Reassessing the Emerging Church Movement in Indonesia: An Evangelical Theological Review

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Abstract

This study reassesses the Emerging Church Movement (ECM) and its theological implications for Evangelical churches in Indonesia through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The review synthesises 41 peer-reviewed sources published between 2013 and 2025, analysed thematically using both deductive and inductive coding. Originating in Western postmodern contexts as a reaction to the perceived rigidity of traditional churches, ECM's influence has expanded into Indonesia, where it interacts with a theologically diverse and culturally plural society. The literature reveals a striking paradox: while ECM promotes participatory worship, digital engagement, and contextual expressions of faith that help churches reach younger generations, it also exhibits tendencies toward relativism, pluralism, and syncretism that threaten the Evangelical commitment to the authority of Scripture and the exclusivity of salvation in Christ. The analysis argues that ECM should neither be dismissed outright nor accepted uncritically. Instead, Evangelical churches must discern between constructive and compromising elements, embracing innovation only insofar as it aligns with biblical truth. Such discernment enables the Indonesian church to remain faithful to its theological foundations while maintaining cultural relevance amid rapid social transformation.

Keywords: *Emerging Church Movement; Evangelical Theology; Contextualization; Theological Orthodoxy; Systematic Literature Review*

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, global theological discourse has increasingly turned its attention to a movement known as the Emerging Church Movement (ECM). Originating in Europe and the United States in the late 1990s and early 2000s, ECM arose as a response to the social and cultural shifts influenced by postmodernism.[1] The

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[1] James S. Bielo, "The 'Emerging Church' in America: Notes on the Interaction of Christianities," *Religion* 39, no. 3 (September 2009): 219–32, T. Cooper, "Emerging, Emergent, Emergence: Boundary Maintenance, Definition Construction, and Legitimation Strategies in the

movement serves as a critique of traditional churches, which are often perceived as no longer relevant to the ever-evolving context of modern society.

As a theological phenomenon, ECM offers a new, more contextual and flexible approach to the Christian faith. It emphasises interfaith dialogue, the incorporation of local cultures, and interpretive flexibility in reading the Bible, elements that are regarded as alternatives to the rigidity of traditional churches in addressing contemporary socio-cultural challenges.[2]

The Emerging Church Movement first took shape in the late 1990s within Western Christianity, particularly in the United Kingdom and North America. It arose as a response to the challenges of postmodern culture, seeking to recover authenticity, community, and relevance in the life of the church. Theologians and practitioners such as Brian McLaren, Eddie Gibbs, and Alan Hirsch became key voices, advocating a shift from institutional forms of faith toward more participatory and

culturally engaged expressions of Christianity. These early developments in Western theology laid the foundation for ECM's later global influence, including its reception and reinterpretation within non-Western contexts such as Indonesia.

However, not all theological communities accept this approach. From the Evangelical perspective, ECM is often considered problematic due to its tendency toward theological pluralism and relativism, both of which are seen to undermine core tenets such as the authority of Scripture and the exclusivity of salvation through Christ.[3]

The apostle Paul's encounter with the Athenians in Acts 17:22–31 provides a biblical foundation for understanding contextual engagement without theological compromise. Paul recognises the Athenians' religiosity and uses their cultural symbols as a bridge to proclaim the truth of the one Creator God and the risen Christ. His approach demonstrates that contextual communication of the gospel does not require the dilution of doctrinal

Establishment of a Post-Evangelical Subculture," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56 (2017): 398–417; Stephen Hunt, "The Emerging Church and Its Discontents," *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 29, no. 3 (December 2008): 287–96.

[2] Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Baker Academic, 2005), 123.

[3] Donald A Carson, "Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications," (Grand Rapids,

MI), Zondervan, 2005, https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:14210324 3; D Ronda and S T P Hengki Wijaya, *Dasar Teologi Yang Teguh: Panduan Teologi Sistematika Di Perguruan Tinggi* (Sekolah Tinggi Theologia Jaffray, 2013); Arnold Tindas, *Inerrancy: Ketaksalahan Alkitab* (Jakarta: Harvest International Theological Seminary, 2007); Budi Priyono and Arnold Tindas, "Otoritas Alkitab Dalam Era Postmodern," *Tri Tunggal: Jurnal Pendidikan Kristen Dan Katolik* 3, no. 2 (April 2025): 16–37.

truth but rather its articulation in a language that resonates with the audience. This scriptural model offers a theological framework for evaluating the Emerging Church Movement's attempts at cultural engagement within the Indonesian context.

Indonesian theologians have also engaged the question of contextual theology in ways that enrich the current discussion. Ronda and Wijaya highlights the importance of a theological foundation that remains rooted in Scripture while addressing contemporary cultural realities, insisting that contextualisation must not compromise doctrinal truth.[4] Similarly, Raymundus Sudhiarsa emphasises the need for theology and theological education to emerge from Indonesia's lived experience of faith, integrating dialogue between global Christianity and local context.[5] These perspectives frame the present study's examination of the Emerging Church Movement within an Indonesian theological horizon that values both contextual relevance and biblical integrity.

Criticism of ECM is particularly pertinent in Indonesia, a nation marked by significant religious and cultural pluralism. The challenges faced by Evangelical churches in Indonesia stem not only from the influence of postmodernism but also from the growing expressions of religious syncretism.[6] With its openness to contextual and pluralistic interpretation, ECM is regarded by some Evangelical leaders as a threat to doctrinal unity and the foundations of traditional theology.[7] These concerns are compounded by the inevitable pressures of modernity and globalisation.

Nevertheless, debates surrounding ECM are not confined to critique alone. Some theological practitioners argue that ECM also presents significant opportunities—particularly in terms of innovation in evangelism, liturgy, and contextual approaches to proclaiming the gospel. ECM promotes inclusive dialogue and engagement, which may prove invaluable in increasingly diverse cultural and religious societies.[8] From this

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[4] Ronda and Hengki Wijaya, *Dasar Teologi Yang Teguh: Panduan Teologi Sistematika Di Perguruan Tinggi*.

[5] Raymundus I Made Sudhiarsa, "Doing Theology And Our Theological Education: An Indonesian Perspective," *International Journal of Indonesian Philosophy & Theology* 1, no. 2 (2020): 105–15.

[6] Stephanas Budiono, "Syncretism: The Strongholds of Tradition, Teaching, and Legend," *Conference Series* 4, no. 2 (May 2023): 24–33; Kaventius Pambayun, "Strategi Gereja-Gereja Daerah Menyikapi Tantangan Pelayanan," *TE DEUM (Jurnal Teologi Dan Pengembangan*

Pelayanan) 11, no. 1 (December 2021): 99–123; P.G.O. Sunkudon et al., "Christ's Redemption and Giwu: Cultural Contextualisation in Pamona, Indonesia," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 81(1), A10217.* 81, no. 1 (January 2025): 1–8.

[7] Ryan P. Burge and Paul A. Djupe, "An Emergent Threat: Christian Clergy Perceptions of the Emerging Church Movement," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56, no. 1 (March 2017): 26–32.

[8] Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet, 2ŋd Edition: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2018).

perspective, ECM can be viewed as a response to the church's need to remain relevant in an ever-changing world.

In Indonesia, cultural and generational shifts, especially with the emergence of Millennials and Generation Z, provide a new context for discussing ECM. These generations, shaped by the digital age and postmodern values, tend to prefer ECM's interactive, reflective, and experimental styles of church over the more rigid traditional forms.[9] This dynamic places Evangelical churches in Indonesia in a difficult position, as they seek to engage younger generations without compromising their theological principles.

This paper seeks to analyse the ECM within the Indonesian context, drawing from an Evangelical theological perspective. The study will review both the strengths and weaknesses of ECM, identify the dialectical relationship between the two theological approaches, and conclude with theological reflections.

Using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, this analysis aims to offer an in-depth reflection on whether ECM constitutes a threat or an opportunity for Evangelical churches in Indonesia. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research question: To what extent does the Emerging Church Movement represent a theological opportunity or threat to Evangelical churches in Indonesia? The author hopes this paper contributes meaningfully to ongoing theological discourse on relevance and orthodoxy in the midst of rapid cultural transformation.

This study is guided by an Evangelical theological orientation that upholds the authority of Scripture while engaging constructively with contextual realities. The research applies this lens to assess the Emerging Church Movement's theological claims and practices within the Indonesian context. Accordingly, the study seeks to answer the following research question: *To what extent does the Emerging Church Movement represent a theological opportunity or threat to Evangelical churches in Indonesia?*

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine the influence of the Emerging Church Movement (ECM) on Evangelical theology in Indonesia. The SLR approach was chosen because it provides a structured, transparent, and replicable way of synthesising existing research, making it

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[9] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping Of Things To Come Innovation And Mission For The 21st-Century Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: BakerBooks, 2013); Jack

Fernando Laduri and Pieter G O Sunkudon, "Maksimalkan Penginjilan Anak Muda: Efektivitas Media Sosial Dengan Aplikasi Litmatch," *Jurnal Iluminasi* 2, no. 1 (2024): 56–78.

suitable for mapping both theological risks and opportunities in a pluralistic context. Literature searches were conducted between January and February 2025 across databases such as Scopus, JSTOR, SpringerLink, Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, and Z-Library, using a combination of keywords related to ECM, Evangelical theology, contextualisation, pluralism, and postmodernism in Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

While the SLR provides methodological rigour, theological analysis requires a clear interpretive framework to ensure consistency and faithfulness to biblical principles. This study therefore employs an Evangelical hermeneutical framework that recognises the Bible as the ultimate authority for faith and practice. Within this framework, culture is not rejected but engaged critically in the light of Scripture. The Evangelical approach emphasises that theology must be both faithful to biblical revelation and responsive to contemporary realities. Accordingly, this hermeneutic provides the interpretive foundation for analysing how the Emerging Church Movement engages cultural change, evaluates truth claims, and redefines ecclesial practices. The interpretive process follows the principle that contextualisation is legitimate only when it remains under the normative authority of Scripture.

To ensure methodological transparency, the study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. The selection process is summarised in a PRISMA-style flow diagram, outlining each stage from identification to inclusion. The initial database search produced 214 records; after removing duplicates and screening abstracts, 41 studies met the inclusion criteria for full analysis. This visual summary demonstrates the rigour and traceability of the review process.

The inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and conference proceedings published between 2013 and 2025, with earlier seminal works added for historical framing. Opinion pieces, blogs, and unrelated materials were excluded. The search initially produced 214 records; after removing duplicates, 177 titles and abstracts were screened, followed by full-text reviews, resulting in 41 works selected for synthesis. Each source was appraised using an adapted Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist, ensuring methodological transparency, theological depth, and contextual relevance.[10]

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[10] Hayrol Azril Mohamed Shaffril, Samsul Farid Samsuddin, and Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah, "The ABC of Systematic Literature Review: The Basic Methodological Guidance for Beginners,"

The data from these studies were then coded thematically, combining deductive categories drawn from the research questions (e.g., theological orthodoxy, contextualisation, pluralism, innovation) with inductive insights that emerged from the literature.

To ensure analytical clarity, a coding framework was developed that integrated both theological and methodological considerations. Table 2 below summarises the main thematic categories used during synthesis, providing an overview of how concepts related to Evangelical theology and the Emerging Church Movement were grouped and analysed.

Table 1. Example Coding Table

Category	Code Example	Description / Theological Focus
Theological Orthodoxy	*Authority of Scripture*	Studies emphasising biblical inerrancy and doctrinal fidelity within Evangelical theology.
Contextualisation	*Cultural Adaptation*	Discussions on integrating local culture and liturgy while maintaining gospel integrity.
Pluralism & Relativism	*Theological Flexibility*	Analyses of ECM's openness to interfaith dialogue and interpretive diversity.
Innovation & Practice	*Digital Ministry / Participatory Worship*	Research highlighting ECM's influence on digital worship, creative liturgy, and church structure.
Risks & Opportunities	*Syncretism / Relevance*	Evaluations weighing ECM's potential threat or contribution to Evangelical witness.

This coding framework provided a structured lens through which the selected literature could be examined consistently. It allowed the researcher to identify patterns of convergence and divergence among scholars, ensuring that the synthesis captured both theological depth and contextual nuance within the broader Evangelical discourse on the Emerging Church Movement.

Themes were synthesised narratively to highlight convergences, tensions, and divergences in scholarly evaluation of ECM. This process ensured that the findings presented here offer a reliable and contextually nuanced assessment of ECM's implications for Evangelical churches in Indonesia.

Quality & Quantity 55, no. 4 (August 2021): 1319–46; Wondimagegn Mengist, Teshome Soromessa, and Gudina Legese, "Method for Conducting Systematic Literature Review and Meta-Analysis for Environmental Science Research," *MethodsX* 7 (2020): 100777.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Criticisms of the Emerging Church Movement

The findings of this study reveal that the Emerging Church Movement (ECM) presents a complex impact on Evangelical churches. As a movement, ECM emphasises theological relevance and flexibility in response to contemporary cultural challenges. However, this approach has also elicited serious criticisms concerning core principles of the Christian faith. This section outlines in detail the major critiques of ECM, its constructive contributions, and the dialectical tension between ECM and Evangelical theology. The analysis seeks to provide Evangelical churches in Indonesia with a comprehensive perspective to engage this phenomenon with discernment.

One of the most prominent criticisms of ECM is its emphasis on interpretive flexibility regarding Scripture. This is perceived as potentially undermining the authority of the Bible as the absolute foundation of faith and fostering theological relativism. Carson notes that subjective interpretations of Scripture within ECM create space for the inclusion of local cultural values that may not align with orthodox Christian teaching.[11] With its relativistic tendencies, ECM raises pertinent questions concerning the place of classical theology. Ratzinger reminds us that genuine theological dialogue must rest upon a firm foundation of truth.[12]

Certain strands within ECM even open the door to concepts such as open theism, which challenge the classical Evangelical understanding of God's omniscience and sovereignty.[13] From an Evangelical standpoint, such views risk undermining confidence in the sovereign and all-knowing nature of God, a foundational aspect of the Christian faith.

The risk of syncretism is another major concern, particularly in a religiously pluralistic society like Indonesia. ECM's emphasis on contextualisation often creates opportunities to integrate elements of local tradition into church practice. While the intent may be to enhance cultural relevance, the result can be the erosion of Evangelical doctrinal purity. Rumbay and Siahaya highlight that without theological oversight, such efforts may blend Christian teaching with indigenous beliefs, leading to

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[11] D A Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Zondervan, 2009).

[12] J. Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (Ignatius Press, 2004).

[13] Damian Dorocki, "Otwarty Teizm - Teologiczny 'wymysł' Czy Sensowna Propozycja?," *Scientia et Fides* 3, no. 2 (2015): 161–80.

doctrinal confusion among congregants.[14]

A further criticism lies in ECM's approach to the exclusivity of salvation through Christ. Central to Evangelical theology is the conviction that salvation is found in Christ alone – yet this often stands in contrast to ECM's inclusive orientation. McLaren observes that many ECM communities are more open to alternative religious traditions, which may dilute the Evangelical principle of exclusive salvation.[15] In Indonesia's multi-religious context, this presents a significant challenge for churches striving to uphold essential Christian doctrines.

ECM is also frequently critiqued for prioritising individual spiritual experience over doctrinal truth. In attempting to make worship more engaging, ECM often emphasises personal narrative and reflection at the expense of deep theological teaching. Stott warns that overemphasis on human experience and storytelling can obscure the Bible's role as the final and authoritative revelation of God.[16]

In addition, ECM's approach to church structure raises concerns about the diminishing role of ecclesial authority. With its emphasis on dialogue and individual experience, ECM may neglect the importance of strong, organised church leadership. Carson contends that this tendency risks weakening the church's role as a spiritual authority, ultimately affecting its capacity to preserve doctrinal integrity.[17]

In the Indonesian context—marked by pronounced religious and cultural pluralism—these challenges are further intensified. Hermanto et al. stress that Evangelical churches face increasing pressure to adapt to social change without losing their theological identity. The tension between cultural relevance and doctrinal faithfulness lies at the heart of criticisms directed at ECM.[18] In view of these risks, Evangelical churches must critically evaluate which elements of ECM can be constructively adopted without compromising the core foundations of their faith.

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[14] Christar A. Rumbay and Johannis Siahaya, "Embracing the Traces of the Deity Opo Empung in Minahasa for Culturative Christianity," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 44, no. 1 (May 2023).

[15] Brian D Mclaren, *A New Kind of Christian a Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 85.

[16] John Stott, *Isu-Isu Global Menantang Kepemimpinan Kristiani* (Jakarta: Yayasan Komunikasi Bina Kasih, 2012).

[17] D A Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications*, 72.

[18] Yanto Paulus Hermanto et al., "Gereja Di Indonesia Menghadapi Tantangan Masa Depan Berkaitan Dengan Gerakan 'Religious Pluralism,'" *Jurnal Teologi Cultivation* 7, no. 1 (July 2023): 199–213.

Positive Contributions of the Emerging Church Movement

Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the Emerging Church Movement (ECM) also offers significant positive contributions, particularly in terms of church innovation. In addressing a younger generation increasingly sceptical of traditional church institutions, ECM presents a more interactive and participatory approach to worship. Worship is no longer merely a hierarchically led activity but becomes a space where congregants actively engage through discussion, reflection, and artistic expression.[19] Rahner offers the perspective that the presence of faith within secular contexts can remain authentic, even if expressed implicitly.[20] This opens a positive interpretative space for the forms of faith expression found within ECM.

Furthermore, ECM strongly encourages the use of technology in ministry. In today's digital era, social media and online platforms have become effective tools for reaching those who may be reluctant to attend physical services. Many churches adopting ECM approaches use platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Zoom to connect with wider communities. This provides Evangelical churches in Indonesia with opportunities to harness technology as a relevant means of evangelism.[21]

Thus, while the Emerging Church Movement presents theological challenges, it also opens considerable opportunities for innovation in evangelism and liturgy within Indonesian Evangelical churches. ECM's focus on social and cultural relevance enables the church to respond to the needs of modern society, especially younger and urban communities who increasingly perceive traditional churches as out of touch with their everyday lives.[22]

McLaren emphasises that, to reach a new generation sceptical of church institutions, churches must discover new ways to express their faith in ways that resonate with modern lived experiences.[23]

One innovative aspect of ECM is its development of more contextual and flexible evangelistic methods. Rather than relying on traditional models, which are sometimes perceived as rigid and monotonous, ECM proposes approaches that are more inclusive and adaptable to

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[19] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping Of Things To Come Innovation And Mission For The 21st-Century Church*, 112.

[20] K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1 (Helicon Press, 1966).

[21] Chang-Yau Hoon, "Between Evangelism and Multiculturalism: The Dynamics of Protestant Christianity in Indonesia," *Social Compass* 60, no. 4 (December 2013): 457–70.

[22] Sudhiarsa, "Doing Theology And Our Theological Education: An Indonesian Perspective."

[23] Mclaren, *A New Kind of Christian a Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*, 45.

cultural change.[24] In the Indonesian context, ECM's approach can be reinterpreted through the lens of local theology as proposed by Schreiter, which emphasises the construction of theology grounded in the cultural experiences of the community.[25]

This is especially important in Indonesia, where rapid social change and cultural complexity have made many, particularly younger people, more sceptical of institutional religion. Through innovations in evangelism, ECM enables Evangelical churches to better connect with local contexts and relevant issues such as social justice, environmental concerns, and religious pluralism.[26]

These innovations are not limited to evangelism but also extend to worship and liturgy. ECM advocates for worship approaches that are more interactive and participatory, emphasising that worship should no longer be an experience dominated solely by church leaders but a space where congregants engage actively. Many Evangelical churches have been inspired by ECM worship formats, adopting more creative methods by integrating art, contemporary music, and technology.[27]

Such elements help congregants to experience worship more deeply and personally, transforming them from passive listeners into active participants within their faith community. Liturgy becomes more dialogical, inviting participation in discussions, collective reflections, and sharing spiritual experiences, which in turn can strengthen community bonds.

ECM also promotes the use of digital media and technology in evangelism and worship. This is especially relevant given the increasing use of social media and digital platforms in Indonesia, particularly among young people. Through platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Zoom, Evangelical churches adopting ECM approaches can reach congregants who may be reluctant to attend physical services but still wish to engage with their faith community online.[28]

Gibbs and Bolger note that this

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[24] K Jong, "The Growth of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches in Indonesia," *Exchange* 45 (2016): 56.

[25] Robert J Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015).

[26] Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*; Chang-Yau Hoon, "Religious Aspirations among Urban Christians in Contemporary Indonesia," *International Sociology* 31, no. 4 (July 2016): 413–31; Hoon, "Between Evangelism and Multiculturalism: The Dynamics of Protestant Christianity in Indonesia"; Susanne Rodemeier,

"Emergence and Establishment of a Charismatic Church within the Framework of Javanese Self-Perception in Surakarta, Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 45 (2017): 66–87; Y B Setyawan, "The Church as an Ecological Community: Practising Eco-Ecclesiology in the Ecological Crisis of Indonesia," *Ecclesiology*, 2021.

[27] Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, 142; Jong, "The Growth of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches in Indonesia."

[28] Hoon, "Between Evangelism and Multiculturalism: The Dynamics of Protestant

digital transformation presents significant opportunities for churches to extend their reach beyond traditional church walls, enabling them to connect with broader society.[29]

Moreover, ECM provides space for deeper theological contextualisation. ECM's approach allows Evangelical churches to be more sensitive to local cultural contexts without compromising gospel principles. It seeks to reinterpret expressions of faith through contextual symbols and narratives, aligning with the analogical approach proposed by Tracy that bridges tradition and culture.[30] In Indonesia, a country rich in cultural and religious diversity, such contextualisation is vital for the church to remain relevant.[31]

In this regard, ECM encourages churches to engage more actively in interfaith dialogue and community projects, such as community development or social justice programmes, without losing their identity as Evangelical communities. This idea can help counter perceptions that churches are solely inward-focused, while demonstrating their role as part of broader social solutions.[32]

However, such innovation must be balanced with the maintenance of fundamental theological principles within Evangelical churches. Although ECM offers a more relevant and contextual approach, Evangelical churches must remain cautious to ensure these innovations do not blur core doctrines, such as the exclusivity of salvation through Christ and the authority of Scripture.[33] Thus, while ECM presents great opportunities for change, Evangelical churches in Indonesia must strive to maintain a balance between innovation and commitment to theological orthodoxy.

The innovations proposed by ECM offer new perspectives on how the church can function within modern society but also

Christianity in Indonesia"; Jong, "The Growth of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches in Indonesia."

[29] Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, 148.

[30] D. Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (Crossroad, 1981).

[31] Franklin Hutabarat, "Navigating Diversity: Exploring Religious Pluralism and Social Harmony in Indonesian Society," *European Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 3 (November 2023): 6–13; Vidhyandika Djati Perkasa and Amelinda Bonita Leonard, "Strategizing Religious Oppression: Christianity and Indonesia's Democracy Resilience," in *Consolidating Democracy: Resilience and Challenges in Indonesia and South*

Korea, ed. Brendan Howe (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 111–29; Parulihan Sipayung and Chammah J. Kaunda, "Jaulung Wismar Saragih," *International Journal of Asian Christianity* 6, no. 2 (August 2022): 161–83.

[32] Hoon, "Religious Aspirations among Urban Christians in Contemporary Indonesia"; Hutabarat, "Navigating Diversity: Exploring Religious Pluralism and Social Harmony in Indonesian Society"; McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet, 2nd Edition: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*, 110; Perkasa and Leonard, "Strategizing Religious Oppression: Christianity and Indonesia's Democracy Resilience."

[33] D A Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications*, 71.

demand that Evangelical churches uphold strong theological convictions. In this context, ECM can serve as a useful tool for addressing contemporary challenges if applied carefully and selectively, grounded on a solid theological foundation.[34]

Evangelical churches may adopt more dynamic and creative worship formats, incorporating art, contemporary music, and digital technology into worship practices. This is especially relevant for younger generations who may be sceptical of traditional churches but open to new forms of spiritual experience. In Indonesia, the use of digital media as an evangelistic tool has also become an effective strategy for reaching broader populations, especially among the youth.[35]

In conclusion, ECM opens significant opportunities for Evangelical churches in Indonesia to grow within a rapidly changing social context. Innovations in evangelism, liturgy, and more contextual theology offer the church avenues to remain relevant and positively impactful within society. However, as with any innovation, it is crucial that the church implement such changes judiciously,

maintaining a firm commitment to the fundamental principles of the Christian faith.

Contextual engagement, as demonstrated by the Emerging Church Movement, reflects an earnest attempt to communicate the gospel in ways that resonate with contemporary culture. Yet from an Evangelical perspective, such engagement must remain rooted in the transforming work of God's grace, which not only accepts but also renews. Grace, rightly understood, is never permissive; it is redemptive. It invites cultural participation while calling believers into holiness shaped by the truth of Scripture. Therefore, the value of contextualisation lies not merely in cultural relevance but in its ability to embody the sanctifying power of the gospel within every context of life and community.

The Dialectic Between the Emerging Church Movement and Evangelical Theology

The dialectic between the Emerging Church Movement (ECM) and Evangelical theology reflects a profound tension between cultural relevance and

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[34] Stott, *Isu-Isu Global Menantang Kepemimpinan Kristiani*, 90.

[35] Hutabarat, "Navigating Diversity: Exploring Religious Pluralism and Social Harmony in Indonesian Society"; Irvan Hutasoit, "Emerging Church Dan Arah Bergereja Ke Depan Pasca Pandemi," Https://Gkpisinode.Org/Emerging-Church-Dan-Arah-Bergereja-Ke-Depan-Pasca-

Pandemi/, 2023, https://gkpisinode.org/emerging-church-dan-arah-bergereja-ke-depan-pasca-pandemi/; Jong, "The Growth of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches in Indonesia"; Rodemeier, "Emergence and Establishment of a Charismatic Church within the Framework of Javanese Self-Perception in Surakarta, Indonesia."

commitment to theological orthodoxy. At its core, this dialectic centres on two main aspects: flexibility in biblical interpretation and inclusivity in approaches to salvation. While ECM offers opportunities for innovation that resonate with contemporary society, Evangelical churches face the challenge of upholding fundamental principles of faith without compromise.

On one hand, ECM emphasises the importance of flexibility in interpreting Scripture to suit local contexts. This approach allows the gospel message to become more relevant to pluralistic and postmodern societies. According to Gibbs and Bolger, culturally contextualised biblical interpretation can assist churches in reaching groups that previously felt alienated from the Christian faith.[36] However, such flexibility often attracts criticism that ECM tends to replace absolute truth with relativistic and subjective perspectives. For Evangelical theology, the principles of biblical inerrancy and authority must remain non-negotiable foundations.[37]

The dialectic between ECM and Evangelical theology becomes more evident in their differing views of the nature of God. In some instances, ECM theologians allow space for open theism, the view that the future is open even to God,[38] a concept that conflicts with the classical Evangelical understanding of divine omniscience. ECM creates room for diverse theological pluralism; however, as Balthasar asserts, pluralism must preserve doctrinal harmony rather than foster destructive contradiction.[39]

Moreover, ECM often adopts an inclusive approach to salvation, opening dialogue across religious boundaries. This approach can be seen positively as it creates opportunities to build bridges with other religious traditions. Yet Evangelical churches regard such inclusivity as a threat to the doctrine of salvation's exclusivity through Jesus Christ. From an Evangelical perspective, salvation is attainable only through faith in Christ, as affirmed in John 14:6. An overly inclusive stance risks reducing the gospel's core to a universal morality devoid of its transformative power.[40]

Faced with this dynamic, Evangelical churches in Indonesia can learn

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[36] Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, 144.

[37] D A Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications*, 67; Tindas, *Inerrancy: Ketaksalahan Alkitab*; Priyono and Tindas, "Otoritas Alkitab Dalam Era Postmodern."

[38] Dorocki, "Otwarty Teizm - Teologiczny 'wymysł' Czy Sensowna Propozycja?"

[39] H. U. Balthasar, *Truth Is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism* (Ignatius Press, 1988).

[40] Stott, *Isu-Isu Global Menantang Kepemimpinan Kristiani*; Mclaren, *A New Kind of Christian a Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*, 85.

from the innovations offered by ECM without sacrificing doctrinal integrity. For example, churches may adopt positive elements of ECM, such as digital technology in evangelism and more interactive liturgies, to engage younger generations. Frost and Hirsch note that Millennials and Generation Z tend to prefer participatory and reflective church models over traditional hierarchical ones.[41]

Additionally, ECM's contextual approach can strengthen the church's mission amid Indonesia's cultural and religious diversity. Evangelical churches can utilise interfaith dialogue as a means to introduce Christian values without compromising theological authority. Gibbs and Bolger observe that prudent contextualisation can help churches remain relevant amid rapid social change without losing their theological identity.[42]

However, Evangelical churches must remain vigilant against the risk of syncretism, which can arise from contextualisation efforts. Syncretism occurs when elements from local traditions or other religions blend with Christian doctrine, thus reducing the gospel message to mere cultural adaptation. Therefore, it is crucial for Evangelical churches to develop clear theological frameworks to evaluate which elements of ECM may be adopted.

The following table presents a comparison of several key aspects between the Emerging Church Movement (ECM) and Evangelical Theology as discussed above:

Table 2: Comparison Between the Emerging Church Movement (ECM) and Evangelical Theology

Aspect	Emerging Church Movement (ECM)	Evangelical Theology
Flexibility in Biblical Interpretation	Emphasises the importance of contextualisation in interpreting Scripture to be relevant to current cultural and social contexts.	Emphasises the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. Interpretation must align with foundational principles of the Christian faith without compromise.
Inclusivity in Salvation	Adopts an inclusive approach that opens space for interfaith dialogue and regards salvation as attainable through multiple paths.	Affirms the exclusivity of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, in accordance with biblical teaching (John 14:6).
View of Truth	Tends to be more flexible,	Emphasises absolute and objective

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[41] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping Of Things To Come Innovation And Mission For The 21st-Century Church*, 112.

[42] Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, 136.

	recognising truth as relative and contextual, adaptable to cultural experience and needs.	truth revealed through Scripture as the final authority in all matters.
Approach to Evangelism	Focuses on local contextual relevance, employing technology and more participatory methods to reach modern society.	Focuses on faithful proclamation of the gospel based on biblical text, emphasising that salvation comes through Christ alone without diluting the gospel message.
Role of Culture in the Church	Culture is seen as important in evangelism and liturgy, with adaptation to local values and traditions to create a relevant church.	Culture is regarded as a context to be carefully evaluated so as not to conflict with biblical principles. Contextualisation must be cautious to prevent syncretism.
Challenges for the Church	Challenges relate to potential relativism and syncretism, where teachings from other cultures or religions may dilute the gospel message.	Challenges concern maintaining the authority of Scripture and doctrine without compromise, while keeping the church relevant amidst rapid social and cultural change.
Main Criticism	Known for allegedly obscuring theological truth and giving too much space to religious pluralism.	Known for being perceived as rigid, inflexible, and insufficiently responsive to rapidly changing cultural contexts.
Innovations Offered	Introduces innovative elements such as digital technology use, more interactive liturgy, and participatory church models.	Focuses on maintaining a more stable and orthodox church tradition, with more cautious application of technology.
Risks	Potential syncretism and reduction of the gospel's transformative power to mere universal morality.	Risk of losing relevance with younger generations and increasingly pluralistic cultural developments.

The dialectic between ECM and Evangelical theology reflects the tension between innovation that is relevant to cultural context and commitment to foundational principles of faith. ECM offers opportunities to adapt the church to evolving cultural and social realities but must be approached with caution to avoid compromising the authoritative truth of Scripture. On the other hand, Evangelical theology maintains doctrinal integrity and faithfulness but must seek ways to remain relevant amid the challenges of an increasingly pluralistic and postmodern world. By selectively and critically adopting the positive elements of ECM, Evangelical churches can remain relevant in the modern era without sacrificing biblical principles.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the Emerging Church Movement (ECM) in Indonesia represents both a theological opportunity and a potential threat to Evangelical churches. The findings from forty-one scholarly sources indicate that ECM's emphasis on contextual engagement—seen in participatory worship, digital forms of ministry, and cultural adaptation—can assist churches in responding to social change and reaching emerging generations more effectively. However, tendencies within ECM toward relativism, pluralism, and syncretistic interpretation challenge core Evangelical commitments to biblical authority and the exclusivity of Christ. The research therefore affirms that Evangelical churches should approach ECM with discerning openness: adopting contextual innovations that genuinely support mission and community life, yet firmly guarding doctrinal foundations. In this balance of relevance and faithfulness, Evangelical Christianity in Indonesia can remain rooted in Scripture while responding meaningfully to contemporary cultural dynamics.

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