

Research Article

The Identity of the Church as *Civitas Dei*: An Analysis of Augustine's Political Philosophy in the Indonesian Bishops' Conference's Response to Political Dynamics in Indonesia in 2025

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Abstract: This study examines the identity and role of the Catholic Church as *civitas Dei* through an analysis of Augustine of Hippo's political philosophy and its relevance to the pastoral response of the Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia (KWI) toward Indonesia's socio-political dynamics in 2025. The research departs from the problem of how the Church should position itself amid political polarization, violent demonstrations, and violations of human dignity that marked the national context. It aims to (1) explain Augustine's concept of *civitas Dei* and *civitas terrena*, (2) formulate the Church's identity as a moral-spiritual community oriented toward God, and (3) analyze the relevance of this framework for the Church's prophetic and pastoral engagement in Indonesia. This study employs a qualitative method with a literature review approach, drawing from Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, Church documents, and the official pastoral statement of KWI, complemented by relevant theological and socio-political sources. The findings show that Augustine's distinction between the two cities is not merely institutional but based on the orientation of love: love of God that generates justice and service, versus self-love that leads to domination and injustice. Within this framework, the Church in Indonesia actualizes *civitas Dei* through solidarity with victims, ethical criticism of power, and active participation in promoting peace and the common good. KWI's pastoral statement embodies this prophetic stance by advocating nonviolence, human dignity, and social justice. In conclusion, Augustine's political theology remains normatively relevant for guiding the Church's mission as a transformative moral force in contemporary public life.

Keywords: Augustine; Catholic Church; Civitas Dei; Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia; Political Theology.

Received: November 25, 2025

Revised: December 21, 2025

Accepted: January 12, 2026

Published: February 20, 2026

Curr. Ver.: February 20, 2026



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1. Introduction

The Catholic Church is a single church both institutionally and theologically (Pulung, 2020). This means that Catholic churches, regardless of their geographical location, remain under the leadership of the Holy See in Vatican City (Sihite dkk., 2025). Theologically, the Catholic Church has the same theology even in the most remote places. This study focuses on the Catholic Church in Indonesia, which is geographically, culturally, and socio-politically different from other Catholic Churches. The leaders of the Indonesian Catholic Church are members of the *Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia* (KWI) ("Tentang KWI," 2025).

The Catholic Church in Indonesia has a widely recognized identity. The identity of the Indonesian Catholic Church is quite unique because the Indonesian people themselves are very diverse in terms of culture, ethnicity, and language. The Church is present as a servant without neglecting the ideals of the nation (Gole & Duha, 2024). The distinctive identity of the Catholic Church also includes synodality or walking together. Therefore, politics as an

effort to create the common good is not anti-Church. The Church actually encourages every individual to participate in politics in a positive way. Young Catholics have shown their participation both through political education and practical politics (Abraham, 2025).

When the world experiences crime, injustice, hostility, and even war, the Church is always there to stand with the weak, the small, the neglected, and the discriminated. In 2025, Indonesia's political dynamics underwent negative changes. Demonstrations occurred quite frequently that year. The first demonstration took place on February 17, and the most concerning one occurred on August 28-30, 2025. There were 12 demonstrations in 2025 (Setiawati, 2025). This study focuses more on the demonstrations that took place in August. On November 8, 2025, Tempo reported that the August demonstrations had claimed 12 lives ("Korban Jiwa Demonstrasi Agustus-September 2025 kini Ada 12 Orang | tempo.co," 2025). The incident involved not only demonstrations but also persecution. It is suspected that many victims suffered violence at the hands of the police in securing the incident (stefanus.ato@kompas.com, 2025).

Faced with this situation, the Church has a moral obligation to demonstrate its existence as a sign of the unity of the Kingdom of God. The identity of the Church is not limited to its name but extends to concrete actions. The Church manifests its identity through active involvement in national life, particularly through the *Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia* (KWI) as a collegial body of bishops. This involvement affirms that the Church is not separate from social reality, but rather shares responsibility for the struggle for justice, peace, and the common good.

In August 2025, in response to ongoing social dynamics, the Indonesian Bishops' Conference issued an official letter as a statement of position (Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia, 2025). The current situation raises questions about the prophetic role of the Church. To what extent should the Church speak out and act when human dignity is violated? As a community of faith, the Church is called not to remain neutral in the face of injustice, but to manifest God's love through solidarity, defense of the weak, and ethical criticism of power. In essence, the letter issued by the KWI is a call to create a peaceful, loving, and just atmosphere.

In the letter, KWI uses the first person plural pronoun. This shows how KWI views the Indonesian nation as a shared asset that must be protected. KWI invites everyone to move forward together in a spirit of unity, mutual support, and cooperation with every person of good will to build the nation towards a Golden Indonesia, by responding to the various concerns of the community and improving shared prosperity. We also need to control ourselves from all forms of temptation to carry out provocative or criminal acts that can cause damage, loss, and threaten national peace and unity. Instead, let us spread positive spirit and energy to each other for the realization of a more advanced Indonesia (Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia, 2025).

Augustine's idea of two cities (*civitas Dei* and *civitas terrena*) in *De Civitate Dei* offers a theological-political framework that distinguishes between the orientation of love for God and love for oneself/power (Agustine, 1998). This concept is relevant for reflecting on the identity of the Church as a community of pilgrims that brings peace, not conflict. Therefore, this study attempts to reinterpret and reanalyze Augustine's political thought to formulate the attitude and praxis of the Church in the midst of Indonesia's less than ideal political situation.

This study is urgent because the Church's attitude is not only valid at the time the letter was issued but also applies to the future. This also demonstrates the Church's consistent attitude toward truth. Based on the above description, this study aims to (1) explain Augustine's political philosophy of the two cities. (2) Formulate the identity of the Church as *civitas Dei*. (3) Analyze the impact of political polarization on the life of the Church in Indonesia. (4) Offer a model of relevant pastoral attitudes and practices for the Church.

3. Method

This study applies a qualitative method with a literature review approach. According to John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, qualitative research is an investigative process that places researchers directly in the context of real life so that social realities can be observed and understood in depth. This approach presents the world in various forms of representation, such as field notes, interviews, conversations, visual documentation, recordings, and reflective memos (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, qualitative researchers examine phenomena in their natural settings and attempt to interpret their meanings. Literature studies are an important part of this method, as they contain reviews of various relevant previous studies and sources to strengthen the theoretical basis and support the analysis of the research being conducted (Agustini dkk., 2024; Putra, Tuerah, Mesra, Sukwika, & Sarman, 2024). In this study, the author collected data from various scientific sources such as printed and PDF books, scientific journals, and credible news media. Some of the main sources used in this study include St. Augustine's political philosophy in *The City of God Against the Pagans* and the statement issued by the KWI in August 2025. Saint Augustine's political philosophy serves as the analytical tool in this study. His thoughts on *civitas Dei* and *civitas terrena* will be used to analyze the political dynamics of Indonesia in 2025 and the stance of the Indonesian Catholic Church. *Civitas Dei* and *terrena* will show which political dynamics are good and which are not. Meanwhile, the statement from the Indonesian Bishops Conference is presented as a concrete example that the Indonesian Church, like *civitas Dei*, is on the side of justice, service, and love.

4. Results and Discussion

Brief Overview of Saint Augustine

Augustine, better known as Saint Augustine of Hippo, was a bishop and Church scholar (Bernardus Wos Baru, t.t.; Irawan, Sitanggang, Samsi, & Pratama, 2024). He was also known as Aurelius. In his youth, he strayed from a life of faith (Putri & Aziz, 2023). Augustine contributed to the eschatological framework (Lamuji, 2025). For Augustine, true love is love in a deep relationship with God (Wiro, 2025). Without God's grace, humans cannot do good deeds continuously (Mulyatno, t.t.). Augustine was born on November 13, 354, in Thagaste, Numidia, to a devout mother, Monica, and a pagan father, Patricius, who later repented before his death. He grew up as a Christian catechumen, but his youth in Carthage was marked by a disorderly moral life, bad company, and living with a woman without marriage until he had a child, Adeodatus (Brown, 2013; Wilken, 2001).

At the age of 19, his life began to change after reading Cicero's *Hortensius*, which awakened his love of wisdom (Brown, 2013). He sought truth through Manichaeism,

Skepticism, and Neoplatonism, especially the thoughts of Plotinus. His career developed as a teacher and professor of rhetoric in Carthage (Chadwick, 2009), Rome, and finally Milan. In Milan, he met Ambrose of Milan, who greatly influenced his spiritual journey. The peak of his conversion occurred in 386 when he heard the voice “tolle lege” which prompted him to read the Scriptures (Chadwick, 2009). This experience led him to an ascetic life and baptism at Easter 387. After returning to Africa, he founded a monastic community, was ordained a priest (391) (Brown, 2013), and then became bishop of Hippo (396) (Chadwick, 2009).

As bishop, Augustine was very prolific in writing and defending the Church from various heresies. His famous works include *Confessions*, which contains his prayers and reflections on life, and *De Civitate Dei*, which discusses the meaning of history and the Kingdom of God. He also produced hundreds of sermons and letters. Towards the end of his life on August 28, 430, when Hippo was besieged by the Vandals, he spent his time in prayer and repentance. Augustine was later honored as a saint and Doctor of the Church because of the great influence his thoughts had on Christian theology.

Civitas Dei

This study focuses on *civitas Dei*, but this concept cannot be separated from *civitas terrena*. St. Augustine always explained these two cities (*civitas*) together. St. Augustine explained the concepts of *civitas Dei* (city of God) and *civitas terrena* (worldly city) as allegorical representations of two types of human society. The term “city” is used to indicate two different orientations in life: one centered on God, and the other on oneself and the world (Nweke & Onwuaturuegwu, 2019). As a result of the first human sin, all of humanity experienced the consequences of the Fall (Augustine, 1998), but in His mercy God chose some people to be saved. Those who are restored by God's grace, freed from self-love, and love God, belong to the *civitas Dei* and obtain salvation. Conversely, those who reject grace and continue to live in self-love belong to the *civitas terrena*, which ultimately leads to eternal punishment. This concept of two cities is central to Augustine's theological and political thinking about human history and destiny.

In St. Augustine's thinking, two cities were born from two different kinds of love. *Civitas terrena* (the earthly city) was formed from excessive self-love that demeaned God, leading to the pursuit of human glory, the rejection of worshipping God, and the loss of justice and social virtue. Conversely, *civitas Dei* (the heavenly city) arises from love for God, manifested in humility, obedience, and true worship (Augustine, 1998). This love for God produces true justice, which is also reflected in love for others. Therefore, the main difference between the two cities lies in the orientation of love: one is self-centered and loses justice, while the other is God-centered and lives in justice and virtue (Markus & Markus, 1988).

St. Augustine explains that the difference in authority between the two cities is evident in the way power is exercised. *Civitas terrena* (the earthly city) is ruled by the lust for power, where leaders oppress and seek power for themselves. In contrast, *civitas Dei* (the city of God) is characterized by love and mutual service: leaders guide with love, and the people obey with humility, all oriented toward God as the source of power (Augustine, 1998).

Augustine also emphasized that the *civitas Dei* was not the same as the institutional Church (Figgis, 1921). The City of God existed before the Church became visible, encompassing living believers (who were “wandering” in the world), faithful angels, and chosen souls in heaven (Dyson, 1998). Meanwhile, *civitas terrena* is not merely pagan

countries, but all creatures, both human and angelic, who reject God, both in the world and those who have perished (Deane, 1963). Thus, the concept of the two cities is primarily spiritual and mystical, namely the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, not merely between the Church and the state.

According to Saint Augustine, during life on earth, the *civitas Dei* and *civitas terrena* are still mixed together, sharing both blessings and suffering, because God gives His goodness to both the righteous and the wicked (Augustine, 1998). However, this mixture is only temporary. At the end of time, when Jesus Christ comes to judge the living and the dead, the two cities will be separated definitively (Rapar, 2002), like sheep separated from goats. Each will then go to its final destination: the city of God to eternal salvation, and the earthly city to eternal destruction (Augustine, 1998).

Catholic Church- *Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia*

The face of the Catholic Church in Indonesia can generally be seen in the KWI. The KWI is a federative body that brings together all bishops in Indonesia with the aim of strengthening unity and enhancing cooperation in carrying out pastoral tasks for the service of Catholics in Indonesia. However, the KWI does not function as a hierarchical structure that is above or subordinate to the bishops, because each bishop retains his authority and autonomy in leading his respective diocese. In addition, the KWI does not have representatives or branches at the regional level (“Tentang KWI,” 2025).

Dioceses cannot be understood as extensions or regional branches of the KWI. KWI membership specifically consists of bishops who are still actively carrying out their pastoral duties, while bishops who have entered retirement are no longer considered active members. The bishops of the Catholic Church in Indonesia, who are members of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference, hold the highest leadership authority of the Catholic Church within the Republic of Indonesia. They bear pastoral responsibility to guide, nurture, and direct the faithful to live in harmony with the values of the Gospel and to be rooted in the Catholic tradition of faith that has been historically and continuously passed down. Therefore, it is imperative for all Catholics to understand, respect, and use the bishops' guidelines and policies as a reference in the conduct of church life (Kirchberger, 2012).

On August 30, 2025, the KWI issued a letter entitled *Pernyataan Sikap Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia (KWI) Terhadap Dinamika Sosial-Politik yang Sedang Berkembang* [Statement of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference (KWI) on Current Socio-Political Developments] (Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia, 2025). The letter was issued by the KWI in response to the socio-political situation at that time, particularly the demonstrations that culminated on August 28-29 (Firyalfatin, 2025). The demonstrations were carried out by various elements of society, such as students, online motorcycle taxi drivers, and other civilians (“Kaleidoskop 2025,” 2025). The demonstrations had actually been going on since August 25, 2025. Several factors contributed to this, such as the Indonesian president honoring a person who had been convicted of corruption and the increase in allowances for members of the House of Representatives (DPR) to more than 100 million rupiah (“Demo hari ini,” 2025). The protests became even more tense when an online motorcycle taxi driver was run over by a Brimob car and killed. This incident was the result of repressive actions by the police (arya.dwiangga@kompas.com, 2025). The Catholic Church in Indonesia loves the

Indonesian homeland and therefore cannot remain silent in the face of such circumstances. The Catholic Church has spoken out firmly by issuing this statement.

Gereja sebagai *Civitas Dei* dan Respon terhadap Dinamika Politik

St. Augustine did say that the *civitas Dei* is not the same as the institutional Church as written by Figgis (Figgis, 1921). However, Augustine's thinking about the *civitas Dei* has been actualized in the Church today. The Catholic Church understands "Church" to include not only those who are still on their pilgrimage in this world, but also those who have died and are still in purgatory, as well as those who are already united with the Father in heaven (Lumen Gentium, 1993 article 49). In the Second Vatican Council, the Church can be understood as a sacrament, that is, a sign and means of intimate union with God and the unity of all humanity. In Lumen Gentium, the first article states the following:

"[...] Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission. This it intends to do following faithfully the teaching of previous councils. The present-day conditions of the world add greater urgency to this work of the Church so that all men, joined more closely today by various social, technical and cultural ties, might also attain fuller unity in Christ." (Lumen Gentium, 1993 article 1).

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has been urged by the times to be more sensitive to current situations and circumstances. In this regard, the author emphasizes the word "social relations." This means that the Church never acts solely for its own sake, but rather for the common good. The decision to issue a statement of position is part of the Church's identity as a prophetic voice. This is in line with what St. Augustine said, that *civitas Dei* is a group of people who love and obey God. Based on this thinking, and in line with the background to the issuance of the KWI statement, the Indonesian Catholic Church is present as a community that hates injustice, as demanded by the demonstrators.

St. Augustine emphasized that *civitas terrena* is ruled by the lust for power, while *civitas Dei* is characterized by love and mutual service (Augustine, 1998). The Catholic Church teaches and bases its existence on three virtues, namely faith, hope, and love (Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia, 1996). Even in the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church is understood as a union of these three virtues (Lumen Gentium, 1993 article 8 and 65). These three virtues can be said to be the driving force behind the faithful from both perspectives, which share a commonality, namely love. Thus, both Augustine's political philosophy and the Church as an institution emphasize love, one manifestation of which is service. The letter issued by the KWI is one form of the Church's loving response to the Indonesian people. The brief introduction to the letter states:

"In recent days, we have been concerned and saddened to witness violence and anarchic acts in several areas of our beloved country. This situation has likely arisen due to widespread disappointment with the unwise and unfair (anti-people) words, actions, and policies of certain individuals or government institutions, representatives of the people, and certain officials. As citizens who uphold the values of Pancasila, let us be mindful, exercise restraint, and take concrete actions that will bring a sense of security and comfort to all the people of Indonesia." (Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia, 2025).

From the introduction, it is clear that the Indonesian Catholic Church has great love for the Indonesian people. Through statements such as this, the Catholic Church is known as the face of God and the *civitas Dei*, which struggles to uphold and voice justice for all people.

St. Augustine explains that *civitas terrena* is ruled by the lust for power. In contrast, *civitas Dei* is characterized by love and mutual service, and its leaders are oriented toward God (Augustine, 1998). Augustine's thinking is evident in the actions of the KWI as a federation of Indonesian bishops. The bishops are leaders of the local Church, represented in the KWI statement by the chairman and secretary general. It is difficult to find examples of service in the field in this letter, but through it the KWI shows its orientation, which is toward God. The KWI's statement in the letter can be summarized as follows. First, the KWI expresses its deep sorrow to brothers and sisters who have been injured or even lost their lives in the struggle to uphold truth, justice, and solidarity for those who suffer. These events serve as a reminder that the struggle for human values often demands great sacrifice.

Second, KWI also urges the Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary branches to humbly listen to the voices of the people, especially those who are poor, vulnerable, and affected by injustice. Any policy that undermines a sense of justice, increases the burden on people's lives, or deviates from the ideal of shared prosperity should be reviewed and even revoked. The administration of government should not stop at rhetoric, but should be realized through transparent, accountable, and credible governance.

Third, KWI calls on security forces to truly protect all citizens by prioritizing a humanistic approach in dealing with mass actions. At the same time, we are committed to remaining critical of every public policy, so that all government actions are always in the interests of the people and the nation. Fourth, KWI expresses its gratitude to all individuals, organizations, and institutions that continue to fight for goodness and truth in a polite, peaceful manner and remain faithful to national values.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that St. Augustine of Hippo's political thinking on *civitas Dei* and *civitas terrena* provides a relevant theological-ethical framework for understanding the identity and role of the Church in contemporary socio-political reality. *Civitas Dei* is interpreted as a community oriented towards love for God, justice, humility, and service, while *civitas terrena* is characterized by self-love, lust for power, and injustice. This distinction is not merely an institutional dichotomy, but a differentiation of inner orientation and moral praxis in communal life. In the context of Indonesia in 2025, marked by political polarization, violent demonstrations, and violations of human dignity, the Catholic Church is called to present its identity as a sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God through prophetic attitudes, solidarity with victims of injustice, and active involvement for the common good. This attitude is concretely manifested through the pastoral statement of Komisi Waligereja Indonesia (KWI), which affirms its commitment to peace, social justice, the defense of vulnerable groups, and ethical criticism of the abuse of power. Thus, the Church in Indonesia can be understood as the historical actualization of *civitas Dei*: a community of pilgrims that is not neutral towards injustice, but rather presents love, hope, and service as the basis for social transformation. This study confirms that Augustine's philosophical theology remains

relevant as a normative foundation for the Church's pastoral practice, enabling the Church to act as a constructive moral force in building a just, peaceful, and civilized national life.

Based on this research, the author suggests that the Indonesian Bishops' Conference needs to continue strengthening its prophetic role through public statements, political education of the faithful, and concrete assistance for victims of injustice. At the pastoral level, parishes and grassroots communities should develop faith formation that fosters critical thinking, dialogue, and love of peace in national life. Cooperation with interfaith organizations and civil society is also important to fight for social justice and strengthen national brotherhood. In this way, the Church can more tangibly embody the values of love, service, and hope as the actual manifestation of the *civitas Dei* in Indonesian society.

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