarnational, and spiritually transformative expression of faith in an era marked by pluralism and epistemological relativism.

This research contributes to the advancement of theological and missiological scholarship by introducing the Christomatrix model as a novel conceptual framework for Christian witness in pluralistic societies. Unlike previous approaches that either defend doctrinal exclusivism or advocate for theological relativism, the Christomatrix model offers a mediating paradigm grounded in relational theology, pastoral sensitivity, and contextual relevance. It enriches the discourse by shifting the

missiologial focus from conversion as an outcome to accompaniment as a process, thereby reframing mission through the lens of presence, empathy, and ethical hospitality. Additionally, this study provides empirical insights into the lived experiences of Christians navigating public faith expression, offering valuable qualitative data that expose the psychological, emotional, and spiritual dynamics at play in interfaith contexts. Theologically, it invites fresh reflection on the interpretation of the Great Commission, the role of identity negotiation in faith practice, and the articulation of truth amidst epistemological diversity. As such, this research opens new avenues for academic inquiry into relational mission, public theology, and the integration of confessional integrity with pluralistic engagement.

Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges several limitations that constrain the breadth and generalisability of its findings. The research primarily draws upon qualitative data from informal interactions within selected Christian communities in Western pluralistic contexts, particularly among diaspora and pastoral settings. As such, it may not fully capture the diversity of Christian responses across different denominational, cultural, or geopolitical landscapes—especially in non-Western or majority-Christian regions where expressions of exclusivism may take different forms. Furthermore, the absence of formal interviews and the reliance on anecdotal narratives, while valuable for preserving authenticity, limit the systematic comparison and quantification of data. Future research could expand this study by employing mixed-methods approaches, conducting cross-regional comparisons, and exploring the reception and practical application of the Christomatrix model across varied ecclesial traditions. A more longitudinal investigation would also help assess the long-term effectiveness and theological coherence of relational mission frameworks in navigating the evolving challenges of pluralistic engagement.

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