

## **When Society Secularizes: Exploring The Transformative Power of Catechesis for Faith Resilience**

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| <b>Keywords</b>                                                                        | <b>Abstract</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
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| <b>Catechesis; Faith Resilience; Rural Communities; Secularization; Social Capital</b> | <i>This study examines how catechesis can strengthen faith resilience in a secularizing rural Catholic community. Conducted in Stasi Rondo Woing, Diocese of Ruteng, Indonesia, it explores the interaction between catechesis and social capital such as kinship networks and communal solidarity in sustaining religious identity amid social change. Using a qualitative approach with interviews, observations, and document analysis, the research reveals that secularization reshapes religious participation without erasing faith. Social capital embedded in community and family life emerges as a vital resource that, when integrated with contextual and dialogical catechesis, reinforces believers' ability to interpret change through a faith perspective and maintain resilient religious belonging. The study concludes that catechesis becomes transformative not merely through doctrinal instruction but by mobilizing relational networks and embedding faith formation within everyday communal practices. These findings offer both theoretical insight into the relationship between social capital and religious resilience and practical guidance for developing culturally rooted, participatory catechetical models in pastoral ministry.</i> |



### **INTRODUCTION**

Modern societies are experiencing profound cultural transformations characterized by secularization, increasing individualism, and shifting value systems. Secularization today is widely understood not as the disappearance of religion but as a reconfiguration of how belief is practiced, internalized, and situated in public and private life (Golder, 2019; Pertek, 2022). Institutional participation often declines while personal spirituality becomes more selective or privatized (DeAngelis, 2023; Sarnecki, 2024). In Indonesia, similar dynamics have reshaped religious identity, especially among youth navigating digital culture, urbanization, and new moral horizons (Adon, 2021; Jazadi, 2025). These trends create challenges for communities whose religious life historically depends on stable traditions, family structures, and communal belonging (Kumbani, 2020).

For Catholic communities, secularizing pressures intersect with internal challenges such as weakening intergenerational transmission and reduced participation in liturgical and catechetical life (Sarnecki, 2024). Yet research consistently demonstrates that religious belief contributes positively to personal resilience, coping, and meaning-making (Gan et al., 2023; Ögtem-Young, 2018). This dual reality—religion threatened yet needed—raises urgent questions about how pastoral ministry, and catechesis in particular, can support faith resilience in changing contexts.

The Catholic Church has long recognized catechesis as central to faith formation. The Directory for Catechesis emphasizes the need for inculturation, relational accompaniment, and context-sensitive pedagogy (Pontifical Council, 2020; Fisichella, 2020). Scholars similarly call for catechesis that is dialogical, experience-based, and embedded in the lived reality of believers (Sultana, 2020; Morris, 2020; Barbosa-Neto, 2024; Gaudiawan, 2023). Traditional classroom-style approaches are increasingly insufficient, especially when disconnected from the sociocultural and familial contexts in which faith is transmitted (Simatupang, 2023; Woga & Tarihoran, 2024).

Social capital offers a powerful framework for understanding how faith resilience is sustained amid secularization. Networks of trust, reciprocity, and shared identity—especially strong in rural communities—serve as resources that bolster communal and religious life. Religious social capital in particular supports belonging, emotional stability, and spiritual continuity (Lim & Putnam, 2010; DeAngelis, 2023; Pertek, 2022). Studies in Indonesia highlight how gotong royong, kinship, and small Christian communities sustain pastoral practice in rural contexts (Arianto, 2020; Jewadut & Nirmala, 2023; Wilhelmus, 2024; Udu, 2024).

Despite these insights, empirical studies integrating catechesis, social capital, and faith resilience in rural, secularizing contexts remain scarce. This research addresses that gap by examining how catechesis can be a transformative force for faith resilience in Stasi Rondo Woing. The novelty of this study lies in its integration of pastoral theology, social capital theory, and qualitative fieldwork to show how catechesis becomes effective when embedded in relational structures of community and family.

This study aims to explore how catechesis functions as a transformative force in building and sustaining faith resilience amid secularization pressures, with a focus on the rural Catholic community of Stasi Rondo Woing, Diocese of Ruteng. Specifically, it seeks to analyze the role of social capital including communal solidarity, kinship networks, and practices of mutual cooperation (gotong royong) as a critical resource supporting contextual and dialogical catechesis. The research contributes theoretically to understanding the relationship between faith formation, social capital, and religious resilience in the context of rapid social change, while also offering practical pastoral insights for developing more relevant, participatory, and culturally-rooted models of catechesis grounded in the socio-cultural realities of local communities.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how catechesis functions as a transformative force for faith resilience within a rural Catholic community experiencing secularizing pressures. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for rich, contextualized analysis of lived experience, social relationships, and cultural practices—elements central to understanding the interplay between catechesis, social capital, and religious resilience. Following Creswell and Poth's (2018) interpretive framework, the study sought to capture the meanings and strategies through which believers negotiate social change and sustain their faith within everyday communal life.

The research was conducted in Stasi Rondo Woing, a rural Catholic community characterized by strong kinship structures, communal cooperation, and limited formal pastoral resources, from February until April 2025. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across relational and ministerial roles, including catechists, KBG leaders, elders, parents, and youth. This strategy ensured that the data reflected the social networks and catechetical structures that shape faith formation in the community. A total of 20 participants were involved, representing a broad cross-section of the community's social and pastoral life.

Data collection drew on three primary techniques:

1. **Semi-structured Interviews:** Interviews provided insights into participants' perceptions of secularizing influences, experiences of catechesis, and the role that communal and familial relationships play in sustaining faith. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility to pursue emerging themes while maintaining focus on core research questions.
2. **Participant Observation:** The researcher took part in communal activities, KBG gatherings, and catechetical meetings. Observations captured the social dynamics, patterns of cooperation, and informal faith-sharing practices that are often inaccessible through interviews alone.
3. **Document and Field Note Analysis:** Parish archives materials, and field notes were analyzed to contextualize contemporary practices within the broader pastoral and cultural patterns of the community.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which involves iterative cycles of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Initial coding identified recurring concepts related to social capital, communal solidarity, faith resilience, and the lived experience of secularization. Codes were then refined into thematic clusters, allowing deeper analysis of the mechanisms through which catechesis interacts with social relationships to foster resilience.

Trustworthiness was enhanced through methodological triangulation, comparing insights from interviews, observations, and documents. Member checking was conducted informally to confirm interpretive accuracy, and reflexive memos documented the researcher's positionality and interpretive choices. Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, and culturally sensitive engagement with community leaders and elders throughout the research process.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings reveal that the experience of secularization in Stasi Rondo Woing manifests less as an overt rejection of faith and more as subtle shifts in priorities, values, and participation. Increasing economic pressures, changing aspirations among youth, and the influence of digital culture contribute to reduced involvement in formal faith activities and a gradual weakening of traditional patterns of communal religious practice. Despite these pressures, the community demonstrates a remarkable capacity for sustaining faith life through strong interpersonal networks deeply rooted in communal solidarity and familial bonds.

First, communal solidarity—expressed through practices of gotong royong, shared labor, and mutual support—emerges as a foundational resource for catechetical participation. Members are more inclined to join catechetical gatherings when these are integrated into communal rhythms and when preparation and implementation involve collective effort. Catechesis embedded in community life fosters a sense of shared responsibility and strengthens motivation, making participation more stable despite external pressures.

Second, familial relationships play a decisive role in transmitting and reinforcing faith resilience. Households serve as primary spaces where prayer, storytelling, and moral guidance occur, often compensating for the limited availability of formal catechetical programs. Parents, grandparents, and elder siblings act as informal catechists whose daily interactions shape the spiritual imagination of younger members. These familial networks not only sustain knowledge of the faith but provide emotional continuity amid social change.

Third, the findings indicate that catechesis becomes transformative when it aligns with the community's existing social capital. Contextual catechetical methods—such as small-group sharing in KBG, home-based sessions, and dialogical learning—directly engage lived experience and reinforce communal identity. When catechesis acknowledges the community's relational structures, it fosters deeper reflection, strengthens belonging, and empowers local leaders to assume active roles in pastoral life. This relationally grounded approach enhances faith resilience by helping believers interpret social changes through a faith lens while remaining rooted in communal solidarity.

Collectively, these findings show that while secularization introduces new vulnerabilities, the social capital embedded in community and family life provides a powerful counterbalance. Catechesis that recognizes and integrates these relational resources emerges as an effective pathway for sustaining faith resilience in a rapidly changing social environment.

The findings of this study underscore that faith resilience in a secularizing society depends not only on individual conviction but on the strength of relational networks and the capacity of catechesis to engage these networks meaningfully. This insight aligns with contemporary scholarship emphasizing that secularization reshapes the social ecology in which belief is sustained, demanding more relational, context-sensitive pastoral responses (Golder, 2019; Sarnecki, 2024). As secular pressures dilute traditional religious authority and shift values toward individualism and pragmatism, catechesis must evolve from a primarily instructional model into a socially embedded and dialogical praxis capable of fostering belonging, identity, and communal meaning-making (Morris, 2020; Sultana, 2021).

A key contribution of this study is its demonstration that social capital serves as a mediating force between catechesis and faith resilience. Social capital theory provides a valuable interpretive lens for understanding why rural communities like Stasi Rondo Woing remain religiously vibrant despite secular challenges. Putnam's (2000) concept of bonding social capital—dense, trust-based networks within communities—helps explain how practices such as gotong royong strengthen the relational infrastructure needed for sustained faith participation. Recent research on religious social capital similarly shows that communal religious practices generate emotional support, moral reinforcement, and psychological stability, all of which contribute to believers' capacity to endure cultural shifts that undermine religious identity (Lim & Putnam, 2010; DeAngelis, 2023; Gan et al., 2023).

In rural Catholic contexts, this relational dimension is even more pronounced. Studies by Arianto (2020), Jewadut and Nirmala (2023), and Wilhelmus (2024) emphasize that small Christian communities and kinship networks play a decisive role in preserving liturgical life and faith transmission. The findings from Rondo Woing affirm these patterns: community solidarity provides the collective motivation required for catechetical participation, while familial intergenerational bonds sustain everyday religious practices that formal catechesis alone cannot maintain. Such dynamics illustrate what Pertek (2022) describes as “embedded resilience,” where individuals draw strength from relational and communal structures rather than purely personal conviction.

This study also highlights that catechesis becomes transformative when rooted in lived experience, a point strongly emphasized in contemporary catechetical and pastoral theology. The Directory for Catechesis (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, 2020) calls for catechesis that engages cultural contexts, encourages dialogue, and integrates faith with life. Scholars echo this shift, arguing that catechesis must move beyond cognitive transmission toward methods that foster encounter, participation, and contextual reflection (Barbosa-Neto, 2024; Gaudiawan, 2023; Woga & Tarihoran, 2024). In Rondo Woing, contextual catechetical practices—such as faith-sharing in KBG groups, home-based sessions, and dialogical approaches—proved more effective than traditional classroom-style methods. These practices resonate with Morris’s (2020) observation that catechesis must “incarnate” itself within local cultures to be meaningful, especially when believers face competing narratives from secular society.

Moreover, the findings shed light on how secularization disrupts traditional faith-transmission pathways, particularly within families. Research consistently shows that parents and grandparents are primary agents of religious socialization, and when their role weakens due to migration, economic pressures, or changing aspirations, religious continuity becomes vulnerable (Adon, 2021; Sarnecki, 2024). However, in Rondo Woing, familial bonds remain vital resources. The community demonstrates what Ögtem-Young (2018) calls “relational resilience,” wherein shared practices and intergenerational narratives provide emotional and spiritual continuity. This supports the view that catechesis should empower families as domestic churches—*ecclesiae domesticae*—whose everyday life becomes a context for faith transmission and resilience (Fisichella, 2020).

Additionally, the study points to the interaction between catechesis and secularizing cultural currents. Scholars argue that secularization does not eliminate religion but changes its plausibility structures—the cultural frameworks that make belief credible (Golder, 2019). In such contexts, catechesis must help believers interpret social change through a theological lens, enabling them to discern not only the threats but also the opportunities embedded in modernity (Sultana, 2021). In Rondo Woing, dialogical catechesis served precisely this function by helping participants articulate their faith in relation to their lived experiences, socio-economic challenges, and cultural shifts. This aligns with Barbosa-Neto’s (2024) argument that catechesis must engage the social imagination of believers, equipping them to navigate cultural complexity with critical and resilient faith.

Finally, this study contributes to the growing consensus that catechesis must reclaim its communal and relational foundations if it is to respond effectively to secularization. While

secularization tends to individualize belief and privatize religion, catechesis grounded in communal solidarity reasserts the inherently communal nature of Christian faith. Rather than resisting secularization through defensive strategies or mere doctrinal repetition, catechesis can cultivate a resilient faith by strengthening the relational ecosystems—families, small Christian communities, and socio-cultural practices—that shape religious identity. In doing so, catechesis becomes not only a pedagogical tool but a transformative pastoral praxis capable of sustaining believers amid rapid social change.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that faith resilience in a secularizing society does not emerge solely from doctrinal knowledge or institutional structures, but from the dynamic interplay between catechesis and the social capital embedded in communal and familial life. In Stasi Rondo Woing, communal solidarity, intergenerational bonds, and culturally rooted practices provide the relational foundation that enables catechesis to become transformative rather than merely instructional. When catechesis engages the lived experiences of believers and aligns itself with the rhythms of community life, it strengthens religious identity, fosters belonging, and equips individuals to navigate the pressures of social change with confidence and hope. Thus, the study affirms that catechesis has the potential to serve as a powerful pastoral response to secularization when it is contextual, dialogical, and deeply embedded in social relationships.

These insights carry important pastoral implications. First, catechetical ministry must actively build upon the relational strengths of communities by empowering families as primary agents of faith transmission and by revitalizing small Christian communities as spaces of shared reflection and mutual support. Second, catechesis must move beyond abstract instruction toward methods that foster encounter, participation, and cultural resonance—especially in contexts where secular influences reshape values and weaken traditional forms of religious practice. Finally, pastoral leaders must adopt a vision of catechesis that strengthens communal identity and mobilizes social capital, recognizing that resilient faith grows where believers experience faith not as an individual burden but as a shared journey sustained by strong community ties. In this way, catechesis becomes a catalyst for forming believers who can stand firm amid secularization while contributing to the vitality and mission of the Church.

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